

POSITIONING OF RETAIL COMPANIES: THEORETICAL ASPECTS

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The rapid development of retailing and changes in customers' shopping behaviour are shifting the competitive situation and stimulate searching for new effective competition strategies. In modern retailing, more and more attention is being paid to positioning, which enables a favourable image in the minds of customers and a differentiation from competitors. The application of the concept of positioning in retailing is quite a new problem. Positioning and the place of image in marketing strategy are briefly discussed in the article. Retail companies' and retail outlets' positioning specifics and methodology are analyzed. Special attention is paid to the specifics of multiple retailers' positioning methodology because of their increasing power within distribution channels and a significant impact on activities of manufacturers and wholesalers and also on customers' shopping habits.

The methods that were used for preparing the article were analysis and summary of scientific literature, modeling and expert evaluation.

Key words: retailing sector, multiple retailer, positioning, image, position, differentiation

Introduction

In the recent years, retail trade faced considerable changes: tendencies of co-operation and concentration, diversification and specialization, internationalization and a rapid implementation of modern technologies have intensified significantly. Retail companies are becoming more and more independent of manufacturers and wholesalers. Various new retail institutions, such as retail systems and groups, are emerging. The role of multiple retailers is becoming more and more important in retailing. Multiple retailers make a signifi-

cant impact not only on the retail evolution and intensifying competition among retailers, but also on manufacturers and service providers. Multiple retailers often act not only as retailers, but also as wholesalers. The impact of multiple retailers on manufacturers and service providers reveals not only that multiple retailers are very important members of distribution channel for many manufacturers, but also that multiple retailers place orders for manufacturing their private label products.

At the same time, significant changes can be noticed in the customers' system of values,

shopping attitudes and behaviour. Development of information society makes the market brighter and clearer, therefore consumers have possibilities to get a lot of information about products and services, manufacturing and service providing companies. For these reasons customers are becoming more critical about retailers, customers' demands are becoming more flexible, and customers' loyalty for brands and stores is diminishing. On the one hand, customers demand luxury, comfort and entertainment during shopping, while on the other hand, customers firstly evaluate the economical rationality of buying, which is especially important in day-to-day shopping.

Changes in retailing and in customers' shopping behaviour are not only shifting the competitive situation, but also rise new requirements to the management of retail companies and stimulate searching for new and more effective competition strategies. In modern theory and practice of retail management and retail marketing, more and more attention is being paid to positioning, i.e. to the marketing strategy that being enables to develop in customers' mind such an image of a retail company which helps to differentiate it from competitors and, using various marketing tools, to satisfy customers' needs better and strengthen their loyalty.

It is accepted that the concept of positioning has arisen in 1972 when in the specialized magazine "Advertising Age" Al Ries and Jack Trout published a series of articles under the common title "The Positioning Era".

The concept of positioning was first adopted in product marketing. When the effectiveness of this concept in persuading consumers of a target market segment that a particular product was the best for satisfying their needs was proved, the concept of positioning was started to use not only for product marketing but also for service marketing.

The application of the concept of positioning in retailing is quite a new problem which has not been given a sufficient analysis. The first comprehensive publications on positioning in retailing were presented only in the end of the 20th century (Davies and Brooks, 1989; Theis, 1992; Schmidt, 1996; Samli, 1998). In Lithuania, the problems of positioning in retailing have not yet been selected as a research object.

The goal of this article is to reveal the specific features and to present the methodology of a retail company positioning.

The object of this article is the content of the positioning process of a retail company and especially of a multiple retailer.

The problem analyzed in this article is the application of the concept of positioning in retailing.

