



**Online Information through Publicity and
The Consumers' Perception
The controversial case of Ryanair**

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Abstract: The online publicity/advertising is a form of promotion utilizing the internet as a quasi-exclusive mean of marketing, serving to attract new customers in larger numbers at costs as low as possible. The online advertising is considering actions by which the organization submits to general or specific audience information on its products and services, its brand names or more about itself. The online advertising success depends significantly on a solid knowledge of the advertising domain in general, on a good knowledge of internet as a medium of communication and prompt information, as well as on the consumer reaction and feedback.

As it is an area of utmost interest, where time equals money literally, the air transportation and especially the low-cost air transportation involves a need for a versatile and offensive online advertising.

The case analyzed is paradoxical underlying perhaps the microeconomics principle of communicating vessels applicable to any system, but favorable to consumers (in this case). Even inconveniences occurred (extra fees, more curious requirements regarding luggage, services on board...), by overall, hence in a balanced situation, the possibilities to get sound and in a shorter time at destination, is more appreciated by the consumers (passengers).

We speak about a psychological aspect in the relationship customer- service provider, meaning that the consumer retains the needed information, brand, even under the publicity form and becomes attached to the activity or service which brings him profit (tangible or not tangible).

Keywords: advertising, online marketing, consumer, information, profit.

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1.ONLINE PUBLICITY-APPROACH

First and foremost, it is necessary to make a clear distinction between the following two specific terms: publicity and advertising.

The difference consists in the fact that the advertising involves placing well individualized advertisements in media, against known costs, while the publicity consists in providing information to the media and consumers under the form of messages, hoping that these messages can be valued for free, as news values.

In the first case, the advertisers (sponsors) pay for rented space in any type of media used (Trifu, 2009)^[1].

Unlike traditional advertising, in online advertising there is no clear cut distinction between the beneficiary of advertising services and the provider thereof. Thus a beneficiary can become a provider of advertising services (for instance where he/she rents advertising space on his/her own website, in turn being present with banner advertisements on other websites).

The online advertising is as follows (Sweeney, 2008)^[2]:

Creating awareness can be achieved very efficiently by utilizing online banner advertising. The overview of new products and services provided by the organization, the stimulation of the virtual consumer interest in connection therewith, the provision of information concerning various key events in the life of the organization are but a few situations where the online advertising can be successfully applied.

Generating traffic to the distribution points of the organization's products and services represents a key objective of the online advertising as far as new products are concerned. As in the traditional advertising, what is important is not that the visitor accessed the website but convincing him to return to the organization's website.

Supporting sales is perhaps the most challenging target of an online advertising campaign because achieving it requires convincing consumers who access a website to act favorably for the organization by buying a product or service, participating to a promotional contest, filling in an information sheet or responding to a questionnaire. This objective translates into the concept of conversion, which means transforming a website's visitor from a potential customer into an actual customer.

The Advantages of Utilizing Online Publicity/Advertising

The online information presentation is seen as more effective than traditional advertising. The presence on the web can be a success for almost any type of company. Success is not measured, though, by an increase in sales. The strengthening of the brand image can as well be a goal of the advertising campaign on the web. The promotion manner in this environment and the assessment of results depend on the company's portfolio of products and services, the target consumers and, last but not least, its goals.

We consider that the advantages of the online advertisement are as follows (based on empirical studies and specific literature as Sweeney, 2008; Trifu, 2009):

- It provides opportunities to capture a certain audience, since it addresses certain users from certain geographic areas, of certain nationalities directly and it can be placed at a specific time, for the users of a particular computer and even according to personal preferences and behavior;
- It can track how users interact with the advertised products and services and thus record what the points of interest are for current and potential customers. It can identify key information sought and the products and services which have the highest success;
- Advertising/publicity has an exposure which is not related to a certain time period and there is a possibility to change it at any time depending on the user response;
- The interactivity offered by the online advertisement to the user offers the possibility to better know the product or the service promoted, it allows the user to learn the opinion of other buyers and the user can test and buy the product without having to leave the computer;
- The online advertising has a global reach, with the possibility of an advertisement to be viewed from anywhere in the world, by any user who has access to the internet;
- The response speed to an advertisement is considerable and is measured either by the number of clicks that the advertisement received or by the number of purchases generated through the banner, which is almost impossible to achieve through traditional means;
- The costs of the online advertising are lower than the costs of traditional advertising leading to noticeable results with a much smaller financial effort.

