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Marketing communication in business relations – trends on the Polish market

Summary

The changes taking place in Poland over the last 20 years have affected market behaviour of enterprises, the character and composition of marketing communication tools included. This paper focuses on the changes that occurred in this regard in business relations in Poland. Results of exploratory research, conducted among 29 managers of Polish enterprises, were analysed in the context of two main trends of marketing communication presented in the literature: striving for integration of marketing communication activities and attributing a significant role to the tools of building lasting relations with clients. The conducted analyses lead to the conclusion that there has been a shift from selling to relation-oriented marketing communications. This translates into a change of the role of salespeople: a salesman is perceived as an advisor who offers unique value proposition. In comparison to marketing research results from 1998-1999, more stress is put on branding, direct marketing and trade show activities. Image creating activities (media advertising, public relations) are used on a broader scale. Moreover, the Internet is becoming “a must used and needed” communication channel on business-to-business market. It is hard to state, however, whether all these activities are consistent and integrated.

Introduction

Communication with existing and potential customers is of vital importance for the success of marketing of industrial goods and services (Hutt and Speh, 1995). For the majority of enterprises, the problem is not whether to promote one's activities, but how to effectively implement the policy of communication with the market.

The approach of marketing communications in the business-to-business sphere is changing. Based on an analysis of literature from this field, one can talk about, above all, a trend to plan and implement information-persuasive activities according to the rules of integrated marketing communications. Another, universally indicated in scientific papers, tendency is shifting the emphasis from sale aims for the sake of engaging in a dialogue and strengthening the supplier – buyer relations. It is worth adding that both trends of changes in marketing communications are convergent.

The nature and process of marketing communication of enterprises is affected by the changes occurring in the environment of enterprises. They are especially visible in developing economies where the impact of global tendencies is parallel to dynamic changes on the

domestic market (e.g. cultural, economic, social or legal changes). Poland is an example of such processes. In the early stages of Polish economy transformation, companies operating in the business-to-business field based their marketing activities mainly on direct, personal communication. The former economic system was conducive to building strong relations between supplier and buyer representatives, however, they were often built on an informal basis and enterprises did not seek to manage these relations nor the communication taking place there. Such an approach to communication between companies resulted, as a matter of fact, not only from the economic, political or cultural context, but also from lack of knowledge and experience in the field of other marketing activities.

Over the last 20 years a series of significant changes has taken place in the enterprises' environment, and opening of the economy to international cooperation (including entering the EU structures) made the Polish market more competitive and demanding, also in the area of marketing activities. Thus questions arise whether, in the face of these changes, also the approach of Polish companies to marketing activities in the business-to-business sphere has been modified, and whether this approach is comparable to tendencies in developed countries

In order to define the changes which occurred in this field, in this paper results of research conducted 10 years after the economic changes (1998-1999) are compared with results of research conducted in the years 2007-2008. Such comparison offers a possibility to trace changes in communication between companies in this period, which may be useful to predict changes in countries which are at the beginning of the systemic reform journey.

In this paper the authors focused on two trends of changes in communication – they determined the extent of use of communication tools to build and develop relations with clients, and estimated the scale of striving for integrated marketing communications in the business-to-business field.

Integrated marketing communications

According to the concept of F.P. Rota the role of marketing communication has altered with time. At the beginning (in the '50s in developed economies) communication was not coordinated and was concerned with the product. In the 1970s the stress was laid on target groups and in the 1980s – on the role of communication in competition. At the end of the last century communication became an instrument of gaining the competitive edge (Rota 1997).

From the beginning of the 1990s the concept of integrated marketing communications (IMC) became a real hot topic in the field of marketing (Holm 2006). Managing communication processes requires looking at them as integrated marketing communications,

which emphasise the benefits of harnessing synergy across multiple media to build brand equity of products and services (Pitta, Weisgal, Lynagh 2006). Integrated marketing communications means managing and controlling all the marketing communication in terms of its effectiveness, minimising costs and maximising effects, or ensuring that brand positioning, its identity and message are communicated synergistically through each element of communication as a result of one consistent strategy (Holm 2006). IMC is about managing the company's dialogue with the market environment (Fill 1999). This is composed of the following elements:

- identifying the elements constituting the company's competitive edge and company qualities to be communicated to the environment (Rydel 2001),
- planning marketing communication activities at main recipients of the medium (Rydel 2001),
- taking advantage of different forms of interpersonal and mass communication in the communication process, with emphasis on interactive (media) activities in order to initiate a dialogue between participants of the process, and build long-lasting seller-buyer relations (Wiktor, 2001),
- paying attention to corporate brand (not only product) and abandoning informative communication for the sake of abstract one (Proctor and Kitchen 2002),
- supervising the communication process, controlling the quality and quantity of company communications, as well as controlling communication results and correcting communication plans (Rydel 2001).

