

# **Red Bull: An analysis of the success of Red Bull and their international marketing strategy**

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2015

Bachelor of Commerce Best Business Research Papers

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Original citation:

Sterling, E. (2015). Red Bull: An analysis of the success of Red Bull and their international marketing strategy. *Bachelor of Commerce Best Business Research Papers, 8*, 99–107.

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# Red Bull:

## An analysis of the success of Red Bull and their international marketing strategy

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Fall Semester 2014

### ABSTRACT

Red Bull GmbH is one of most successful energy drink companies and one of the most recognized brands in the world. The launch of the energy drink in Austria in 1987 was not only the introduction of a new product, but also the introduction of an entirely new product category. After experiencing success in Austria, Red Bull began expanding internationally, and today is sold in 166 countries worldwide. Red Bull has created a powerful global brand that has achieved incredible success by implementing a unique approach to business and marketing strategy and communications. This paper will use the marketing mix and 4-Ps (Product, Place, Price, and Promotion) to analyze Red Bull's innovative marketing strategy as well as primary research supplemented with secondary research to identify the key strategic features that have led the company to achieve success on a global scale.

### INTRODUCTION

On October 14, 2014, Felix Baumgartner, an Austrian skydiver, took a free-fall jump from 24 miles above the earth, breaking the record for highest altitude skydive, and became the first human to break the sound barrier. Not only was this a sensational stunt for mankind, it was one of the most successful marketing campaigns of all time. This event, also known as "Red Bull Stratos", sponsored by Red Bull, captured consumers' attention all over the world. The jump and Red Bull's logo was shown on more than 40 TV stations, 130 digital outlet, and more than 8 million people watched YouTube's live stream of the event worldwide (Chun, 2012). This event is just one of many examples that reflect Red Bull's powerful, innovative and non-conventional marketing strategy that has led them to become one of the most successful energy drink companies and one of the most recognized brands in the world.

Red Bull was founded in 1985, by Austrian businessman, Dietrich Mateschitz. Before establishing Red Bull GmbH, Mateschitz was the International Marketing Director for Blendax, a toothpaste and hygiene product company. In 1982, during a business trip to Thailand, Mateschitz tried a Thai beverage called "Krating Daeng" which was popular among truck drivers and laborers. After finding that this beverage had cured his jet lag, Mateschitz became fascinated with the product. He saw an entrepreneurial opportunity that became the inspiration of Red Bull. In 1984, Mateschitz partnered with the creator of Krating Daeng, Chaleo Yoovidhya, and brought the product back to his home country, in Austria. After making a few small changes and adapting the product to western standards, Red Bull was launched in Austria in 1987. The launch was not only the introduction of a new product, but also the introduction of an entirely new product category. Red Bull GmbH was the first company to introduce the "energy drink" into Europe and North America. After achieving great success in Austria, Red Bull began rapidly expanding internationally. Red Bull arrived in Singapore in 1989, Hungary in 1992, Germany in 1994, the UK in 1995, and overseas to the US in 1997. Today Red Bull is available in 166 countries and employs 9,694 people worldwide (Red Bull, 2014). Since the company was founded 26 years ago, more than 40 billion cans of Red Bull have been consumed and more than 5.3 billion cans of Red Bull were sold in 2013 alone (Red Bull, 2014).

However, this company is much more than just another beverage company. Red Bull is not just a product, but also a philosophy and lifestyle. Red Bull has created a powerful global brand that has achieved incredible success by implementing a unique approach to business and marketing strategy and communications. Red Bull's target group is not determined by a demographic, but more so by a state of mind. Red Bull consumers are active, dynamic individuals, with a common aspiration of living on the edge. In a rare interview, Mateschitz explains this strategy by stating, "we don't bring the product to the people, we bring people to the product. We make it available and those who love our style come to us" (McDonald, 2011). From the beginning, Red Bull, the lifestyle, and Red Bull, the product, have been equally important. This paper will use the marketing mix and 4-Ps (Product, Place, Price, and Promotion) to analyze Red Bull's innovative marketing strategy, as well as primary research supplemented with secondary research to identify the key strategic features that have led the company to achieve success on a global scale.