1.THE WEBSITE - THE MAIN VECTOR TO PROMOTE LOW-COST AIRLINES

The websites of low-cost airlines are basically a combination of corporate website (promoting the company image, transmission of information on company policy and values, recruitment, its products and services), content website



(providing useful and interesting information), promotional website (promoting one or more products and services) and transaction website (buying goods and services).

The websites of low-cost airlines are structured so that the page titles are to be found on each page of the website, making it much easier for the user to find the desired piece of information. Most often websites are structured according to the following model:

Data on the history and identity of the company - details on the company history, its evolution over the years in terms of aircraft fleet structure and the number thereof;

Map of destinations - it is a map that includes all the destinations and routes operated by the low-cost airline;

Flight timetable - includes the operating schedule of flights for the next period, usually for six months;

News and useful information - the latest news on the new routes, destinations and aircraft and useful information on the new services offered;

Travel conditions - a regulation specifying the conditions offered to passengers by the low-cost airline;

Buying flights - the key function, whereby customers can search for flights and destinations, for days and hours and links between different airports. They can choose the desired services offered for each flight and they can pay by credit card;

Change of flights - the method by which passengers can choose a different flight replacing the one they originally purchased;

Services - the description of all services offered to passengers before, during and after the flight;

Efficiency of low-cost airline websites

The websites are constantly updated to attract and induce customers to buy the services they provide.

The factors contributing to the effectiveness of the low-cost airline websites are:

Developing the content

The best way to attract visitors, to build a relationship with them, to turn them into loyal customers is providing an offer of interesting and useful information upon the services provided. In order to encourage visitors to return on the website and buy tickets, the airlines utilize online contests, special offers available only on their websites and other information of interest to passengers.

Updating of information

This requires constant updating of information on the website. Customers need to know about the efforts made by the company, they need to be constantly updated upon the latest changes in flight schedules, the conditions of travel, the destinations and other important issues.

The clients of low-cost airlines are encouraged to subscribe to newsletters (using e-mails) to be informed upon any available news; thus they are kept up-to-date with the latest offers, promotions and other various useful pieces of information.

E-mails become an important for communication, clear, concise, in time real and a channel to obtain updated information and, of course, are a mean for an efficient feedback, for the airline company and for the clients (Chaffey, 2006)^[3].

The design of the website

The golden rule states that the website's functionality takes precedence over aesthetics, visitors having the option to move freely on the website in any direction they want. Therefore the organization of information on the site is very clear and logic, the data arising from one another, and the links between pages are cleverly made to facilitate navigation.

The ways to attract clients on the website are numerous (Trifu, 2009):

Registration on databases

There are three ways a piece of information can be located on the web: typing an address, following a link and calling virtual databases (search engines and directories), by utilizing keywords. Studies show that the databases are utilized in 70% of cases. It is therefore important for a website to be indexed according to keywords. They usually are: flight, cheap, low-cost, air, plain, etc.

Including the web address in offline advertising

The site address is mentioned in all offline advertising efforts: from credit cards, brochures or other promotional material even on company aircraft. The web addresses are as short and simple as possible, usually the company name, to be easy to remember and type.

Also, low-cost airline website displays information for its future potential customers, people who will fly that particular airline for the first time and need a dedicated section - Passenger for the first time?.



Public relations, press releases

The low-cost airlines try to exploit every opportunity to get the word out through press releases, interviews, case studies. They print their web addresses on promotional materials and other things that remain unchanged or have a low relativity: brochures, announcements, letterheads, envelopes, cards, pens, mouses. Another important aspect is an emphasis upon the flying crew, their number of flight hours (in the thousands) represents a warranty for a safe flight. Also, it is important to guarantee the passengers that their luggage will make it safely to the destination, that it is taken care of and it does not get trashed before, during or after the flight/the plane has landed. It is also important to highlight the safety of a company's aircraft at a time when airplanes either disappear or crush.

