"BRANDING: BRAND CREATION IN THE CERAMIC SECTOR" A GENERAL MODEL OF BRAND CONSTRUCTION AND MANAGEMENT OF ITS ASSETS

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ABSTRACT

This paper deals with the importance of creating solid brands that enable to us to survive and to compete in mature and increasingly sophisticated markets. The ***Spanish Ceramic Sector*** *which is, at present, going through a period of rapid changes, is not foreign to this need. Instead, rather, given the structural variables of this sector (which we shall subsequently see), the 'construction of brands' takes on a special strategic importance.*

The habits, so common in small and medium-sized companies of the Sector, must ***be set aside*** *of reducing the process of brand creation to the development of their visual image, of assigning the realisation of this imagery 'to a friend who draws well', of thinking that communication activities boil down to paid advertising and, particularly, of postponing the planning and management of company brands to when 'we have time and money'. The best product, the most careful service, simply 'do not exist' if we do not manage to make the 'client' aware of these and have him/her choose, out of all the companies, our company for his purchase or enjoyment, with the perception of a clear difference, which means an advantage over the others. The* ***management style*** *tied to the exploitation of brands is consolidated not just in mighty and successful companies, but also in cultural institutions, political parties, NGOs, and even religious institutions.*

We shall set out ***a general method for constructing brands and managing their assets,*** *of special interest to professionals who, from inside small and medium-sized companies, need to develop brands or to review and to update existing old or obsolete ones, over and beyond the mere adaptation of their visual image, to turn them into pivotal instruments of competitive strategy.*

In the ***conclusions*** *section we shall briefly set out our opinion in regard to the technical improvements of marketing to be implemented in the Ceramic Sector, based on the reality of this Industry.*

1. BRANDS AND MARKET

The function of the brand is, from its origins, essentially identificatory: an element of geographic location of origin, a 'guarantee of origin'. After the industrial revolution, the brand has incorporated the function of differentiating the product, basically by its presentation through the packaging and the assignment of distinctive iconographic features. Most of the companies that operate in the Ceramic Sector have, in one way or another, more or less corporative developments of their brands, which fulfil at least these two functions.

However, brands in the *modern marketing concept* are something more…, the brand is *the proprietary title that provides the exclusive right to use a series of signs which include its name, symbols, designs or combinations of these for identifying goods and services in the market, endorsing its functional features and benefits that their use or enjoyment provide and differentiating them from analogous proposals by competitors.*

In present markets, which are more mature and global, products and services are increasingly undifferentiated, given the reduction in the cost of accessing production technologies. The willingness of many manufacturers to manufacture for third parties accentuates this situation, since it is usually the same product with the same features and properties. There is supply saturation where the consumer can find any product under several brands (some of which are the property of the same company) and a 'communication saturation' as a result of the need continuously to promote new products or to defend existing ones from harassment by the competition.

The construction of powerful brands, leaders in their sectors, is basic in order to compete successfully, in particular to avoid vicious price competition: with almost identical products or services, with the same technology, and distributed through the same channels. The final element of the purchasing decision is price.

Rigorously constructed and judiciously managed brands are the central axis of the competitive strategy of successful companies, since they become value-generating instrument. A strong brand provides the company that has it with important benefits:

1. Brand fidelity generates recurring business.
2. Faithful clients are willing to accept payment of a higher price for the brands that deserve their confidence. These surcharges allow greater margins and, therefore, higher profits.
3. Brands that are deeply rooted in the market, recognised and prized, contribute immediate credibility to the introduction of new products, thus reducing promotion and communication costs.
4. In the internal field, the brand acts directly on the own company and its human resources.
5. A strong brand is the best defence against penetration by the competition.
6. The good reputation and public image of the brand and the organisation generate loyalties that make clients more likely to be understanding if the company commits an error, independently of the fact that a strong brand will need to find ways to turn a complaint into an opportunity for reinforcing fidelity.

The value of the brand (brand equity) is the surcharge that a consumer is willing to pay for the product of the brand compared with its version without the brand. It is an added value to the product with important assets:

1. *Recognition of the brand name:* established as the degree of spontaneous knowledge or induced recognition. The selection is easier if the brand is well known.

2. *Brand fidelity:* the repetitive purchase and intensification of the consumption of a brand are a source of recurring business.

