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July 3, 2002

Starbucks Coffee Corporations

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STARBUCKS COFFEE COMPANY

Starbucks understands. They are not just selling coffee. They are educating clients, creating customers, building clientele, increasing understanding, promoting the industry, the products and the brand. This company understands the power of their attraction is not just in the coffee, it's in the experience they create and the rich, steamy, full-bodied education they provide. – Weiss, Naomi

1. Introduction

Headquartered in Seattle, Washington, Starbucks Coffee Company began in 1971 with just one retail store at Seattle's historic Pike Place Market. Now Starbucks is the leading specialty coffee brand and retailer in the world. Starbucks went public on June 26, 1992 at \$17 per share, Starbucks stock is traded on Nasdaq, under the trading symbol SBUX (www.starbucks.com).

Starbucks overall corporate goal is to become the leading retailer and brand of coffee in each of its target markets by selling the finest quality coffee and related products, and by providing superior quality customer service. Company-operated retail stores accounted for approximately 84% of net revenues during fiscal 2001. Starbucks is to purchase and roast high-quality whole bean coffees, and to sell them along with fresh, rich-brewed espresso beverages, a variety of pastries, and coffee-related accessories and equipment (www.starbucks.com). Starbucks also recently has strategically sold coffee and tea products through other channels such as supermarkets, or non-traditional retail channels such as United Airlines, Marriott International, Barnes & Noble bookstores, Seattle Kingdome, Holland-American Cruise Line, and Department Stores (Lewis, 1997). So far, Starbucks is seemingly promising and invincible in the coffee chain industry. Yet no one can guarantee the yesterday's or today's success factors that worked for Starbucks' prosperity can still do tomorrow. This paper will first investigate key patterns of actions and decisions that have decisively determined the success of Starbucks Coffee Corp., and will discuss what issues Starbucks will be or is facing in the ever-changing competitive

global market. For each major strategic issue, possible recommendations are made respectively, followed by key actions that indeed make such recommendations happen.

2. Strategies

Starbucks' distinctive competence in store ambience and innovative coffee drinks has propelled it to the forefront among coffee retailers. What Starbucks stands for is not just a good cup of fresh coffee. Starbucks is about the passion for the soul of people, quality product, excellent customer service, and the experience and understanding of the culture of coffee (Filipczak, 1995). Starbucks has so far enjoyed its unprecedented achievements in coffee chain industry, thanks to the well-brewed, mixed and served strategies of 5's, people, product, place, promotion, and price.

2.1 People

Human Resources Strategy: Starbucks believes that the Company is in the "people development" business as well as in the coffee business (Filipczak, 1995). As stated in its mission "Provide a great work environment and treat each other with respect and dignity", Starbucks realizes that one of the most important resources contributing to success is their employees or "partners" as referred by the Company. Starbucks is attempting to imbed its values in the Company culture. They use these values to give employees a sense of meaning to their work even if it is just pouring a cup of coffee. The coffee chain provides medical, dental, and vision coverage to all employees, even including part-timers. The part-time partners are also eligible for the company's stock program. The purpose is to instill in its partners a sense of purpose, commitment, loyalty, and enthusiasm (www.starbucks.com). Expectedly, what Starbucks benefits are the reduced recruiting and training costs, and added value for the company.

Quality-control Training Strategy: Starbucks has a comprehensive strategy for quality-control training program, which is designed to cultivate skills and knowledge in coffee making and delivering. Employees hired for retail-level jobs receive a minimum training of 24 hours in their first two or four weeks in class on customer service skills, coffee knowledge and beverage-making techniques (Lewis, 1997). Starbucks' goal in each store is to offer super service to their customers while educating them about coffee quality.

2.2. Product

Premium Product Strategy: Starbucks has been committed to sourcing the highest quality coffees around the world. It only purchases coffees that have been grown and processed by suppliers who meet strict environmental, social, economic, and quality standards. Starbucks encourages and expands the production of sustainable coffees. Starbucks is well-known for its exceptionally high quality coffees, care in selection, and expertise in roast (www.starbucks.com).

Broad Product Differentiation Strategy: Depending upon competence and innovation, Starbucks establishes its longer-lasting and more profitable competitive advantages by broadly differentiating its coffee and coffee related products.

Brand Image Strategy: Starbucks combines its merchandizing strategy with its marketing programs to create and reinforce a distinctive brand image for its coffees. The company's brand image strategy is reflected in its product mix, producing, and sales and educational materials. What Starbucks stands for is a good cup of fresh coffee and the recognized brand worldwide.

