

Case Study 7:

Too Formal for Footwear?

Background

Khairul Ahmed is a recent hire at Click Marketing Company and is employed as a market analyst in the planning division of the company. As such, he is responsible for conducting market research to assist others in the department to complete marketing plans and advertising strategies for Click's many medium to large-sized business clients. He is still learning about the communication style and expectations for reports at Click.

Current Situation

Khairul has been asked to write a short report (memo) on his progress researching the competitive threat for a marketing plan for Fabulous Footwear, a women's shoe retailer that is considering moving into the TriCity area.

So far, Khairul has done research online and has determined Fabulous has two direct competitors (other women's shoe stores that sell most of the same brands at similar prices, and target the same primary and secondary customers), but that these competitors do have a few weaknesses and threats that Fabulous could take advantage of. Specifically, Sly Shoes is in a part of town that is troubled by increasing crime, with a resultant decrease in customer traffic as no one wants to shop in that area. The location of LaceUP is also problematic as recent road construction has diverted traffic from the area, and nearby municipal parking lots have been eliminated—making getting to LaceUP difficult. In a Google search to find customer feedback on these two competitors, Khairul found both Sly Shoes and LaceUP's customer service is less than stellar, with many customers complaining of sales staff ignoring them, difficulty returning damaged goods, and poor-quality products.

Khairul has also found several indirect competitors, namely unisex discount shoe stores that offer a lower-quality range of footwear at cheaper prices. These discounters attract younger customers, both women and men, and elderly people seeking more affordable, as opposed to fashionable, footwear. Khairul doesn't think these indirect competitors will be a threat to Fabulous Footwear but are worth considering in planning Fabulous' competitive strategy, as some potential customers might be tempted to shop at the discount stores because of the opportunity to get shoes that look like the higher-end brands at lower prices.

The Problem

As Khairul does not yet know about Click's in-house communication style, he is going to rely on what he has learned in business communications courses in his college program and hope he hits the mark in terms of style and tone. As it's a small, progressive, and creative company, Click's communication style is moderately informal in-house, and moderately formal in external communication with clients. He only has a couple of days to crunch his information into a report.

Exhibit A
Khairul's progress report

To: Ola Amato, Market Research Manager
From: Khairul Ahmed, Market Analyst
Date: October 15, 2021
Subject: Progress report – Fabulous Footwear competitive threats

Work commenced on Fabulous Footwear's marketing plan research on September 10, 2021. A research plan was conceptualized and initialized by the appropriate senior management personnel following a meeting held that day, with implementation of the research to take place in November. At that time, marketing plan writers will review and assess information gathered in the research process and write the marketing plan for Fabulous Footwear's upper management.

As was previously mentioned, work did not commence until the marketing plan research was conceptualized and initialized by appropriate senior management. This was still within the operational schedule approved by the Market Research Manager and the client. On September 11, extensive searches were conducted using Internet search engines, with the result being a comprehensive list of Fabulous Footwear's potential competitors in the TriCity area.

On September 12, assessment of the direct and indirect competition commenced. It has been determined that no clear and present threat is suggested by the presence of a multiplicity of discount women's shoe retailers, nor two direct competitors; the latter are currently operating under difficult circumstances due to location, poor customer service, and an increasing crime rate in the vicinity. While the direct competitors have been operational for over two decades respectively, their negative reputation in the community implies they will not be able to meet or exceed Fabulous Footwear's positive customer service interface.

As of this writing, further research and assessment must be conducted into the strengths of the direct and indirect competitors. All significant competitors' weaknesses have been identified and scrutinized, with the result being a comprehensive assessment of this threat. Appropriate and timely research will be conducted using suitable methods, such as Internet search, review of industry – specific literature on the noted competitors, and a focus group where desirable or possible.

It is anticipated that the assigned work will be comprehensively and completely presented to the Market Research Manager by the mutually agreed deadline of November 15, 2021.

Activities and Discussion

1. Is the diction (word choice) used in this letter appropriate to the in-house communications style and tone at Click? Why or why not? Identify specific examples of words that are too formal or too informal for this type of communication.

2. Are the sentence structures (ie. length, variety) appropriate for Click's in-house style and tone? Why or why not? Identify specific sentences or phrases that are appropriate or inappropriate for the purpose of this memo.
3. There are several uses of "ized" words – conceptualized, initialized, for example. Would these words be examples of jargon? Why or why not? Are these words explicit enough for the reader to understand what the writer is trying to communicate? How could you re-write these words and/or the phrases or sentences in which they are found?
4. Based on what you have learned so far about writing style, level of formality, and tone to be used in business writing, do you think this progress report provides the reader with information she can use? Why or why not?
5. Rewrite this informal report so it is clear, concise, and to the point, adding in details where needed, and subtracting wordy and redundant passages or sentences. (You may have to use your imagination to fill in needed details.)