It is very important for the future customer to know that the low-cost of a flight does not impact upon the safety of the aircraft and that flight safety is a number 1 (one) priority of the company. In other words, the customer needs to know that a low-cost flight can be as safe and comfortable as any other normal flight ticket with any other airline.

Links placed on other websites

This can be performed either upon payment, or through various partnerships. There may be websites of services addressing the same category of consumers as the company in question, websites of complementary services or simply websites that may be of interest within the area covered by the company customers.

Links by themes or information provided

Most lists of links are grouped by themes: travel, tourism, leisure, transport, sometimes representing the sole purpose of a website or a part of it. They represent some of the best tools for browsing the web and they direct visitors towards various similar websites. This method is free of charge and is highly persuasive because it does not appear as an ordinary advertisement.

1.STUDY CASE- RYANAIR LOW-COST FLIGHT COMPANY

Ryanair was founded in 1985 by Christy Ryan, Liam Lonergan and Tony Ryan, launching flights to Waterford (southeast Ireland) - London, with a smaller Embraer aircraft of only 15 seats (www.ryanair.com). But in 1991 a major restructuring occurred, led by Michael O'Leary, who took over the American model of low-cost Southwest Company, which involved operating flights from secondary airports where airport taxes were much lower than on major airports, creating a fleet consisting of a single type of aircraft and the decrease in the time spent by aircraft on the ground. While also taking advantage of the liberalization of European air transport market, the aggressive management of Michael O'Leary has paid off, so that up to the 10th anniversary of the company, the airline managed the transportation of a number of 2.2 million passengers per year.

This is the significant online publicity page on Internet for Ryanair, the first low fares airline, with an impressive profit amount of €193m, based on crews , bases, airplanes, routes and people to be transported.



Fig.1. The Ryanair Company Official Homepage



Welcome to Ryanair.

We are Europe's only ultra low cost carrier, and that means we bring you the lowest fares on flights to all of our destinations – and that's guaranteed.

From the moment Ryanair embraced a no-frills, low-cost, get-you-from-A-to-B model, we've pretty much revolutionized the air travel industry. We get you from A to B, and we get you there cheaper, and more reliably, than any other airline.

Ryanair made air travel accessible to the masses and opened Europe up for tourism in a way it had never been opened before. Even when our competitors saw what we were doing and arrived on the scene to get a little piece of the action – well, the company upped our game and lowered our fares.

