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A unique brand of airport

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Winning passenger figures depend on winning passenger trust. Urs Brüttsch explains the role of marketing in securing the hearts, minds and business of consumers.

Everything was running smoothly and the outlook was rosy. As a recently privatised company formed for the purpose of operating Zurich Airport, we held an operating licence valid for 50 years and were able to count on a home carrier that was widely regarded as financially sound and which was undergoing constant growth. With the initiation of a major airport expansion project just around the corner, there were no grounds for concern at that time regarding our future business development. This was the situation back in 2000.

But then two devastating events occurred within just a few weeks of each other: the terrorist attacks of 11th September 2001 and the grounding on 2nd October that same year, of the home carrier fleet that accounted for more than 60 per cent of the passenger volume at Zurich Airport. The shock was, of course, enormous.

Apart from coping with the resulting crisis, we suddenly had to find answers to a variety of crucial questions: How were we going to compensate for the lost revenue so that we could refinance the biggest expansion project in the airport's history? How could we reduce our dependence on a handful

of major clients in the future? How could we increase the attractiveness of the airport as a destination and as an important link in the chain of tourism services, partly in order to win back passengers lost as a result of the crisis?

Strategic reorientation

Uncertainty and concerns about the future can be overcome by taking sufficient time, making clear decisions regarding the company's strategy and by defining clear objectives.

Formulating a strategy for an airport means having a clear picture of its strengths and weaknesses and identifying the opportunities and risks in the marketplace. It also means paying close attention to the main business partners. Who are they? How do they contribute towards the successful operation of the airport and our company? What are their needs? Which future trends need to be taken into account?

Since it is solely the end-consumer who chooses Zurich as his/her departure or transfer airport and decides whether he/she wants to make use of the extensive shopping facilities and commercial services, we started to focus on this target



group. Airlines with their route networks and licensees with their ranges of products and services are the most important partners, being jointly responsible for the quality and attractiveness of the overall airport. It is vital that they work closely together with the airport and support its philosophy.

Our mission statement and the resulting business areas and activities are based on the following vision: Zurich Airport is comprehensively networked at the international, national and regional levels, and functions as a major transport hub and attractive commercial centre.

In addition to our policy of full integration of all forms of transport, we attach a great deal of importance to the development and operation of an attractive commercial centre. Our main considerations are operational independence, consistent performance of our leadership role at the airport and constant increase of the company's value.

Marketing philosophy

Our focus on consumers means that we have to identify their expectations, behaviour and profiles. Our decisions and future investments are influenced solely by consumers. A high-quality network of all forms of transport is a fundamental prerequisite for the development of a commercial centre with national and international appeal.



The aim behind all of our activities is to present Zurich Airport as a user-friendly and attractive airport. To learn more about our end consumer (who they are, what their preferences and behaviour patterns are), it is essential to conduct surveys that allow us to constantly evaluate the services provided by the airport. Our Research Competence Centre, which is attached to our Marketing & Real Estate division, conducts surveys on a periodical basis (e.g. ACI-ASQ Study) and monitors consumers' perception of Zurich Airport with the aid of an image tracking process. Another important instrument in this area is our complaint management office, which deals with complaints raised by consumers and prepares periodical reports that can be used for taking appropriate corrective measures.

The financial resources required for carrying out activities within the scope of the marketing plan are secured through a marketing fund into which contributions are paid by business partners in the form of marketing fees, and by the airport operator. Our Marketing Committee, which includes representatives from the airport's business partners, ensures that these financial resources are used appropriately and for their intended purpose, both for long-term positioning and for short-term sales promotion activities. The integration of business partners generates an atmosphere of trust and also obliges all involved players to focus on the continual



Innovative smoking lounges meet the needs of smokers and non-smokers alike

improvement of not only their own services, but also the entire range of services provided throughout Zurich Airport.

The objective here has to be to create the best possible conditions, so that consumers will not only feel comfortable at the airport but will also perceive time spent here as a pleasant and rewarding all-round experience.

Innovation and tradition

With respect to choice of product range, the key factors are focusing on the needs of an international clientele and early identification of trends. With increasing globalisation, there is also a risk of increasing standardisation of product ranges. Differentiation is essential if we are to counter this trend and it has to be approached with authenticity and the provision of local products. It is important to maintain an awareness of the positive attributes attached to Switzerland and consistently incorporate them into the marketing strategy; Zurich Airport is the ideal place for this. Security and a sense of well-being, a well-organised, well-presented and highly attractive range of products and pleasant, comfortable surroundings encourage consumers to shop and buy more. If it is able to draw attention to typical Swiss products, such as chocolates and watches, in a truly creative manner and thus make the time spent by visitors even more enjoyable, we can perhaps claim that Zurich Airport is already close to successfully combining innovation and tradition. The "Soul of Chocolate" exhibition, which is to be held at Zurich Airport from 15

September to 31 October 2006, will tell the whole story of chocolate-making, from source to end-product. This event, which will feature on-site production, a display of artistic creations and the possibility to taste various kinds of chocolate, will be the first at Zurich Airport to promote a typical Swiss product in an exemplary co-production with leading chocolate manufacturers.



The "Soul of Chocolate" exhibition will combine innovation and tradition

Marketing communication

The main questions to be faced in the area of marketing communication are as follows:

- How do consumers and sales forces learn about the advantages Zurich Airport has to offer?
- How do we want to be perceived on the market?
- How can we persuade consumers to travel via Zurich?
- Once they are actually at the airport, how can we persuade consumers to shop there?

