

un elemento fundamental en el éxito comercial de la cadena, que cuenta ya con más de 100 establecimientos, y ha iniciado su expansión en el exterior.

Aunque después han aparecido muchas imitaciones, la imagen de marca que ha logrado *Pans & Company* supone una verdadera barrera de entrada para los posibles competidores que se interesen por este mercado.

Además, esta cadena se ha convertido en referente obligado, como un modelo innovador y a la vez eficaz en identidad corporativa, que sin duda están siguiendo muchas empresas, y no sólo en el mundo de la distribución y del *fast-food*.

Dado que la imagen tiene una enorme importancia en la estrategia de la cadena, recientemente se ha planteado la necesidad de evolucionar y optimizar aspectos funcionales y comunicativos que permitan seguir marcando la pauta en cuanto a imagen. Así, se han realizado sucesivas optimizaciones en los signos básicos, en el diseño de los mostradores, en los soportes de comunicación en el punto de venta, en la separación visual de los espacios, en la dotación de mayores espacios para congelación y, en fin, en todos aquellos aspectos susceptibles de evolución, de cara a seguir manteniendo esta ventaja competitiva.

El éxito comercial obtenido por esta cadena ha destruido varios tópicos:

1. Que el éxito no está reñido con la calidad de diseño (que ha obtenido numerosos premios en certámenes nacionales e internacionales).
2. Que es posible llegar al gran público con propuestas innovadoras.
3. Que cuando se trabaja con rigor, no hay por qué temer a la competencia extranjera.

The creation of the brand image for *Pans & Company*

The *Pans & Company* chain is a recent example of a chain that has achieved a great success from the creation of a strong brand image. This image is an added value for the product, acts as a key difference factor, and even means a barrier against new competitors.

This article will try to explain what the keys have been in configuring this strong brand image, which meant an important impulse in the initial development of the chain and which many brands (not only distribution and fast-food brands) have tried to imitate.

In the first place, I would like to stress that the image is an effect produced as a result of the perception a consumer makes up from a set of impressions obtained from the company's actions in all fields. The image is a value that resides, therefore, in the mind of the consumer and not in the company's marketing department. What happens is that the company has efficient tools for conditioning or influencing the creation of that perception in the consumer's mind.

We should specify that this perception is formed as the result of an accumulation of all the stimuli the consumer gets from a company. Among these, there are some which depend on the company's will for communication (what is known as voluntary messages), as in the case of publicity, public relations, direct marketing, etc. However, there are other types of messages which do not depend on the decision to communicate, but rather are naturally produced by the simple fact of the company's existence. The company itself, as an organisation, its premises, products, and personnel which make it up are the main communication route for this sort of «involuntary» message.

Both sorts of messages reach the public and reinforce one another if they are coherent in what they intend and carry out or, in the case of the contrary, they discredit one another. In the first case, the perception that the receiver makes up of the company will be clear and positive and will contribute decisively to the company's business success, as is the case in *Pans & Company*, while in the second case, this perception will be confused and its results negative, or neutral in the best

of cases, for reinforcing the company's competitive position.

Therefore, before the decision to communicate, the decision to use communication resources outside the company, it is necessary to optimise communication the company emits with its own resources which is none other than its identity as a company or as a brand. It is important to realise that this sort of communication will reach the public whether the company wants it or not. However, what is the company's decision is carrying it out strictly and using it effectively for the potential of its business or otherwise.

If the identity is well set out and has been visualised and transmitted correctly, it will make up a solid basis for all the company's communication actions, and thus will be the keystone for the construction of a strong brand image.

This is the case of Pans & Company. Its corporate identity, from the conceptual point of view, and its visual expression, have been, even before beginning its commercial communication, the factors which have influenced more decisively in the construction of a strong brand image.

For an analysis of the keys to the process of the creation of the Pans & Company identity and its visual expression, we have to follow its creation process. The starting point was a briefing which defined the business concept as follows:

The creation of a chain of establishments placed in high-traffic areas, specialising in the sale, in a fast-food-like system, of a limited range of high-quality sandwiches and some complementary products (salads, cakes, drinks, and ice-cream) which will guarantee the satisfaction of all appetite and snack needs of a wide public at any time of day.

The company's aim was ambitious, as a quick spread was foreseen, as well as the possibility of competition, in the medium term, in external markets.

The introduction policy began with the creation of some first establishments of our own, basically for three reasons:

1. The possibility of experimenting.
2. Allowing faster growth.
3. Creating a brand desirable for possible franchise holders.

At a geographic introduction level, the decision was to create two first prototype premises in Barcelona and study their behaviour for a year, so as to then begin the expansion process.

We had previous information as market data which indicated that the volume of the Spanish market for fast restaurants would increase rapidly and that, therefore, there were great possibilities for new initiatives.