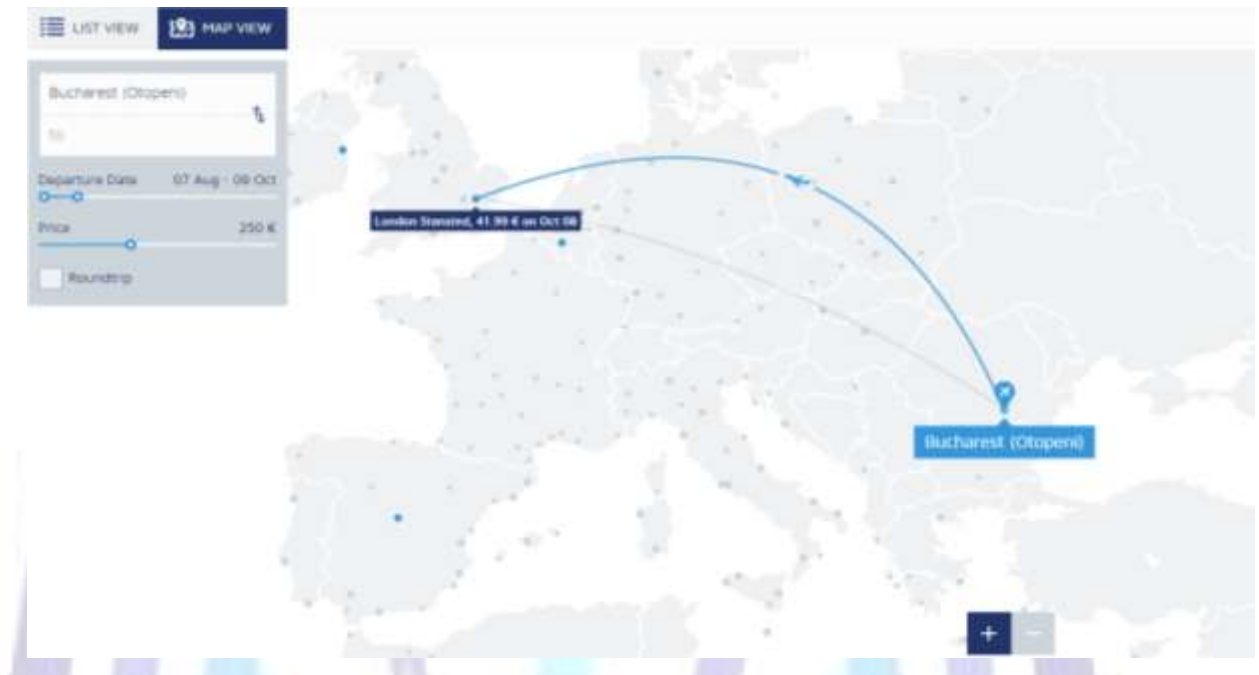


Figure 2. Ryanair's Fare Find Page

We see the menu, main page, about all directions and all information to be found in a quite limited space of internet, but with important benefits for the customers.

I said, at the beginning about the controversial case of Ryanair Company, two examples being enlightening in this respect: one is that of the live interview of M. O'Leary affirming that "it was a quiet news day", referring to the decision to charge the passengers with £ 1 when using the flight toilet. In fact, the attention was drawn to Ryanair, immediately following structural changes in the mode of check-in. And, the other one is the O'Leary's tactic to generate by all means, free publicity on the airline.

The increase of the Ryanair company size has been facilitated by the rapid development of the internet. A website has been created through which could buy their own airline tickets (e-ticket) in electronic format, thus completely eliminating commissions to travel agencies. Currently, almost all flight bookings are made exclusively on the internet, and payments are made by credit or debit card.

According to IATA (International Air Transport Association) World Transport Statistics, Ryanair ranks first worldwide in the number of international passengers carried – 81,395 thousands (2014 edition)-(www.iata.org).

The online publicity/advertising utilized by the low-cost airlines is basically the most efficient form of commercial communication, information, with certain specificity from other companies advertising online, given the desire to reduce costs.

Also, for the customers, generally speaking, we have to underline the fact that a low-cost flight can be as safe and comfortable as any other normal flight with any other company.

In our case, for example, I've chosen Ryanair to flight easily and cheaper from Iasi to München (or Belgium) via Venice. The links was better in Venice to take Ryanair and also the cost, per total, was less. And like me, many customers (passengers) have chosen the Ryanair services for direct flights, or being the best links between starting point and the arrival point (despite inconveniences which occurred in other segments of the company range of services). This activity



being done in few minutes, by observing the information, even under publicity and offers form, included on the online presentation of the company on the Internet.

In such cases, we may speak of a psychological mark on the most suitable air company, which provides convenient duration of transportation, accessible costs and other services at acceptable levels.

