

THE MARKETING MIX: MANCHESTER UNITED MASTERS



BACKGROUND

Consider the marketing machine that is international soccer's dream franchise, Manchester United. The franchise's success in establishing a solid marketing mix has effectively helped to brand the organization as one of the most recognizable professional sports teams in the world.

Manchester United has consistently offered an excellent product in an extremely successful soccer team, but the success on and off the field has helped the organization maintain its marketability. The continued exposure of a quality product has resulted in high volumes of merchandise sales, furthering the development of the brand with fans gobbling up everything from replica jerseys and apparel to key chains and coffee mugs.

The key to continued fan support for Manchester United has been the effective development of price points. The organization has positioned itself as a premium product, one which commands a higher ticket price. The simple foundation of the economic principle of supply and demand has no doubt weighed heavily into the pricing strategies as with the club selling out the majority of its home games. Access to seats is limited to the organization's "membership".

Adding to Manchester United's appeal is the venue in which they perform. With a historic tradition rivaled by very few sports stadiums, Old Trafford Stadium plays host to over 200,000 visitors from all over the world every year for tours alone. The team's website features information on the stadium, but also highlights an online video lounge, player interviews, team news and a host of other attractions that drive traffic. With thousands of visitors to the site each day, the organization has an excellent opportunity to make its products, such as tickets and merchandise, available to consumers. Fans also have an opportunity to see games live on television on MUTV, a television channel dedicated to Manchester United. MUTV is owned by the franchise, allowing for the team to maintain control of the broadcasting rights. In addition, fans can listen live on the radio and Internet.

Manchester United also engages in multiple promotional opportunities, including a host of sponsor partnerships. The mass world-wide appeal of the franchise provides exceptional marketing opportunities for sponsors, and the club has effectively turned those sponsorships into unique promotions for fans, including offers for a Manchester United credit card (MasterCard) and insurance discounts (complete with an online quote from Man U's website). Manchester United also has valuable sponsors in Nike, Vodafone (mobile phone company), PepsiCo, and Anheuser-Busch. In 2005, a company called Serious USA launched a line of DVD trading card collectibles featuring Manchester United. Also in 2005, the team website featured a promotion providing fans the extraordinary chance to "Fly To Milan With The United Team", donated by United's official car supplier Audi UK.

QUESTIONS

1. How has Manchester United implemented each element of the marketing mix?
2. Do you think Manchester United has been successful in integrating those components? Why or why not?
3. How has the marketing mix helped Manchester United in branding their franchise?