One of the trends influencing the conceptual development of integrated marketing communication was relationship marketing (Gurau 2008), stemming, among others, from research on business-to-business relations (Grönroos 1994). The concept assumes that “marketing is to establish, maintain, and enhance relationships with customers and other partners, at a profit, so that the objectives of the parties involved are met. This is achieved by a mutual exchange and fulfilment of promises” (Grönroos 1990). Market communication is a central means of reaching customers, and the focus on relationship building leads to an interest in emphasizing dialogues (Grönroos 1994).

Communication, together with an interaction process and a value process, is among three processes that are vital for the successful execution of a relationship strategy (Grönroos 2004). Communication has an effect on trust (Mohr and Nevin 1990, Andersen and Narus 1990), coordination of activities (McQuarrie 1993) or commitment (Hakansson, Johanson and

Wootz 1976), and through these variables - on the results of a distribution channel (effectiveness, efficiency and profitability) (Mohr and Nevin 1990). Consequently, communication is seen as the essence of coordination of organisation's behaviours (Hutt and Speh 1995), and even as the “glue” that keeps together the inter-organisational distribution channel (Mohr and Nevin 1990). The role of communication so significant that there are suggestions to treat it as the basic index of relationship lifespan (Mohr and Spekman 1994).

Marketing communications in business relations

Communication on the business-to-business market has always played a different role than in the case of consumption products. In business-to-business relations the main task of communication is ensuring that intentions and capabilities of partners are understood, and preparing the ground for relationship development. The quality of information and its exchange influence the success of relations (Mohr and Spekman 1994).

In business-to-business marketing services play a crucial role. Even when production companies are concerned, the company's competitive edge is determined by the quality of customer service and complementary services. It reinforces the role of communication with customers, which, as far as services are concerned, becomes the core of marketing activity. As a result, communication is not only an element of all marketing activities, but is actually in the centre of marketing function.

The aim of communication in marketing channel could be sending persuasive information, supporting common decision-making, coordinating programmes, executing power, and arousing commitment and loyalty (Mohr and Nevin 1990). Business-to-business relations are often, especially in the case of industrial products, an example of short, direct marketing channel. In such conditions, determination to implement the aims listed by Mohr and Nevin could lead to disruption of relations between business partners. Research suggests that on the content level business-to-business communication generally is not persuasive in character, and rather serves to inform, collect information and explain, which requires an interactive approach to communication (Duncan and Moriarty 1998). This shows connections between such use of communication with the principles of relationship marketing.

Assuming that enterprise behaviours are purely rational would lead to the perception of business-to-business communication as an exchange of information. From the point of view of relationship marketing, however, and also from the assumption about the existence of two layers of relations – the content and style (Sheth 1976) – it can be concluded that in incomplete information settings, the development of expectations also involves affective

elements such as the judgement of character (Andersen 2001) or characteristics of seller or customer (Williams and Spiro 1985). Thus attention is paid not only to the content, but also to the style of communication, creating the context of communication, which enables trust building and the development of credibility. These effects of communication are perceived as building of a collaborative atmosphere (Hallen and Sandstrom 1991).

Such approach is adopted in the research into communication between a seller and a business client (Saxe and Weitz 1982). The research results indicate that the atmosphere of communication, together with the structure of relations, constitute the environment of the buyer and seller interaction (Wren and Simpson 1996). Consequently, integrated marketing communications of companies operating on the business-to-business market, should also cover emotional elements and tools of conveying them. Communication can take a planned and unplanned form (Grönroos 2004), and a distinct nature of both spheres hampers the integration of communication, especially since contacts are established not only between individual employees, but between whole groups of people on the supplier and customer side.

Business-to-business communication should implement the ideas of relationship marketing, and the implementation of relationship marketing ought to take into consideration the needs of marketing communication integration. It is the central axis of changes in the business-to-business sphere. The need to integrate communications in business relations results from its complexity since communication between a supplier and buyer occurs on three levels: salesperson - buyer dyad, groups of people involved in customer service on the side of the supplier – groups of people in the buying centre of the recipient, image communication on the company level.