1. The concept of positioning and the place of positioning in marketing strategy

Positioning is defined as a process of creating the image of a selected object, to clearly differentiate it from the competing objects (Brasington, Pettitt, 2000; Dibb, Simkin, Pride, Ferrell, 1997). An object for positioning can be a brand name, company name, state institution, resort, person, country, etc. In this part of the paper we discuss product positioning, because it is widely analyzed in scientific literature. Various marketing tools are used for positioning. Through positioning, a selected object is made attractive for consumers and they are convinced that it is the best alternative for satisfying their needs (Lamb, Hair, McDaniel, 2001; Best, 1997; Pranulis, Pajuodis, Urbonavičius, Virvilaitė, 2000). It should be noted that positioning is directed not at a selected object but at the consumers' mind and perceptions, try-

ing to influence purposely consumers' knowledge and attitude towards a selected object (Zyman, 1999; Smith, 2002). As the positioning pioneers Al Ries and Jack Trout said, "Positioning starts with a product. ... But positioning is not what you do to a product. Positioning is what you do to the mind of the prospect. That is, you position the product in the mind of the prospect." (Ries, Trout, 1986).

In some literature sources (Engel, Warshaw, Kinnear, 1991; Hutt, Speh, 2001; Brassington, Pettitt, 2000; Zyman, 1999) the concept of competitive positioning is discussed instead of the concept of positioning, emphasizing importance of the aspect of competition and competitors. It is not only the image but also the object's position that are important in positioning a selected object. In other words, the stress should lie on the selected object's place in consumers' mind as compared to the other competing objects. Most important is what consumers think about the selected object while comparing it to other alternative objects which could be used for satisfying consumers' needs. Through positioning, a company seeks to achieve a firm competitive position when a selected object occupies a particular niche in the mind of consumers. Positioning mostly defines what marketing ac-

tions directed at the competitors are used or should be used by a company.

The concept of repositioning is closely related to that of positioning. Repositioning is a change of the selected object's position in response to changes of the competitive or other environment (Czinkota, Kotabe, 2001; Boone, Kurtz, 2001; Belch, Belch, 1990; Lamb, Hair, McDaniel, 2001; Ries, Trout, 1986; Траур, Ривкин, 2001). The main task of repositioning is to change the existing position in a way it would better correspond to the needs and perceptions of target consumers when their opinion and requirements change significantly. The need for repositioning can occur when sales volumes decrease, when new opportunities appear in the market segments that have been of no interest to the company, trying to correct the mistakes made during positioning, or present new ideas to consumers. Repositioning is not a correction of the image and position of a selected object, but considerable changes of its image and position. That is why repositioning is a complicated, risky and costly exercise (Brassington, Pettitt, 2000).

Positioning is one of the marketing strategy development stages (see Fig. 1).

The stages of positioning strategy prepara-

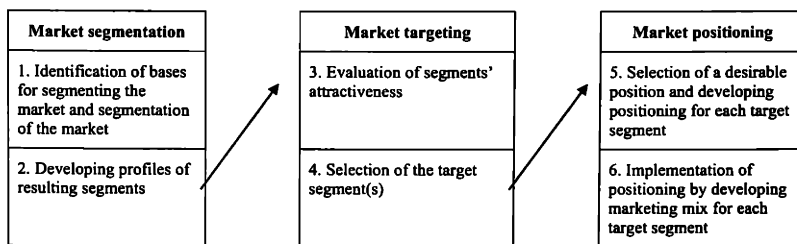


Fig. 1. Marketing strategy development stages (prepared according to Kotler, Armstrong, Saunders, Wong, 2001)

tion and positioning actions selection follow market segmentation according to important segmentation criteria and selection of a target segment (or target segments) which is (or are) the most attractive for a company.

There is no common opinion in marketing literature as to the content of the positioning process. Some of authors say that market segmentation and targeting are components of the positioning process (Czinkota, Kotabe, 2001; Dibb, Simkin, Pride, Ferrell, 1997), while market segmentation and targeting should be done before preparing the background for successful positioning (see Fig. 1). Some other authors think that one of positioning process stages is collecting and analyzing information on the consumers' decision process (Winer, 2000; Dibb, Simkin, Pride, Ferrell, 1997), while this information should already be analyzed during selection of a target segment. In our opinion, the process of positioning contains the following stages:

1. Determination of the image attributes (or image dimensions) of an object.
2. Determination of the competing objects.
3. Evaluation of the competing objects' image and positions.
4. Selection of a desirable image and position.
5. Development of a desirable image and position.