3. *Perceived quality:* this is the consumer's judgment regarding the superiority and excellence of the product. It can constitute a differentiating element from the competition, strengthening or arousing the interest of different channels for the distribution of the product and facilitating extensions of the brand.

4. *Associations of the brand:* Appropriate associations help a comprehensive image of the brand, which evidences the virtues and advantages of the product, creating favourable attitudes and feelings.

A brand may also count on other assets, such as *patents or exclusive designs.*

2. MODEL OF BRAND CONSTRUCTION AND MANAGEMENT OF ITS ASSETS

We need to distinguish between *a process of* express *creation* of a brand and the most frequent *process of* existing brand revision. The former case occurs when new product lines are developed, new activities are incorporated, new institutions are created, and in order to solve the result of company mergers or acquisitions. In the latter case, the starting point will be based on certain structures, a corporate culture and a previous image, which are to be taken into account in the reconstruction of the brand, independently of whether the decisions that are finally adopted involve simple updating or radical revision.

Secondly, we need differentiate between the construction of *a brand associated* with a product and that of a *corporate brand* that will be applied to a company, identifying its products and activities, a concept extensible to non-profit organisations, nongovernmental organisations, institutions, cities and even countries.

The model that is set out in the present paper is articulated in four stages and nine steps in accordance with the following structure:

2.1. STAGE 1: DEVELOPMENT OF BRAND IDENTITY

2.1.1. System of brand identity

Brand identity is the essential element on which brand construction is grounded. 'It is a unique set of associations that the strategist aspires to create or to maintain. They represent the reason to be of the brand, involving a promise of the members of the organisation to the clients, and must contribute to establishing relations between the brand and the client by generating a value proposition that involves functional, emotional or self-expression benefits.'

The concept of brand identity requires the previous existence of corporate declarations, which are explicit, known and assumed by the organisation, and communicated consistently to the general public.

In the first place, the company must have established strategic goals: a geographic field of action, a way of accessing the market, segments of target clients, formulas of growth and differential supply. With these elements the corporate mission must be worked out, which defines the organisation's core business: what the company is and what it does.

In addition, corporate values must be established, which represent how the organisation does its business. These are a set of rules or guidelines that define how daily actions are performed (professional principles: quality control of the production or commercial process, respect for the environment or permanent innovation) when it comes to designing its products, to making them and to selling them, as well as those that govern interpersonal relations between members of the organisation, and third parties (relational principles: integrity in the performance of functions, participation in project development and teamwork).

On the other hand, the company must establish its corporate vision: the way in which the organisation signals where it wants to go, what the ultimate objective of the organisation is: the corporate vision of Microsoft is stated as 'a computer on every desktop and in every home'.

This corporate philosophy (mission, values and vision) is an ineluctable prerequisite for elaborating an appropriate brand vision; it is the way in which the company plans to lever its brands to reach its corporate vision, to maintain its corporate values and to reach the corporate mission defined in its declaration.

The brand identity is composed of twelve dimensions grouped according to four different perspectives:

- *Brand as product:* scope, features, quality, price, uses, users and country of origin.
- *Brand as organisation:* organisational features and their condition as local or global.
- *Brand as person:* personality of the brand and relations between brand and client.
- *Brand as symbol:* visual imagery and brand inheritance.

The identity of a brand does not necessarily need to include all the dimensions. We should take into account the following considerations:

- The components of brand personality as a product are, in general, relatively easy to imitate. Basing brand personality on these involves assuming short-term risks, if there are no patents or designs that provide a competitive advantage.
- To be noted is the country of origin component, since it has associated connotations that contribute specific associations of value (German technology, Italian design).

- The organisational features are more difficult to copy because they are inherent to the organisation.
- Finally, the inheritance dimension, conceived as a set of skills and knowledge, fruit of company experience and history, constitutes a unique heritage. This history and these experiences must be significant and contribute to differentiating the company.

Having selected the dimensions that fit the brand, the company needs to provide them with an operative structure: of 6 to 12 dimensions to describe suitably the aspirations of the brand, articulated around a Core Identity, an extended Identity and the brand Essence.

The core identity, comprising 2-4 dimensions, must synthesise the vision of the brand and is the most important element in brand identity. It must constitute the basis of competitive differentiation and be important for the different 'publics'. Their dimensions must be perpetuated and easy to communicate.

