

Full Length Research Paper

Marketing orientation of franchisors

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Franchisees often complain that franchisors do not meet their needs, generally causing franchisors to be seen as non-marketing-oriented. A census survey was conducted in association with 75 (51%) of the 145 franchisees of a selected franchise whose postal addresses are available on the Internet. Aspects such as the needs of franchisees with regard to products, services, prices, promotions, distribution, people and processes were investigated. Data was collected by means of a self-administrated questionnaire that was sent to the selected population. The results indicate that the franchisor met the franchisees' needs with regard to products and services as provided or prescribed by the franchisor. Franchisees joined the franchise because of the brand name of the franchise and the professional services offered by the franchisor. Franchisees were satisfied with the current franchise fees. In general, the franchisor had a high level of marketing orientation with the exception of identified opportunities that could be developed in order to increase the franchisors' level of marketing orientation. Further research is needed to ensure that the franchisors current product ranges will be more competitive compared to other franchise concepts. The franchisor should attend to the improvement of product research, new product development, pricing strategies, packaging and product planning.

Key words: Marketing orientation, franchisee and franchisor, franchise association of southern Africa (FASA), franchise legislation.

INTRODUCTION

Franchised businesses in South Africa are often dissatisfied because they believe that they do not get the necessary support from franchisors. According to Ueckerman (2003) large corporate companies in South Africa have little interest in franchises and as a result, the support for franchise systems is largely based with medium to small companies with limited resources. In many instances, franchise concepts are being sold by franchisors without being properly researched and tested. In South Africa anyone with a good concept could start trading as a franchise, with the result that franchise concepts do not always meet franchisees' needs (Ueckerman, 2006). This article illustrates the dangers of misrepresentation of the quality of franchise concepts

(also referred to as 'low levels' of marketing orientation of franchisors) due to generalisation based only on impressions of franchisees' views.

Reed et al. (2004) pointed out that companies that are involved in business to business marketing are often not marketing-oriented and have difficulty in meeting the needs of customers. Berger (2007) supports these authors and points out that most franchisors underestimate the support franchisees will demand from them, resulting in their actions not being marketing-oriented. Stauble (2000) refers to marketing orientation as the identification of consumer needs and the development and marketing of these products to satisfy and meet the customers' needs.

Zikmund and D'Amico (2001) contend that marketing orientation refers to the implementation of the marketing concept where companies at all times aspire to meet customer needs, to ensure long-term instead of short-term success, to determine what customer needs are and

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to develop products and services to meet those needs. In view of the fact that the franchise industry in South Africa is relatively young (in comparison with other countries), this article will focus on franchising in the optometric industry in South Africa. According to research conducted by Slater and Naver (1994) marketing-oriented companies are better placed to identify and capitalise on new opportunities than non-marketing-oriented companies.

This article describes how the level of marketing orientation of a franchisor in the optometric industry was determined by researching the franchisees of the franchisor. The discussion deals with several aspects of franchising, including the pros and cons of franchising, and the influence of the franchise contract on the franchise industry. The aim of the article is to assist franchisors in determining the needs and satisfaction of franchisees with regard to products and services, prices, promotions, distribution, personnel and processes as provided, prescribed or used by the franchisor.

Next a summary of relevant literature relating to the creation and development of franchises, the relationship between franchisors and franchisees, strategic marketing planning of franchises and the dimensions of franchise marketing will be reviewed. This will be followed by a discussion on the methodology and research design, empirical results, a summary of the main findings, including important assumptions and recommendations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Creation and development of franchises

According to Tikoo (2005) franchising represents the sale of services and goods by the franchisee using the trade name and or trade mark along with the business system as provided by the franchisor. The foundations for franchising as it is known today were established between 1940 and 1950 (Illetschko, 1995). In South Africa, franchising only got under way in the 1960s and 1970s. People with little or no business experience are often looking for a winning recipe or plan like franchising to help them establish a business and are willing to pay a premium for this kind of assistance.

A variety of franchise systems exist, for example licence and or distribution franchises, agency franchises, trade network systems, trade name franchises, business format systems, joint project systems, voluntary relationships, and adjusted franchises (Rodkin, 1996; Kotler and Armstrong, 2001; Illetschko, 2000). Franchise systems help to define the relationship between franchisors and franchisees.