## **ANALYSIS**

### **The marketing mix and 4-Ps**

The Marketing Mix, also referred to as the 4-Ps, is a conceptual framework that identifies the principal marketing decisions managers face when configuring their marketing strategy to best fit customers' needs (The Economic Times, 2014). The marketing mix is a useful tool to analyze marketing strategy, because it effectively determines a product or brand's unique selling point, by identifying and analyzing each of the four major decision points, known as the 4-Ps. The 4-Ps include: Product, Place, Price, and Promotion. Product includes the specific features and benefits of the product; place includes where and how the product is sold; price includes setting the price in the market; and promotion includes the communication method of the marketing offer to the target market (The Economic Times, 2014). Using this framework, this paper analyzes Red Bull's marketing strategy in each category (product, price, place, and promotion) and how collectively they have contributed to the company's global success.

### **Product**

Red Bull Energy Drink is a functional beverage that "vitalizes [the] body and mind" (Red Bull, 2014). The functional effects of the product claim is to increase performance, concentration and reaction speed, improve vigilance, stimulate metabolism, and overall make you feel more energetic. Red Bull is meant to "provide wings whenever you need them" (Red Bull, 2014). The product's logo and slogan are recognized globally, and represents the high-energy and extreme brand of lifestyle Red Bull promotes. The slogan "Red Bull gives you wings", and the company logo, comprised of two red bulls charging against each other in front of a gold circle, symbolize attributes such as strength, power, and vitality.

Red Bull entered the market with only one product, Red Bull Energy Drink. Since then, the company has slightly expanded their product line, with small variations of their flagship drink. In Canada, the product line currently includes the original Red Bull Energy Drink, Red Bull Sugar-Free, Red-Bull Total-Zero, and recently the Red Bull Editions, which include three different flavors, cranberry, lime, and blueberry. For the most part, the product line is standardized globally, with only small variations between countries. The remainder of this section ('Product') provides information solely regarding Red Bull's flagship product, Red Bull Energy Drink. Information about other products in the product line will be indicated as needed.

The original product, Red Bull energy drink, is a simple formula containing five main ingredients: Caffeine, Taurine, B-Group Vitamins, Sucrose and Glucose, and Alpine Spring Water (Red Bull, 2014). One 250 ml. can of Red Bull contains 80 mg of caffeine, comparable to one small cup of coffee. Red Bull is very public and open about the "high quality ingredients" used in the production of the product (Red Bull, 2014). Their transparency regarding the production and ingredients contributes to the credibility of their product. The energy drink industry

is often criticized about the beverage's effects on health, and today's customers expect and reward honest companies. All other products in Red Bull's product line contain similar ingredients, with only small adjustments to each formula. All products contain the key ingredient, Taurine.

The product has been criticized for poor taste, and has been compared to "liquid sweet tarts" or "cough medicine in a can" (McDonald, 2011). However, this criticism has never been a concern for the company. Mateschitz explains, "it's not just another flavored sugar water differentiated by color or taste or flavor. It's an efficiency product, about improving endurance, concentration, reaction time, speed, vigilance, and emotional status. Taste is of no importance whatsoever" (McDonald, 2011). As stated before, their product focus is about the functional effects.

Red Bull's packaging is also a point of product differentiation. Red Bull is sold in a sleek 250 mL tall and slim can. This size differentiates the product from other canned soft drinks (which are typically around 350 mL) as a functional beverage. The can's simple and appealing packaging design includes a blue and silver background, with the red bull logo in the center. Red Bull's packaging is standardized globally, and only small modification such as the background colors change between different products in the product line.

## Price

Pricing is one of the most important elements of the marketing mix, as it directly affects product turnover. Pricing a product too high or too low can contribute to a loss of sales for the organization. Pricing also has the power to reflect the perceived quality of a product. Products priced relatively high in their market are typically perceived as higher quality, while products priced relatively low are perceived as lower quality.

