

Airbnb: Powerful Global Branding in Action

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Abstract

Throughout this research paper, it will explore the influences of branding on international customers and will also focus on the important attributes social media continues to bring to advertising. While researching several companies of branding internationally, the company that stood out the most was Airbnb. Airbnb Inc. operates as an online marketplace for hospitality services, which offers lodging, homestays, and tourism services via websites and mobile applications. Airbnb serves clients worldwide and must use branding on different customers all over the world. During this paper it will go into further detail explaining the challenges behind the influences of branding, the strategies and creativeness behind this company, and the achievements that continue internationally. Although there are several benefits behind Airbnb's successful brand, there were challenges that came up along the way. The uniqueness of the company brand strives from storytelling, acceptance, belonging, and creating endless opportunities for anyone, anywhere, and at any point in time.

Keywords: Airbnb, branding, marketing, social media, storytelling

Introduction

Global branding is the purpose of marketing a product or service under the same name with similar coordinated marketing strategies in multiple different countries. Therefore, this means that the personality, feel, look, position, and strategy should all be the same from one country to another. Adopting a global branding strategy is very important and a company must measure all the advantages and disadvantages. Airbnb is a unique company and has a branding strategy that works and differentiates from others. They provide a great example as to how connecting with others is not only important for their brand, but also makes their brand possible. Airbnb uses more of a human interaction and connection approach which helps people bond all over the world. They must also use the internet and social media to increase their brand awareness and they do this by sharing with the world the great experiences and hosts that are found all over the world.

Using Global Branding and the Internet

The internet continues to grow, and it has helped make global branding much easier compared to previous decades. A company's global brand relates to the way their company looks or feels from one country to another including their advertising and strategy. For example, Airbnb global brand relates to convincing people all around the world that staying in a stranger's home is not odd or scary (Animucka, 2015). To do this the company had to provide a website on the internet and now an application on the phone to allow customers around the world to access this opportunity. This also allows each host to tell their own story by sharing pictures and giving descriptions on the area that surrounds their home. The global brand for Airbnb is essential when it comes to developing trust between the community of hosts and travelers. A strong brand helps allow consumers to be comfortable to communicate and get to know and trust the brands quality

and consistency. Global branding has several advantages, but it also helps companies increase their bottom line because consumers are willing to pay more for the services and products that are perceived as dependable and achieve a high quality (Thompson, 2019). Global branding not only just benefits consumers and companies, but also provides advantages within several other areas and has so much to offer.

Benefits to Global Branding

Companies who market brands globally achieve so much more on a global scale by increasing their overall client base and there are several benefits behind this success. First, when marketing globally it helps improve the effectiveness of a company's services and products by allowing the company to grow into a wider spectrum audience. Airbnb has a mission to live in a world where anyone can belong anywhere, and this applies to all employees, hosts, and guests. This has led to serving several different cultures and has brought an explosive growth to the organization. This example relates to another benefit to global branding which is it creates a stronger competitive advantage. Airbnb started out locally and eventually expanded globally which benefitted from global branding as customers were able to be better informed on what the service had to offer. By creating a global brand, this allows for the company to be able to adapt the consumer needs, demands and current trends. Airbnb adjusts their market strategy depending on the local culture or the region and must adapt to the global strategy that is allowed. The last and largest benefit of global marketing revolves around the customers around the world. They help communicate and keep future customers informed and can interact with the community on what the company has to offer (Thompson, 2019). For Airbnb, the internet helped produce a worldwide audience that now can leave a review when necessary and can recommend future customers to stay at the same place. Therefore, this allows customers to stay on top of this

service by the click of a mouse or by the tap of a phone screen and allows them to stay up to date about the brand.