Relationship between franchisors and franchisees

The franchise relationship refers to the business relationship and interaction between franchisors and franchisees that are managed by the franchise contract (Wall, 2005).

Spinelli et al. (2004) point out that the relationship between franchisors and franchisees starts with consumer needs that franchisees and franchisors aim to satisfy by means of cooperation between the two parties.

Parties in a business relationship cooperate with one another to minimise individual risk (Doherty and Alexander, 2004). South Africa, unlike America and Australia, does not have specific franchise laws that determine the relationship between franchisors and franchisees (Illetschko, 1995; Gordon, 2002). Franchise laws are strict in America and Australia and franchises that do not comply could be closed or face a substantial fine. Due to the absence of franchise laws in South Africa, the relationship between franchisors and franchisees is managed under normal contract law by means of a contract between the two parties (Gordon, 2002).

The Franchise Association of Southern Africa (FASA, 2008) confirms that franchisors and franchisees are two independent businesses, and that the Competition Act, 1998 (Act No. 89 of 1998) governs the franchise contract between the two parties. The operational manual as provided by the franchisor assists the franchisee to correctly operate a franchise in accordance to the franchisor's operational expectations (Illetschko, 2005). Franchisors expect and train the franchisees to operate in accordance to the franchisor's operational manual.

Nieman (1998) refers to the different phases a franchise will go through in its life cycle that could have an influence on the relationship between franchisors and franchisees, namely the introduction phase, the growth phase, the mature phase and the declining or development phase. The importance of the relationship between franchisors and franchisees is emphasised by the Franchise Association of Southern Africa (FASA, 2000): it should be grounded in mutual trust, ongoing research, and the development of new products, services, and promotional campaigns. FASA's main objective is to establish and maintain ethical conduct by franchisors and franchisees in the franchise industry that will benefit franchisors, franchisees and the general public at large (Potgieter, 2002).

Strategic marketing planning for franchises

There is a link between the strategic marketing planning of a company and the degree of marketing orientation that exists in an organisation (Morgan and Strong, 1998). The competitive environment in which a company functions directly influences the degree of marketing orientation in an organisation. According to Slater and Naver (1994) marketing-oriented companies are better placed to identify and capitalise on new opportunities than non-marketing-oriented companies. Ferrel et al. (1999) support the formulation of a marketing strategy that will include the selection of a specific target market and decisions regarding products, prices, promotions and distribution in order to meet customer needs and expect-

tations. The implementation of the strategic marketing plan is usually followed by the evaluation and management of the plan in order to take corrective steps if required (Lamb et al., 2000).

The traditional marketing mix (product, prices, promotions, personnel, processes and distribution) refers to a group of tactical instruments used by companies to manage and influence desired responses from selected target markets (Kotler and Keller, 2006). Franchisors and franchisees could influence responses from the target market by managing elements of the marketing mix that they control namely product, price, promotions, distribution and place.

Dimensions of franchise marketing

Illtetschko (2005) as well as Spinelli et al. (2004) define franchising as a complete package that is made available by the franchisor. It includes items such as product, price, personnel, processes and distribution in order to assist the franchisee. The franchise system is the franchisor's product and needs to meet the franchisees' needs (Blythe and Zimmerman, 2005). The franchise agreements direct the relationship between franchisors and franchisees and needs to ensure that both parties perform in terms of its obligations. Morrison (2006) advises franchisees not to become involved with franchisors whose concepts have not been tried and tested.

There are broadly three types of franchise agreements, namely binding contracts, exclusive agreements and refusal to trade agreements (Pride and Ferrel, 1993). It is important for potential franchisees to consult legal opinion on any franchise agreement before signing anything (Abatzoglou, 2002). Franchisees should know that it is the franchisor's responsibility to supply the franchisee with an operational manual, consisting of step-by-step instructions for the establishment and management of a specific franchise (Nieman, 1998). The franchisor has an obligation in terms of the operational manual to develop, implement and manage meaningful information management systems that will measure and determine the success of franchise systems (Osso, 2002).

Only twelve percent of trade names in South Africa have originated from the franchise industry, resulting in limited focus on the workings and contributions of franchises. A general impression of this industry is that franchisors are not marketing-oriented and do not meet the needs of franchisees. The aim of the study on which this article is based is to determine the market orientation of a franchisor in the optometric industry, based on the view of franchisees of the franchisor.