The extended identity will include all the other dimensions relating to the ones associated with brand image, in particular in respect to its personality. It will be able to undergo alterations with the passing of time and should adapt to the new markets in which the brand is introduced or to the evolution of those in which it operates.

Finally, brand essence is a simple idea that captures its soul. In certain circumstances this may not be possible or implementation may not be practicable. When it is possible, it leads to a clear value proposition for the clients and should enable its appropriation.

Summarising, after selecting the dimensions of brand identity, the company first proceeds by defining the central identity. An examination of this will reveal the existence or non-existence of a brand essence, establishing the extended identity at the commencement of the dimensions not included in the foregoing structures.

2.1.2. Definition of brand image

Having defined the brand identity by selecting the dimensions that compose it and their location in the central or the extended identity, the company can proceed to define the image of the brand or revise it. Brand image can be defined as the 'way in which the brand is perceived at the present time'; it is a set of interpretations by the consumer of the intrinsic and extrinsic authentic characteristics of the product.

It differs from brand identity in that brand identity is aspirational and is defined inside the company, whereas brand image evolves outside it, and may develop independently from the plans of the company, which can only decide what type of image it wishes to offer to its 'publics' and to communicate this actively, seeking to have the image it wishes to offer coincide with the one the public really perceives.

As brand image components, we can distinguish, on the one hand, the so-called brand associations and, on the other, personality or brand as personage.

Brand associations

These are the set of evocations that the presence of the brand is able to call up. They must produce in whom perceives them a favourable mood through their perception, which causes a feeling of approval and identification. Not all associations have the same weight when it comes to describing a given brand image. We can distinguish three levels:

- Low segment: characteristics, features and processes that must be shown to the consumers.
- Intermediate segment: functional or emotional benefits that the brand offers.
- Top segment: beliefs and emotional, spiritual and cultural values with which to associate the brand.

When it comes to configuring the set of associations, it will be sought to position these as high as possible in the foregoing pyramid or, in absence of this, at the highest possible position within the segment that its nature allows it to occupy. Naturally, these associations should lead fundamentally to brand differentiation against competitors and contribute some component of value, functional or emotional, for the consumers.

The own organisation can present itself as a set of values, culture, people, plans and assets, which are considered own capabilities and are associated with it, which, as a whole, enable supplying a product or service in a differentiated form and, if possible, the only form. These organisational characteristics can provide the foundations for the differentiation, a value proposition and a relation with clients. For example: its social and community orientation (Ronald McDonald Institution of Child Assistance), its perceived quality (good value for money/Korean brands), its commitment to innovation (top brand technology reputation of Hewlett-Packard), etc.

Brand personality

We can conceptualise this as the set of human traits associated with a given brand. Brands can appear in a humanised image that represents its equivalent in terms of personality, and suits the product or service with which it is going away to be identified. Every organisation has a personality and, by extension, so do its brands. We may identify five basic personality factors:

1. *Sincerity:* transparency in the relation with users, stressing the familiar character and being considerate, careful and close-by. This is the case of Gallina Blanca, Kodak or Casa Tarradellas.

2. *Excitement:* this corresponds to facets of intrepidity, animosity, imagination and topicality. Their essential traits focus on fashion, being exciting, eccentric, provocative, youthful, independent, innovative and aggressive. This is the case of brands like Porsche, Absolut or Benetton.

3. *Competence:* This is articulated around concepts of reliability, as an expression of being a hard-worker, efficient, trustworthy and careful. Intelligent is the distinctive feature of technical, corporative and serious. It represents success, adopting facets of leadership, security and influence. This is the case of the brands CNN, IBM or Intel.

4. *Sophistication:* This is a personality typical of luxury articles, held by brands capable of representing a clear association with the attributes of high class and charm. It includes references such as suggestive, sophisticated, sensual, pretentious or simply luxurious. Brands like Lexus, Mercedes, Gucci or Louis Vuitton represent this category.

5. *Rusticity:* There are two basic traits: taste for the outdoor life and strength. It is a masculine, active, athletic personality, with strength and roughness. This is the case of brands like Marlboro, Levi's or Nike.

These five traits, together with their facets, are *strategic options* in the definition of brand image. Note that that these options are not exclusive, but are to be considered the most convenient combinations.