Red Bull uses a premium pricing strategy. They have a strict policy of keeping prices relatively similar or high compared to the rest of the beverage industry. Prices are typically set about 10% above competing products (Farris, 2008). The price is set high to reflect the exclusiveness and quality of the product, and maintain a premium image. As Red Bull was the pioneer of an entirely new product category in the beverage industry, their premium priced product was used as a strategy to differentiate themselves from their competitors. Red Bull strived to be viewed as a "functional beverage", and superior to their competitors. In line with selling Red Bull as a functional beverage, and not just another flavored beverage the company charged up to four times per ounce more than the average soft drink, or approximately \$1.99 to \$3 per 250 mL can (Farris, 2008). Further, as Red Bull has the first-mover advantage in the market and substantially high market share, they have even more power and flexibility to set higher price points, without losing customers.

## Place

With a flexible branding positioning, "[providing] wings whenever you need them" (Red Bull, 2014), Red Bull is positioned, not just for a specific occasion, but for a range of different occasions, and is made available accordingly. As described on their website, suitable occasions where consumers may use the product include: on the road, whether it be for a business trip, spontaneous excursion, or vacation; during challenging lectures and study sessions; at intensive days at work; while doing sports; playing video games; going out day and night; or for people who need more energy regardless of the situation (Red Bull, 2014). Norbert Kraihamer, the company's global director of marketing and sales, explains:

*There are five user categories: students, drivers, clubbers, business people, and sports people. Forget about age, where do they shop and when do they use it? Well, drivers use it on petrol forecourts. Clubbers use it in pubs and clubs, students use it in pubs and clubs and around campuses. We say we only have two dimensions: people who are mentally fatigued and people who are physically fatigued, or both (Farris, 2008, pg. 3).*

In line with this branding position, Red Bull is made available wherever and whenever consumers may need the product. During Red Bull's initial launch, the product was available in targeted trendy clubs, bars, specialty stores to generate initial buzz. However, as the company grew, they moved towards accessing the mass-market. Today Red Bull is available at nearly any distribution outlet, including convenience stores, vending machines, and supermarkets. Red Bull strives to make their product available anywhere consumers may find themselves looking for that extra burst of energy.

## **Promotion**

Although Red Bull's standardized product, premium pricing, and extensive distribution strategy have played a crucial role in the success of Red Bull, perhaps the most interesting element of Red Bull's marketing mix is their approach to promotion. From the beginning Red Bull was never just a product, it has always been a lifestyle brand. This image has been created through their innovative promotion strategy. Mateschitz knew that the "success [of Red Bull] would be in how [they] market the product, as much as the product itself" (Iezzi, 2014). Red Bull has consistently aligned its brand with extreme sports, and action. Rarely is the brand ever directly correlated to the drink itself. The success of the company has been attributed to the brand and lifestyle that Red Bull has created, and the unconventional marketing efforts to promote this brand and lifestyle. Red Bull has developed a unique marketing and communication strategy to successfully engage their target audience through the use of content marketing.

By definition, "content marketing is a marketing technique of creating and distributing valuable, relevant, and consistent content to attract and acquire a clearly defined audience - with the objective of driving profitable customer action" (Content Marketing Institute, 2014). Content marketing is a method of communication with consumers that strives to deliver information that makes the buyer more intelligent, without pitching or selling a product. The purpose is to attract and retain customers by creating relevant and valuable content with the intention of changing or enhancing consumer behavior, and ultimately influencing consumer decisions during the time of purchase. It is an ongoing process, which is most effective when fully integrated into a company's marketing strategy (Content Marketing Institute, 2014). Red Bull is a perfect example of a company who has created an amazingly rich brand image through the use of content marketing.

The scope of Red Bull promotional approaches is overwhelming. This paper will focus on four of the major promotional tools Red Bull has successfully used and/or created to broadcast their messages and to engage consumers. These four promotional tools include sampling, events and sport teams, athletes, and the Red Bull Media House.