METHODOLOGY

Research was conducted amongst franchisees of a selected franchise in the optometric industry in South Africa. Addresses of 145 distribution points of the selected franchise that are available

on the Internet were used. A census survey was used and data was collected by means of self-administered questionnaires, consisting of multiple choice answers and scaled questions that were posted to respondents (franchisees). The questionnaire for this research was designed in accordance with McDaniel and Gates's (2005) guidelines for the design of effective questionnaires. The questionnaire consisted of the following sections: (1) demographics, (2) products and services, (3) prices and promotions, (4) distribution, (5) personnel and processes. Respondents were requested to arrange their level of agreement in relation to 141 pre-stated variables on a 5-point Likert scale (ranging from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree'). Of the 145 questionnaires that were posted to franchisees, only 77 (53%) were received back. Of these 75 (51.7%) could be used while two (1.3%) were rejected because they were incomplete.

The SPSS (5) statistical package was used for the processing of raw tabulated data as part of the statistical analysis process. The means were used to measure the central tendency in this study. In order to ensure reliability and the level of internal consistency of the 141 (variables) that were contained in the questionnaire, a Cronbach-alfa of 0,785 was obtained. This indicates an expectable level of internal consistency and the reliability of the measurement instrument that was used in this study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Respondent's profile

Fifty (66.7%) male and 25 (33.3%) female respondents took part in the research. Of the respondents participating in this study 47 (63.7%) are franchisees for two years and longer, and 28 (37.3%) franchisees are franchisees for less than two years (Table 1).

All the respondents matriculated and of those 64 (85.3%) obtained a university degree. Fifty three (70.7%) of the respondents are the owners of the franchise, and 22 (29.3%) act as managers of the franchise. The main group of the respondents 31 (41.3%) are based in Gauteng, followed by 15 (20.0%) from KwaZulu-Natal.

Products and services

The results indicate that the franchisor meets the franchisees' needs with regard to products and services, including the quality of products and services as prescribed by the franchisor. The trade name that is used by the franchisor is commonly known and recognised by consumers. Current product ranges of the franchisor is seen to compare favourably with competitors products with regard to stockholding, promotions and advertising, after-sales service and distribution. Franchisees are of the opinion that the franchisor meets his obligations with regard to services as prescribed in the franchise agreement. Franchisees believe that the franchise agreement will ensure that all franchisees will comply with the requirements and meet the standards as stipulated by the franchisor. Franchisees commented that the current franchise agreement only favoured the franchisor and they are not sure whether the current franchise agreement

Table 1. Summary of respondent's profile.

Demographics		Respondents	Total %
Gender	Male	50	66.70
	Female	25	33.30
Period in Business	Franchise 0-2 years	47	63.70
	Franchise 2 years +	28	37.30
Academic Performance	Matriculated	75	100
	University degree	64	85.30
Relationship to business	Franchise owner	53	70.70
	Franchise manager	22	29.30
Age	18-25 years	2	2.60
	26-35 years	32	42.60
	36-55 years	26	34.60
	56 years and older	15	20
Geographical area	Gauteng	31	41
	North West Province	5	6.70
	Northern Province	4	5.30
	Mpumalanga	5	6.70
	Free State	4	5.30
	KwaZulu-Natal	15	20
	Northern Cape	5	6.70
	Western Cape	4	5.30
	Eastern Cape	2	2.70

Note: N=75

will allow them to sell their franchise to a buyer of their choice (Table 2).

According to the respondents the franchisor's product marketing capabilities are reasonable to good. The franchisor's capability to develop strong consumer promotions, regularly introduce new products and innovative packaging is reasonable to good. Franchisees also regard the quality of the franchisor's relationship with franchisees as reasonable to good, and the franchisor's quality of promotional activities as good.

Twenty two (29%) respondents had joined the franchise because of its prominent trade name, while 13 (17%) respondents joined because the franchisor provided professional support to franchisees. Most of the respondents in both groups are franchisees for less than 2 years 18 (39.1%) and franchisees for 2 years and longer 23 (28.4%) make use of the marketing services of the franchisor, followed by (33%) who make use of general management services and (21%) that make use of the franchisor's strategic planning services.

Both the franchisees of less than 2 years and franchisees 13 (34.2%) and franchisees of 2 years and

longer 16 (22.9%) confirms that the current product packaging provided by the franchisor adequately protected products. According to 8 (21.1%) franchisees of less than 2 years and franchisees for 2 years and longer 15 (21.4%) as franchisees, packaging of products reflects the quality of the products. Most of the franchisees 59 (78.7%) are of the opinion that the franchise was good value for money.

