

Brand Communication Audit

Gilbert is a retail brand that produces clothing, balls, cleats and other training equipment associated with the sport of rugby. William Gilbert started the brand in the early 1800s when he provided rugby balls and boots to the Rugby School in Warwickshire, England. As the sport of rugby grew, so did the recognition of the Gilbert brand. They began exporting balls to other countries and winning medals and awards for their products. The Gilbert company was essential in developing the modern game of rugby by adjusting the size and shape of the balls to be more suitable for the sport.

Their audience consists of all men and women who play or are fans. More specifically, they often advertise to professional level players, tournaments and teams. This demographic is represented by their partnership with the Rugby World Cup, which they have had since 1995 and they have signed contracts to continue this relationship in the future. Additionally, eight out of the top-ranked 10 teams in the International Rugby Board use Gilbert brand balls. This demographic of their audience plays an important role on promoting their brand because they are endorsed each time those teams are on television or social media with their ball's logo visible.

One message the brand is trying to communicate is the intense passion they have for the sport. Rugby has a reputation of being an incredible bonding experience for the players, a great show of sportsmanship, and is something that brings people from many countries together through their devotion to the game. Gilbert understands this idea because it was founded by people who played rugby

themselves and understood what the game means. Their PR plays off of this passion for the family-oriented game by their partnership with Get Into Rugby. The initiative was started by World Rugby as a way to give information and resources to families in order to encourage others to play rugby for life in a safe and fun way. Gilbert offers a Get Into Rugby Toolkit that can be purchased in order to begin a lifelong devotion to the sport.

Another message the brand is trying to communicate is that their products will hold up to the competition. Rugby is a rough and dangerous game, so the jerseys, scrum shorts and balls used need to be able to withstand whatever the game throws at them. Gilbert's PR shows men and women wearing Gilbert products playing in mud or getting tackled as a way of demonstrating that they understand that their products need to be strong.

This relates to something they are doing well to reach their audiences, which is creating partnerships with other companies that are related to the rugby experience. When going to their website, one of the first items that shows up across the top of their main page is an advertisement for their partnership with Guinness. They are putting Guinness logos on balls and marketing their cooperation. Rugby has a well-known tradition of drinking beer as a form of socializing after playing a game. This partnership brings together two different things that actually function well together and promote what they have to offer to an interested market.

As with any company, Gilbert has their weaknesses. One big thing is that Gilbert does not make their brand as family-friendly as they could. Rugby is a rough sport and is associated with alcohol, but it also is a family trend, as seen by the

Gilbert family's business and their Get Into Rugby promotion. As a PR professional, I would advise them to start some initiatives that involve the whole family and promote a rugby legacy. Gilbert Rugby could form a youth rugby league, completely outfitted in Gilbert attire, of course, that would grow their market. Their current customers would be excited to get their children or other young people they know involved in something they enjoy. Though not a professional organization, Miami's Hockey program partners with the Junior Redhawks as a way to grow young hockey players and develop a passion for Miami hockey. They play during the period breaks of the varsity games as a way to advertise and show that their organization supports families. This is definitely something that Gilbert could institute at events with teams that they sponsor in order to promote their products and encourage more involvement in a new target market. Gilbert has an advantage because of their variety of markets, so they could implement this strategy all over the United States and other countries.

Another weakness Gilbert has is that they are advertising to college and professional players who do not get to choose what they buy. Many schools and organizations do not allow their athletes to pick the brand of uniform they wear or ball they use. Therefore, Gilbert needs to work hard to reach out to other colleges and universities that have rugby teams and offer them deals. As a PR professional, I would encourage Gilbert to find a list of all colleges at the varsity and club level (maybe those certified through USA Rugby) and reach out to them. Trying to do a partnership with USA Rugby in order to contact all of those teams and offer them a deal for purchasing Gilbert jerseys, shorts or balls. Expanding on that idea, they

could offer events in each state for USA Rugby members that provide them with the chance to see jerseys, meet up with players who are sponsored by Gilbert and get free promotional items that advertise the brand.

Gilbert does such a good job of branding because they understand exactly who their target market is and how to speak their language. With this great understanding, Gilbert has the ability to expand and reach a wider audience to grow their brand recognition and their company as a whole.

References

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