

The North Face Marketing Plan



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Part 1: Executive Summary

The North face began in 1966 in San Francisco, California selling men, women, and children's high-end apparel, such as premium outerwear, footwear, and a recreational equipment line for outdoor sports and activities. The company prides itself on its practicality and has always had the mission in mind to get out and never stop exploring. The North Face is a retailer known for high-performance climbing, technical mountaineering apparel, and backpacking equipment. As time went by, the product mix grew in size and the brand expanded its recognition dramatically.

Part 2: Mission and Four Theories of Excellence

The North Face uses many forms of marketing strategies to reach out to their customers. One strategy that the firm used to improve sales was that they encouraged people to explore the lands around them. North face's goal was to connect with people emotionally about the idea of exploring new and breathtaking places they have never been before. Aaron Carpenter, VP-global marketing at The North Face said "We've always been a brand that's always been associated with Everest and pushing your personal boundaries, and we wanted to make that a little more personal with people." What Aaron said describes the entire marketing plan that The North Face used in 2014. In that year, the firm increased spending by just about 50 percent, compared to previous campaigns. Once sales reached over two billion dollars, Aaron Carpenter stated that "we're a real leader in the outdoor sports world," and "We're just gaining influence, and we want to use the spot to inspire people." Once Aaron said this, it was clear that North Face was the front-runner in the outdoor clothing market.

The firm focuses on four forms of excellence to ensure the customers are always satisfied with their product, which are: customer excellence, operational excellence, product excellence, and locational excellence. Customer excellence is the first theory and is achieved when a firm retains loyal customers and excellent customer service. The North Face achieves this by offering services on its website where the customer can email, live chat, or call with any questions that may arise when shopping on the site or any issues with the products. They have all separate hours posted for the chat room, phone lines, and where their main location is. Under their customer service tab, they give options of what is covered on the warranties, frequently asked questions so save you time, contact information, the return policy and many other options to making your shopping experience with them as painless as possible. The firm uses many of their employees to ensure the satisfaction of each and every customer.

Operational excellence is the second theory and is achieved through efficient operations, excellent supply chain, and human resource management. The North Face puts ample time and effort into doing achieving this. When the firm is producing a product they look at the climate that it will be used in and how much competitors are selling similar products for. The North Face also looks at what the customers are saying on social media and other forms of communication to come out with the best product possible to appeal to the largest group of people. When they do so, the firm gains profit. If they see an increase in the profits of the firm, then they know they are satisfying the needs of the customers. The brand is also seen in a wide range of stores. This is because with a product that can be used for all types of seasons, other stores such as Macy's (Department store), Dicks Sporting Goods (sporting store), and Finish Line (Shoe store). North Face's representatives use many different types of stores to sell their product since even though

everything from the brand may not be suited for that store a portion of their products, is enough for all of these stores to carry North Face proudly. With contracts large and small with stores they still focus on giving the best service to each and every one of their clients.

The third theory, product excellence, is accomplished by stipulating products with a high perceived value by using effective branding and positioning. North Face's product excellence is one of the most important things within the firm. On the website, it shows how durable the product is and how it is made to help make the customer feel more at ease when purchasing a coat or pant. One of things that they do which you usually won't see with other firms is the amount of products that were damaged, wasted, and donated. This is because they are very confident in the product they are releasing to the public and want to the customer to feel just as confident in buying the product. James Rogers, senior sustainability manager said, "The evolution of our approach to sustainability lies in the design of our products. When we make sustainability a fundamental component of everything we design, then we can move toward making innovative products that have a positive effect on the environment and society." North Face puts the design of the product before making the next innovative product because they believe that they cannot lead the market without ensuring that all of their products work to the maximum potential.

Finally, the last theory of excellence is location and this is achieved by having a good physical location as well as Internet presence. Where they locate the brand is one of the most important portions of success in the saturated market. One way they do this is by having store put their products closer to the front of the store or have a window display to show how and want the products are used for. Also putting their brand next to similar brands could help since the

customers can compare right there on the spot with firm has the product at hand. Another way The North Face uses locational excellence is that they put themselves in the large department stores, footwear stores, and sporting stores to raise profits to the maximum potential. Giving the customer the largest value for the least amount of money is something North Face looks into also. Customers get a high quality product for cost similar to other brands, which is why The North Face is successful in marketing their products time and time again.