2.3 Place

Site selection Strategy: Starbucks' decisions about where to site its stores depend on reaching its potential customers and providing better service to its existing customers. Starbucks stores are typically clustered in high-traffic, high visibility

locations. When it opens a new store near an established Starbucks, it is generally intended to relieve long customer lines and improve service. It takes more than just location to be successful. Attracting customers to Starbucks happens by providing high-quality coffee as well as creating inviting, comfortable places that are conveniently located. These places should be those that add to the spirit of each community (Starbucks Annual Report 2001).

Store Expansion Strategy: Starbucks expands its stores by entering new markets wherever the opportunity exists to become the leading specialty coffee retailer. By the year 2001, its current location totals 4,709 worldwide (www.starbucks.com).

2.4 Promotion & Social responsibility

Starbucks doesn't have much conventional advertising because it found that there is too much competition for consumers' attention in TV, radio and print media. Starbucks usually picks one or two charities or events that reach the community it serves. This will inspire people inside and outside the company and reinforce the company's value and image (Lorenzini, 1993). For instance, stores in New York, Washington D.C, and Pennsylvania brewed free coffee for relief workers after September 11.

Starbucks integrates its corporate culture with its surroundings. At all levels of the Company, Starbucks partners strive to be good neighbors and active contributors in the communities where they live and work. It's part of the Starbucks culture. It is the goal of Starbucks to involve partners as decision-makers, volunteers, and leaders in the initiatives they support (Starbucks Corporate Social Responsibility 2001 Annual Report).

2.5 Price:

Best Value-offering Strategy: By pricing its coffees competitively with the prevailing high-end coffee prices, Starbucks represents an attractive combination of price, features, high quality, good service and other attributes customers find attractive.

3. Strategic Issues

3.1 Challenges for Global Expansion

The primary reasons that most corporations are going international are strategic growth and profits. Starbucks is not an exception. Part of the advantage of having an international chains or affiliates is that a strong foreign presence helps increase brand recognition and may also boost a company's domestic business (Gee, 1994). Although Starbucks expands internationally to increase market penetration for those reasons, it can expand to track its customers who travel around world especially in the Pacific Rim. The more locations Starbucks has, therefore, the more loyalty and familiarity it can build among its existing and potential customers.

3.1.1. Standardization vs. Adaptation

However, there should be major concerns to which Starbucks converting from a pure domestic to a global company should pay in-depth attention. Nationalism, cultural differences, and the lack of adequate suppliers may result in recurrent problems with resource availability, compromised quality and consistency standards, and runaway costs, which often plague foreign operations (Gee, 1994). China represents the great opportunity, for example, because of its population and the potential for growth. Yet coffee has been considered a Western bourgeois commodity until recently. The country's coffee drinking has doubled in the past four years, but it still only amounts to about one cup per person per annum, and the brand typically is instant Nescafe. Tea sounds a lot better. Overall coffee doesn't go well with Chinese food and culture (Woznicki, 1999). Key issue here is how to meet

individual market wants and needs without compromising its brand image and culture of the company.

3.1.2. Going International vs. Defending Home

The other issue is how much Starbucks should weigh its emphasis on going international and defending or growing its domestic market. It might often seem like there is a Starbucks coffee store on every corner in most major cities and neighborhoods, but not everyone is quite fortunate enough to have the "Starbucks Experience" in their urban areas and nearby homes. With 73 percent of its stores concentrated in just 50 markets, there is plenty of room to grow, or at least most analysts think so. Some Wall Street analysts do believe Starbucks Corp. has room to double its chain of 3,000 U.S. coffee shops without over-saturating the market (Bruss, 2001). While it may seem to dwellers on the East and West coasts that there's a Starbucks on every corner, plenty of communities in the U.S. are still waiting for their first shop. Company watchers say saturation is actually years away (Lee, 2000). With 5,000 stores worldwide -- and ownership of 3,000 of its 3,900 U.S. locations -- Starbucks outlets most densely packed into the West Coast, there are a large number of other wealthy and white-collar populated areas that are part of the prime target market of potential Starbucks consumers (Bruss, 2001). Therefore, the bottom line issue for Starbucks is not about whether Starbucks goes international or not-- indeed it has been a while that Starbucks went global since 1996-- but the degree of efforts accordingly balancing its expansion in the US domestic market and the promising Asian Market. Considering domestic market growth potential, it should put efforts to defend home since its competitors such as Diedrich Coffee chain based in Irvine, California, Caribou Coffee in Minnesota, or Seattle based Best Coffee, currently are aggressively expanding. Though the size or scale of them is not instantly posing a threat to Starbucks so far, it cannot afford to

simply ignore them. Once they enter a market first where Starbucks is not in presence, it may lose its brand preference to its competitors in particular markets.

