

GUERRILLA MARKETING

A CASE STUDY ON WEDDING SERVICE BUSINESSES

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Abstract

The main purpose of this independent study is to examine guerrilla marketing concept and observe the responses of decision maker in the wedding service businesses toward the concept. First part of the study describe the basic theoretical framework of guerrilla marketing concept and the outlook on the tools, so called guerrilla weapons in which corresponded the traditional marketing concepts. Although phenomenal due to the extreme creativity and low budget oriented, the lack of information and data about the guerrilla marketing, including the tactics, effects, and ethics, still limit the practice and implementation of guerrilla marketing. The final part of the study includes the wedding service business case study which demonstrates the opinions of four key informants towards the concept of guerrilla marketing, as well as the potential of implementation. This part of research involves qualitative research data, particularly in-depth interview. Results reveals that although guerrilla marketing seem to be very interesting due to its creativity and low budget concept and, in fact, some had implemented it without realizing, yet it is still rejected on implementation by giving the reasons of the concerns acceptance sensitivity of the customers and the competitors. The rejection can be explained through the "garbage can model" decision making, in which an individual decides to act according to the limited information and situation. The behavior of such justification can be explained by the theory of rationalization of defense mechanism.

Keywords : Guerrilla marketing, guerrilla weapons, Wedding service business, Traditional marketing, Marketing mix, 4Ps.

1. Introduction

As time passed, people gets bored and staled of the same old message from the old tradition of advertisement. An article on a Harvard Business Review [1] mentioned Traditional Marketing - including advertising, public relations, branding and corporate communication is dead. Many people in traditional marketing roles and organizations may not realize they're operating within a dead paradigm. But they are. Yet the article argues that although traditional

marketing may be dead, but the new possibilities of peer influence-based, community-oriented marketing, hold much greater promise for creating sustained growth. Consequently, there is a demand for more efficient, effective, and innovative marketing, in which are not over cost. The consumers block out marketing today in several different ways, therefore who must fund new channels, a good way to reach the end customer without being blocked is to target the segment, using target marketing to work properly. For example, audience can switch the TV channels during the commercial breaks on TV and radio with a simple click on the remote and internet users can delete mass advertisements through junk mails. As a result, advertisers inevitably needs to find new and creative ways to reach the target and exposed the customers to the message in an innovative and unconventional way. One of the many non-traditional approaches used as often as not ideally used by small businesses is known as guerrilla marketing. The term, also known as the non-traditional marketing, derived from the phenomenal warfare tactics. One of the current and growing trends in business and marketing literature is the use of military terminology and concept to describe and illustrate how businesses and organization should manage and market products and services in today's extremely competitive marketplace [2,3]. With that mentioned background, the term "guerrilla marketing" was used by the father of guerrilla marketing, Jay Conrad Levinson in the 1980s. He describes guerrilla marketing as an unconventional marketing method emphasizing rather on a very low budget by relying on time, energy and creativity instead of huge marketing campaign budgets [4]. Due to the rapid growth of wedding market in Thailand, many wedding related enterprise would like to take the opportunity to gain the market share and value. In order to compete with the rivalries, the enterprise should create marketing objective and strategies toward their target customers. The specific non-traditional guerrilla marketing background and forms of usability will be explained in the secondary research of the Literature Review of this study. The author of this study will also conduct a case study on the responses and opinions of the wedding service enterprise marketers towards guerrilla marketing concept, with a final conclusion and recommendation consecutively.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Instrument: Semi-Structured In Depth Interview Question

The interview questions are categorized into categories according to the objective of this research, as follows below. : Requisite variety: How much the marketer acknowledges the importance of marketing?, Guerrilla Marketing : basic knowledge and realization of guerrilla marketing, Potentials : to what extent does the marketer willing to implement guerrilla marketing.