Selection of a desirable position and developing positioning (stage 5 in Fig. 1) would cover stages 1 to 4, and the implementation of positioning by developing a proper marketing mix (stage 6 in Fig.1) would cover stage 5.

2. Specifics of positioning in retailing

Retail trade is developing rapidly, its influence on manufacturing companies and whole-

salers increases. Retail companies take over part or even all functions of wholesalers. Finally, competition among retailers also increases. For these reasons retailing companies need to search for new ways of effective competition. One of the possible ways seems to be competition based on positioning. Development and implementation of positioning strategy enables retailing companies to compete not on price, but on other elements of marketing mix. While developing the positioning strategy, attention is focused on elucidating the needs and priorities of a target market segment and evaluation how competitors try to satisfy customers' needs, searching for ways to differentiate from competitors. This enables satisfying customers' needs better, increasing customers' loyalty and improving the quality of retail services.

Application of the concept of positioning in retailing requires evaluation of retailing specifics. First, retailing services consist of a combination of various manufacturers' products and special services. Second, most buyers still often shop in a store, so the place of a store is very important. Third, a retailing marketing mix includes more elements than a product marketing mix. Fourth, multiple retailers have to position not a single store, but a number of stores. For these reasons the concept of positioning should be modified according to the specifics of retailing.

Positioning in retailing is defined as a preparation of strategy for developing the image of a retail company or store¹ (Berman, Evans, 2001). Through development and implementation of the positioning strategy, a retail company is differentiated from competitors and a

¹ Here and later in this part of the article we use the concept of retail company both for a retail company and a store.

retail company's strengths are revealed. Also, through development of positioning strategy proper marketing tools are selected for attracting target segment's customers and ensuring their loyalty for a retail company (Darling, 2001; Fernie, Fernie, Moore, 2003; Omar, 1999; Samli, 1998; Sullivan, Adcock, 2002).

The image in retailing refers to how a retail company is perceived by customers and stakeholders (e.g., partners, suppliers, other members of the distribution channel); in other words, the image is an overall impression of a retail company as perceived by customers and stakeholders. The image is a combination of a retail company's functional qualities (or tangible attributes) and psychological attributes (or intangible attributes). The image is a basis for a retail company differentiation. The image not only distinguishes a retail company from competitors, but also provides the basis for its competitive advantage. For a retail company, the image is an important component in a retail company choice decision and in a retail company patronage decision (Berman, Evans, 2001; Bloemer, Ruyter, 1998; Joyce, Lambert, 1996; Omar, 1999; Porter, Claycomb, 1997; Samli, 1998; Sullivan, Adcock, 2002).

Positioning in retailing has a certain sequence of actions and consistency, which is specific if compared to product positioning. The object of positioning in retailing is a retail company name, store name or the name of a chain of stores, unlike in product positioning. Considering various methodologies of positioning in retailing, which are discussed in different sources of literature, we prefer a certain sequence of actions for positioning in retailing (see Fig. 2).

One of the most important issues in the positioning of a retail company is the criteria that customers evaluate while selecting a particular retail company for shopping. The process