3.2. E-Commerce

Starbucks had been facing an unexpected profit decline for its e-commerce. This issue was due to strategic distraction and dilution from core business. In the physical world, Starbucks is almost everywhere, and its leaders have a same ambition to build an equally strong presence on the Internet. So they launched their first-generation e-commerce website in 1998. Within one year, Starbucks moved boldly, acting as if the Internet presented a can't-miss opportunity. It tried to diversify its products online by merchandising of everything from gourmet foods, kitchen products and home furnishings to videocassettes (Anders, 2001). Furthermore, in fiscal 1999, the Company invested \$8.0 million in Talk City, Inc. ("Talk City"), a publicly traded interactive online chat site. The Company also invested \$20.3 million in living.com Inc., an online furniture retailer. Meanwhile, it established an alliance with Cooking.com, Inc., a privately held Web-based retailer of cookware, accessories and specialty foods and provider of information about cooking. As part of this alliance, the Company made a \$10.0 million investment in Cooking.com. It is not hard to see why Starbucks dreamed big at the height of the Internet boom if we look at its main customer group. Starbucks' cafes attract young, affluent, tech-savvy customers -- exactly the sort of people who made that boom take off. "In 1999, Starbucks estimated that 70% of its customers were Internet users. Today, that figure has risen to 90%."(Anders, 2001)

However, the e-commerce has been not as profitable as the leaders expected. This "new Internet strategy does little more than sugarcoat its weak earnings" (Chet Dembeck, 1999). The online diversity strategy diluted Starbucks' strong suit – selling coffee – with unrelated categories. In mid 2000, Starbucks earnings per share dropped from 60 cents down to 54 cents. Investors lost their confidence on Internet

and concluded Schultz was distracted by his online aspirations (www.starbucks.com). In October 2000, the Company recognized losses totaling \$58.8 million to reduce its investments in living.com, Talk City, Cooking.com and Kozmo.com to their aggregate fair value of \$4.8 million (www.starbucks.com). Realizing the negative impact of its Internet strategy, Starbucks management team pulled their focus back on growing core business at the end of 2000. They have been slowing down their pace by narrowing down their online business to coffee related product such as coffee beans, mugs, brewing machines. As the way the company senior vice president Darren Huston put: "We aren't in the business of selling Internet access. Our job is to sell more coffee." However, some unrelated products still remain in their online collection such as toys.

3.3. Human Resources

Though it is an undeniable fact that Starbucks is one of the most popular workplace that majority of job seekers want to work for, the company is not totally immune to human resource issues that most large companies face such as sexual harassment. Though Starbucks set a policy and rule for such issues described below as overtime violation and sexual harassment, the problem detected is partly due to lack of communication.

3.3.1. Overtime violation

Starbucks has positioned itself as a socially responsible corporate, but citizen has filed a pair of lawsuits accusing the company of cheating its management and assistant managers out of overtime pay. Starbucks faces lawsuits filed under California's unique labor laws, challenging the exempt status of managers and assistants managers.

Under state law, employer s must pay overtime unless an employee qualifies for an exemption, which, among other things, requires that he spend more than 50% of his time on management duties. It's so apparent to anybody who walks into a

Starbucks that the managers are doing the same work as the subordinates, said Dennis Moss, a Santa Monica lawyer who is representing two managers in a suit filed in Los Angeles county superior court. If you are out there making coffee or cleaning a cappuccino machine, it's not managerial time. It's not exempt.

3.3.2. Sexual harassment

Starbucks, meanwhile, is gearing up its defense for a lawsuit filed by three female employees who insisted that they were sexually harassed, then faced retaliation for reporting the complaints. However, the company reported that the allegations were not on legitimate basis.

4. Recommendation

4.1. Challenges for Global Expansion

Seattle is a Pacific Rim city, and a lot of companies go back and forth between west coast and Asia. Coffee consumption is growing faster in Asia than in Europe or Latin America. According to Datamonitor, coffee sales in Asia rose 33.9% from 1992 to 1996, while sales in Europe grew 23.2% (Madden, 1998).