Nevertheless, little is said about communication in research on relations on the business-to-business market. As a rule, it is treated as the environment in which an interaction takes place (Williams, Spiro and Fine 1990). When communication is an element of research it is treated as an independent variable or supporting the success of building relations or the atmosphere (Andersen 2001). Very few studies have investigated the relation between IMC and customer relationship management (Gurau 2008). No attention is paid to the changes occurring in the attitude to communication and to the use of its instruments to strengthen relations depending on the changes taking place on the market.

Determinants of business-to-business communication in Poland

Analysing the whole spectrum of determinants of business-to-business communication in Poland exceeds the scope of this paper. It is worth, however, examining the key factors shaping trends in this field.

Taking into account culture dimensions adopted in the research by Hofstede (1991), Poland is a country with average power distance, above world average individualism, masculinity and uncertainty avoidance and lower long-term orientation¹. Polish people, while not tremendously close knit, are neither very hierarchical, it is also a highly rule of law oriented society. Polish nature is to praise individuality, while also understanding and accepting fairly close interpersonal relationships. Traditional values do not stand in the way of change. The Polish people are able to embrace new ideas and principles with little impediment to change (Nasierowski 1998). In this regard, from the culture point of view business communication is based on interpersonal relations, but is relatively formalised on the company buyer – seller level. With long-lasting buyer-seller relationships, the relations become less formal.

Economically, Poland was forced to undergo a form of "shock therapy" to quickly modernize its economic system following its independence. Centrally planned economy, which was the case in Poland until the 1989 political changes and the rejection of socialist political system, created specific conditions for business relations. Centrally planned production and buying were of great importance for communication between enterprises – its effect was a significant role of personal contacts, formal and informal, which made winning contracts possible (Berrios 1995, Stepień and Robinson 2002). Among other activities of marketing communication, trade fairs played a relatively major part as they paved the way for establishing business contacts with foreign enterprises. At the same time, great importance was attached to formalised reporting communication with government authorities (Kuca and Mruk 2002).

Political changes and the institution of free market principles did not change communication behaviours. As at the beginning of these changes foreign enterprises investing in Poland in the FMCG sector contributed to rapid changes in communication with consumers (dynamic increase in expenditure on advertising in mass media, mainly TV advertising), in the business-to-business sphere, especially in industrial enterprises, such changes did not take place. Companies entering the market often took over Polish employees, and simultaneously

¹ G. Hofstede, *Poland Cultural Dimensions Explained*, http://www.geert-hofstede.com/hofstede_dimensions.php

Polish communication customs. Thus, the dominant significance of personal contacts remained. Other tools of communication were used to a lesser extent.

The sphere of marketing, and marketing business-to-business communication, was beyond the interest of researchers and academics. At higher education schools there were no classes concerning this field. There appeared only single Polish textbooks. The first scientific conference on industrial marketing was organised only 10 years after the economic breakthrough (1999). It was a response to more and more articulated needs of Polish enterprises which faced increasingly complex marketing activities of foreign competitors. It was remarked that marketing communication, seen as personal selling (which actually made marketing and sales equal), may not be sufficient to compete with those who have gained invaluable experience and marketing knowledge on more developed markets.

The situation is illustrated by the results of research conducted among Polish industrial enterprises in the years 1998 and 1999 (Michalik 1999). The most effective were considered direct meetings, whose average evaluation was 4,0 on a scale of 1-5 (the higher the evaluation, the higher effectiveness). Next, with a clearly lower evaluation, was sales promotion (3,7) and also advertising in specialist magazines (3,6), regular customer recommendations (3,6), trade fairs (3,6) and informal contacts (3,5). Effectiveness of written offers was evaluated at the level of 3,3, and effectiveness of other activities was evaluated 1 over – the average did not exceed the value of 3. Similar results were obtained in research conducted in 2001 into tools of building partnership with industrial clients. The largest group of enterprises used formal (36,3% of the respondents) and informal (31,9%) direct meetings with customers, as well as discounts, rebates (34,5%) (Leszczyński and Waśkowski 2001).

The research conducted in 1998 indicates a varied approach to the importance of brand in business-to-business relations. Almost half of the respondents attributed a significant role to the brand, and a group of 30% claimed that investing into brand is only a matter of the future due to decisive importance of the price in the buying behaviour of Polish industrial enterprises. For the same reason, 20% of the respondents believed the brand was of secondary importance (Waśkowski 1998).