When developing a marketing plan for North Face, we have to go through three phases: the planning phase, the implementation phase, and the control phase. All phases need to be perfect for success in the current market.

The first step in the planning phase that The North Face will have to look at is their mission statement. The firm has released this statement to show what their goals are for the present and future, “Our passion is beyond setting records and achieving fame. For us, it’s all about changing lives, not just our lives, but also, the lives of those people who inspire us to aim for extraordinary dreams.” North face want their consumer to use their products to the fullest potential, so that people keep testing their limits and “never stop exploring”

The second step in the planning phase is conducting a situation analysis. They do this by conducting a SWOT analysis which goes over all of the firm's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. The third step overall, and the first step in the implementation phase is identifying and evaluating the opportunities by using STP or segmentation, targeting, and positioning. Both of which, will be covered in depth in part three.

Step four when the firm implements the marketing mix. North Face has to focus on the four p’s to have success in the flooded market, which are: product, price, place, and promotion.

The firm designs products in its field and to establish the standard in the industry for each of its products. They design their products for extreme conditions such as high altitudes, climbing, winter board sports, and other places where your clothing will be tested to the fullest of the coat or pants ability. They also make their apparel very fashionable to a large range of ages. North Face sets their prices to be competitive with any of their other competitors. At the beginning, the firm mostly focused on making their products to only appeal to extreme athletes, so they made their prices very high. Once other competitors came out (Patagonia) they had to make their prices slightly lower than the other firms, while keeping them at premium pricing. North Face keeps their products readily accessible to consumers and continue to have growth in retail. They also offer a free three day shipping to anywhere in the world, thus giving them a strong place value in this growing market. Promotion is one of the most important parts of the firm, since they are always trying to grow their customer base. They use a traditional source of promotion and with the internet growing everyday, the firm goes through social media and thought-sharing websites to promote their product. The ever growing company also offer yearly discount promotions to increase sales throughout the year. North Face uses the four p's very effectively to improve their customer base, sales, and the overall knowledge of the firm.

The last step and the first in the control phase is evaluating performance using the marketing matrix. The North Face uses the push strategy to increase demand by motivating sellers to push the products onto consumers. North Face motivates viewers by adding the statement, "Never stop exploring" at the end of their commercials. Through the entire commercial, it focuses on how exploring is good for the body and soul, this is why the idea of "Never stop exploring" pushes sellers to sell North Face over other competitors. They also push

that their products leave the consumer comfortable and happy. In a commercial when they say, “where nature may heal and give strength to the body and soul” shows that one of their main focuses for success is to use nature as a way to relax and get away from all of the other stressors in life. The quote above is also related to the emotional appeal of the consumer. Even on the coldest of days, you see the user’s in the commercial smiling because they know their product will perform to the best of its ability and will do so better than most competing products. Another form of the matrix that is used is social marketing. They use social media to reach out to their clients through multiple ways. On the website they currently have a 50th year anniversary interactive page to highlight the progress that the firm has made thus far. They also make many youtube videos and post on Facebook and other social medias to reach out to the general public. The North Face uses these techniques so the customer has the utter most confidence when purchasing such an expensive coat.

The boston consulting group matrix is used by firms all of the time. When using this chart, we look at four categories: stars, cash cows, question marks, and dogs. We found that our current star or the product that gives the most return and has the potential to become a cash cow was the men’s thermoball full zip jacket. This is because it is a new slimmer look similar to the men’s nuptse jacket (our cash cow) but does not limit your range of motion as much as the other coat. Our question mark was the men’s custom denali jacket since it is a very old look with almost nothing changing in years to the coat. Profits for the coat haven’t been what they have been in years past and will most likely keep this downward regression. Lastly, our dog for the chart was the men’s ballard duck boot since there are many different brands coming out with other duck boots more appealing to consumers.