In summary respondents are of the opinion that the franchisor meets the needs of franchisees with respect to products and services, with a small portion of the franchisees believing that the franchisor do not meet the needs of franchisees with respect to products and services, which indicates a high level of marketing orientation on the part of the franchisor.

Prices and promotions

The research results indicate that the franchisor control the prices of products and services to end users (consumers). The franchisor has a planned marketing

Table 2. Franchisees needs regarding products and services as provided by the franchisor.

Variables	Mean / (Standard deviation) Franchisees operating two years and less as franchisees	Mean / (Standard deviation) Franchisees operating for two years and longer as franchisees	P- value = > 0,05 Ho ₁ = not rejected if P- value = < 0,05 Ho ₂ = rejected
[V1] The franchisor meets the franchisees needs with regards to products and services provided by the franchisor	3.21 (.006)	3.21 (.006)	.996 Ho ₁ = not rejected
[V2] I, the franchisee are satisfied with the quality of products provided by the franchisor.	3.61 (1.608)	3.34 (1.730)	.112 Ho ₁ = not rejected
[V3] The current trade name of the franchisor is commonly known in the market place.	4.32 (.890)	4.15 (.908)	.376 Ho ₁ = not rejected
[V5] I, the franchisee are satisfied that the franchisor perform his duties as stipulated in the franchise agreement.	3.18 (.037)	3.17 (.037)	.971 Ho ₁ = not rejected
[V6] I, the franchisee is satisfied that I will be able to sell my franchise to a buyer of my choice.	3.14 (1.141)	2.91 (1.187)	.257 Ho ₁ = not rejected
[V7] The current franchise agreement ensures that all franchisees conform to the processes and standards as prescribed by the franchisor.	3.43 (.339)	3.36 (.330)	.745 Ho ₁ = not rejected

strategy that assists franchisees with marketing functions as well as pricing and promotions. It is clear that the franchisor's prescriptions has the greatest influence on the prices franchisees will set for end users (35 respondents = 46.7%), followed by general economic factors (20 respondents = 26.7%). Equal numbers of franchisees took part in this research that is franchisees of less than 2 years as franchisee and franchisees of 2 years and longer as franchisees (Table 3).

Franchisees are not happy with the margins on products as prescribed by the franchisor or with the financial contribution they have to make to the franchisor's promotional strategy. Franchisees also view the promotional activities and decisions taken by the franchisor as one-sided. Both groups are of the opinion that the franchisor in general meets their needs with regard to prices and promotions (with the exception of margin expectations and contributions to promotional

strategies) indicating a relative high level of marketing orientation on the part of the franchisor .

Distribution

With regard to the selection of a distribution point, the franchisees agree that the franchisor's support meet their expectations adequately and that they are fully aware and informed of the franchisor's distribution policy. Selective distribution will be more competitive in meeting customer needs. Fifty eight (77.3%) of franchisees are in favour of promoting new and existing products via established distribution points. The majority of franchisees sixty seven (89.3%) are satisfied, while others eight (11%) are less satisfied, with the marketing opportunities that were available in their allocated geographical distribution areas (Table 4).

Table 3. External factors influence on prices to end-users (consumers).

External factors influence on prices to end-users (consumers)	Period as franchisee		
	Between nil and two years	Two years and longer	Total
Consumer behaviour / needs	2 7.1%	3 6.4%	5 6.7%
Competition	5 17.9%	10 21.3%	15 20.0%
Perscriptions by the franchisor	14 50.0%	21 44.7%	35 46.7%
Economical factors	7 25.0%	13 27.7%	20 26.7%
Total	28 100.0%	47 100.0%	75 100.0%

Table 4. Professional services provided by the franchisor during the development phase of the franchise

Professional services provided by the franchisor during the development phase of the franchise	Period as franchisee		
	Between nil and two years	Two years and longer	Total
Proposals regarding the most suitable geographical position for a distribution point	9 18.8%	14 13.5%	23
Proposals regarding minimum and maximum stock levels	16 33.3%	26 25.0%	42
Proposals regarding the design of the franchise outlet	8 16.7%	18 17.3%	26
Support with the negotiations of the lease contract	2 4.2%	10 9.6%	12
Support with the establishment of office facilities	2 4.2%	6 5.8%	8
Support with the opening promotion	4 8.3%	16 15.4%	20
Support with the analyzing of the selected geographical areas potential	5 10.4%	8 7.7%	13
Support to obtain finance for the project	0 .0%	3 2.9%	3
Support to enhance the visibility of the distribution point	2 4.2%	3 2.9%	5
Total	48	104	152