Starting from here, we carried out an investigation to discover tendencies, consumption habits, and perceptions that consumers had about fast food outside the home and the offer that existed till then.

The main conclusions from this study (carried out in 1990) were the following:

– It confirmed the trends which endorsed the growth of the market: increasingly, people have less time for preparing meals every day and, therefore, have to eat out more and more often. In this consumption situation (more an obligation than a pleasure) the consumer wants to be served quickly, with varied quality products, at a reasonable price, and in pleasant surroundings which will allow a certain mental relaxation before going back to work.

– In regard to the perception of existing supply in the fast-food sector, the investigation stressed that consumers appreciate simplicity, affordability, and the quickness and informality of these premises, but, on the other hand, a good section of the public rejected this formula because of a perception of poor quality, a certain weariness of the monotony of the offer, and a certain association of the offer with teen-agers.

– We quite definitely saw that a good portion of the public did not identify with the existing offer and had a negative perception of fast food, not so much of the system itself (it was accepted as a consequence of current life-styles) as of the formulae offered till then: basically, American hamburger joints which had arrived at the end of the 70's and the 80's. In spite of the fact that there was already a sandwich chain in Barcelona, the consumer lined up with the American offer, as they did not have an identity of their own but reproduced the typical American codes for hamburger joints.

– There was also a part of the public which was psychologically reticent to changing food habits so as to follow the norms then marked by American hamburger joints; this favoured the offer of products which initially were better adapted to our food consumption habits.

From these data we defined a strategy based on taking a greater advantage than the competition of market growth produced by incorporating new consumers. More than fighting for a market share of the existing market, it was a question of dominating most of the future market. This is what is known in marketing terms as a market development strategy rather than fighting for a share. The position proposed for achieving this strategy was the following:

1. Faced with the existing fast food formulae, we wanted to place our brand as a more original alternative, more modern and closer to our own habits and tastes.

2. Faced with traditional bars, we had to take a position as the more modern alternative, with more novelty and more fun (when I say traditional bar, I mean not only those that offer sandwiches —most of them— but also those which offer combined courses and three-course meals).

Faced with both of these, the answer ought to be a proposal of greater quality.

At an objective public level and according to this strategy, we ought to target not so much the usual fast food public, but rather those who «only went once in a while, with the children» or almost never.

This public was made up of collectives such as:

- Young people from 18-20 on who give up traditional fast food «because they're too old for that sort of place».

- Employees, office personnel, professional workers, secretaries from all social classe, at lunch-time, mid-day, or odd hours, either to eat quickly or take out.

- People, couples, or groups looking for a place to have something quick while or after shopping, going to the cinema, or doing errands.

- People passing by and impulse buying.

- Parents with children, in the evening or during the weekend, to eat on the premises or take out.

Quite definitely, to interest this public which, in principle, was not a fast food consumer, we had to create a brand with values they could identify with. We wanted to associate the brand with values like informal, innovative, original, near, quality, nice, and functional.

The challenge to take up was the creation of a strong brand carrying an added value for the product and differentiating us from the competition.

Starting from here, we began the creation process. The first thing we had to do was formulate a concept of over-all image for the chain and, from this, begin a process of multi-disciplinary design to answer all programme needs from a formal coherence, and always according to the brand strategy and the concept formulated.

The creation of the programme was placed around the use of our own product as the axis of identity visualisation.

A crunchy baguette, just baked (by means of a pre-cooking system which was non-existent at that moment), represented an innovation we could capitalise at the image level. The product, magnified, omnipresent, turned into the central axis of brand identity and, above all, of the sales point, while fleeing from any accessory or gratuitous element.

When describing the design process, I will refer more extensively to the sales point, but first I must briefly expose the creation process for the rest of the areas which make up the visual identity of the chain, as they are an indivisible whole which cannot be understood without an over-all view.

The first step was to find a name for the chain. For this, we set up a process of creative search route generation, according to the attributes and identity signals to be transmitted. By means of a methodology of our own, hundreds of alternatives came up and were evaluated for ability to achieve proposed aims. Originality, ease of understanding, pronunciation, and memory were, of course, highly recommendable values for the name.

The process concluded with a short list from which Pans & Company was chosen.

The name chosen brought up a series of interesting connotations:

- It had the capacity of describing the product concept: a sandwich is made of bread (pans) above all, plus any ingredients you want to add.

- Pans & Company wanted to be, from the beginning, a place to have delicious sandwiches, in company.

- It gave an idea of a chain, of a commercial firm.

- It established more than a name, a name system, which could derive towards a product name, but also a communication.

Once we had found the name, the next step was to develop the design in all key areas of chain identity (product, surroundings, personnel, and visual communication).

