



CHAPTER ONE

WHY SPACE IN CONSUMER'S MIND IS IMPORTANT

ONE OF THE GREATER CHALLENGES any marketer faces is planting a flag in the consumer's mind. Marketing is after all a battle for mind space. A brand that occupies a share in the mind of consumers is likely to be remembered during the most opportune time – that is, when the consumer is about to make a purchase.

At the New Products Showcase and Learning Center Inc., in Ithaca, New York, are more than 65,000 (mostly) supermarket products. These products have been collected by its founder, Robert McMath, since 1968.

Most of the products are failures; some have become epic successes.

Among the failures are BenGay aspirin, Maalox in whipped cream form, a beer shampoo, Benecol margarine, Dr. Care aerosol toothpaste.

McMath reveals that the number one source of new product failure is a “me-too” offer. Consumers want something that they believe is distinctive. This is where a product's perceived differentiation comes in and the brand's unique selling proposition (USP) becomes relevant.

Why is occupying a space in the consumer's mind important?

Because it is evidence enough that the consumer deems a certain brand different and relevant. More so, a space in the mind is an assurance that the brand will always be part of a consumer's consideration set when thinking of a specific category.

Stored memory

The brain is like a filing cabinet. Each person has a unique way of cataloguing information. More often than not, data is unconsciously classified as very important, not so important and nice to know. The last two are often stored in the deepest recesses of the mind, to be pulled out only when needed.

In practice, color codes or markers help distinguish which file is important, not so important or not important at all.

The marketer's challenge is for his brand to be classified in the very important data file and be assigned a color that symbolizes this importance. Information becomes classified as important only when it is perceived to be meaningful or when it addresses a pressing or future need.

For example, a consumer needs running shoes. Brands that have been doing their awareness campaigns anchored on messages that are relevant to the athletic footwear market are likely to be in the *consideration set* of this buyer. More so, if these have been communicated long before the need emerged.

Heritage brands like *Adidas* or *Nike* have long track records of marketing campaigns and a roster of athletic personalities who represent the brand. These endorsers lend credibility to the brands' claimed product attributes.

No small wonder that these brands belong to the *consideration set* of many global consumers. These brands share in the very important file data of potential buyers. Each and every development around these brands – new technology, styles, colors, endorsers, etc. go straight into the brand's mental file folder.

Keep the information regular

The regularity of brand information is likewise a frequent reminder in between purchases of a specific target market. It is also a guarantee against the brand being buried or placed in the 'not important at all' folder.

Not a monopoly of space

Not to despair, there is always room for another very important file provided the file contains substantive information.

In China, the world's largest market with over one billion people, there are three strong brands in the athletic footwear category: *Nike*, *Adidas* and *Li-Ning*.

Li-Ning's strong entry in the market was borne out of the brand's emotional driver – national pride. It capitalized on being a local brand that is just as good as the two foreign brands. The brand's rational attributes – design,

functionality and value for money at half the price of Nike are mere reassurances. Its selling line “anything is possible” sums up the founder’s philosophy, China’s distinct culture and the company’s value.

Introduced in 1990, Li-Ning is the third largest sports brand in China with apparel, footwear and accessories for major sports like basketball, football, tennis, fitness and swimming.

The brand is named after its founder, Li-Ning, a world renowned gymnast who, during his 19-year sports career, has won 106 gold medals and was a two-time World Cup AA champion. Li-Ning had a strong sense of national pride and was inspired by the thought that any victory he made helped bring across national pride and global respect for China and its people, once classified as underdeveloped and poor.

In the last five years, the Li-Ning’s group sales turnover has been growing at a rate of more than 45 percent a year on the average. In 2005, its turnover rose by 30.5 percent with a gross profit of RMB 1.1 B (US\$142.1 million) from the previous year’s RMB 873 M (US \$112 M) based on an average exchange rate of US\$1 to 7.739 RMB.