The majority of respondents (42) from both groups (franchisees less than 2 year and franchisees for 2 years and longer) view the proposals from the franchisor regarding the design of a distribution point during the development phase of a franchise as one of the most important services provided by the franchisor. Nine (18.8%) respondents (franchisees for less than 2 years) and 14 (13.5%) respondents (franchisees for 2 years and

longer) view suggestions by the franchisor on geographical location as an important service provided by the franchisor.

A brief synopsis of the results are that the franchisor meet the needs of the franchisees with reference to distribution, with a small portion of the franchisees that feel that the franchisor do not meet their needs with respect to distribution, again indicating a high level of

marketing orientation on the part of the franchisor.

Personnel and processes

Owners and managers of franchises receive training from the franchisor and is satisfied with the training as provided by the franchisor. Franchisees confirm the existence of an operational manual, used for the management of the franchise. Not all the franchisees worked in complete accordance with the operational manual as provided by the franchisor.

The non-availability of products and the long lead times for the development of new products contributes to conflict between franchisees and the franchisor. Conflict between franchisors and franchisees is further strengthened by ineffective communication processes for the identification of problem areas. Franchisees argue that less control and prescriptions by the franchisor will not make the franchise industry more marketing-oriented. However, franchisees state that improved margins for franchisees, more support from the franchisor to franchisees that experienced financial difficulties, and improved communication between franchisees and the franchisor will make the franchise industry in South Africa more marketing-oriented. They feel that franchise fees should be in relation to the franchisees' real turnover in order to make the franchise industry in South Africa more marketing-oriented.

A large number of respondents (41 = 54.7%) view the service provided by the franchisor as satisfactory in general, followed by 25 (33.3%) of franchisees that viewed the services provided by the franchisor as average. Only 4 (5.3%) of the respondents regard the services they receive from the franchisor as somewhat disappointing compared to 6.7% of the respondents that view the service they receive by the Franchisor as above average.

Franchisees believe that the franchisor meets their needs with regard to personnel and processes, while a small number of franchisees that are of the opinion that the franchisor does not meet their needs with respect to personnel and processes, indicating a high level of marketing orientation on the part of the franchisor.

Conclusion

The main aim of this article was to illustrate the dangers of misrepresentation of the quality of franchise concepts due to generalisation based only on impressions of franchisees' views. In order for franchisors to be more marketing-oriented it is important to determine franchisees' needs with regard to the products, services, distribution, personnel and processes provided by the franchisor. In light of the results of this research, it is concluded that the selected franchisor in the franchise industry displayed a high level of marketing orientation. Implementing the following recommendations derived

from the research, could assist in making the franchise industry in South Africa more marketing-oriented in general:

- 1.) The franchisor needs to do research to determine which aspect of the current product: product research, development of new products, pricing strategies, packaging, labelling and product ranges do not compare favourably with those of competitors.
- 2.) The franchisor needs to do further research to determine why franchisees are not satisfied with the profit margins of products provided by the franchisor.
- 3.) The franchisor needs to compile internal communication programmes in order to communicate to franchisees the balance between the purchase price of a franchise and the services as provided by the franchisor.
- 4.) The franchisor need to establish internal working groups in order to involve franchisees in decisions concerning promotional activities.
- 5.) The franchisor needs to use market research, the measurement of promotion results, and the influence of the franchisees in order to make decisions regarding promotional activities.
- 6.) The franchisor needs to establish working groups in order to introduce steps to improve the management of promotions and advertising activities.
- 7.) The franchisor needs to do market research to find more scientific methods to assist in the process of determining franchise fees, and methods should be investigated to assist franchisees who find themselves in financial difficulty.

This article offers a new perspective on the generalisation that franchisors in general are not marketing-oriented. Franchisees confirmed their satisfaction with the franchisor in meeting their needs with reference to products and services, prices and promotions, distribution, personnel and processes, indicating high levels of marketing orientation on the part of the franchisor – contrary to popular belief.

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