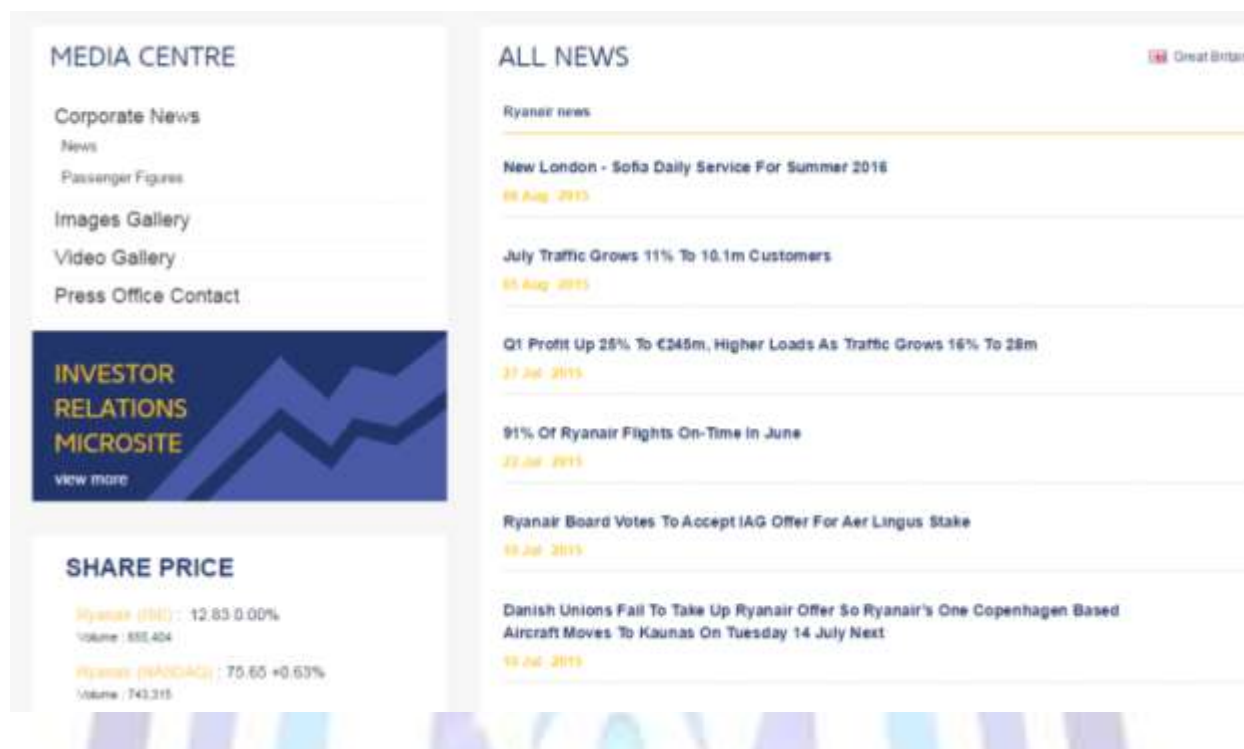


Figure 3. Ryanair's News Feed and Media Centre Page

Conclusions and discussions

The development of publicity on the internet, the modernization of the air transport infrastructure, the restructuring and the emergence of new airlines have major implications for growth and development. The future will make it possible to frame the mass media into the global World Wide Web opening the way to an ever increasing diverse and interactive online advertising.

It is very important for the future customer to know that a low-cost of the flight does not impact upon the safety of the aircraft and that flight safety is a number 1 (one) priority of the company!

Ryanair Company provide, perhaps, an aggressive advertising, getting money from different operations or actions, normally not being taxed, as we mentioned, BUT, by the rest of offers, opportunities and, above all, the most suitable links for transportation in due time for clients, even the customers using other low-cost companies are willing to get in the respective point of the route the Ryanair services.

The future of low-cost air transportation will be characterized by fierce competition, thus those companies that fail to truly implement the low-cost business model will not be able to stay in business. Such companies will be forced to use increasingly more the online publicity/advertising, to keep costs as low as possible. All the aspects treated in this paper can help attract new stable customers, let alone the existing customers. The targeted category is represented by the undecided potential future customers, people who maybe are afraid to fly and must fly for the first time and those who are passengers for the first time ever in their life, the youth, for instance. A 'youth' category on the low-cost airline website is of great use. These people will, probably, choose the company displaying the most user-friendly website. In a time when cutting costs has become a "must do", it is key to highlight the fact that the "low-cost" concept does impact only the ticket costs and not the aircraft safety or the professionalism of the flying crew or flying attendance.

In this paper we highlighted the context in which the online publicity has become so popular among the low-cost companies that have managed to significantly expand their number of customers. Only "clicking" on Internet, the consumers (passengers) have the possibility that, in a faster time, browsing the menu of the desired company, to find out the best options for their flights: links, duration, costs.

The low-cost airlines have revolutionized air transport from the ground up so that this trend will be further noticed, as the air travel becomes a cheap and fast transportation option for a larger number of passengers.



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