Situational Analysis (SWOT)

A situational analysis, otherwise known as SWOT, is a structured planning method that helps analyze and determine a company's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. A SWOT analysis is broken up into its internal strengths and weaknesses and external opportunities and threats. Internal meaning the company has control over it and external meaning the company has no control. The strengths are characteristics of the business or project that give it an advantage over others. The weaknesses are characteristics of the business that place the business at a disadvantage relative to the competition. The opportunities are elements in the environment that the business could exploit to the business' advantage and finally, the threats are elements in the environment that could cause trouble for the business. Listed below is the SWOT analysis our group determined for The North Face.

Internal	Strengths -Brand recognition -High Product quality -Experienced owners and founders -Strong Global Presence	Weaknesses -Seasonally limited products
External	Opportunities -Emerging countries -Expansion of product line	Threats -Competitors and knockoff brands -Staying on top of trends

Strengths

The North Face holds numerous strengths in its company; brand recognition being one of the leading assets. It is rare for someone to be unaware of The North Face brand and the high-quality products the company has to offer. The business has expanded its market throughout the years and created a demand of its products amongst men, women, and children. It is also subsidiary of the VF corporation, which is the largest American Apparel corporation; however, even amongst all of the brands under the VF corporation, The North Face is still the largest outdoor and action sports brand in the market. With that being said, the businesses greatest success is its brand recognition. Additionally, throughout the last ten years international sales have gone up. In 2013, the brand launched a “Never Stop Exploring Campaign” in China for people to compete to win a trip to the United States that drew 216,000 new members to the brand's online community (AdvertisingAge, 2014). The company also has a team maxed with experienced owners and founders that have trained the staff accordingly and understand the direction they want to pivot the company in the future.

Weaknesses

The North face does not face too many weaknesses but price point is unquestionably one of them. It's quite evident that the price point for The North Face is above what most people would like to pay for a coat, sweatshirt, etc. Customers are often tempted to resort to knockoff brands that will provide them with just as much warmth as the North Face would. The North Face faces also only sells products designed for the winter season, which limits its market. This however is only a minor weakness because the niche market has allowed the business to be one of the top selling brands for its consumers.

Opportunities

It's easy to think that such a well-established brand lacks the need to fix anything, but opportunity is something that is always an option amongst any company. The North Face has plenty of ways it can improve its brand and further increase profit. One way in particular are the emerging countries that are new to The North Face brand. Not only will this increase the company's profits worldwide, but it will also provide the business an opportunity to expand its product line. Trends constantly vary amongst countries, so The North Face will have to expand its product line in order to cater to these specific trends.

Threats

The North Face's most dominant threats are the competitors that target that same type of customer. The market amongst sportswear and outerwear is highly competitive. Patagonia is the company's most challenging competitor because it is constantly trying to take the market share away from The North Face. Additionally, staying on top of trends and responding to them efficiently is a perpetual threat for any apparel company. Failure to do so in a timely manner can put an adverse affect on the company.

STP: Segmentation, Targeting, and Positioning

The process of STP, segmentation, targeting and positioning allows North Face to have strong opportunities for increasing sales and profits because they appeal to multiple markets. STP by definition is, the process of dividing the marketplace into subgroups or segments to determine which of those segments it should pursue or arge, and finally decides how it should position its products and services to best meet the needs of those chosen targets. In the case of

North face, they use segmentation to divide up their market based on their consumers wants and needs by providing goods and services that are attractive to them.

North Face is primarily geared toward those who live an outdoor and active lifestyle. Many of these individuals who live a lifestyle like this, are young and generally live in a lively environment. That being said, demographics such as age are a huge factor when segmenting their outdoor company. Since North Face is a brand that possesses such high quality in their products, income has an influence as well. A person who lives an active and outdoors lifestyle will need products that can hold up against the harsh conditions of the outdoors, which of course raises prices as quality rises. Geographic segmentation shows importance for North Face as well, as they are an international company, present in the United States, Canada, Europe and the United Kingdom. Not only do they segment on a large international scale but they also segment on a smaller scale among cities like New York and Boston.

North Face views each of these segments with high priority for their market. From these segments they decided to target individuals who are between the ages of 20-40 and are involved in sports like, skiing, mountain biking, climbing and have a general interest in adventure, all of which live a life with a strong economic background. This is where the targeting aspect of STP comes into play for North Face. These individuals that fit into each of these categories are generally extreme athletes, whom make up their target market, which is actually expanding.