Brand personality is an essential factor of its image, since it can constitute a very powerful perception in potential clients and other segments of the public. It can constitute the basis of a significant differentiation, especially in contexts in which the brands are similar in regard to product features.

2.1.3. Brand value proposition

This consists of the manifestation of functional, emotional and self-expression benefits supplied by the brand, which provide value for the client. A functional benefit is considered that which is based on product features that supply the client with functional usefulness. In contrast, emotional benefit is the capacity of the brand to cause a buyer to feel something during the purchasing process or to experience in use. Finally, the self-expression benefit appears when the brand supplies a vehicle that enables the person to proclaim a particular self-image profile. In this step, the benefits are identified and selected, taking into account the following considerations:

1. The functional benefits are the most evident since they respond directly to the question 'what is it for?' and connect directly with its nature. They are easily imitable, providing little differentiation and causing the selection by the consumer to be made in a rational selection process, which is often difficult. If a brand can command a key functional benefit, it will be able to dominate the category, but this dominion will last as long as it takes the competition to reproduce the article or service, which, in addition, will be cheaper. For this reason, the brand must be focused as the expression of the organisation that backs it up, and of its personality, transforming or accompanying the functional benefits, in a value proposition which, in addition, includes emotional and self-expression benefits.

2. It is difficult to draw a sharp line between emotional and self-expression benefits. Thus, the functional benefit of feeling safe driving a Volvo, may appear joined or replaced by the self-expression benefit of 'driving a price car', even though the first feature still dominates as it constitutes the own manifestation that the brand has of itself. Logically the emotional benefit may appear to a greater number of potential consumers, whereas those of self-expression require careful selection of the client model.

3. Finally, the value proposition must be set out with absolute clarity to the client and must govern the relation that can be established with the client, in such a way that it impels the client to make the purchasing decision. Its

correct definition will enable focusing the selection of the client model and allow reliable positioning of the brand.

The formulation of the value proposition will begin with an analysis of the benefits, of their type and of the existing possibilities of accompanying them with, or transforming them into emotional or self-expression benefits, since these will be harder to attack or compare with mere functional benefits. The set of promised benefits can change with time, and it may even be necessary to adapt these. We may consider the following back-up sources for the configuration of the value proposition:

1. The own product or service itself can contribute a backing if it can be articulated around the specificity of its ingredients, design, manufacturing process or actual real performance. Certain conditions, such as quality control, respect for the environment and automation of the production process, cannot, in a strict sense, be authentically differentiating elements since in some sectors they may be essential conditions in order to compete.

2. The production process may represent a backing for the value proposition, embodying itself in the people that make the product, their abilities, the use of advanced techniques and their specific knowledge of the sector at issue.

3. Product presentation (packaging, product protection, materials, reusability, etc.) could be part of the value proposition, particularly when it is difficult to evidence the intrinsic singularities of the product they contain.

4. The channels through which the product is distributed, conditions of sale and payment, appropriate characteristics of the sales point, after-sales back-up and attention to the client can also be a source of backing for the promises that make up the value proposition.

5. Finally, the image of the typical user and some specific uses, for their difficulty or precision, must be considered as a source of support.

2.1.4. Definition of the client model based on the brand

With the worked-out value proposition, together with brand identity and brand image, we have the set of elements needed to be able to define a client model accurately. This definition must envisage all the possible present and potential clients, their beliefs and behaviours in relation to the brand, the sector and the competitors with their concurring offers. For this, we need to go further into the two following aspects:

Analysis of the purchasing process

Its ultimate objective is to determine how clients choose a brand: the way in which the purchase process takes place, the criteria used, who takes the purchasing decision and who can influence this.

The typical purchasing process comprises five stages: intention, knowledge, pre-selection, search and choice. This will subsequently be joined by a fidelisation stage. The weight of these stages and their content differ according to the product category.

There are nine dominant criteria when choosing purchases: great quality and reliability, consistent performance, familiarity, availability and comfort, value for money, match to personality, capacity to solve a problem, client service and the known advertising on the product or service. All of these are summed up in one: confidence in the brand.