2.2 Semi-Structured In Depth Interview

These questions were used to investigate the responses of the marketers towards the concept of guerrilla marketing. It consisted of 20 items. The three-point rating scale (1= Item clearly related to the researcher objective, 0= Item is unclearly related to the research objective, -1 = Item is clearly not related to the research objective) was used for a post-study interview. The draft questionnaire was created with 20 items.

2.3 Department Selection

The author wants to explore the opinions of marketers from more than one point of view, therefore selected four marketers that are decision makers in the wedding service companies as key informants. In order to find the right person to interview, the author search for the list of companies through google.com search engine. The company website and profile were then reviewed. The criteria of the selection process includes (1) the high popularity of the company, in which indicates by the rank of the searched list in google.com since the more popular the company is, the higher rank it is on the search engine, (2) the scale of ability to have workloads of the company, indicates by the total amount of the customers per year, in which for this study the company ought to have at least 80 couples per year, and lastly (3) the company should have an office and a website that features the previous works done. Interview initiations and details were sent by walk-in and telephone calls. This is in short how the author of this study pick up the key informants, in consideration, the availability of the firm was part of the selection.

2.4 Interview Data Collection Process

The interviewer will send an official letter to the targeted key informants asking to make an appointment for the interview. After the target key informants responded and selected the interview date and time, the interviewer will send briefing information about guerrilla marketing in a multimedia format one day in advance, in order to

prepare the key informants for the coming interview as well as give some time for a brain digestion about guerrilla marketing. On the day of the appointed interview, the interviewer will introduce herself, give a 3 minutes briefing about the concept of guerrilla marketing and its examples, then discuss the situation of the interview (including purpose, confidentiality, recording, roughly 50 minutes and a short discussion afterwards) and ask if there are any questions before the starting of the interview.

2.5 Analyzing the Results

After the authors conducted all interviews, the taped interview will be written out detailed as if scripted. The written format of the interview will be coded into the qualitative research software. This time consuming way will give the authors a better overview of what the interviews included and to make sure that nothing was left out. The major function of the software will be use to find the word frequency or in other words, the repetition of some certain words that are said by the key informants. This could identify the common response and opinion of the key informants and illustrates specific insights for the researcher. Though, this process is time consuming but the author argues that it was needed to be done in order for the empirical chapter of this study to be well written. After done with writing all the interviews up, the author will have to categorize the key informants' answers into the planned categories for the questions.

3. Results

Data Analysis

After all necessary data from the interviews were successfully recorded; the author had analyzed the data and finalized it directly to answer the research questions :

1. What is the opinion of Thai wedding service businesses on guerrilla marketing and usefulness for their organization?
2. Is there a potential in guerrilla marketing implementation for wedding service businesses in Thailand?

The interview responses collected by the researcher from 4 selected professional wedding service business owners reveals how marketing is important in the organization and how guerrilla marketing is an interesting concept. The primary research is designed in order to identify potentials of adopting guerrilla marketing into the marketing activities of the business organizations.

1. General Data

Three out of four key informants are females as well as having bachelor degree in the field of communication and marketing. Only one of the key informants has a master's degree on psychology

and is a part-time professor at a university. Significantly, all of the key informants are business owners of wedding service businesses, with various experiences from 2 years - 10 years.

2. Individual Key Informant's Response

Key Informant 1

The acknowledgment of the importance of marketing :

The key informant clearly stated the importance of marketing as a crucial factor in business performance. She said, "Marketing is the tool to keep the company survives the competition". Most of the company's marketing strategy is through social media, having facebook fan page and webpage as the main tool. They are the main tool the company communicates with the customers. Some other kinds of marketing, such as celebrity endorsement, was also implement with careful and limitation to sensitivity of the industry, according to the interviewee. "We didn't do anything too unconventional because the industry is too sensitive," said the key informant 1: The knowledge and realization of guerrilla marketing. Although not knowing the exact details if guerrilla marketing, the key informant is aware of the term and the strategy as a low budget campaign that needs creativity and energy. She described guerrilla marketing as "an unconventional kind of marketing- it is based on low budget but gives great impact". The key informant, although realize the potentials positive impacts of guerrilla marketing, is significantly aware of the great negatives consequences if the implemented is unsuccessfully. "If you used it in a wrong way, then it's negative. So there are risks. If it's done correctly, then it's going to bring a great impact," stated the key informant 1. The ethical issues of guerrilla marketing that could potentially ruin the image and branding of the company was also briefly discussed during the interview.