In the following 10 years (1998-2007) significant economic changes took place². Since 2004 Poland has been a member of the European Union which means that Polish enterprises are exposed to competition factors similar to highly developed markets. In addition, there is a

² The inflation rate fell from 11,8% in 1998 to 2,5% in 2007; source: Raport o inflacji 1998, Narodowy Bank Polski, Warszawa 1999, Główny Urząd Statystyczny, www.stat.gov.pl; an average rate of GDP growth in 2007 equaled 6,5% (2007), in the years 1998-2007 GDP increased by 112% (in current prices); source: Główny Urząd Statystyczny, www.stat.gov.pl

dynamic development of new and fragmentation of existing channels of communication, better access to knowledge and professional services in the field of marketing communication.

Changes in marketing communication in Poland as a subject of study

In the context of the above literature deliberations indicating the main trends in communication on the market of enterprises and presenting a change of determinants on the Polish market, some questions arise: Has marketing communication in the business-to-business field changed on this market over almost 10 years since the last research and almost 20 years after the economic transformation, and if so how? Are development trends similar to the ones observed in western countries?

Further deliberations focus primarily on identifying changes regarding the integration of marketing communications in the business-to-business field. In accordance with what has been stated in the first part of the paper, integration will be indicated by aiming to:

- set goals of marketing communication and target them at particular segments of recipients,
- communicate through corporate brand the features constituting the company's competitive edge,
- take advantage of tools of interpersonal and mass communication,
- use activities ensuring interactive communication in order to build long-lasting relations with customers,
- supervise the whole process of communication and control its effects.

The analysis will be conducted on the basis of results of the research undertaken among managers of Polish enterprises. Due to lack of similar research on the Polish market and also next research planned on a broader scale, this research is exploratory in nature (Babbie 2001). Consequently, qualitative approach was adopted here (McDaniel and Gates 2002). Considering a wide content scope of the research, it was decided that the group of respondents should consist of marketing managers from companies operating on the market of enterprises. In the frame of purposive sample, managers doing postgraduate studies on marketing management on the business-to-business market were chosen as respondents. This ensured a selection of individuals holding suitable positions and eliminate persons using marketing targeted at consumers, and allowed for controlling the course of research.

In the preliminary stage of research design, in-depth interviews were intended to be used. However, in the end it was decided to conduct an Internet survey with the use of unstructured questionnaire, containing questions on the above issues. Such a method gave the

respondents freedom to express what they wanted and, simultaneously, gave them time to consider answers (McDaniel and Gates 2002, Kaniewska-Sęba, Leszczyński and Pilarczyk 2006). The survey was conducted in May 2007 among representatives of 14 enterprises, and repeated in May 2008 on an independent group of 15 persons. Both groups included representatives of varied enterprises: 13 operated at the same time on business-to-business and business-to-customer markets, 16 aimed their offer exclusively at business clients. Among 14 companies from the service sector most were financial companies (including one of the biggest Polish banks, insurance and auditing companies) and marketing companies (advertising agencies and consulting services). A group of 14 production companies embraced both large and small companies from energy, smelting, chemical, automotive, cleansing agents, food and furniture industries. One respondent represented a commercial company (confectionery industry).

The first survey contained a question concerning setting aims of marketing communication and directing it at selected segments of recipients. All the respondents, however, provided vague answers and commented that the question posed difficulties. Therefore, in the questionnaire used in the 2008 survey the question about communication aims was removed and replaced with one on brand's aims in company communication.

Because of qualitative nature of the research, the response analysis was conducted in two stages. In the first stage, as part of open coding, the studied phenomena were categorised (Babbie 2002). In the second stage, the given responses were assigned to the set categories. In order to reduce the impact of researchers' subjectivism, the whole data analysis process was conducted independently by both authors who then accepted coincident analysis results and in case of discrepancies – discussed, agreed on or redefined them.

Communication in the business-to-business field in the light of research

Analyses of research results lead to the conclusion that as far as the formulation of marketing aims is concerned, it is still dominated by a sales – relation oriented approach. Adaptation of partnership marketing concept is noticeable: the aim of the surveyed companies, besides sales results (increasing, sustaining the number of clients), was creating an image of the company as a partner who cares about the customer, who advises and supports the customer, and adapts to their needs. There appear also aims of image nature – improving the image of company/brand products. Moreover, among aims of marketing communication in the business-to-business sphere there were mentioned: strengthening relations with

suppliers, increased knowledge and information about new products, being distinct compared to competitors and information exchange.

