

BRANDING IN BELARUS

Brand is no longer just a material concept (a trademark and a logo) but rather a perceptual one (image, impression, and expectation of quality). A brand has become a crucial sales tool and a competitive edge for companies, and a guarantee of quality and reliability for consumers. In a market economy, a strong brand serves as a means to attract customers, increase profitability and enhance client loyalty. The purpose of this research is to identify the peculiarities and problems of branding in Belarus.

The concept of brand in Belarus is difficult to define. Firstly, the term "brand" does not have a clear definition at the legislative level: only the terms "trademark" and "service mark" are officially used. Secondly, the development of marketing and branding in the country started only at the beginning of the 21st century. Thirdly, the cultivation of brands is impeded by excessive government regulation of trade and monetary relations, protectionism, low purchasing power, the dominance of price competition, and limited marketing budgets. Lastly, in Belarus, there are few companies that correspond to the criteria of a global brand, such as mission (for example, IKEA's mission is to produce affordable and functional household goods for a larger number of people); brand awareness (the Apple logo is easily recognized); brand identity (Coca-Cola's red color and family traditions); market position; level of consumer loyalty; social significance (charity).

There are various points of view on the presence of brands in Belarus: some contend that brands are absent as they are poorly recognized internationally, others claim that brands refer to legal registration of a trademark, with only 20% of trademarks being registered in Belarus, and the others mention local brands known within particular regions (for example, Russia). Hence, branding is still in the forming stage within the country.

Branding is the process of creating and promoting a brand, it aims at shaping consumer preferences. Nevertheless, this process encounters numerous difficulties in Belarus. Local companies focus on naming and packaging, they neglect the concept of "impressions."

Outdated names and logos are regarded as one of the main issues. Many firms continue to use Soviet or regionally specific names, which makes it hard to be identified. For example, such names as "Krasny Pishchevik", "Kommunarka", "Komintern" are scarcely associated with modern products. In contrast, businesses that incorporate Belarusian language and national identity ("Svitana", "Milavitsa", "Vitba", "Slodych"), as well as brands consisting of foreign words ("Conte", "Mark Formelle", "Viber") are more attractive and competitive.

The next peculiarity of Belarusian branding is poor interaction with the target audience. It is accompanied by some other problems. The majority of Belarusian producers develop a product or a product line, without thinking about its positioning. As

a result, "Milavitsa" is known to clients, but "Lauma," "Alisee" and "Hidalgo" product lines are viewed as foreign brands.

Furthermore, resources which Belarusian companies invest in promoting their trademarks are insignificant. Even large manufacturers, such as Belita-Vitex, release dozens of brands that are hardly recognized and remain unknown to consumers. Such cases undermine consumer loyalty and have a negative effect on the reputation of the brand.

Another problem is prioritizing low prices over marketing investments. Since Belarusian consumers are inclined to focus on cost rather than on brand reputation, businesses prefer to minimize advertising expenditures.

Some producers attempt to lure customers by imitating famous global products. The notable examples are "Twikers" (Snickers), "Bela-Cola" (Coca-Cola), and the "Spartak" bar (Mars). But this approach does not guarantee success as firms win by competing on price, not quality. Moreover, they may encounter serious consequences such as lawsuits.

An additional weakness of Belarusian branding is the usage of basic and cheap advertising tools: public transport, billboards, exhibitions, and fairs. Certain manufacturers neglect digital marketing for promotion, resulting in mistrust and inability to reach the target audience.

National producers also struggle with creating effective advertising content. The logos are either too plain with vague meaning or overloaded with design elements. For instance, different companies use identical icons (the red bison appears in branding for both Belshina and Belarusian Doors) which reduces their uniqueness. At times advertising slogans may cause embarrassment as "Мы нагнули цены" (travel agency), "А вам какого хрена?" (ABC)

Despite the difficulties, Belarusian brands apply various strategies of promotion. Some businesses utilize related brands when incorporating their corporate name into product names (e.g., "Slodych" with "Tea Slodych" and "Chess Slodych"). Others choose umbrella branding where the business name serves as a quality mark, ensuring that their logo appears in advertisements regardless of the product (such as "Kommunarka" and "Savushkin Product"). A third strategy involves developing distinct product lines for different categories or target audiences. For example, "Santa Bremor" sell fish under "Matias" and "Moryachok" brands, ice cream under "Yukki" and "Soletto," and dumplings under "Babushka Anya."

In conclusion, Belarusian producers must implement certain strategies to compete internationally: to increase digital marketing investments prioritizing social media platforms and e-commerce; to rebrand Soviet-era names and logos to reflect up-to-date values; to shift from low-cost imitation to quality assurance. Undertaking these measures will foster stronger brands that can win customers loyalty locally and globally.