The extent of the marketer willing to implement guerrilla marketing:

Although very interested in implanting, the key informant admit she is not planning to do it any soon, because there is a stake of risk if the guerrilla marketing fails to create positive impact. "So if you ask if I am planning to do it soon, my answer would be no, at least not soon. But it is very interesting idea of marketing."

Key Informant 2

The acknowledgment of the importance of marketing.

According to key informant 2, marketing is essential part of the business. Nevertheless, company's marketing style is not very outrages due to the product and service of the company that isn't mobile. "I can't move the wedding place," he said, "but advertise my business and give my customers the best service-delicious and healthy food, fresh flowers, good atmosphere, - to have the best day

of their life in my place." The company focuses on "mouth-to-mouth marketing strategy", as the main tool of marketing.

The knowledge and realization of guerrilla marketing.

Having seen some guerrilla campaigns implemented by Red Bull and Ichitan companies, the key informant has a particular interest in guerrilla marketing; "personally, I quite like guerrilla marketing concept." The interview explained he might have done guerrilla marketing without realizing it is one, such as promoting the company verbally during the traditional thai wedding parade along the road, called "Kanmark".

The extent of the marketer willing to implement guerrilla marketing.

Although the key informant insisted he will definitely find ways for more opportunities for guerrilla marketing to be implemented for his company, careful strategy needs to be considered, especially the sensitivity of the customers, especially Thais. He said "the thing is Thai people are very sensitive - and they might be offensive when using guerrilla marketing." However, the key informant believes that "time will change the opinion of Thai people".

Key Informant 3 : Wedding Filming Service

The acknowledgment of the importance of marketing.

The key informant admitted that, compare to few years ago, marketing is not as important as it is today. Especially when it comes to social media marketing- "...nowaday it is very important. Few years ago, it was different. Today, everybody uses social networks to promote themselves and their works, such as the pictures of the couples that they shot [on internet]." The company because of the trend that is changing towards social media, the company uses website and a facebook, and by those channel allowing the customers to look at the portfolios. Other than these basic online tools, the key informant said nothing had been done much for promotion strategies since the main focus is on the find quality of the product, in which she believed it is the main marketing strategy of the company.

The knowledge and realization of guerrilla marketing.

A side from the term "guerrilla warfare", the key informant is not familiar with the word guerrilla marketing. After briefing the concept and some example, the key informant shows an interest to the concept, saying "I want to do some marketing that let people know us more... now that you are interviewing us, we are asking ourselves about our own marketing strategy and what should we do next." Accordingly, the company needs an attractive and creative marketing strategy ; however it lacks initial research and the implementation strategy.

The extent of the marketer willing to implement guerrilla marketing.

Although seeing that guerrilla marketing could be an interesting way to attract more customers, the key informant still believes marketing activities are not everything for the company, it is their product that will always be most important. "If I have to give a percentage for it, I would say 50-60% of the importance of it to my company," said the key informant. Conclusively, guerrilla could be an interesting marketing idea for the company ; however, it will not be the major focus since the concern is major towards to product itself.

Key Informant 4 : Wedding Decoration Service

The acknowledgment of the importance of marketing.

The key informant sees marketing as the most important aspect of running a business. The knowledge and realization of guerrilla marketing - "I think it is very important. If I have to score out of 5 stars, I'd give 5 stars for the importance of marketing.", Like other key informants, currently the company is only using social media and website as a channel of marketing and communicating with the customers. She said, "... the internet is the main instrument to communicate [with customers]. It is cost-effective ; you don't need to pay for the location for office or pay for unnecessary staffs." She believes it is important to offer the customers according to the changing trend of customer's needs.