The respondents pointed out the great importance of the brand. Out of 15 questionnaires filled in the 2008 survey, 12 managers acknowledged that corporate brand plays a pivotal role in the company's communication with the environment. In each of these cases the goal of the brand was to make the company stand out based on the distinguishing features that according to the respondents signified the competitive edge. Based on the respondents' answers, one can conclude that in the case of enterprises operating parallel on the goods and consumer services markets, the brand is created mainly for consumers, and then communicated to business clients. A good example of this is one of major Polish banks, where a strategic decision was made not to conduct any intermediate communication activities directed at business clients. Only corporate brand and tools based on direct contact were used. The brand is also built to achieve negotiating advantage over middlemen. In a nutshell, the first association with the brand was “quality”.

What is interesting are three cases where respondents indicated a low significance of the brand. Two cases concerned small companies providing marketing services, which – according to the respondents – should develop the brand, but do not do so due to the owners' belief in the power of attachment of clients to particular persons dealing with sales, and also due to informal connections of the owner with decision-makers in the client company. In the third case (producer of cleansing agents), lack of interest in the brand was attributed to a strong price competition resulting from customers' exclusive price orientation in purchase decisions. The company, despite their belief in the great role of the brand, cannot afford any expenses leading to the price increase for fear of losing clients to competitors offering cheaper products. At the same time, the manager representing the company remarked that their products sold as a private label to a competitor achieve higher price in retail sales than the same products sold under an unknown brand of the producer.

The results of the research show that recipients of marketing communications in the business-to-business sphere are predominantly potential and existing clients. Other subjects of marketing environment, such as media, society or even families of business clients, were seldom indicated. Employees are a “neglected” group. Only a few of the analysed enterprises considered them a group of target audience of communication activities (energy concern, packaging producer). In one of the analysed companies - providing head-hunting services - communication is directed at two groups – potential employees and potential employers.

The research results confirm the theoretical assumptions regarding the importance of communication in the business-to-business field. Most respondents stressed that marketing communication means a two-way process in their company, and primarily tools of direct communication are used to reach the client. Personal selling is of great importance and is widely applied. The respondents emphasised that it is one of the most expensive, although at the same time the most effective, tools of promotion. What is important, companies aim for a change of image of salespeople in the business-to-business sphere – from product specialists to customer advisers (companies from energy and confectionery industries). Tools supporting salespeople's activities are attached a significant role. Salespeople are equipped with professional information-promotional materials (company and product presentations as CDs, brochures, catalogues or samples).

Stress is also put on direct marketing activities. The respondents clearly indicated the complementary character of such activities in relation to personal selling. Firms operating in the business-to-business field declared the use of the following ways of personalised contact with customers: letters/parcels sent by post (catalogues, leaflets, price lists, brochures, or information-promotional newsletters are distributed in this way), fax and e-mailing³ (used mainly for fast communication with customers).

The respondents' statements are a confirmation of the vital importance of trade fairs in communication on the business-to-business market. Some of the analysed companies participate in trade fair events, especially those enjoying the status of the most important events in the industry (at home and abroad). Trade fairs are perceived as an effective tool of maintaining contacts with existing clients and winning new ones. Also the role of trade fairs in building or consolidating a positive image of products and companies (medals, awards) is appreciated. Some respondents admitted that participation in trade fairs results in noticeable sales results.

The majority of companies organise regular meetings with clients in the form of events which are aimed at building partner relations and loyalty attitudes. Such events normally take place in special, attractive places. They usually consist of two parts: content-related and entertainment. There was, however, an example of an informal event which was only about socialising, and a marketing event in the form of internal trade fairs (confectionery industry). Financial companies emphasised the importance of customer relations based on

³ At the same time they emphasised that contact via the Internet does not build strong relations and does not guarantee that a one-off buyer will become a regular client. It was also stressed that an interest in a company must be supported with other direct activities.

trust. A way of building and deepening them was meetings of top executives with customers in the form of regular dinner meetings and special occasion meetings around traditional holidays (Christmas).