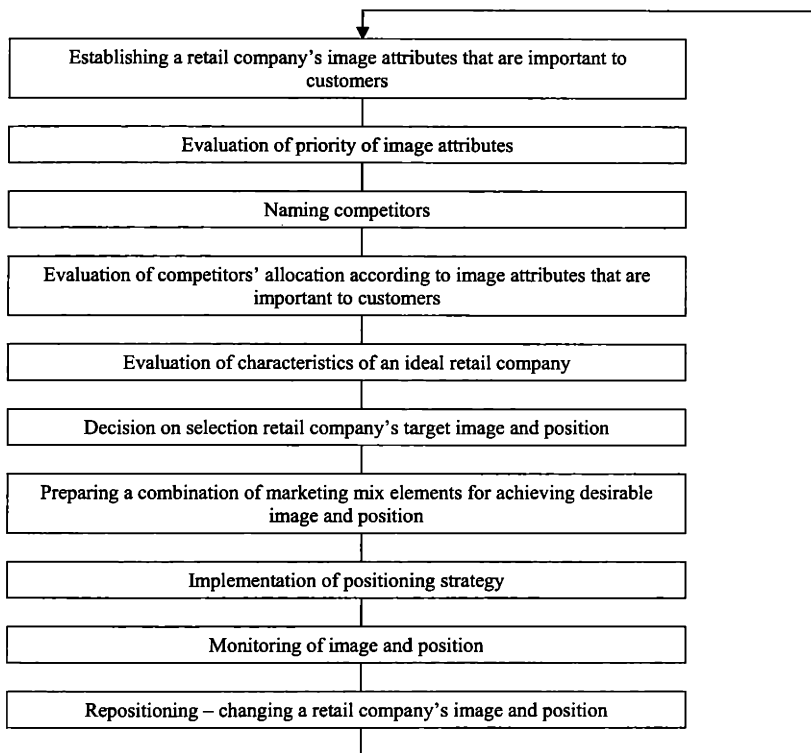
of positioning starts from this stage. Information on customers' behaviour is useful for identifying a retail company's image attributes that are important to customers. It is important not only to identify what criterion customers evaluate while selecting a retail company, but also to clarify if all criteria are of equal importance. Therefore, in the second stage of positioning the importance of one criterion versus the other criteria should be evaluated.

The next step in the process of positioning is naming the competitors. Here all competitors of a retail company should be identified for further analysis. When all competitors are identified, their allocation in customers' perception space is analyzed. This is done mostly for evaluating the competition intensity in the market. For analysis of competitors' distribution, two- or three-dimensional perception maps are mostly used. If there is a lot of important image attributes, several perception maps can be compiled.

An ideal retail company is realized as a combination of a retail company's image attributes most acceptable for target customers. An ideal retail company most often is a guide for selecting a retail company's image and position which correspond to a retail company's possibilities and customers' desires.

A retail company's target image and position are selected according to its possibilities to satisfy customers' desires and requirements. Target image and position depend not only on customers' desires and requirements, but also on the retail company's long-term goals and strategy.

When the target image and position are selected, the next decision is to set the marketing mix elements that should be used for achieving the desirable image and position. This set of marketing mix elements is presented to customers. It is important to assure that the set of



*Fig. 2. Sequence of positioning actions in retailing
(prepared according to Ivanauskas, Urbonavičius, 2003)*

marketing mix elements, which customers find in a store would exactly correspond to what is planned when preparing the positioning strategy. Otherwise even the best positioning strategy would not work effectively.

Monitoring a retail company's image and position should be performed with regard to changes in the market related to changes in customers' attitude, competitive situation, other relevant changes and applying proper actions

for assuring that a retail company retains its competitiveness. Retail company repositioning should be performed in the cases when the situation in the market undergoes dramatical changes. Repositioning should be performed also in cases when the current image and position do not allow achieving a retail company's long-term goals.

There are not many authors to discuss the process of positioning in retailing (Davies,

1992; Samli, 1998; Pajuodis, 2002; Ivanauskas, Urbonavičius, 2003). Besides, different authors are of partly different opinions as regards positioning actions in retailing. All authors suppose that during a retail company positioning it is important to establish a retail company's image attributes, features of an ideal retail company and to evaluate how the competing retail companies are allocated in the customers' perception space. However, what concerns such retail company positioning actions as evaluation of the distance between an ideal retail company and real retail companies and the distance between different real retail companies, performing a SWOT analysis of a retail company, establishing the image attributes important to customers in different customers' segments, and monitoring changes of a retail company's image there is not one common opinion, because some of authors distinguish these positioning stages while other authors do not.