Analysis of the competition and their competitive strategies

The analysis of the competition begins by identifying these, and must be exhaustive, taking into account that although for the development of a value proposition and the definition of brand image, it is sufficient to consider two or three greater competitors, for the elaboration of the client model they will need to be known. The competitive strategy of the different actors must be established, with the greatest possible precision. A minimum threshold of necessary knowledge could be determined by analysis of the following magnitudes:

1. Knowledge of each competitor's market share, both in absolute terms of turnover and in percentage of the estimated total size of the market.
2. The degree of recognition, both spontaneous and suggested, of the different competing brands enables establishing the strength of their position in the market and their capacity to respond to attack.
3. Finally, a qualitative comparison must be made in relation to the features that the clients signal as being most significant in the sector involved.

Analysis of the data obtained allows establishing the strategic position of the competition and determining the appropriate strategy for the own brand, defining an appropriate positioning.

2.2. STAGE 2: BRAND POSITIONING

Positioning is the taking up of a particular and definitive position in the mind of the subject to whom a given offer or option is directed. To position a brand would consist of occupying a place in the mind of consumers, such that it was the first to be considered in its category.

Possible enterprise positionings are: leadership in the product, operational excellence and an intimate connection with the consumer. Also: the product, price, accessibility, value of the added service and experience with the consumers.

Have a strong brand position means that it has a unique place, which is credible, sustainable and valued in the minds of the clients. Correct management of positioning must combine solidity of formulation with the necessary flexibility for its adaptation to changes in the market, clients and competition.

The communication plan, internal and external, is a cornerstone of positioning. Thus, not just institutional messages, transmitted through advertising instruments or public relations actions construct an efficient way of positioning a brand. For the result to be coherent with the aims, it will be necessary to define positioning and, then, communicate this effectively.

2.3. STAGE 3: ELABORATION OF A FORMAL IDENTITY

This is made up of the set of signs that identify a brand, differentiating it from the rest. It is an important phase: an inadequate name, a confused logotype or a not very functional or appealing product presentation, have led to numerous investments to correct errors that might seriously have damaged the brand.

When defining the constituent elements of the formal identity, we must consider as *categories of signs:*

1. *Verbal identity:* made up of the name or phonotype. This is the pronounceable designation of the brand or, given the case, of the company.
2. *Visual identity:* this includes all the visual expressions that identify and differentiate the brand or company. It includes elements such as: logotype, symbol, chromatic identity, typographic identity, etc.
3. *Systems of brand presentation* (packaging): label, wrapping, packing.
4. *Particular systems:* elements of internal and external communication: stationery, publications, identification of persons, newsletters, Web sites, items of publicity, promotion, presence at events and sponsorships, internal signalling, external identification, directories and vehicles.

Each brand will need to develop the elements that correspond to its catalogue of needs, tying itself to certain minimum development requirements which will enable working with assurance, identifying the institution, product or service, being consistent with the positioning, being standardised, etc.

2.4. STAGE 4: DEVELOPMENT OF A BRAND ASSET MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

2.4.1. Communication of brand positioning

After fixing the objectives to be reached with the communication actions, the company will need to study thoroughly the scenario in which these actions are going to be undertaken. The messages will not just compete with those of other alternative actions in the sector in which the company operates or in the same product category, but, in addition, will challenge those of any other advertiser. A system of effective communication must be established, in accordance with the aims pursued, which will make the investments profitable that are necessary to reach these aims.

Having identified the brand 'publics', the company must establish the sources that provide each public with information in order to develop a strategy of coherent communication. There are three categories of source groupings:

1. *Mass media:* which can carry commercial messages as well the news on the brand or the proprietary company, whether these are the product of an appropriate public relations action or the capacity of the brand to generate them spontaneously.
2. *Interpersonal relations,* fruit of the interaction of the information-receiving subjects with their reference groups of and opinion leaders.
3. *Personal experience,* the result of the direct relation of the information-receiving subjects with the brand or emitting company.

This will, all together, define a comprehensive communication strategy that devotes due attention to each public, following certain minimum principles:

coherence with corporate strategy targets and brand vision; grounding the comprehensive communication strategy on brand image and positioning; executing this strategy throughout the organisation by generating internal participation, training and measurement systems to determine the success achieved in the communication actions and, finally, following a strategy of integrated marketing communications.

The following step is to examine the means to be used: advertising, public relations, commercial and consumer-directed promotions, direct marketing, internal communication, etc. These communication categories put the brand in contact to with its public with greater or lesser intensity.

