



Brand and Merchandising Manager of the Children's Products Sector - braM

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abstract

The role of the Brand Manager is a key factor in the management of SMEs in the Children's products sector: functions and responsibilities are not determined yet, but he must take in charge all the issues related with the perception, visualisation and communication of the brand, looking to reach the defined target groups with the required values, in accordance to the strategic mission and vision of the company.

This means an horizontal activity that must harmonize with different departments in the company.

This new profile requires a training that does not exists now, as was the case some time ago with the designer profile. This training requires a sound curriculum, able to transfer to the future professionals the knowledge and skills that they need.

The objectives of the project are:

- *to define a professional profile for the Brand Manager of SMEs in the children's fashion sector;*
- *to define and develop a curriculum for the training, as a European standard, including a qualification and recognition framework;*
- *to define and develop a training system ICT based, as well as the corresponding training materials; and*
- *to deploy a pilot action, with the corresponding evaluation and readjustment of the previous results.*

The consortium is integrated, in a balanced way, by Companies Associations of the Sector, Training higher Institutions with curricula in the sector, Technical developers and Consultants.

- *Coordinator: Children's Fashion Europe*
- *Other partners:*
- *Hellenic Clothing Industry Association*
- *CNA FEDERMODA*
- *Association of Fashion Retailers in Finland*
- *University of Borås – Swedish School of Textiles*
- *S2 Grupo*
- *IEP Instituto de Economía Pública*

The result of the project, beside the focus on the children's product sector, will be applicable to all SMEs working in sectors with a high value of the brand.



1. Introduction

A brand, according to Davies (2000), consists of three things: what a business does, what a company sells and what the company is. The strongest brands have clear positioning in the consumer consciousness. The quality of the product distinguishes the brand, and the brand is the umbrella for the launch of new products. The efforts that SMEs are doing in R&D and Innovation will profit the use of good professionals with an adequate knowledge in brand management, so that the SMEs will be able to consolidate their stability and position on the markets.

In this context of globalisation, it is necessary to manage the brand and its right perception to win market position in front of the rest of products with less quality, and even insecure.

For this reason the braM Project was born, which has the goal to create an on-line course addressed to children's fashion professionals in order to enhance the brand in children's fashion SMEs.

The above course will let children's fashion companies apply the brand skills that adult's fashion companies are already using. Therefore the results will improve the competitiveness of companies by positioning the brand in their marketing channels.

2. Methodology

2.1 The braM approach

The braM Project Approach, target and outcomes are directly addressed to improve a high quality new product in Lifelong Learning Knowledge, with a highly innovative dimension in contents and systems.

In the first place, braM is directed to SMEs companies of the children's product sectors: after various analysis and discussions the consortium has agreed that the product must focus in first place on children's fashion SMEs, being the world of children's products extremely wide and composed of many sub sectors.

Although the project addresses to this particular niche of the market, it is believed that the course, with the appropriate amendments, can be applied to all kind of sectors where the brand is highly valued. braM's strength is also characterized by:

- **A General Overview of the sector in each of the countries represented by the partners, and with different levels of activities.**

For this reason, each work package has its direct responsible as point of reference, but also counts on the contribution, evaluation and opinion of all partners.

Support in all activities with the confirmation of deliverables from all partners has been constant during the whole project, and the sharing of information and documents through the private section of the web site has lead to an easier and more efficient communication network.

- **Direct interaction with final target:** The intervention of employees of various European children's fashion companies has been fundamental for the conclusion of the first work package, the analysis of needs, which has helped giving all the information for progressing in the right direction with the development of the project.