Implementation of positioning in retailing actions shown in Fig. 2 should ensure attaining a competitive image and position of a retail company, corresponding to the situation in the market, which enable the company to achieve its long-term goals.

3. Positioning of multiple retailers

Multiple retailers² are retail companies which operate in a number of outlets³. The main distinctive feature of a multiple retailer is com-

mon management of a chain of stores. A multiple retailer operating outlets of the same format is considered as realizing a mono-system policy. A multiple retailer operating different format outlets is considered as realizing a poly-system policy. The latter type of multiple retailer can operate either in one or in several fields of retail trade (Berman, Evans, 2001; Pajuodis, 2002).

Multiple retailer is one of the latest types of retail companies. Multiple retailers acquire more and more power in distribution channels because of rapid development, successful competition with other formats of retail companies and with wholesale companies. Some literature sources report on an approach that the growth of retail power has been driven by the growth of the major multiple retailers (McGoldrick, 2002). Multiple retailers are able to take over part or even all functions of wholesale companies because of their ability to perform those functions more effectively (McGoldrick, 2002). A manufacturing company distributing the major part of its production through a particular chain of stores becomes highly dependent of that chain of stores and starts competing with other manufacturing companies for the possibility to sell its production through that chain of stores. Another reason why manufacturing companies become dependent on multiple retailers is retailer's own brands⁴. When manufacturing their own branded products, multiple retailers sometimes participate even in the manufacturing process: in designing products, establishing specific requirements for products, supplying raw materials, controlling manufacturing processes, product quality and other important indicators. For this

² In various literature sources multiple retailers are also called chain retailers or chain stores, therefore we use all these concepts as synonyms.

³ In the USA, chain stores normally refer to retail companies operating 11 or more outlets (according to Dunne, Lusch, Griffith, 2002). In Europe, different sources variously define a multiple as a retailer with at least two, five or ten outlets (according to McGoldrick, 2002).

⁴ In various sources, retailer's own brands are also called private brands, private labels or store brands, therefore we use all these concepts as synonyms.

reason some of multiple retailers are named "manufacturers without factories" (McGoldrick, 2002).

Multiple retailers stock only the brands they wish to sell and form merchandise supply depending on their overall retail strategy and relationship with manufacturers and suppliers. Thus, multiple retailers perform as gatekeepers within the channel of distribution and consumers cannot find some manufacturers' products in some chains of stores. The effect of this is that consumers are able to purchase only what is selected and offered to them by multiple retailers and so they may be considered to be shaping consumer demand (Gilbert, 2003). Finally, multiple retailers as compared to the other retail companies have better technical and financial possibilities to collect and analyze information about consumers and using various marketing tools and actions make a purposeful influence on the customer's behaviour and habits.

The positioning of multiple retailers is more complicated than the positioning of a retail company which operates one or several outlets. The first complication of the positioning of multiple retailers is related to the specifics of customer segmentation and the selection of a target segment. Multiple retailers often try to satisfy needs of customers of various social and demographic characteristics, while this does not correspond to the common logics of segmentation and targeting, which requires to exclude different groups of customers with common characteristics and to select one of these groups. In the case of a multiple retailer, there is a possibility to exclude different customer segments and select one target segment, but at the same time work with several or even all the other customer segments. In some sources we can find an opinion that market segmentation is not equally important to all retail

companies and multiple retailers. Market segmentation is useful just in cases when potential customers' requirements for assortment, prices, services, etc. are different. If there are no substantial differences among different customers' requirements for multiple retailer services, it can manage without market segmentation and without selection of a target segment (or target segments) (Mattmüller, Tunder, 2004). However, in our opinion, the situation when there are no substantial differences among customers' requirements for multiple retailer services should be quite unusual. In the case when one target segment is selected but the multiple retailer works with several other customer segments, also in a situation when the multiple retailer's market is absolutely unsegmented, the issue of establishing the image attributes becomes very complicated. It is very likely that important image attributes will not match different customers' segments. Finally, traditional segmentation according to customers' socio-demographic characteristics is not most suitable for some multiple retailers seeking to differentiate effectively their customers and to select a target segment. Therefore, there arises the problem of a new segmentation criterion which would be suitable for multiple retailers' specifics. One of the possibilities indicated in the literature (Wileman, Jary, 1997) could be segmentation according to buying occasions⁵, but this segmentation criterion still is not yet comprehensively evaluated in market surveys.