## **Sampling**

When Red Bull was launched in 1987, Mateschitz used sampling as a tool to build initial buzz, brand awareness, and to convince consumers about his new product and product category. Mateschitz persuaded students to throw Red Bull parties in unusual locations and paid them to drive to university with a giant can of Red Bull strapped to the tops of Minis and Beetles (Gschwandtner, 2004). Today, Red Bull still uses sampling as a promotional approach. Red Bull's sampling team, known as the "Wings Team", plan exciting missions to help energize consumers in multiple environments. On the company's website, the goal of the Wings Team Members is described as "[driving] product trial, [winning] new users, and [introducing] existing users to new consumption occasions" (Red Bull, 2014). Wings Team members show up virtually everywhere at the most unexpected moments. Whatever the occasion, whether it be a visit to a library, sports game, festival, or a party, the Wings Team strives to help consumers understand that Red Bull can be useful in many different situations. Wings Team members sport the Red Bull logo on all of their missions and aim to educate consumers about everything Red Bull. Sampling and the Wings Team's memorable missions differentiate Red Bull from its competitors and effectively promote the energetic brand.

## Events and Sport Teams

Red Bull does not just sponsor events; they create their own new, innovative, and image-building events. True to the brand's thrilling personality, most of these events involve extreme sports and athletes performing tremendous stunts. Besides the event itself, these events always gain additional publicity through pre- and post-event parties and extensive media coverage (Gschwandtner, 2004). To provide insight on exactly how extreme some of these events are, a few examples include the Big Wave surfing event in South Africa, where the world's best surfers challenge some of the biggest and most radical waves on the African continent (some waves reaching up to a striking 45 feet in height); Deep Sea Diving without Oxygen in Monaco, where in 2003 a record was broken by a deep sea diver, by descending to a depth of 123 meters in one minute and 30 seconds and swimming back to the surface unaided in three minutes and 22 seconds; and Red Bull's Flugtag, where competitors test their outrageous, human-power flying machine creations, while launching themselves off a 30-foot ramp into the air into a body of water below. Some events, like Red Bull's Flugtag, draw crowds of 50,000 people or more (Gschwandtner, 2004).

Further, unlike other companies, instead of solely sponsoring sporting teams, Red Bull actually owns a variety of enterprises. Red Bull owns four professional soccer teams including the New York Red Bulls, Red Bull Salzburg, Red Bull Brazil, and RB Leipzig. They also own a NASCAR team and two Formula 1 car-racing teams. As Red Bull is a private corporation, it is publicly unknown if these events and sport teams generate a profit, however the business value that is created in the form of brand awareness contributes to the company's success.

## Athletes

As well as sponsoring extreme events and sport teams, Red Bull also sponsors approximately 600 professional athletes all over the world (European CEO, 2013). However, unlike traditional sponsorship arrangements, Red Bull does not have written contracts with any of their athletes. Alternatively, Red Bull offers its athletes a verbal agreement to "support" them in achieving their dreams, and views their relationship more so as a "friendship" (McDonald, 2011). Red Bull supports athletes who accurately represent their brand, and as a tradeoff, these athletes proudly sport Red Bull's logo and put their products on public display. By seeking out and sponsoring extreme sport professionals with strong cultural influence who are living the extreme lifestyle that Red Bull promotes, the company is better able to attract their target audience to the brand and further promote their claim that Red Bull can improve athletic performance.

## Red Bull Media House

Of their promotional approaches, Red Bull's boldest marketing effort was the launch of their own media company. In 2007, Red Bull Media House, an umbrella brand of Red Bull, was launched aiming to perfect Red Bull's image and brand (European CEO, 2013). As described on their website, Red Bull Media House is "a multi-platform media company with a focus on sports, culture, and lifestyle. [They] offer a wide range of premium media products and compelling content across media channels as diverse as TV, mobile, digital, audio, and print, with core media offerings that appeal to a global audience" (Red Bull Media House, 2014). The aim of the Red Bull Media House is to "create content and operate media platforms with direct consumer impact" (Red Bull Media House, 2014). Red Bull Media house is truly unique in that not only are they distributing TV shows, magazines, movies, books, music and more, but these are also all their own creations. From creating, to producing, to distributing, Red Bull Media House owns the entire project. Mateschitz believes it is the "most important line extension so far". As a major content provider, it is [Red Bull's] goal to communicate and distribute the 'World of Red Bull' in all major media segments" (McDonald, 2011). Since 2007, Red Bull Media House has released a men's active lifestyle magazine, The Red Bulletin; an in-house record label, Red Bull Records; a digital video service, Red Bull TV; and a documentary film about snowboarding, The Art of Flight, just to name a few. Similar to Red Bull's sport teams, Red Bull Media House is not yet making a profit, however Mateschitz believes

“in value terms, they are” (McDonald, 2011). The consumer engagement created by Red Bull Media house attracts and acquires the attention of Red Bull’s target market, and ultimately results in the loyalty of consumers.