23.4.2. Establishing a brand-based corporate culture

Corporate culture determines to a large extent the capacity of the organisation to become an effective element for communicating brand identity, image and positioning since, by conditioning the behaviour of the members of the company, it establishes the guidelines of the relation with the different 'publics' of the company. We may define it as the group of standards, values and conduct rules, shared and unwritten, by which the members of an organisation are governed and which are reflected in their behaviour.

All organisational cultures are determined by the following influences:

1. The personality and standards imposed by the founder and key people in the history of the company.
2. The historical evolution of the company in which noteworthy milestones, successes and failures will be taken into account.
3. Finally, the personality of the different groups in the organisation will have to be considered, with their social environment since, the more complex the organisation is, the more likely will subcultures exist.

The factors that must concur to create a brand-based culture are: commitment and leadership of the top management, motivation and participation of employees, and the existence of a permanent and effective internal communication that enables triggering a continuous process of education.

2.4.3. Establishing measurement systems on the investment in the brand

The set of standard measurement will need to be adapted to each organisation, according to its specific characteristics and set targets. They must be readily obtainable by the company information system and be repeatedly evaluated in time over a period of three or four years, and must at least be formulated so as to evidence the causes of the value obtained in each measurement, orienting the actions to be adopt as a result of the observation.

We may highlight as standard measurement: For semester evaluation: brand recognition, understanding of the positioning, recognition of the brand image and compliance with the value proposition. For annual evaluation: acquisition of new clients, retention and loyalty of the present ones, increase in purchasing frequency and financial value of the brand.

3. CONCLUSIONS

The construction of powerful brands is high-priority and the brands constructed with rigor, which are judiciously managed, become the central axis of competitive strategy, since they become value-generating instruments. But… How can branding be achieved successfully in an Industry like that of the Spanish Ceramic Sector. The Sector has a characteristic and self-limiting structure, which makes it difficult to construct differentiated and well-known, successful brands. In a rapid synthesis we may note the following variables:

1. *Production:* more than 250 manufacturing companies (155 manufacturers of finished bases) with a tremendous geographic concentration in the 'Castellón ceramic cluster' (76 % of the manufacturing companies that account for 94 % of total national production). Production of 635 million m^2 and total sales value of €3,628 million. It is an industry highly dependent on export: 55 % is exported: 60 % to Europe, 11 % to the USA and 11 % to the Near East. In addition, there is an important concentration of first receiving countries: 5 countries concentrate 41 % and 10 more than half.

   The average values in the industry are: average sales price of 5.7 €/m^2, a mean production of about 4 million m2 per manufacturer with an average sales value of about €22.8 million. However, these average values in terms of market reality involve, in turn, an important concentration of supply by a few manufacturers: the top 20 companies account for over half the production.

   This situation leads us to the following structural analysis of supply: fragmented manufacture with an average size corresponding to a small company (most are SMEs), with an enormous geographic concentration (with the limitations and advantages that this involves). Although 20 companies stand out clearly above the rest, their size continues to relatively small, even for the largest. Very few companies enjoy a turnover of more than €100 million and, even so, this allows highly reduced marketing investments in absolute value, particularly if we compare these with those existing in other consumer markets, like the food or automotion markets, in which, moreover, the enterprise concentration is highest.

   Conclusion: the balance sheets of the most privileged companies only allow total investments in advertising and promotion of around €5 million. However, of this money, how much can really be devoted to branding and to communicating clear brand positioning to the consumer, that 'eternally forgotten figure'. For commercial reasons, most of the budget is goes to promotion at the sales outlet (display stands of ceramics at the distributor's), catalogues and attendance at trade fairs (at least two or three a year, which leading manufacturers must attend). The marketing challenge is then, how can we engage in branding with maximum investment budgets of €1 million per annum? The situation is more dramatic if we consider that these numbers can only be afforded by a reduced number of elite companies.

2. *Distribution Channels:* to be noted is the great importance of the construction market as a natural channel, in which the sophistication of the marketing tools very is limited (public and civil works, real estate developers, building materials wholesalers, etc.). In parallel, there is a replacement market with a tremendously fragmented channel, in which building materials wholesalers

with direct sale to the user mix with specialist stores (kitchens, bathroom, home, ceramics) and manufacturers' stores with their own proprietary brands, societies or franchises.