Part of multiple retailer positioning specifics is determined by its organizational and management peculiarities. A multiple retailer

⁵ Buying occasion is a situation when some products or services are necessary for satisfying customer's needs and desires and when the customer takes a decision in what retail outlet (or store) his desires and needs would be satisfied in the best or the most acceptable way.

creates and manages the image not for a single store, but for a group of stores. Therefore, for implementation of the established combination of marketing mix elements, it is necessary to unify the operations of a chain of stores and control how the chain of stores implements the preplanned marketing solutions for assuring that in all stores of the chain customers would receive retail services of a determined quality.

Because of the specifics of multiple retailers, the methodology of their positioning should be different from that of a retail company. In the positioning process, the stage of establishing multiple retailer's image attributes, several levels of attributes, such as generic attributes can comprise which are important to all customers and all retailers must offer them, expected attributes which describe how consumers perceive an ideal multiple retailer, and segmenting attributes or additional attributes, which can be important for some customer segments and can serve as a basis for implementing the differentiation strategy (Davies, 1992). It is also important to take into account the priorities customers attach to specific image attributes. One more opportunity is establishing multiple retailer's image attributes and their priorities for different buying occasions.

In the process of positioning, the stage of naming the competitors is important for identifying both direct and indirect competitors of a multiple retailer. Usually competitors are analyzed according to the image attributes that are important to customers. For naming the competitors it can be useful to evaluate not only the general competitive situation, but also the competitive situation for different buying occasions, because the importance of image attributes to customers can be different in different buying occasions. Evaluating the

competition intensity and differences among the competing chains of stores requires selection of a proper graphical method of the allocation of chains of stores in the consumers' perception space.

An ideal multiple retailer is usually understood as a set of the multiple retailer image attributes that are most acceptable for customers. This set of image dimensions enables ascertaining how the so-called "ideal store" should look like. If a multiple retailer operates several chains of stores of different names, it could be necessary to consider the possible specific features of an "ideal store" for each differently named chain of stores. Also, it can be useful to evaluate the possible specific features of an "ideal store" for every buying occasion.

The target image and position of a multiple retailer is often selected taking into account the image attributes of an ideal multiple retailer. However, this is not the only possible option, because if all competing multiple retailers would position themselves against the attribute set of an ideal multiple retailer, the risk of reducing the overall differentiation in the market would increase significantly. Therefore, the target image and position of a multiple retailer could be directed at specific market niches or a specific set of image attributes that does not correspond to a set of attributes of an ideal multiple retailer, but is important for consumers in a particular buying occasion or important to a customers' segment that seems interesting to a multiple retailer. Also, if a multiple retailer operates several chains of stores of different names, it is important that their target image and positions would be different and not competing with each other.

When the target image and position of a multiple retailer are selected, a combination (or combinations) of marketing mix elements

for achieving a desirable image and position is prepared. In this stage of positioning of a multiple retailer, attention should be paid to specific possibilities of marketing mix elements in retailing, e.g., the retailer's private label products, which can be used not only for increasing the profitability, but also for creating a desirable image and increasing the customers' loyalty (Burt, 2000; Davies, 1998; Fernie, Pierrel, 1996; Sheinin, Wagner, 2003). It is important to ensure that in all stores of the same chain consumers would receive retail services of equal quality. It is also important to use the possibilities to minimize objective differences among the stores of the same chain (e.g., differences in the convenience of stores' places, in reaching the stores of the same chain, etc.). Implementation of the positioning strategy requires a proper control and evaluation of the ways the planned positioning actions are realized.