## **Global vs. Local**

Red Bull’s unique marketing strategy, illustrated previously, has been a global success. Red Bull has created a global brand that is consistent in uncountable markets. Today, Red Bull is available in 166 countries, with little recognizable variation in their strategy between countries. Although there are numerous risks in creating a global brand, Red Bull’s unique strategy has facilitated their ability to gain global recognition that holds a consistent position in every market it serves.

In today’s world, international companies are faced with the constant challenge of finding a balance between a standardized global strategy and a customized local strategy. In the past, globalization, which aims to maximize the standardization and integration of marketing activities across markets worldwide, was the exemplar in international business. However, due to differences in culture and norms worldwide, standardization led to consumers to feel disconnected and unhappy with this strategy of business. Today, the focus of international business has shifted towards a “think global, act local” concept. This means, adopting a consistent strategy when selling internationally (a global strategy), while adapting a tactical approach to targeted local markets (a local approach) (Mahoney, 2013). Although for most international companies and global brands, a “think global, act local” concept has been the best practice approach and key to success, Red Bull’s experiences in expanding internationally and their expansion strategy is slightly different.

Despite the immense global success Red Bull experiences today, they have not always been successful in their approach to expand internationally. During their growth into the United Kingdom in 1995, Red Bull initially looked to engage in the suggested “act local” concept. They decided to change their traditional market entry strategy to what they believed better suited the UK consumer and existing sport and energy drink market. First, they marketed Red Bull as a “sport drink” instead of a “functional drink” as they had in Austria (Farris, 2008). Second, rather than initially pursuing a word-of-mouth and buzz-generating strategy, and slowly moving into mass-market channels, Red Bull immediately sold their product through large distribution channels such as supermarkets (Farris, 2008). Red Bull also chose a use a new slogan in the UK market, “You should never underestimate what Red Bull can do for you”. Despite their efforts to adjust their existing strategy to best fit the consumer base in the UK, their efforts were misunderstood, and the expansion was a failure. By the end of 1996, Red Bull’s market share in the UK energy-drink market was less than 2%. The experience was referred to as “an expensive disaster” (Farris, 2008). Disappointed in their failed market entry strategy, the existing UK management team was replaced, and the company attempted to enter the market for a second time. During their second attempt to enter the UK market, the new management team returned to the company’s traditional market entry strategy, which had proven successful in Austria. The company repositioned Red Bull as a functional energy drink, and replaced the existing slogan, with the original slogan, “Red Bull gives you wings” (Farris, 2008). Following these changes, Red Bull began experiencing success in the UK market that continues today. Despite the risks of multinational companies engaging in a global approach, this occurrence suggests that Red Bull was more successful implementing a standardized global strategy, than adjusting their existing strategy and pursuing customized local solutions.

## **Global Strategy**

Perhaps the reason Red Bull is able to succeed on a global scale is because their global marketing strategy and the brand they have created is totally unique compared to other companies. Red Bull is not just a product, but also, a philosophy and lifestyle, and therefore universal when it comes to application. Red Bull stands for energy, extreme sports, and vitality. These core brand characteristics hold true to every market Red Bull serves and they do not change country to country. Using Mateschitz concept of “[bringing] people to the product”, not

“[bringing] the product to the people” (McDonald, 2011), the company appears to be focusing on interacting with their consumers by communicating their brand and targeting a certain type of person, not a particular country, culture, or market. In all the markets they cater to the same crowd and use the same product, pricing, placement, and promotion strategies. Their global marketing strategy in combination with their standardized product line, allows Red Bull’s symbols, promotions, and advertising to appear the same globally. Navigating through their online website, besides the obvious difference in language, one will find that each country’s local website is almost identical. In terms of product, brand, position, personality, look, and feel, Red Bull appears to have created a global business (Aaker & McLoughlin, 2010).