Companies from the business-to-business domain notice the importance of external public relations activities. Part of the respondents declared that they maintain regular contact with the media – both formal (press conferences, briefings, sending press releases) and less formal (individual meetings with journalist over dinner or on the occasion of official local events). Nevertheless, the most common PR activity in the business-to-business field remains sponsorship. The conducted research proves that special attention is given to sponsorship of contestants and sports teams. Nonetheless, there were also given examples of sponsorship of institutions or cultural events. The firms also declared participation in social and charity actions. Two respondents stressed that an important element of marketing communication is participation in branch associations. Individual respondents described non-standard PR activities: publishing their own quarterly magazine for business clients (automotive industry) and regular publishing research results on the job market (head-hunting).

Some of the respondent companies do not undertake any advertising activities – in some cases it is due to small and local scope of activity, and more often it results from a focus on direct and, not infrequently, informal contacts with customers. Other firms, if they do decide to use advertising, tend to advertise in branch magazines or on the Internet. Few respondents mentioned advertising of their own products (language courses for companies, building materials, insurance, IT) in media of the more mass reach: in business press and, depending on the company's scale of activity, in local or national newspapers. Outdoor advertising was also mentioned. At the same time, it serves rather as a signpost how to get to the company than an element of integrated marketing communications. The majority of the respondents confirmed the use of printed materials (e.g. catalogues or brochures) in communication with customers.

Relatively little attention was given to sales promotion activities. Individual respondents declared the use of: promotional offers, free product samples, training and technological demonstrations (during events or in the customer's company seat).

In the answers of 8 out of 29 managers a loyalty programme was treated as a means of communication. In the light of description of these programmes, however, they can be rather considered tools of sales promotion and not building affective loyalty. Conducting the programme forces additional communication with the client, nevertheless, it is not communication tool.

All the respondents pointed out the great importance of the Internet, which is used mainly for day-to-day correspondence with customers and distributing offers (via email), and presenting the company (website). A few companies run separate websites for business clients available after logging in. A manager representing a middleman from the IT industry commented that their company aspires to win the competitive edge thanks to an Internet platform devoted to communication with companies and handling their orders. In three cases advertising in branch portals was used; one company set up their own portal for business clients to enhance the brand and also regularly uses the Google AdWords service.

The idea of relationship marketing is implemented in relation to clients. As mentioned before, only a few companies emphasised that parallel to externally-oriented activities, they develop internal communication within the enterprise via the Intranet, e-mail and company newsletters. In order to reinforce the enterprise's identity among employees, one of the companies prepared a culture book (in which the company's history was recorded).

When selecting means of communication, one takes into account first of all the financial situation of the company, the kind of products on offer, the specifics of the industry and target group, and the so-far effectiveness of particular tools. In 11 cases companies conducted any analyses of communication results, mostly based on current analysis of sales results or information from salespeople. Also taken into account are opinions of customers (expressed spontaneously during talks, recommendations). Still less often, the measurement of effects is more formalised in nature. Only 6 managers stated that their companies conduct regular questionnaire surveys on customer satisfaction. Few use effectiveness measures of selected tools of communication (trade fairs, events, media relations, Internet activities) based on the quantity of contacts with clients, generated by these activities.

Research limitations

One needs to remain aloof from the research and its conclusions. This is on account of its method of measurement and respondents' characteristics. Taking into account the fact that a lot of detailed data was collected in the research it seems that the results are accurate. However, the accuracy of the obtained results may have been affected by subjectivism in the coding and data analysis processes. The authors attempted to reduce such risk through conducting research on two independent samples and conducting two independent analyses. The selection and characteristics of respondents may have also affected the quality of results. Holding posts in marketing departments in companies from business-to-business sector and being aware of marketing concepts stemming from the respondents' post-graduate education

positively affect the results' accuracy. However, no analyses of respondents' diversity in terms of the role of marketing in the enterprises they work in or the scope of their responsibilities were conducted. The differences in this area, resulting from the common in Polish enterprises fact of combining marketing and sales functions, may reduce the accuracy of the results.

Conclusions

The research showed that communication on the business-to-business market is more and more often planned; however, companies tend to apply rather “traditional”, tried and tested communication activities. There are relatively few non-standard tools of communication (e.g. internal trade fairs) which would distinguish a given enterprise from others in the same industry. Companies in the business-to-business field do not opt for originality or spectacular nature, but for being direct and interactive in communication with customers. This is to result in mutual trust and lasting (often informal) relations with the exchange partners. The shift from promotion-oriented attitude to dialogue is even reflected in marketing terminology – the very term “marketing communication” is becoming more frequently used than the word “promotion”.