The knowledge and realization of guerrilla marketing.

The key informant was not familiar with the term guerrilla marketing until receiving a briefing document before the interview. The key informant appears to be interested on the concept of guerrilla marketing, give the reason "we need to find something new to attract the customers". Nevertheless, the key informant is aware of the potential negative aspects of guerrilla marketing, especially the ethical issues.

The extent of the marketer willing to implement guerrilla marketing.

According to the key informant 4, the idea of guerrilla marketing is, like other key informants, very interesting to the key informant especially considering the low-budget and creativity factor in which comes as the main factor of implementation. However, negative impact that might follow is too risky if implement without cautious and careful research. Technically the key informant shows interest but did not mentioned if implementation should be taken place for her company as of yet.

3. Overall Responses

The 4 key informative, all admit that marketing is important and even crucial for their business activities. Internet, a website presence in particular, is identified as the most common, in fact

essential, channel of communication in promoting the business. By analyzing the data, all respondents are interested in creative and innovative marketing communication but yet aware of the ethical and etiquette issue if Asian culture. Although all the of key informants said they are familiar with the term guerrilla marketing, only 1 out of 3 key informant mentioned about implementing guerrilla campaign in the business. All of the key informants believed guerrilla marketing would be interesting for their business, yet skeptical about the outcomes of such marketing. However, all clearly stated that their company focuses on customer's impression and satisfaction, therefore, it is essential to know the marketing trend that will attract more customers, and if guerrilla marketing will be the coming trend, there are potentials of acceptance among the key informants.

This obviously indicates for nature of wedding service business, in which to goal is to serve the customers which are wedding couples. All key informants have the same direction when it comes to the "change" of the industry and business, in which effect how the company performs and how the company markets itself to the potential customers. All key informants are changing the marketing strategy according to the way the customers consumes information and search for the desired services, such as using website, facebook, and blogs to communicate with the customers, while in the past it was as crucial as it is now. The word "personally" and "guerrilla" also comes in repetitive because the interview is about the personal opinions of guerrilla marketing. Therefore opinion varies, as shown in figure 1, in which illustrates the in correspondence of the opinions.

However, all goes toward the same direction if not implementing guerrilla as of yet, due to the fear of unconventionalness that might create negative offense effect to the sensibility of the Thai culture as they are the major customers. Although the word tree illustration doesn't show the correspondence of this because all the key informants did not stated clearly that they will not perform it, bring up the quotes from all interviews might does make it clearer, as follows :

Key Informant 1

"Yes there are potentials. In fact, I want to do it too. But think we need to wait until my company's brand is stronger. Wait until we are strong enough to cope with the negative impact if the guerrilla marketing fails to create the desired results. Because, as I understood, guerrilla marketing suites best with small companies. I think it's because small companies have no, or little, stake when it comes to the negative impact to the company. As for my company, we have build out brand to the point where it is pretty well known now, so it is hard to rebuild it if anything happens,