Recently outdoor clothing has become more of an everyday wardrobe for individuals that don't necessarily have an interest in active lifestyle at all because of its ease and comfort. North Face has recognized this and is now beginning to expand their market into a more casual market

as well. That being said, their target market is still extreme athletes but now also individuals who don't view sports with such high importance, who they refer to as casual consumers.

From this, North Face was able to create the process of market positioning for themselves by creating a distinct understanding of what their products represent to their consumers. Since they have the target markets of both extremists and casual consumers, they must position themselves so that they can reach out to both. North Face has positioned themselves so that their consumers understand the versatility of their products. When an individual thinks of the North Face brand, they understand that their products are of high quality and can be used by any type of individual. By creating this positioning in the market, they have become a very strong company because it does attract so many types of people and markets. This creates many opportunities for North Face to grow and succeed as they now have more ways to appeal to a wider variety of consumers.

Part Four: Marketing Mix

North Face is one of the most recognizable companies known across the world because of their strong brand, providing both the firm and their consumer's advantages. Since they have such a strong and familiar brand, it is used as an asset for the entire company and it has positioned them to be seen with a good reputation through their quality products.. They are legally protected through their trademarks on their name and logo, also adding to their reputation.

The fact that their brand is so strong, it is easy for consumers to know if they want to choose them over another company like Patagonia, who is their biggest competitor. This is due to the advantage that brands have through facilitating purchases by consumers. North Face is a

brand that caters to both leisure as well as an individual who lives an active lifestyle through sports like hiking or climbing. By being a company who caters to both markets, they make it easy for consumers to make the quick decision of choosing North Face over Patagonia because Patagonia clothing is used more for leisure than anything else as well as being much cheaper than them as well.

This also leads into the advantage that their brand protects them from competition through pricing. North Face happens to be on the cheaper end of companies who provide outdoor clothing. Consumers more often than not, going to buy the cheaper product especially if it is of a company that has such a strong brand among society like North Face. With that being said, North Face has products that people buy just from them because of their quality and satisfaction, the Denali Jacket being one of them.

Product Life Cycle: Denali Jacket

One of North Face's most popular products is the Denali Jacket, for both men and women. This product incorporates all of the aspects that North Face strives to have throughout their entire company. The Denali Jacket for both men and women was introduced as a lightweight, warm, comfortable and even fashionable fleece layer outdoor activities. The jacket also incorporated the idea of saving the earth and being environmentally friendly as well, which is the main goal for North Face, as we know from their branding strategies. North Face used both old fabric scraps and recycled bottles for each jacket. "The North Face is built on a love of exploring and protecting the outdoors, so making products responsibly is a priority," said Adam Mott, director of sustainability at The North Face. (Repreve. 2016)

Originally, when the product first entered the introduction stage of the product life cycle, it was to attract the market for an insulating layer for hikers and other outdoor extremists. The jacket was geared towards being worn as a fleece layer under the North Face Mountain Light Jacket, an outer shell layer made for wet conditions. As the Denali Jacket entered the introduction stage, these outdoor extremists took great interest in the product and other innovators recognized this and began to buy the product as well.

Since the jacket was comfortable, warm, lightweight and even fashionable, it grew into an even bigger market, where it went through the diffusion of innovation with pioneers because it had now begun to enter a completely new market. It had satisfied so much ideal criteria that both, North Face and all types of consumers were looking for that it entered the growth stage. At this point the Denali Jacket had not only been introduced to a market where an outdoor fleece layer was needed but it had become so accepted by others that the demand went right up, increasing sales as well. The Denali Jacket has a 98% recommendation rating, which has even created competition because of its success.

All of North Face's competitors like Patagonia and Columbia have recognized the success of this product and have tried to mimic the criteria of the Denali Jacket to create their own success. North Face still seems to be in the growth stage and does not seem to be moving on to the maturity stage, where it will have to rejuvenate or reposition their product anytime soon. The Denali Jacket has had so much success that it still has a huge demand in markets that almost everyone has interest in. North Face is "embraced by the city student, the rural rancher and just about everyone in between." (Tugend. 2013) This jacket was exactly what North Face had in

mind when creating their brand, which is why the product is one, if not the most popular product that North Face has to offer.