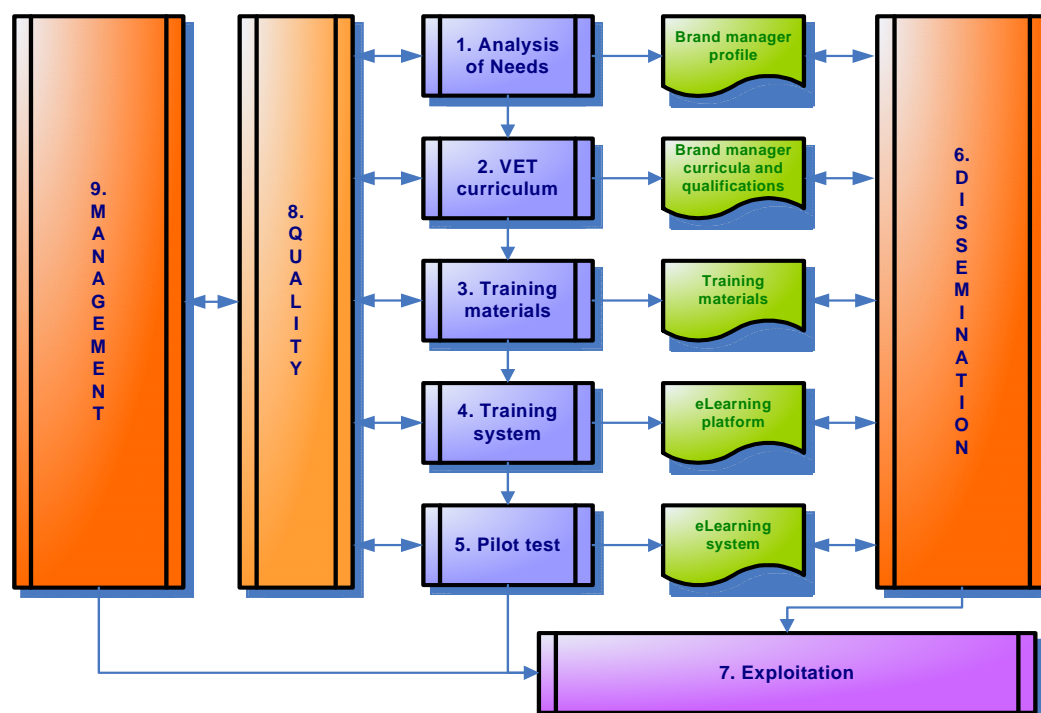
The constant relation that associations have with their members, has helped in increasing the level of liability of the results given by the analysis, and has also given the opportunity of having a direct opinion from the end consumer of the braM course, on how to improve the project.

- **Effective dissemination & communication activities:** The participation of the partners to many commercial activities has given the chance to have a direct contact with children's fashion companies and associations. Also, to present the results of the projects directly to its target, has been useful in order to have a direct feed back and suggestions.



2.2 Project outcomes and results

The Project has been divided in 9 work packages, for a length of 24 months. The work programme is outlined as follows.



(Fig.1. braM's Work programme)

The work packages 1, 2, 3 and 4 have been successfully completed, all the deliverables created, and peer reviewed.

Work packages 6, 7, 8 and 9 are under constant development.

WP1: Analysis of Needs

The objective of this work package was to carry out a detailed analysis of the training needs of the children's product sector SMEs. It was lead by the Greek partner, HCIA, and through a quantitative tool, such as a survey and a qualitative tool, such as an in-depth interview, it addressed to companies based in the countries of the partners: Italy, Spain, Greece and Finland. HCIA was able to define the profile necessary for the sector to cover the role of a Brand & Merchandising Manager.

WP2 & WP3: VET Curriculum & Training Materials

In this work package the Swedish partner, Textile School of Borås, has made a deep research of material to include in the course.

The curriculum has been divided in 4 modules, each of them will be dedicated to a special theme of the fashion and brand management.

The case studies, which will be proposed on the basis of true case studies from each country and the partners at the end of each module, include an assignment that the student will have to complete.

The Training Materials include structure and layout definition, development of a sample module, development of all the modules and of the support materials for each module, development of the guides, for trainers and trainees, in order to explain them the use of the modules.

WP4: Training System

S2 is the partner leader of this work package: after a deep analysis of the different learning platforms such as Moodle, Atutor and Sakai, all partners have agreed that the selected platform for the braM course will be Moodle.

WP6: Dissemination & Communication

Dissemination and Communication activities have followed the entire course of the project, since the very beginning.



Within the most visible results of the WP6 are:

- braM web site www.brandfashionmanager.eu
- braM Newsletter: published every 4 months and sent to all stakeholders and SMEs of the children's product sector
- Publication of braM activities in ADAM and EVE portals
- Publication of braM activities on the partners web sites
- Publication of braM activities on the partners blog pages
- Advertisement in different fashion magazines
- Leaflets
- Posters

Moreover, dissemination has been made during various events which the partners have attended, such as trade fairs, catwalks and design competitions.

WP7: Exploitation

In the future the braM course will be handled by Universities, Professional Schools specialized in Fashion Management or Fashion Associations. The title obtained after the course has been completed, will be released by the University of Borås, and it will have 7,5 ETC credits

WP8: Quality

This work package, leaded by IEP has the objective of defining a Quality and Evaluation plan to assure the internal quality of the work during the project and the external evaluation of the results, as a continuous process along the project.