Increasing the competitiveness of a multiple retailer is the main goal and result of developing and implementing the positioning strategy. Results of the positioning of a multiple retailer can be particularized by pointing out the following benefits of the positioning of a multiple retailer:

- selection of a competitive image and position of a multiple retailer;
- purposeful multiple retailer's marketing and management actions directed at the implementation of and control over the positioning strategy;
- preparation of a sequence of actions for the repositioning of a multiple retailer;
- establishing the possibilities for competing not on price but on other marketing mix elements and tools which enable a purposeful differentiation of a multiple retailer (Burt, Carralero-Encinas, 2000);
- reducing the customers' perceived risk that they would not satisfy their needs

and expectations while buying in a store of a particular multiple retailer. Some authors indicate that the customers' perceived risk can be related to evaluation of the time spent for shopping, of how much the acquired goods or, more generally, shopping benefits are worth in money, as well as several other aspects of perceived risk (Mitchell, 1998);

- assuring the continuously improving quality of retail services of a multiple retailer, which is related to evaluation of customers' expectations as regards the services of a multiple retailer, setting the quality specifications of retail services according to customers' expectations, delivering retail services according to those specifications, and a proper external communication with customers by informing them about the services offered by a multiple retailer (Berman, Evans, 2001; Fernie, Fernie, Moore, 2003);
- increasing the customers' loyalty to a multiple retailer (Bloemer, Ruyter, 1998; Joyce, Lambert, 1996; Thompson, Chen, 1998).

All results of positioning that are named above are important for multiple retailers. Which positioning benefits are of most importance to a particular multiple retailer depends on a specific situation of that multiple retailer.

Conclusions

1. Positioning is one of the marketing strategy preparation stages related to developing an image of products or services by using various marketing tools and seeking differentiation from the competitors. Positioning is considered to be an effective tool in trying to convince customers that a product or a service exactly meet their needs.

2. Positioning implies a specific sequence of actions. First, the image attributes of an object are established. Then the competitors of the object are defined and their image and positions are evaluated. Finally, the desirable image and position of the object are selected and achieved using various marketing tools.

3. The object of positioning in retailing is a retail company name or the name of a store or a chain of stores. In a retail company positioning, a strategy for the preparation and management of its image is developed. The company's image should be attractive to the target customers, it should differentiate the company and show its strengths as compared to the competitors.

4. The methodology of retail company positioning is a set of consistent actions aimed at establishing, selecting and maintaining a desirable image which enables to compete in the market successfully. The main differences of a retail company positioning process as compared to a product positioning process are related to defining the characteristics of an ideal store, modifying the image and position and repositioning.

5. The specific character of positioning a multiple retailer is first of all determined by the complexity of customers' segmentation and selection of a target segment of customers. Another reason for the specific nature of a multiple retailer's positioning is that the image of a group of stores should be developed. For these reasons, the positioning methodology of a multiple retailer has some specific features, which are related to establishing the image attributes that are important to customers, analyzing the competitive situation, selecting a target image and position as well as preparing a combination of marketing mix elements for achieving the desirable image and position.

6. The benefits of the positioning of a multiple retailer are related to the possibilities to compete not on price, but on the other marketing mix elements that help to differentiate a multiple retailer. Positioning of a multiple retailer also enables to establish a competitive image and position and a purposeful implementation of the marketing actions. Finally, the positioning of a multiple retailer increases the customers' loyalty and provides for improving the retail services.

