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CORPORATE PRODUCT AS A MARKETING CHEAT CODE

In the conditions of tough competition and rapid development of digital technologies, companies are looking for non-standard approaches to attract and retain the audience. One of such tools is corporate attributes. The purpose of the work is to analyze existing corporations or firms that, thanks to a competent marketing strategy, have reached a new level of brand recognition. As a result, they have gained authority in existing markets.

Keywords: *branded clocks, corporate merch, limited collectible, meme merch, promotional products*

Corporate merch is an integral part of modern business, capable of highlighting a brand, strengthening loyalty and bringing in additional income. The path of merch began long ago, having gone through stages of evolution, reflecting changes in society and the world of marketing. Based on this, the purpose of this article is to study the influence of corporate merch on company sales.

The first rudiments of corporate merch can be found in the distant past, in the 19th century. It was then that companies began to use simple but effective promotion methods: souvenirs, calendars, badges with a logo. These items served not only as advertising, but also as gifts for clients, helping to strengthen the connection with the brand.

At the beginning of the 20th century, corporate merch experienced a new round of development. The emergence of industrial enterprises and the growth of consumption led to the spread of such products as T-shirts, caps, bags, which became a popular way to demonstrate your affiliation with a particular company.

In the 1950s, the preppy style gained popularity in the United States - clothing characterized by strict silhouettes and elements of a school uniform. This gave rise to a trend for corporate merch products with university and college logos, which soon became popular among the masses. In the 1980s, with the advent of MTV and the "rock and roll" culture, corporate merch took on a new look. Music groups and concerts began to use T-shirts with logos and slogans as a way to promote their work. This led to corporate merch becoming not only a means of advertising, but also an important element of pop culture. In the 21st century, corporate merch has experienced and continues to experience a boom. With the development of online commerce and social networks, companies have new opportunities to promote their products and create unique experiences for customers.

Using the example of a corporation familiar to us, let's consider the emergence of a corporate product. This happened in the 1980s, when Coca Cola and its competitors started producing branded clocks, photo frames and other things.

Nowadays, corporate merch (sometimes also called 'corporate swag') is a huge market. If you count both orders from companies and sales of merch to consumers, it is comparable in volume to the book publishing industry or the revenues of music labels.

Merch is the perfect kind of marketing, but you have to know how to get into it too. In the 1990s-2000s a lot of companies tried to get into merch, but most of them went bust. But if you approach it wisely, you can accelerate brand development. Good, stylish and useful merch can become a consumer's favourite item, raising loyalty to the company. A good merch comes in contact with a person more than once. It will always be in front of their eyes, and if it turns out to be really cool, the consumer will proudly carry your logo in front of friends, colleagues and random passers-by [1].

Good merch can be of many different kinds. It can be a stylish accessory that people will buy for money. It can be some branded thing given away as a bonus (for example, Tinkoff cardholders).

A special chic is to make a fashionable limited edition or collectible, like Crocs + Coca Cola.

KFC or Tesla with its tequila, cyber whistles or cat houses. Another cool option is to make themed merch for a certain client segment, here we remember children's sets of airlines, where they put notebooks, pencils, key chains, toys and other nice little things. But for me the coolest example is the whole fashion lines of NASA, these guys managed to put their logo on every third. And you can also remember what Burger King did with their crowns (figure) [2].



The Burger King crown

The well-known Russian chain of perfume shops "Golden Apple" has quietly introduced its merch. The acid-yellow color of the bags immediately draws attention to itself. Therefore, even at a casual meeting, a person does not necessarily have to ask anyone where they bought such a wonderful perfume. After all, few competitors use such a provocative color.

A mascot is a powerful branding tool that increases recognition and strengthens the emotional connection with service or service users. If a company has a character that has ingratiated itself with the audience, you could try making merch with it.

The Duolingo owl has already become a meme, so you can find t-shirts, caps, badges and even weird masks with it in the app shop. The main thing is to pick up your order by picking it up so that the owl doesn't recognise your home address.

Vkontakte and their Peaches. With the image of the mascot, they released a collection that broadcasts the same cuteness as the cat itself.

But how much impact does corporate paraphernalia have on shop sales? This varies greatly depending on factors such as brand strength, product type, marketing strategy and audience fit. While the numbers may vary from industry to industry, research and case studies point to a few key ways to boost sales with corporate paraphernalia [3]:

1. A study by the Advertising Speciality Institute (ASI) found that 85 % of consumers recall an advertiser after receiving promotional products. Branded merchandise helps turn one-time customers into loyal customers by increasing repeat business. Example: A sportswear shop can increase footfall and basket volume by selling branded sweatshirts or water bottles, especially if customers associate the product with an active lifestyle.

2. Cross-selling opportunities.

Offering branded products promotes bundled deals (e.g., a mug with a coffee blend or a gym towel with fitness gear). This technique increases the average order value (AOV). Example: A tech

shop offering branded phone cases or headphones can increase overall sales if customers purchase them along with their main purchase.

3. Indirect increase through customer advocacy.

Customers often become brand ambassadors when they use visible merchandise (such as t-shirts or hats). This free publicity can attract new customers, indirectly increasing future sales.

4. Increase sales in-store and online.

Merchandise creates excitement around a brand. Shops can use window displays, in-store promotions and social media campaigns to attract visitors and generate additional revenue. Offering merchandise online extends reach and encourages impulse purchases, especially when it comes to personalised or customisable products [4].

5. Research and trends.

Promotional products have high margins: according to ASI, the cost per impression from branded products is lower than many traditional advertising channels, meaning they provide long-term impact at a low cost.

Promotional products also contribute to higher customer retention: a study by PPAI (Promotional Products Association International) found that customers who receive branded products tend to spend more with the company in the future. [5].

In today's world, where competition is high and consumers' attention is scattered, corporate merch has become not just a nice addition, but a necessary element for the successful development of any company. It has long ceased to be just "souvenir products", turning into a powerful marketing and image-building tool. Corporate merch, like a bright banner, not only demonstrates affiliation with a certain brand, but also creates a feeling of involvement in something big and significant. It helps employees feel like part of a single team, and for customers - strengthens positive associations with the brand.

Unique, stylish and high-quality merch becomes a vivid expression of the company's values and philosophy, attracting the attention of both potential clients and the general public. It helps to stand out from competitors and be remembered by consumers, making the brand more lively and recognizable. Ultimately, investing in corporate merch is investing in the success of the company. Properly selected and thoughtful merch can become a real engine of business growth and development, helping to attract new customers, strengthen the loyalty of existing ones and create a solid foundation for long-term success.

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