The Denali Jacket is not the only North Face product that has this much success. Since 2013, there has been a 35% increase in sales with over \$2 Billion in revenue since then as well. (VFC.) North face has a five-year plan, which expects The North Face brand to reach \$3.3 billion by 2017, based on a five-year compound annual growth rate of 12 percent. That includes double-digit growth rates in the Americas, Europe and Asia Pacific regions. (VFC.) Much of the North Face products follow the trend that the Denali Jacket has through the product life cycle which shows where the overall position of the company among its marketplace.

The Intangible Products of North Face:

North Face is a company that prides themselves in their commitment to the environment. One of the ways that North Face gives back to the environment, in addition being a company built around sustainability is through their Clothes the Loop program. This program is a service that invites its consumers to drop used apparel and footwear in any condition at participating *The North Face* brand retail stores. Items are repurposed for reuse to extend their life or recycled into raw materials and customers earn coupons toward The North Face brand gear. (VFC.)

The way in which North Face markets this service is much different than how they market their products because services are inseparable, heterogeneous, perishable and intangible. Since North Face does not have a tangible object to incorporate in their commercials or other advertisements, they have found other ways to share the program with their respective markets and that is through mostly social media. Social media has become such a large influence on

marketing especially in the past few years and North Face has taken full advantage of it for their program. North Face has made Clothes the Loop a part of an app called, STUFFSTR. This is an app that is used to recirculate clothing items that people don't want anymore. The collaboration between STUFFSTR and Clothes the Loop is becoming a major stimulus for the Go Green Movement that has been so prominent in the past few years.

Though this is much more difficult for North Face to market, they are still just as successful as the program has received over 42,500 pounds of clothes and footwear. In addition to their service they provide for the environment, North Face also has many services they pride themselves in for their consumers as well. These services are provided through their excellence in Retail Service Quality of the VIPeak Loyalty Program, great return policy and lifetime warranty on all of their products. The success of these programs are due to the fact that North Face has closed all of the service gaps including, knowledge gap, standards gap, delivery gap and communication gap. North Face has done research on what products their consumers want and what features are most important to incorporate in each product.

As stated previously, North Face is a strong believer in sustainability and going green just as many of their consumers are as well. North Face has done their research on what ways they can go green by using recycled materials in their products, satisfying the knowledge gap. North Face is a company focused on quality, both through their products and treatment to customers. Customers are always going to expect to be treated with the highest standards and they ensure this by offering their return policy and lifetime warranty on products, which all satisfies the standards, delivery and communication gaps.

Profit Orientation

NorthFace when deciding the price of their products always first considers their competitors pricing as well. This pricing orientation is called competitor orientation or a company based objective on the premise that the firm should measure itself primarily against its competition. For instance, Patagonia; a major competitor of NorthFace that also specializes in active-living wear. When comparing prices of similar products that both firms offer such as fleece jackets, North Face's prices range from \$65-\$130 while Patagonia's price ranges are within the \$90-\$130 range. However, that is to say that NorthFace does not necessarily change their pricing on items when Patagonia does. This would-be status quo pricing. Instead, North Face engages in competitive parity, a strategy of setting prices that are similar to those of your major competitors. Though the products and pricing are similar, NorthFace does offer prices that are lower and more affordable than Patagonia, thus appealing to consumers with lower income.

Though being cheaper than some competitors, NorthFace could also be considered premium pricing, a competitor-based pricing method by which a firm will intentionally set product prices above competing products. When considering all retail clothing outlets rather than only active-wear retailers, North Face prices are much higher than average. This is to allure customers who always shop for the best or whom price does not matter. In this case, NorthFace can now reach a market of both lower-income consumers while still appealing to higher-income consumers by having a premium price, but also using competitive parity to offer lower prices.