The design of the visual expression of the Pans & Company brand had to have an enormous visual strength in its graphic concept. Besides, it had to express, if possible, the product concept.

But if Pans & Company was to be an innovative chain, its brand had to be stressed from the beginning. Thus, the design was not limited to the conventional, but we developed a System of Visual Identity, capable of identifying the chain, beyond incorporating the Pans & Company logo.

This system is made up of the logo, a symbol (the baguette), a chromatic code, and a graphic code.

At the chromatic level, faced with the use of one «corporate colour» only, Pans & Company decided on a code made up of four colours, which give the chain visual resources which are greatly useful for giving establishments a young and merry image. The colour for wrappings and service material (glasses, mats, bags, and even personnel uniforms) were definitely designed to be elements giving life and merriness to our establishments.

The graphic code, with an enormous visual strength, is a grid which works to visually join all the pieces and has a standout role both in graphics and in decoration.

When creating the brand, there were genetic information codes, «identification tics» the chain could count on for all visual manifestations, such as wrappings, posters, object design, or visual communication.

As to the sales point identity, the concept bases on which the design rests are the following:

1. The product: the windows full of baguettes and magnified sandwiches on the walls are the stars in every premises.

2. We had to differentiate and innovate regarding everything which was in existence; for this, we had to flee from clichés existing in hamburger joints, even though they were sometimes useful from the functional point of view.

3. Giving more potential to the counter as the central visual element, always facing the entry to the premises, is an aspect which intends to encourage impulse buying.

4. The use of traditional materials with an innova-

tive concept was another key aspect when creating the sales point identity. Wood and marble are outstanding elements in the premises. However, their layout, together with a lighting concept out of the ordinary in fast food spots, give these establishments a warm, young (but not excluding) atmosphere, with more quality.

5. Lighting is «discriminate», giving value and hierarchy to the different elements and avoiding the uniform visual chaos which tends to be seen in this kind of establishments.

6. Visual separation between dining area and kitchen was another basic criterion followed when designing the prototype premises project. Quite different from hamburger joints, where the kitchen is visible from the counter, in the Pans & Company premises its view only allows us to see that the product is made at the moment, without allowing a view of the actual making of it nor of the machinery to make it, as we were trying to refer to the craft aspect, fleeing from any connotation of industrialism.

When creating chains, it is basic to take serial criteria into account. Sometimes it is necessary to give up ideas which are brilliant but cannot be serialised. We must also understand that if we have to work in very different architectural surroundings, we have to have total application versatility for applying the elements.

Supports on which to work on identity (what we call visual tics) must be few but impacting and allow memory beyond the different circumstances where they can be found. Thus, the counters and their exhibition of baguettes, the gridwork floors, the yellow in posters, and the magnification of product images, give Pans & Company premises a strong impact image which is memorable and exclusive.

The integral creative process for the Pans & Company identity finished with the creation of a Corporate Manual which guarantees the correct development of identity in the future, in all areas (graphics, product, space) independently both of internal or external teams that could intervene at any moment and the surroundings where it must be applied.

Once the corporate identity and its expression had been created, the basis for a brand image construction was laid. However, the image was reinforced with publicity communication and brand management by company marketing experts.

At this stage, the communication carried out by the

brand was basic, especially during the first years, for strongly rooting both in the formal and conceptual nature defined in the project for creating identity. Once more, the product was the axis of brand communication and its visual expression, beginning with the chromatic codes (the colour yellow), the graphics (the grid), decisively contributed to fix this perception. In this way, we achieved publicity which, besides selling, also created a brand.

Since then, company initiatives such as sponsoring events like Pans & Classics and Pans & Bikes, have reinforced this image of a unique and differential brand. We must say that the brand is a vehicle for significance and thus must be kept up by the company. Only thus will identity end up becoming a brand image.

The Pans & Company image has been, without a doubt, a basic element in the chain's commercial success; it now has more than 100 establishments and has begun to expand outwards.

Even though many imitations have later appeared, the brand image achieved by Pans & Company means a real barrier for possible competitors interested or trying to enter this market.

Besides, this chain has become an obligatory reference as an innovative model as well as an efficient corporate identity which will doubtless be followed by many companies, and not only in the world of distribution and fast food.

As the image is enormously important in the chain's strategy, we have recently considered the need to evolve and optimise functional and communication aspects which will allow setting up the standard as to image. Thus, we have carried out succeeding optimisation in basic signs, in counter design, in communication supports at sales points, in visual separation of space, in greater space for freezing, and, altogether, in all aspects which can be developed, so as to keep up this competitive advantage.

The commercial success obtained by this chain has destroyed several clichés:

1. That success is not incompatible with quality in design (which has won several prizes in local and foreign competitions).
2. That it is possible to reach the public by innovative proposals.
3. That when work is accurately carried out, there is no reason to fear foreign competition.