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MAŽMENINĖS PREKYBOS ĮMONIŲ POZICIONAVIMAS: TEORINIS ASPEKTAS

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Santrauka

Spartus mažmeninės prekybos įmonių veiklos plėtojimas, įtakos gamybos ir didmeninės prekybos įmonėms didėjimas, taip pat didėjanti mažmeninės prekybos įmonių konkurencija verčia ieškoti naujų veiksmingų konkuravimo būdų. Vienas iš tokių galėtų būti konkuravimas, pagrįstas pozicionavimo koncepcijos taikymu mažmeninėje prekyboje. Pozicionavimu mažmeninėje prekyboje vadinamas strategijos, kurią pasitelkus sudaromas ir valdomas mažmeninės prekybos įmonės įvaizdis, parengimas ir įgyvendinimas. Dėl pozicionavimo mažmeninės prekybos įmonė išskiriama iš konkurentų, atskleidžiami jos pranašumai, pritraukiami tikslinio rinkos segmento pirkėjai ir didinamas jų lojalumas. Mažmeninėje prekyboje pozicionuojamas įmonės vardas arba parduotuvės (ar jų tinklo) vardas. Mažmeninės prekybos įmonės pozicionavimo metodiką sudaro nuoseklūs veiksmai, kuriais nustatomas, pasirenkamas ir išlaikomas siekiamas įvaizdis, leidžiantis sėkmingai konkuruoti rinkoje. Svarbiausi pozicionavimo mažmeninėje prekyboje nuoseklumo skirtumai, palyginti su prekių pozicionavimo nuoseklumu, susiję su idealios parduotuvės sąvybių nustatymu, įvaizdžio ir pozicijos monitoringu bei perpozicionavimu.

Parduotuvių tinklas – viena iš naujausių mažmeninės prekybos įmonių formų. Tinklai sparčiai plėtoja veiklą ir įgyja vis didesnę įtaką prekių paskirstymo kanalams. Parduotuvių tinklai ne tik sėkmingai konkuruoja su kitomis mažmeninės prekybos įmonėmis, bet ir perima kai kurias arba ir visas didmeninės prekybos įmonių funkcijas, nes sugeba geriau jas atlikti. Gamybos įmonės tampa vis labiau priklausomos nuo parduotuvių tinklų, nes juose daugelis gamybos įmonių parduoda didelę dalį prekių, taip pat todėl, kad

tinklai užsako gamybos įmonėms pagaminti firminio ženklą prekes, kartais ištraukia į gamybos procesą kurdami prekes, kontroliuodami jų gamybą, kokybę ir atlikdami kitas funkcijas. Parduotuvių tinklai tam tikru požiūriu apriboja prekių pasirinkimą pirkėjams, nes formuoja prekių pasiūlą atsižvelgdami į savo strateginius tikslus ir santykius su tiekėjais, o tai užkerta kelią kai kurių gamintojų prekėms patekti į tinklų parduotuves. Parduotuvių tinklai taip pat turi daugiau galimybių analizuoti pirkėjų elgseną ir įvairiomis marketingo priemonėmis daryti jai kryptingą įtaką. Parduotuvių tinklo pozicionavimas – sudėtingesnis uždavinys negu mažmeninės prekybos įmonės, turinčios vieną ar kelias parduotuves. Tinklo pozicionavimo specifika pirmiausia lemia pirkėjų segmentavimo ir tikslinio segmento pasirinkimo sudėtingumas. Kita parduotuvių tinklo pozicionavimo specifika prielaidos – turi būti formuojamas grupės to paties vardo prekybos objektų įvaizdis. Dėl šių priežasčių parduotuvių tinklo pozicionavimo metodika turi tam tikrų ypatumų jie labiausiai išryškėja nustatant pirkėjams reikšmingus įvaizdžio požymius, analizuojant konkurencinę situaciją, pasirenkant siekiamą įvaizdį bei poziciją ir sudarant marketingo komplekso elementų derinį norimam įvaizdžiui ir pozicijai pasiekti.

Parduotuvių tinklo pozicionavimo nauda pirmiausia pasireiškia galimybėmis konkuruoti ne kaina, o kitais marketingo komplekso elementais, padedančiais diferencijuoti parduotuvių tinklą ir turėti konkurencinę poziciją rinkoje. Pozicionavimas naudingas ir todėl, kad garantuoja parduotuvių tinklo marketingo ir valdymo veiksmų kryptingumą. Galiausiai per parduotuvių tinklo pozicionavimą didinamas pirkėjų lojalumas ir sudaromos prielaidos nuolat gerinti mažmeninės prekybos paslaugos kokybę.

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