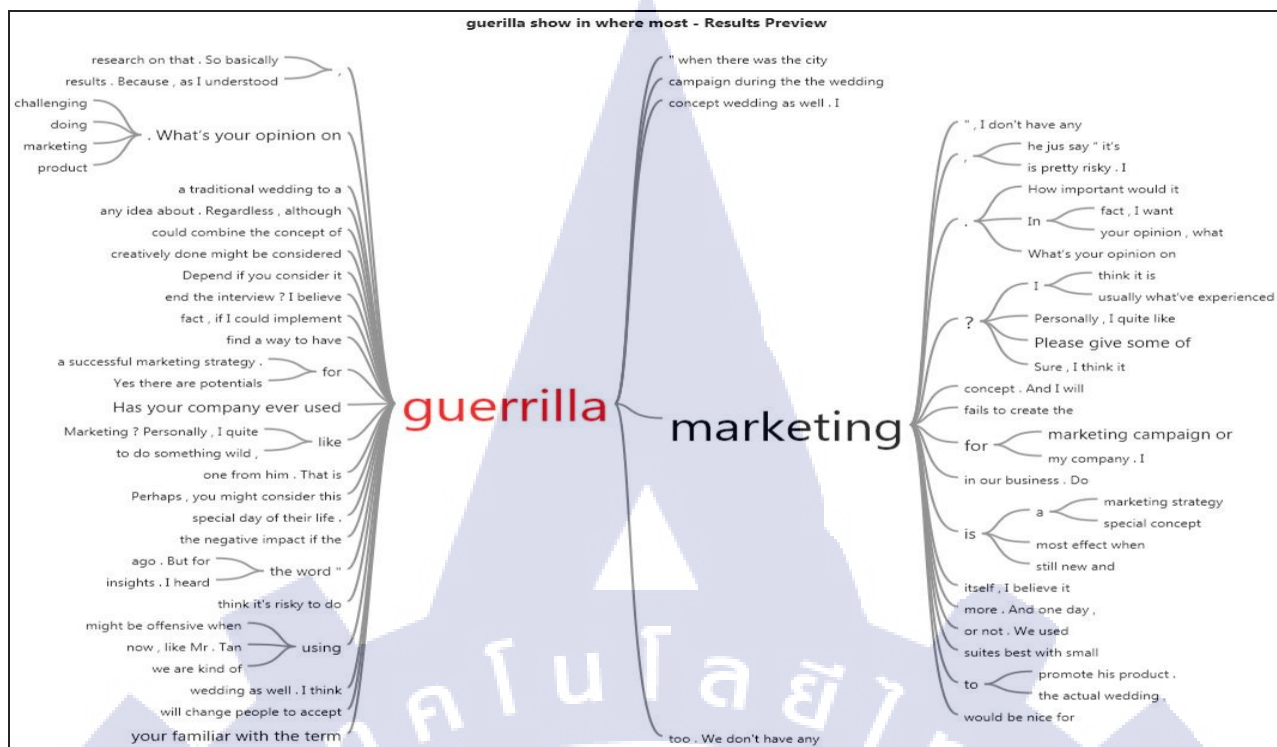


Figure 2 Word Tree Result

because there are lots of stakes involved."

"So if you ask if I am planning to do it soon, my answer would be no, at least not soon. But it is very interesting idea of marketing."

Key Informant 2

"Guerrilla marketing is a special concept... Regardless, everything depends on... how far are [customers] are willing to go from a traditional wedding to a guerrilla concept wedding as well."

"The thing is Thai people are very sensitive - and they might be offensive when using guerrilla marketing."

Key Informant 3

"I heard the word "guerrilla" when there was the city burned down few years ago. But for the word "guerrilla marketing", I don't have any idea about. Regardless, although guerrilla marketing is still new and maybe doesn't have a legit definition yet..."

"For guerrilla marketing itself, I believe it is just a marketing way to think out of the box."

"Personally, I don't believe advertising is everything for our business. It's not that important compare to the product."

Key Informant 4

"I usually what've experienced are the negative aspect of [guerrilla marketing], which is not creative, such as cutting the price off or giving fault information about the competitors."

"If the competitors use the same techniques as ours, then there's no point of doing it, maybe? But I will probably use the good ones that suites my company."

Conclusively, the primary research shows that professional community understands that the need of creative and innovative marketing activities is important, however, realizing the benefits and potential risks as to be clearly defined before applying the guerrilla marketing successfully.

4. Conclusion

Guerrilla marketing was very interesting due to its creativity and low budget concept and, in fact, some had implemented it without realizing, yet it is still rejected on implementation by giving the reasons of the concerns acceptance sensitivity of the customers and the competitors. The rejection can be explained through the "garbage can model" decision making, in which an individual decides to act according to the limited information and situation.

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