The prevailing role of personal selling on the business-to-business market is undeniable. Nonetheless, in reference to the results of the research conducted 10 years before, other direct activities gained in significance. Such conclusions to a large extent correspond with knowledge presented in the Polish literature⁴. What is brought to attention there is the importance of trade fairs and marketing events in communication mix in the business-to-business field. Still it is recommended to treat trade fairs as an arena of communication, and not the place of completing transactions (Kwiatek and Zielinski 2006). Moreover, a major role is attributed to: telemarketing, letters/parcels sent by post and Internet communication (Olczak and Urbaniak 2006).

Differences between theory and practice appeared in a different area of activities supporting sales. Although the need to run sales promotion activities is signalled in the literature (Olczak and Urbaniak 2006), the companies embraced by the research rarely use

⁴ Business-to-business marketing does not receive much attention in Polish scientific publications. Out of 1155 articles, published between 2001 and 2007 in major Polish scientific magazines on marketing, 52 were classified as texts related to business-to-business marketing. The most often discussed areas were partnership marketing and marketing tools, including tools of promotion (Leszczynski and Zielinski 2008). There exist also few monographs on this subject. What is more, none of them is devoted exclusively to marketing communications. The essence, determinants and tools of communication in the business-to-business field is usually described in one chapter. They refer rather to the idea of relationship marketing than the principles of the concept of integrated marketing communications.

these tools. Possibly they are not perceived as tools of communication, therefore, this conclusion should be verified in quantitative research.

In the few Polish publications regarding marketing on the market of enterprises, the need to provide integrated marketing communications is very rarely emphasised (Gołębiowski 2003). In this regard, it is only now that the change of attitude to the use of advertising in mass media in the business-to-business field is accentuated. There are opinions that it is worthwhile to treat it as an essential activity that enhances direct communication, especially in the case of standard products or “products of dual purpose” (Wojciechowski 2003). Companies should allot part of their budgets to marketing activities not only in specialist magazines, They should also use more “mass” media, so far regarded in relation to B2C communication (Kaliszewski 2008). An idea, more and more often presented in the literature and very much in line with the concept of integrated marketing communications is implementing by enterprises the concept of corporate social responsibility (Jerzyk and Wańkowski, 2008) and building a strong corporate brand through sponsorship.

The conducted analyses confirm that some of the surveyed companies from the business-to-business sphere run more and more complex activity as far as marketing communications is concerned, combine sales activities with image-creating activities (advertising in the press and sponsorship). It is difficult, however, to determine the full scope of integration of communication on this basis only. Respondents' statements do not provide sufficient ground to evaluate the degree of coordination of such activities and their consistency as far as creating / enhancing corporate brand is concerned.

As a matter of fact, in theoretical deliberations on communication on the business-to-business market, the brand, especially corporate brand, is given little attention. It is considered rather a symbol of guarantee of the product's technical quality and the quality of provided complementary services (Urbaniak 2003). The research results, on the other hand, indicate that there is high interest of managers of business-to-business communication in brand, and that is on the corporate and not the product level. It is the most accentuated in the statements reason to say that in most companies covered by the research there are attempts to provide integrated marketing communications. The role attributed to the brand may signify a change in attitude to marketing communications over the last 10 years. As mentioned in the earlier part of the paper, in the 1990s of the 20th century opinions on validity of investment into the brand on business-to-business market were divided.

In view of the presented deliberations, one can conclude that enterprises try to implement principles of partnership marketing and use communication in building lasting

relations with clients. It is hard to explicitly assess the level of integration of marketing communication activities. Kitchen and Schultz (2000) have identified four stages of IMC starting from tactical coordination of promotional elements, redefining the scope of marketing communications, application of information technology to financial and strategic integration. They found that the majority of firms are anchored in the first two stages, some are moving into stage three and very few have moved to stage four. One conclusion is that there are barriers to developing IMC from tactics to strategy. Can a similar conclusion refer to the Polish enterprises operating in the business-to-business field? It seems that activities undertaken within marketing communication do not originate from a well-thought-out strategy. Most companies vaguely formulate both the aims and target groups of marketing communications. The respondents did not mention any signs of formalisation in this area, i.e. creating / existence of a strategy or a plan of marketing activities. Only in one of the companies such activity is being undertaken. Furthermore, budget limitations demand being rational in spending on promotional activities.

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