4.1.1. Standardization vs. Adaptation

Though cannot be resolved overnight some concerns for Starbucks going international such as nationalism or cultural difference, it can deal with or at least reduce them slowly. Rather than making efforts to achieve fast change by having the market follow the company's own culture or business practice in the US, it should take "act local, think global" and "long-term" mindset. Starbucks can reposition itself for each market's needs and wants. Sometime Asia can be mistakenly seen as one culture by outsiders. It can be true somehow, yet to be successful in the region, you better keep in mind that the countries in Asia are totally different when it comes to culture, value, religion, tastes etc. For instance, many Asians prefer for tea especially in China, a country of devoted tea drinkers who do not take readily to the

taste of coffee, in the meantime, Japan and Korea traditionally have a huge coffee culture (Madden, 1998). Starbucks should set different strategies and approaches for each market to make Starbucks' experience part of culture.

For instance, the similarities and differences even among Chinese from various China territories, suggest that Starbucks must finetune its strategies when targeting various groups of Chinese customers. Starbucks now has more than 35 shops, and successfully runs them so far, mainly in Beijing and Shanghai (Economist, 2001). However that does not mean necessarily Starbucks will be welcomed in the rest of China market or Asia. No evidence so far supports that China fully accepts Starbucks coffee culture. People simply may want to try new things or to be shown their financial status since coffee price of Starbucks in China is not affordable for average customers. Starbucks still has a long way to go. It should endure patience for the market to accept Starbucks in a trend, hopefully as part of culture, not a fad easily that comes and goes.

4.1.2. Going International vs. Defending Home

Asia Pacific is considered to be a huge potential market for Starbucks in developing their coffee retail restaurants as well as other diversified businesses in the future (Rungfapairn, 1999). Since 1996, Starbucks has struggled for an international company. Until now, Starbucks seems to be invincible, a fail-proof company. Naturally, Starbucks is one of the most favorite companies that investors prefer investing in. But not always. Investors who has a key for the company to growing sometimes tend to turn their backs if they found the invested company go in other direction they do not want. It would be of not use, though the company is good at the international market or non-core businesses, if it is so preoccupied with global expansion planning, so that it easily lets its competitors chip away its strong brand image and preference in domestic market, which has still plenty room to grow. Similar thing happened years ago. Howard Schultz, CEO, has learned the lesson

when he was trying to make the company a cyber leader. Delayed store openings and lower-than-expected sales at existing outlets were putting a damper on earnings (Lee, 2000). Due to the top management's obsessive affairs with Internet, investors concluded the management team was distracted by his online aspirations. The next day, investors sent the stock down an eye-popping 28%. Schultz got the message, and seven months later, he's a born-again coffee-shop man (Lee, 2000). Like the case of Internet strategy, you can get into trouble and get distracted by doing a non-core thing. First thing should come first. If Starbucks fails to defend and fortify its domain and core business, it would face a sudden downturn in the international as well as domestic market so that its investors may turn their backs again like the case of Internet's preoccupation. Schultz should make sure what would be the proper mix or balance between two conflicting strategies.

4.2. E-Commerce

The lesson Starbucks learned is that customer loyalties can't be stretched or transferred overnight to a new product or channel. Starbucks should expect a gradually change on its customers' purchasing power and habits. Eventually, the Internet may reconfigure how customers think of mass-market brands. But that shift will take years to unfold, and company leaders need to manage the transition with great skill.

Therefore, Starbucks needs to make some change on its current e-commerce strategy. First, it may add more value to its value chain by expending its website function as a communication tool to link its stakeholders such as customers, suppliers, management and employees. Second, consolidate the public relation function. Starbucks.com is not only a window for online business, but also a window for building the company's image and reputation. Third, keep online business on core products but maintain the products diversification as a long-term strategy, and implement it by gradually introducing new products one at a time. Last, to strategic

ally with .com companies to expand its selling channels.

4.3. Human Resources

4.3.1. Overtime violation

The time for food service company can not be avoided, so we think the recommendation to this issue is to increase the overtime pay to the employees to make up for the inconvenience. They need to also provide the over timers with more protection and more insurance program.

4.3.2. Sexual harassment

Employees sometimes don't know how to protect themselves from harassing or what kind of misconduct can be interpreted as sexual harassment. So the company can prevent such unpleasant allegations and incidents through retraining and education to its employees, to make sure management as well as associates clearly understand the rule and policy.

5. Actions

5.1. Challenges for Global Expansion

5.1.1. Standardization vs. Adaptation

To be a real global company diluting its strong nationality or origin, Starbucks may want to participate in or support local events, helping education in developing countries or community activities so that it can enhance its public relationship with those international markets. They would appreciate that, and naturally accept Starbucks as part of local community. In most Asian markets, once it is perceived as a true partner or caretaker, its growth strategy might work just as in US market without much backlash or nationalism among locals.