Building a Multi-Cultural Brand

Starting in 2008, Airbnb went from a single based operation out of San Francisco to a global brand that is so transforming and disrupting the traditional industry. The company has a unique business and takes pride within its stand of diversity and presence. Airbnb constantly creates a place that anyone can feel they belong too, and they continue to grow from this inception with each passing year. Airbnb started from a single apartment in a big city and expanded to over three million homes across close to two hundred countries. The company is centered behind the concept of belonging and continues to use this platform to spread across all different environments and diversities. By using values such as trust, kindness, and acceptance; it helps enhance the brand marketing for those outside of the company and portray positive expectations as a host or a traveler. Airbnb is becoming a “super brand” and by continuing to create optimistic employee experiences, superb host experiences, and brand promises it will continue to rise and align across all different cultures, geographies, and channels. The purpose of Airbnb’s brand experience was developed by three co-founders in hopes of created comfortable, temporary and affordable accommodations for people looking for a local experience. All members can meet their ‘Airfam’ virtually and physically and helps bring people together. Airbnb has a purpose of creating a vision and a strategy that helps people learn from each other and helps give back to communities. Airbnb provides its hosts with the opportunity to travel other homes, cultures, and people as this helps create a deeper purpose behind belonging for all who continue to participate. Leadership of Airbnb is continuing to define the generation by ensuring its mission and values, the marketing team will continue to build its diverse brand and

inclusiveness that each community serves (Primola, 2017). Each company has an attribute that makes them different from others, and they must be confident when exploring brand marketing initiatives and discovering what communities around the world really care about.

Brand Challenges

While there are several benefits and advantages that come along with Airbnb, there have been some challenges behind its branding tactics. Airbnb has very successful marketing as they have a disruptive tech and travel brand that continues to influence the daily news. However, Airbnb is still developing its brand and at times it appears larger than it is. Within 2015 the campaign began its journey by expressing the “Never a stranger” slogan, which helped created a major awareness to its brand. As this slogan was a great start, it only led to some challenges that stirred up in 2016. For instance, awareness was not being spread everywhere and not to where competitors were like China or South Korea. This brought Airbnb to realization that not all awareness and considerations were going to be created equally by country. As time moved forward, awareness only continued to grow, however, the news was not always positive, and consideration was hard to keep up on. Competitors and online travel agents were outperforming Airbnb and were taking away from the company’s unique characteristics and features that the company brings. Continuing to look for global growth was also a challenge that Airbnb faced and to keep this continuous growth within their budget. Airbnb also had to get a positive message across to travelers regarding safety and security. In order to get consumers comfortable with being in a different home and a different neighborhood was going to be a big step and challenge for Airbnb (Mildenhall, 2017). Since 2015, Airbnb has proved and outsmarted all these challenges as they continue to remain innovative and constantly are convincing travelers all over the world to risk taking a chance to travel and host with Airbnb.

A Creative Challenge – Do Not Go There

Another creative idea that ended up turning into a challenge, was the adventurous idea of telling audiences all around the world to quit tour groups and to start experiencing the world like locals, and to do this, they must experience with Airbnb. Therefore, marketing went about this by telling people not to travel like they used to but with the new way of traveling with Airbnb. For example, by saying “Do not go to Paris, do not go to New York, do not go to Hong Kong”. This campaign encouraged people to stay in different hours outside of the traditional tourist areas by try new foods, exploring new neighborhoods, and meeting new friends. Although the campaign was saying not to travel, it was reinforcing people to start a new role by balancing new experiences by being in your very own home, which meant you make your own bed, cook your own food, and do the normal things you would normally do within your home. However, with the use of television series like Modern Family, social media, and Pinterest; Airbnb was brought up and the awareness was spread. Locally innovation continues to spread as pictures are shared throughout the Airbnb homes by helping to create that personally experiences with the families (Mildenhall, 2017). The main objective of this campaign was to create a global increase in consideration and awareness by sending a single message to travelers, and this goal was achieved, and the results surpassed the expectations the company envisioned.