The Consortium

The ensemble of the consortium has resulted of extreme competence and efficiency.

Being each partner from a different country and a different kind of organization, the input from every one has been important in order to take into consideration all aspects interesting for each partner according to their different experience.

The consortium is equilibrated and complete, and is formed by:

- **Children's Fashion Europe**, the lead partner of braM. It is a new generation association, formed by manufacturers of children's fashion and child care products, research institutes and associations. Its objective is to improve competitiveness of the companies of these sectors, through organization of commercial actions, participation in European projects and representation of the companies at a European level in various work groups and European associations. In the braM project, CFE is the leader of work packages 6 and 9.
- **Hellenic Clothing Industry Association (HCIA)**: Based in Athens, this organization was established in 1962 with the aim of representing Greek companies from all sub sectors of the clothing industry. It provides a wide range of services to its members such as supplier information, consulting, support, sectorial and individual company promotion, training and education including provision of training centre and related facilities. HCIA has led the Analysis of Needs WP1 and contributed in all dissemination activities. Also, it will give its contribution to the definition and validation of the training materials and system and coordinate the pilot test in Greece.
- **HB**, the Swedish School of Textiles at the University of Borås. It is a comprehensive resource for education, training, research and societal cooperation in Sweden. It has an excellent support from the country's textile industry and well developed contacts with universities & institutes in other countries. University of Borås is the main responsible for the educational aspects of the project. HB has led the definition of the curricula (WP2) and the definition & development of the training materials (WP3).
- **MKL**, the Association of Fashion Retailers in Finland. This organization is representing the fashion retailers sector in Finland. The organization is working for the good of its members connected with the clothing, shoe, textile and other fashion businesses. MLK has participated in the Analysis of Needs (WP1) work package, contributing to define the professional profile of the Brand Manager and cooperates for the correct development of all work packages.
- **CNAFedermoda**: CNA is the national Confederation of Crafts and Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises, created in Rome in 1946. CNAFedermoda is the group of the fashion sector, including shoes, and accessorize and represents 25.000 SMEs in Italy; it provides to its members services such as training, marketing and promotion. CNAFedermoda has



participated in the Analysis of needs, and will contribute also to the validation of training materials and system. Moreover it will coordinate the WP7, the Exploitation Plan and has actively participated to various dissemination activities.

- **IEP**, is an innovation management consultancy, specialised in the promotion and implementation of innovation as a factor of competitiveness. It has been involved in the last years in a number of initiatives directed to carry out innovation management diagnosis in SMEs and find their possibilities in innovation. IEP has taken an active role in the Technical Management of braM and has coordinated the entire Pilot test (WP5) work package, assuring the homogeneity of the national pilot, as well as the functionality of the Pilot test Report.
- **S2**, an IT privately held company based in Valencia, Spain. Founded in 1999, it is specialized in information systems security, Business Activities Monitoring (BAM), collaborative work tools and e-learning tools. S2 is responsible for the ICT aspects of the project, mainly the ones related with the definition, design, implementation and deployment of the eLearning platform and the integration of all training materials. S2 will lead WP4, contribute to the Pilot test, and will do modifications of the system after collecting the feed-back. It will also have an important role in the definition of the exploitation plan.

3. Conclusions

In its very simplicity a brand is a symbol that guarantees a specific experience. The most complex brand consists of a blend of attributes that distinguishes a product, service, or companies from one another.² The consumer market today is extremely competitive and the number of new products and brands on the market is growing faster than population growth. 156 000 new consumer products were introduced worldwide in 2005, but generally 80 per cent of these failed within the first 3 months.

We are also moving towards a more global consumer culture where consumers are united by their love of strong brands. Now, more than previously, products are marketed based on their attributes rather than their function and concrete offer.³

braM will suppose the possibility to acquire new and necessary knowledge and skills to manage the brands in the companies, and compete with more strength on the market.

It will be useful for all companies working in sectors with high visibility of the brands, which are the most added value and relevant sectors in the future knowledge based European industry and services.

Also braM will offer opportunities to the young people accessing the market, for active workers that could upgrade their competences and their work place, and for the unemployed people who will be able to reach a job in this new area.

Finally, braM will open a new theme that today is only partially solved in general training, and that does not have a direct link to a specific professional profile.

References

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