Conclusion: fragmented, dispersed and poorly structured channel. Excess number of points of sale and relatively small purchasing dimension. The manufacturer does not have interlocutors of true size, faithful to the brand. The very dynamics of the sector obstructs and complicates the task of brand construction.

3. *Product:* ceramic tile is a product of lasting use with a very long useful life. That is, end-users make purchasing decisions on this product no more than 2 or 3 times in their lives. The purchase is through an intermediary specifications writer and the average value of the purchase is very high (over € 300 with an added implication: the product must be installed and, in addition, it involves a total makeover whose value is much greater for the user).

   Conclusion: The product, even the one that is technically the most differentiated by ceramic specialists, passes unnoticed by the users who are incapable of understanding and valuing the structural and quality differences. If the design and finish are important factors in the sale, reality tells us that to be an outstanding pioneer is very difficult, as the successful compositions are immediately copied by everyone.

4. *End-user:* as we have mentioned, the consumer is placed very few times before the purchasing decision. The consumer does not know very well where to go to buy and is usually in the hands of a specifications writer: the tile fixer and the seller in the store. There are really no 'top of mind' brands (at most two or three) whose fame and image decisively influence the purchasing decision.

   Conclusion: direct dialogue with the consumer is difficult on a product with technical connotations and a readily imitable design with a tremendous oversupply.

In view of this outlook one might be led to say that branding 'is impossible in the Ceramic Industry', at least in Spain. However, nothing is further from the truth, and from the spirit of this paper: quite the contrary, branding activities are possible, but logically in a limited way and closely matching the reality of the companies. We propose the following practical recommendations and in the proper order:

1. The Board of directors must decide with clarity if it wants decidedly to undertake the 'long road' of branding; i.e. an integral management project on the brand concept that must preside over and commit the entire company. It requires the commitment and engagement of Top Management, since the road does not generate immediate resources, nor is it an ordinary commercial activity.

2. Having made the decision to tackle the strategy of branding, the company must follow a clear method. The one we propose would be perfectly valid, independently of company size or resources: developing brand identity, establishing its positioning, developing the formal identity and defining a strategy for managing brand assets.

3. In practice, the problem arises in the selection of the most suitable marketing means for the 'construction' and the 'nurturing' of the brand, considering the

resources of the company, its structure and its strategic plan (taking for granted it has one). The great brands seem to have no problems in their branding, in view of their multimillion investments in communication (leading companies devote huge budgets to nurturing their brands. In 2004 Opel invested € 63.3 million in mass media, Coca Cola 28.3 million, Nike 8.5 million, etc. These are just a few examples that place us in the true dimensions of the issue).

4. However, we consider that by following a clear strategy of concentration (not everything can be done), many things may be done to capitalise on branding:

   - Training and raising the awareness of all the company workers in regard to branding. It is a comprehensive task that ranges from the receptionist to the goods carrier, from management to the seller. All have an aliquot part in the attainment of the image sought.

   - Participation at the Trade fairs in the Sector as far as possible, but without devoting everything or almost the entire budget to 'being there'.

   - Looking after the image of product catalogues and materials at the sales outlet (from the display stands to simple posters). Even look after packing boxes.

   - Investing in a well-taken care of and well-presented product showroom in the factory, in order to be able to create good atmospheres and get across a good company image.

   - Maximising the use of public relations tools: from communication and presentation manuals of the company and its brands, and press communiqués, to the participation in all the possible forums.

   - Sponsorship of events of all types: sport, cultural, etc. This approach may be more or less expensive, but it requires continuity not to throw away the money.

   - Seeking out opinion leaders that serve as icons and multiply their communicating effect.

   - Using sales promotion in a marketing sense, seeking to impact the end-user with the presence of the brand and seeking recognition.

   - Limiting our actions to certain clients or geographic zones to take advantage of the concentration effect.

   - Going to the mass media whenever the advertising professionals recommend creativity and the most suitable means depending of the available budget: newspapers, journals, outside, radio, outdoor advertising, television, cinema, etc.

   - Conducting joint advertising activities with certain clients who serve, at the same time, as commercial action, brand impact and availability, etc.

We could evidently make an endless list; but that is not the objective now. It would suffice to transfer the message of the importance of brand construction in all the sectors in general, and in the ceramic one in particular. Some companies have already gone the way successfully, others are initiating it, but many haven't done their homework yet …