### **Local Strategy**

While Red Bull has proven successful through maintaining a consistent global marketing strategy, although not as clearly evident, there are suggestions that the company still considers local needs. As found in the career section of the company’s website, a job posting titled “National Culture Marketing Manager” is a position within the company specifically dedicated to individual countries that Red Bull operates in to manage cultural needs. The responsibilities of a National Culture Manager include: “translating the global culture marketing strategy into a national strategy and creating locally relevant and innovative programs; building and maintaining a strong network of artists and creative Opinion Leaders; [developing] new concepts and ideas; [evaluating] the effectiveness and impact of existing programs; [aligning] closely with [the] business entities; and contributing his/her work to the overall national marketing and business goals in line with the set international culture marketing strategy” (Red Bull, 2014). Although Red Bull’s standardized product and brand appears identical worldwide, this job posting suggests that Red Bull is willing to respond to local needs and maintain relevance in all markets they serve. Red Bull’s extensive variety of international athlete sponsorships and international events also provides consumers with more opportunities to connect and associate with the brand.

### **Survey**

In order to further explore the reason for Red Bull’s international success, I conducted a small research study aimed to test the extent to which Red Bull uses a global marketing strategy based on international brand perception and awareness. To do so, I created a short survey that was filled out by a random sample of Canadian and Austrian students between the ages of 19 and 27. I distributed the survey to 40 students in total, including 25 Austrians (11 males and 14 females), and 15 Canadians (5 males and 10 females). By distributing the survey only to Canadian and Austrian students, I was able to specifically gain insight to analyze if the marketing strategies or perceived brand image differed between Canada and Austria. Though limited in scope, I believe the information gained through the survey results adds valuable information to my research, as well as provides additional insight to the existing research conducted about Red Bull’s current global marketing strategy.

The survey began by asking demographic questions including the respondent’s gender, age, and country of origin. These questions were asked to ensure that there was representative sample of Red Bull’s typical consumer base and an equal sample size of Canadian and Austrian respondents. Next, the survey asked about familiarity with brand on a scale of 1-3, from extremely familiar to not at all familiar. This question was asked to determine the overall success based on brand awareness, as well as to discount respondents who were unfamiliar with the brand. Lastly, the survey asked a simple open-ended question, “describe Red Bull in three words”. This question was asked to gain insight on the respondents’ perceived brand image of Red Bull, as well as identify any clear differences in answers between the two cultures. These questions were strategically chosen in an effort to gain additional data to support the information provided in this paper and supplement the analysis.

The results of this survey emphasized that Red Bull has extremely high brand awareness internationally. From the 40 students who completed the survey, only two respondents answered not at all familiar, when asked about their familiarity with the brand. The survey also showed that Canadians and Austrians seem to perceive the Red

Bull brand similarly. From the 38 respondents, who were either moderately or extremely familiar with the brand, two of the three most popular words to describe the brand were the same between the Canadians and Austrians. The most popular words for both the Canadians and Austrians respondents were “energy” and “unhealthy”. The third most popular word was “wings” for the Canadians, and “sports” for the Austrians. Respondents for the opposite countries used both of these words, but not as frequently. Other words that appeared multiple times from respondents from both countries were “innovative”, “extreme”, “involved”, “events”, “popular”, and “global”. All of these descriptive words are consistent with core brand characteristics of Red Bull, and further verify the effectiveness of their global marketing strategy.

## **CONCLUSION**

Red Bull has created a powerful global brand that has achieved incredible success by implementing a unique approach to business and marketing strategy and communications. Red Bull’s standardized product, premium pricing, extensive placement, and most importantly, engaging promotional strategies have led the company to become one of the most successful energy drink companies and one of the most recognized brands in the world. Recognizing the importance of engaging with consumers, Red Bull has successfully managed to create a globally standardized product and brand that consumers all over the world are able to connect with.

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