

BRANDING STRATEGY FOR SMALL MEDIUM ENTERPRISES IN THE DIGITAL ERA: A COMMUNITY SERVICE IN CIREBON CITY, WEST JAVA

Mochammad Riyadh Rizky Adam

rizky.adam@sgu.ac.id

Swiss German University

Abstract: In the digital age, small and medium enterprises encounter distinct obstacles when it comes to creating and executing successful branding strategies. Like how venture capitalists invest in promising startups, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are now realizing the significance of brand management in driving growth and staying competitive. For small and medium-sized enterprises, a major hurdle is the lack of sufficient financial and human resources to dedicate towards formal branding initiatives. Some small and medium-sized enterprise owners may not fully recognize the value of branding and may not possess the expertise needed to effectively develop and implement a comprehensive branding strategy. Research indicates that small and medium-sized enterprises can greatly profit from implementing effective branding strategies. Branding is a powerful tool for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to stand out in competitive markets, foster customer loyalty, and improve their public perception and reputation. Building a strong brand has the potential to completely transform a small business into a successful and well-established enterprise. Thus, a seminar and workshop on branding strategy were organized in Cirebon City for small and medium enterprises in Cirebon and the surrounding area. More than 30 persons benefited from this community service. They expect to improve their business.

Keywords: Branding, SMEs, Digital Era

Introduction

In the contemporary, swiftly changing business environment, branding has emerged as an essential instrument for enterprises of all scales (Abimbola, 2001). For Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), cultivating a robust brand has become an essential endeavour, no longer exclusive to giant corporations with extensive marketing resources. It has transformed into an essential requirement for existence and expansion in a progressively competitive market. This paper wants to report what the author have done in educating Cirebon SMEs owners about branding strategy in the digital area. It is essential to understand branding strategies for SMEs in the digital age, analyse how these enterprises may utilize digital tools and platforms to

establish strong, identifiable brands that connect with their target customers (Dumitriu et al., 2019).

Methodology

In the community service that the author delivered, the author started with delivering the idea that brands live with us. Many brands are around us. From top to toe, Monday to Sunday, morning to night, we live with brands. It means consumers live with brands. Therefore, it is very imperative for businesses to build the brand. Branding fundamentally involves the establishment of a distinctive name and image for a product or service within the perceptions of consumers. It transcends logos and taglines to include the complete experience a customer has with a brand. In the digital era, this experience transcends physical encounters to encompass every touchpoint in the virtual realm. Every digital engagement, including social media presence, website design, customer care chatbots, and email marketing campaigns, plays a crucial role in creating a brand's identity and reputation. The digital age has fundamentally altered the operational and interactive dynamics of businesses with their customers. The surge of smartphones, social media platforms, and e-commerce has established a hyper-connected environment in which customers possess unparalleled access to information and options. The digital revolution has equalized opportunities, enabling SMEs to access global markets and compete with larger corporations in previously inconceivable manners.



Figure 1 Documentation 1 sharing session about branding strategy for SMEs in Cirebon City

Nonetheless, the digital economy presents distinct challenges for SMEs. These businesses, with fewer resources and often smaller staff, must navigate a complex and evolving digital landscape. They face the daunting challenge of breaking through the noise in an oversaturated digital market while still attempting to establish meaningful connections with

their target audience. Furthermore, the rapid pace of technological change mandates that SMEs be agile and adaptable, always refining their branding strategies to remain relevant. Despite these constraints, the digital age provides huge opportunities for SMEs to build strong and impactful brands. Digital platforms provide cost-effective ways to reach specialized audiences, gather customer insights, and create bespoke experiences. Social media allows for direct client engagement, which promotes loyalty and advocacy. Content marketing enables SMEs to demonstrate their competence and build trust with their target audience. Search engine optimization (SEO) can help small businesses stand out from the competition (Pohjanen, 2019).



Figure 2 Documentation 2 sharing session about branding strategy for SMEs in Cirebon City

Results

Author delivered ten misconceptions of marketing and branding. This is very important to know so that the SMEs owners can think and do the right thing in their marketing and branding strategy. The first misconception is about marketing and branding is only for big or established business. This is totally wrong. Both business – small and established ones – need marketing and branding efforts. Second misconception is having advertisement means having marketing and branding strategy. This perception is also wrong. Advertisement is a tiny part of the promotion mix strategy. Marketing and branding strategy is beyond the advertising strategy. Third conception is marketing and branding means selling. Again, selling is just one part of the promotion mix strategy. Therefore, marketing and branding strategy is beyond the selling strategy. Fourth misconception is having marketing and branding strategy means having promotion in the social media. This perception is, again, wrong. Promotion in the social media is just one part of the promotion mix strategy. Marketing and branding strategy is beyond the promotion in the social media. Fifth misconception is about SMEs owners easily say that they know their customers, but they stop to keep studying them. As we know that market circumstances are very dynamic. We cannot use the old points of view or knowledge to our current situation. The sixth misconception is cool product no need marketing and branding

strategy. This is wrong. Marketing and branding strategy is needed for all products. The seventh misconception is marketing and branding strategy will generate faster sales results. This is wrong. It takes time, integrated efforts, trial and errors, fine tuning the tactical strategy. The eighth misconception is SMEs owners do not need market their products to their customers. This is also wrong. SMEs owners need to market their products to their existing customers and prospects. The ninth misconception is SMEs owners do not have time and money to do marketing and branding for their business. Marketing and branding strategy is crucial in business. No excuse for this. The tenth misconception is since the sales is going down, then marketing and branding budget is reduced. That is exactly when we must increase the budget.



Figure 3 Documentation 3 sharing session about branding strategy for SMEs in Cirebon City

In the last part of the session, author gave eleven practical marketing and branding strategies for SMEs in Cirebon. The eleven practical marketing and branding strategies are:

1. You must know what value/benefit you want to offer ----> this is important for brand identity.
2. You must know your target consumers!
3. Find the uniqueness/difference, authenticity and reasons why target consumers should choose your brand over competitors! ----> this is important for brand positioning.
4. Be consistent and continue to promote your brand to the right target consumers in various communication channels in the way you want, creative and innovative ----> communication method ----> brand personality.

5. Make sure your product/service is AWESOME for consumers! ----> this is very fundamental to speed up the branding process (e-WOM, WOM).
6. Make sure your business brand's digital 'home' looks great! because first impression is important...!
7. Build connection or conversation with your consumers.
8. Don't forget to innovate your product or service! Understand your brand mantra.
9. Be honest in promoting your brand!
10. Listen, listen, and listen to your customers. What do they want and give it!



Figure 4 Documentation 5 sharing session about branding strategy for SMEs in Cirebon City

Conclusion

SMEs owners in Cirebon have been introduced to the practical marketing and branding strategies as well as the misconceptions that they should know so that they will formulate good marketing and branding strategies. Hope this community service will help, improve, and grow their business.

References

Abimbola, T. (2001). Branding as a competitive strategy for demand management in SMEs. *Journal of research in marketing and entrepreneurship*, 3(2), 97-106.

Dumitriu, D., Militaru, G., Deselnicu, D. C., Niculescu, A., & Popescu, M. A. M. (2019). A perspective over modern SMEs: Managing brand equity, growth and sustainability through digital marketing tools and techniques. *Sustainability, 11*(7), 2111.

Pohjanen, R. (2019). The benefits of search engine optimization in Google for businesses.