Discovering a Lasting Brand

Although Airbnb has had several challenges, this has only resulted in building a lasting brand. Airbnb’s Head of Brand, Nancy King, and the Chief Strategy Officer, Neil Barrie, explained the key to their success. In 2017, a new CEO was hired, and investors were examining every decision the company made. The brand’s success wasn’t from finance or spreadsheets but was from using language and terminology that investors could understand. The biggest barrier

for Airbnb was the uncomfortable and different concept it brought to the table, and it was an emotional challenge to overcome this barrier. There were five key attributes that helped guide Airbnb to where they are today; those attributes consist of recognizable visuality, universal values, understanding culture, creating a stand, and emotional connection. This is just the first step to success, because the next step is turning that iconic brand into money for the company. Brands are just as important internally for an organization as it provides them financial assets, growth, and provides customer value. Airbnb has had several opportunities including Super Bowl ads and constantly having updates along Facebook; however, the largest advantage involves their own hosts and customers who already provide this market platform for the organization (Safian, 2017). It truly does go to show that a brand has a large impact on investing in building a brand for your enterprise.

Worldwide Acceptance and Storytelling

While discovering ways to create a lasting brand for your company can be difficult, Airbnb has conquered and mastered using community storytelling in order to build and continue to build their global brand. By using passionate community stories, this helps take a closer look at what Airbnb is all about, helps facilitate between hosts and guests, and gets the community behind the company's brand. Airbnb had to venture out because they are different from most brands, which is what introduced the company motto of "belong anywhere". This transformed Airbnb from a tech company to a hospitality company that encouraged their guests to travel and believe as if they can go wherever they want. Later in 2016, the "belong anywhere" encouragement continue as hosts were now contributing to the brand by offering tours or other hand on events with their guests. The key to their success is how strong the community involvement is and continues to be, as stories from the community are growing. With host stories

from traveling to the UK to make wooden clogs with host JoJo or planning a trip to Danville where you can be accommodated with a hot tub; the opportunities are endless. It is so important for to understand the values behind the traveling experience, getting a proper sense of belonging, and gathering with the community who helped make all this possible. In 2017, they made it clear that everyone would be accepted, “Until We All Belong” campaign was addressed to help keep people committed behind no matter where they travel to, they should feel as if they belong (Clement, 2017). The power of acceptance and storytelling is a clear value and has helped grow the Airbnb brand beyond all their expectations.

Airbnb for Everyone

This is only the beginning for the storytelling and audience driven marketing brand tactics and it is not going away within the near future. Airbnb has built a powerful tool that includes using the community as brand advocates increasing their brand to be above and beyond. A global brand is defined to “identify the good or service and to differentiate them from those competitors” (Cateora, Money, Gilly, & Graham, 2016). Throughout the textbook, it discusses the importance of a brand name, and states that a successful brand is the most valuable resource a company can have. This is exactly what Airbnb strives to continue to achieve as they make the marketing process look easy. Early on within their business strategy Airbnb discovered the importance of using the power of connecting which led them to the peak of their success. With the brand growing, it is so much more than just a place to stay as it provides that personal feel that everyone craves. Airbnb is now focusing on the power of end to end travel experiences and their website explains how they “embrace the new way of marketing with the shift from brand-empowered messaging to audience-empowered messaging”. All experiences relate to their own quality and uniqueness that makes Airbnb the special organization it already is. The company

realizes the importance of recognizing both guests and hosts as they both serve a role within the picture. The two attributes need each other, and the bond of connection must be there for hosts to have guests and guests to book out the hosts lodging. Along marketing research may say not to try and market to everyone, this is exactly what Airbnb has done because they are accepting and want everyone to join their platform and take forth in their own experienced journey (Millar, 2018). Airbnb continues to do everything right and is exploring options into the right direction by creating positive brand experiences for all types of audiences all around the world.

Conclusion and Future Study

In conclusion, today's world is filled with customers waiting for the newest product or service offered and it is up to global branding to help advertise worldwide. Being a part of a Marketing business course, it is fascinating the success that has come from storytelling and building such a strong brand from social media audiences. Airbnb continues to use these tactics to develop a strategy that creates a vision of the company's needs, wants and expectations of the audiences. Airbnb has had extraordinary success that has been driven from the importance of their global brand. The future is endless for this unique and booming company as they are constantly encouraging people to "belong everyone" and create a new experience in your new home away from home.

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