Of course, there is always more than one way to achieve a given objective but once a strategy has been decided, it is important to consistently pursue it and to repeatedly communicate positioning elements once they have been defined. Our main objectives, in view of the fact that airports have attained the status of mature, interchangeable products, are to bring about a positive perception of Zurich Airport, motivate consumers to visit it and encourage them to shop there by making their stay pleasant and rewarding. In order to communicate our messages to consumers, we use the whole range of marketing tools and all available communication channels. The greater the distance, the higher the importance attached to key account management (tour operators and travel agents) and key media management (specialised media).

Experience has shown that a geographical orientation of communication has been positive for Zurich Airport.

The purpose of regional communication is to encourage visitors and residents throughout the region, employees, transfer passengers and departing local passengers to stop and buy as they pass through the airport. The main messages that we communicate are as follows: open every day of the year, broad range of products under one roof, excellent accessibility, entertainment, special events and cosmopolitan atmosphere.

In effect, all activities relating to communication and sales promotion at the airport serve the purpose of attracting consumers into the shops and/or enhancing the quality of their stay.

Promotion of the commercial centre is, of course, also included in our national communication programme. The priority here is to heighten the appeal of Zurich Airport to a broader public as Switzerland's civil aviation hub and thus, as far as possible, to expand the airport's catchment area. Essentially, this means gaining acceptance and trust within Switzerland as well as within the expanded catchment area. For example, the better informed the travel sector is about Zurich Airport as its "extended arm", the better the service it can offer to its clients, including information about the range of facilities and services at the airport. Numerous flyers and brochures providing information about Zurich Airport are available from a special mailing centre, and travel agents and tour operators can order copies of these at any time, free of charge.

At the international level, Zurich Airport has successfully positioned itself as the gateway to the Alps. This message is primarily addressed to tour operators, specialised media, travel agents and incoming agencies. Our line of argumentation focuses on the ultra-modern facilities resulting from the recent expansion of the airport, its proximity to the city centre, its excellent connections to the national railway network, Switzerland's status with respect to duty-free shopping, and the airport's active role in the chain of tourism services. Wherever possible, we want journeys through Europe to begin in Switzerland and, above all, to finish up at Zurich Airport.

Although this geographical message requires different communication methods, the various markets have one thing in common: in order to distinguish ourselves from the competition, clear positioning is required with respect to "Zurich Airport" as a destination brand.

Strategic partnerships

Tougher and more global competition, changing consumer requirements and increasing pressure on prices are important reasons for entering into partnerships. These can only be successful, however, if they result in win-win situations for all parties. Over the past few years, Zurich Airport has set out to enter into strategic partnerships at an early stage in order to cut costs, while simultaneously making the airport more widely known in an effective manner, beyond the bounds of its own sector and in new markets.

In addition to upstream and downstream partners, we have also sought partnerships outside our own sector. In the case of Switzerland Tourism, Zurich Tourism and Swiss International Air Lines, the main aim is to utilise synergies in international marketing, whereas in our partnership with the Swiss Museum of Transport, our focus is on exploiting the



The airport's partnership with Swiss International Air Lines has created new marketing opportunities

significant potential for presenting Zurich Airport as an attractive destination for day trips. All of our strategic partnerships have one thing in common, namely a long-term agreement with a clearly defined range of services. Membership of other organisations and our close ties with key suppliers enable us to expand our network of opinion leaders, campaign for our own interests and/or efficiently distribute information.

Together with our main partners, Switzerland Tourism and Swiss International Air Lines, we have already taken the first steps via bilateral relations towards forming an alliance for marketing Switzerland as a destination, in order to further utilise the synergy potential resulting from this three-way partnership. The decisive factor is the shared acknowledgement that Zurich Airport may be regarded as Switzerland's calling card, that it creates both an initial and a final impression of the country for visitors and is an important distinguishing feature for a successfully operating network airline to assert itself against competitors.

Conclusions

The need to define and implement a group-wide strategy undoubtedly became more urgent after the events that took place in 2001. Thanks to our established strategic partnerships, we are able to communicate our main messages directly to the travel sector, the media and consumers, while our Marketing Committee ensures that the necessary financial resources are used selectively and appropriately. The integration of other business partners for the purpose of promoting certain destinations that are missing from the route network but are of importance to

Switzerland as a centre for trade and industry, represents a potential step that could be taken to underscore the importance of the transport hub as a gateway to the world, as well as to receive the necessary support in expanding the route network.

The various awards that we have received over the past few years are a result of our intensive efforts and demonstrate that Zurich Airport is well on its way to becoming one of the world's leading airports again. They also confirm that the overall strategy of Zurich Airport, as well its marketing and communication strategy that focuses on continuity and long-term objectives, are sound and are beginning to yield the desired results.

It is not so much in the marketplace that the competition takes place, but rather in the heads of consumers. It is here that the struggle for empathy, trust and preference is won or lost. It is here – and only here – that the decision for or against a brand is ultimately made and it is with this conviction that we approach our marketing and communication responsibilities for Zurich Airport. □

Urs Brüttsch



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Zurich Airport



Many thanks – we'll keep up the good work!

In 2006, Zurich Airport received the World Travel Award in the category of "Europe's Leading Airport" for the third year in succession. The award is based on the results of a survey of the world-wide travel and tourism industry. We intend to continue providing the best possible service in the future: connections to more than 120 destinations, easy access to city centres and the alpine region, and a comprehensive range of services. www.zurich-airport.com