To meet local tastes or preferences, Starbucks can act local, for example, by introducing alcoholic beverage for special happy hour set in some countries or region.

Traditionally Korea and China are huge alcohol consuming culture as well as coffee. High margin of beer, wine or cocktail may help Starbucks match local tastes and preferences, most importantly, can boost its revenue.

5.1.2. Going International vs. Defending Home

Starbucks top management team should make sure defending its major territory is not distracted with obsession of hasty global expansion planning. It should be patient. That does not mean 'do nothing,' instead pursuing global expansion on the basis of its thorough analysis; what its potential target market wants and needs, and does not want or need, what its strengths or weaknesses are, and what internal and external challenges exist in the market it plans to enter.

Though Starbucks divided its jobs by launching Starbucks International Company whose core job is to expand internationally, major important decisions are still dependent on Parent company, Starbucks Coffee Co. CEO, Schultz along with his top management aides. For Starbucks, the current business practice in the international market is quite different from domestic market. In the international market, Starbucks International Co. takes no equity participation, instead it uses joint venture, or licensing. Therefore, when it comes to going international, in order to avoid distraction from defending domestic market and expanding international, it would be another option for Starbucks to spin off Starbucks International Co. from Starbucks Coffee Co., just as Marriott Corporation did in the early 1990s; Host Marriott Co. and Marriott International Co. Currently Marriott International and Host Marriott are totally different companies. They are no longer seen as brother and sister. Both companies are operated by wholly different management teams and governed by different members of board of directors. Since separation, two companies have so far been successful, one in mostly international market as a management company and the other in domestic market as a real estate investment company.

5.2. E-Commerce

Starbucks can setup online chat room to facilitate communication among its stakeholders. It may also create free email accounts to further spread its fame and consolidate customers' loyalty. In addition, it can gradually add indirect coffee-related products into its online sales collection, such as coffee table. It may also want to introduce some online coffee tour package to provide cheap air-tickets, car rental and hotel accommodation. In order to increase its sales, Starbucks may also ally with .com companies to promote its products. For example, to sign a sell contract with amazon.com or yahoo.com to carry Starbucks' products.

5.3. Human Resources

5.3.1. Overtime violation

Merit pay program assumes that employees' compensation over time should be determined, at least in part, by differences in job performance. Employees earn permanent increases to base pay according to their performance, which rewards excellent effort or results, motivates future performance, and helps employers retain valued employees. They could also provide the employers the security after work and offer them more medical insurance comparing to those employees who only work in the daytime.

5.3.2. Sexual harassment

Starbucks need to educate their employees, for example giving employees handout to let them know how to protect themselves. They also need to educate employees to know how to clarify sexual harassment. They have the requirement to deal with sexual harassment already, only they need to do is to strengthen the requirement.

6. Conclusion

It is no wonder that Starbucks is a great firm and one of the most successful companies in the world, thanks to the ambitious entrepreneur Howard Schultz's unique but simple strategy, "connecting links between treating employees with dignity and respect, and producing a good product and service." Fortunately, that is not an unknown secret anymore. But unfortunately, carrying out the discipline is not easy and sometimes painstaking. Easier to be said than done. But Starbucks did it. It has acted on the connection, while most competitors are aware of that but failed. That was the pivotal factors that differentiate Starbucks from others, and bring today's Starbucks, which is often used as one of the popular examples for success companies.

The future of Starbucks, which is in a fast-growth phase, is seemingly ever successful and promising. Starbucks should bear in mind that those keys to today Starbucks' success, however, may not be applicable to tomorrow's environment and in global market, and what were and are innovative strategies and policies today and yesterday will ultimately become the core strategies of tomorrow that every company is finally armed with. Thus defending and growing a competitive position requires firmly built strategies based on its unique, valuable, and inimitable capabilities and resources, rather than the products and services themselves, proactively responding to ever changing internal and external environment to keep fending off its competitors. Although currently there exist no formidable competitors for Starbucks leadership in both international and domestic markets, it should not take it for granted for good. Tomorrow's destiny of Starbucks should depend on its strategic capability to preserve and sustain its strengths, offset weaknesses, avert threats, and capitalize on opportunities. A company that is used for benchmarking today would be exemplified as a failed one tomorrow, if it sticks with 'business as

usual' mindset. If Starbucks would correctly identify and deal with the issues under current and near future circumstances, it could remain excited about further growth and continues to be prosperous.

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