Elasticity

This is important because appealing to both markets is vital to staying competitive due to NorthFace being in a very elastic market. Elastic means that a small change in price could generate a large change in quantity demanded. Consumers that see a product price increase are likely to either settle for a substitute or a competitor's product rather than purchasing an expensive product. This is why North Face penetrating multiple markets is so important. North Face's products can be much less elastic in some markets than others. If for some reason NorthFace were required to increase their products prices, it would ultimately decrease demand in lower-income markets as they would be more likely to substitute it with competitor's products. However, in the higher-income market where consumers are more apt to premium pricing, the products would suffer a much smaller drop in demand, constituting it as inelastic.

Competition

With pricing being critical to a North Face's success, it is also important to realize how it's competition level affects its practices. Considering North Face has many competitors selling differentiated products, product differentiation is key to appealing to customers. This type of competition level is considered monopolistic competition. Having NorthFace use its products, pricing, and their own brand, they can create value in the mind of the customer and set them apart from their competitors. NorthFace can specifically offer any of their fleece jackets at their normal prices allowing for both high and low-income consumer markets to be hit. Furthermore, with the North Face brand name comes certain qualities that all consumers associate with it, such

as quality and durable outdoor and active-wear, while still meeting the customers fashion and comfort needs.

Matrix

Like other firms, Northface must focus on specific advertisements and how they are shown to the consumer. North Face will run most of their advertisements on a continuous schedule meaning their advertisements are run steadily throughout the year. Furthermore, many of the advertisements are product focused so they are informative to the consumer about the specific product that North Face is currently offering. Additionally, Northface focuses on a push strategy or a the strategy of having retailers highlight North Face rather than its competitors. By doing this it almost forces the product on the consumers by making it one of the main focuses of the store. In addition, by doing this it also makes the North Face brand stronger by making it more noticeable to consumers. Most importantly, Northface uses social media to the most to effectively market their products. Specifically on many media and thought sharing websites a consumer can see the latest offering that North Face has to offer. Through this marketing strategy North Face can effectively meet the four E framework. The first being Excite the customer. North Face excites the customer using social media by showing off the latest products and sales they are offering. Second. Is educate the customer. When a consumer visits either the social media page, or the website of Northface, it gives them the opportunity to communicate the value and benefits that Northface has to offer. Third is experiencing the product or service. In 2007, through a series of documentary videos on media sharing websites, Northface followed multiple mountain climbers in south east Asia. The purpose was to show the durability of the product as

well entertain and educate the customer about Northface the brand and the product. Throughout this the consumer had the ability to experience second-hand Northface products and see the value for themselves. Finally, the fourth E is engage the customer. With such websites as Facebook and Twitter it makes it easier than ever for many larger companies to now communicate with customers directly. Many customer problems that are sought out on either of these websites can be directly communicated to Northface in which Northface will reply. This allows North Face better customer satisfaction and service while satisfying the fourth E.

Part 5: Recommendations

Taking everything into consideration, Northface would benefit from moving from specialty products to a larger more casual market. This would be considered a market development strategy, or a growth strategy that employs the existing marketing offering to reach new market segments. Such products that can be made are casual sneakers and footwear, to basic pants and shirts. Using the North Face name and brand awareness, it would allow customers to recognize high quality, durability, and fashionable clothing while appealing to many other consumers and markets in different price ranges. In doing this they can simultaneously reach more of an international market. Expanding the product mix can allow Northface to introduce new and different items of casual clothing that will appeal to more markets than just in North America. As Northface is right now, they are very limited to a market of individuals who have excess income for luxury outdoor clothing, the increase in the product mix will also introduce clothing that will be simpler, such as basic shirts that are likely to be cheaper than the heavy winter jackets that they are known for. Having cheaper products will allow Northface to reach a

market they rarely reach, a market of lower income consumers that likely do not purchase brand clothing because the price is too costly.

Part 6: Group Summary

Responsibilities among the group were broken up into equal portions through separating parts of the document among each individual. We used the Hershey Blanchard Model to ensure completion of the document by expressing our maturity to the task. Each of us did exactly what was assigned and showed significant motivation to achieve our assigned task. With using this model, our group did not have any issues concerning parts not being completed as we knew who to go to if they were missing. We also met up a few times to go over research we had found, which also incorporated the high relationship portion of the Hershey Blanchard Model. Overall, our group really enjoyed working together and we all feel it had a lot to do with how we split up tasks through the Hershey Blanchard Model.

Part 7: Appendix & Citations

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