Timothy Fair

Sports Marketing Audit

For this sports marketing audit I decided to dive into the commercial brand world and focus this project solely on Warrior’s ice hockey sticks. The man that I interviewed with and who was able to guide me and teach me of their marketing strategies was Keith Perera. Keith is Warrior’s product manager for hockey products at Warrior sports, so he seemed liked a perfect person to interview to answer my questions. Just to start off with a small introduction about the company, Warrior is the newest brand to enter into the hockey market, compared to brands such as Bauer, CCM, and Easton who have been around for decades. Based out of Michigan, Warrior is a local company that focuses on their simple grass roots marketing along with new generation techniques to sell to their customers. Starting off as a lacrosse company and expanding into other markets such as hockey, and even buying smaller brands such as Brine and New Balance, Warrior has quickly rose to the top of the chart behind those top hockey brands that were mentioned before.

Talking to Mr. Perera he is very passionate about this company and certainly is passionate when it comes to their hockey sticks. The company tries to set itself apart from all of the other companies by sticking with that young, energetic atmosphere and taking that into marketing their hockey sticks. The image they set out to portray to customers and to the hockey market is that they want to be looked at as a high performance based product that markets to high level hockey players, such as AAA, juniors, and future “NHL” players, at least hopeful NHL players. Their target market is these specific hockey players in the age range of 12-18, because this is about the time when kids start to really focus on hockey and trying to perform at the highest level and move their hockey careers in the forward direction. Another portion of the image that really stuck with me and made sense was that Warrior wants to be as Unique as possibly, whether it be with their social media, commercials, product designs and names, or even some of their other marketing techniques. Keith said something to me that really was a terrific look into how they want their company to be viewed, and that is” If you take the logos off of the sticks, is it still Warrior?” Meaning that he wants their brand of sticks to be recognizable and not go along with the traditional hockey styles and designs and stay their own brand. One of Warriors greatest marketing techniques for their products is their grass roots techniques, so going to big tournaments or events and setting up tents and displays, even demos, like they used to do at lacrosse tournaments when they first started. One other major important aspect of branding their hockey sticks and the image that Warrior would like to portray is that their sticks are made in the USA, which in terms of hockey equipment may be rare.

When talking about creating value out of their sticks for their customers, Warrior uses some very interesting techniques that some other brands may necessarily not be using. When dealing with hockey sticks there is the top of the line stick which is just like what the NHL players use, and then there are lower models of that stick to make the stick and technology at every price point available. What Warrior does compared to other brands is offer the same technology and materials in all of their sticks allowing for even lower priced stick to feel like the top model stick. Some other brands do not exactly do this, but the only difference is the weight and the amount of response out of the stick.

In terms of relationship marketing, Warrior really tries to ensure long-term relationships with their customers so that the company and consumer can both be happy. This can be done by ensuring buying agreements especially with dealers of their products, such as hockey stores. Doing this ensures the company that a certain amount of products will be bought. Another thing Warrior does compared to some other companies is that they work in cohesion with the marketing departments of these stores to create innovative Point Of Purchase displays in store and also scheduling in store NHL player appearances with Warrior athletes that promote their sticks in the process along with bringing in customers and sales to the store itself.

Star power is a major aspect of marketing sports products especially hockey sticks. The pros of marketing like this is creating instant legitimacy with customers about their sticks along with giving major exposure in the professional sports market that can be witnessed by their target audience during games. The cons of marketing this way has to deal with the NHL players that may have trivial issues or problems with the product, such as performance or eye appeal. This can cause definite problems because the player may be a sponsored athlete, but the goal is to keep the professional players happy. Using this star power from NHL players allows the company to using their name in likeness when promoting or marketing their hockey sticks. The company makes these NHL players the face of their company and of their sticks.

Going along with star power, Warrior has a process that is gone through to determine what player market their sticks. According to Mr. Perera, the company looks to make sure that the player is one of their contract athletes, also what market that player is from in terms of which team they play for, and also how high profile the athlete is. Another major aspect that Warrior looks at when finding players to be the marketing face of their sticks is performance throughout the season and past season along with potential for contending during the playoffs. Warrior wants players that are high performers, and players that can make it into the playoffs, because most of the new releases for their sticks are late in the season which means that the only players that could be promoting these sticks are ones participating in the playoffs.

In today’s day and age there are many forms that can be used to market products and get the Warrior name out there. Warrior is shifting towards the new generation and cutting edge pf marketing these hockey sticks. Television and print ads are their least used and successful forms of advertising for their sticks. These forms are still used, such as an ad in USA hockey magazine, which is a magazine subscription given out to every insured, registered hockey player in the USA, and having TV commercials that directly use NHL players to promote the new sticks coming out. Also, marketing during hockey games with sponsored TV segments or advertisements on the ice or the boards are still used today but are not the most widely used or successful. The best way for Warrior to market towards that targeted audience from earlier in the paper is to interact via social media and online. The use of Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter are the modern way of appealing to that target market and spreading the word about these new sticks and showing players using these sticks. Kids now are all over social media so this presents the opportunity for Warrior to appeal greatly to those high level players, and players in general to try and get Warrior sticks in these player’s hands. Another form of marketing that is very effective is again that grass roots style at tournaments and events. Also, being the title sponsor of the Warrior Invitational tournament and for other events state and worldwide is a great way to shed light on new products especially the new sticks. Setting up shooting demos with fake ice and nets to allow players and customers the opportunity to use these new sticks is a great way to show the sticks and present the products. The method is also teamed with social media to show players/customers at these demos or events, or to get the word out about Warrior’s presence at such events like this.

Warrior puts a great deal of time and effort to stay away from the status quo when dealing with their hockey sticks. The strive to be unique and market their brand of sticks to the high level player and to create the brand image they do is something other companies are not doing. Being a relatively young company in the market presents different problems, but Warrior handles these issues by staying close to its roots and sticking with what they know. That is producing high performance sticks and being very in touch with their consumers and the players that market these sticks. Warrior has grown so much from their introduction into the hockey stick market and I cannot wait to see what is in store for the future of these hockey sticks and for the company itself.