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THE CHALLENGE OF NEUTROX IN THE BRAZILIAN HAIR CARE MARKET

O DESAFIO DA NEUTROX NO MERCADO DE *HAIR CARE* BRASILEIRO

EL DESAFÍO DE NEUTROX EN EL MERCADO BRASILEÑO DEL CUIDADO DEL CABELLO

ABSTRACT

Dilemma: The case presents the dilemma of Neutrox's Marketing and Innovation Manager, who needs to strengthen the relationship with a younger audience throughout Brazil, in the mission of rejuvenating the brand, without leaving aside the democratic character of the company and its knowledge and penetration in a higher age group.

Educational Objective: The main objective of the Neutrox case is to encourage students to reflect on possible solutions so that the brand in question can solve its problem of growing sales through implementation in the national territory.

Contextualization: The case portrays the journey and professional challenge experienced by Stephanie Lozano, Marketing and Innovation Manager at Neutrox. The protagonist faces a highly competitive market, which contains global players with very high investment capacity, but which at the same time has good opportunities for performance and profitability.

Main Theme: The investigation is a theoretical reflection that uses the teaching case methodology, which creates conditions and situations that require real managerial resolutions on the part of students, to experience the difficulties and consequences of their actions when managing a business.

Audience: The case can be applied to professional/technical courses, as well as undergraduate and postgraduate courses that focus on Administration, Communication and Advertising, Advertising and Marketing.

Originality: The work highlights how the case provides tools for undertaking practice-based teaching that favors the improvement of the teaching-learning relationship, helping to train excellent professionals and future business leaders.

Keywords: Teaching Case. Neutrox. Business Management.

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RESUMO

Dilema: O caso traz o dilema da Gerente de Marketing e Inovação da Neutrox, que precisa estreitar o relacionamento com um público mais jovem, em todo o território brasileiro, na missão de rejuvenescer a marca, sem deixar de lado o caráter democrático da empresa e seu conhecimento e transposição em uma faixa etária mais elevada.

Objetivo Educacional: O caso da Neutrox tem como objetivo principal levar os estudantes a uma reflexão sobre possíveis soluções para que a marca em questão possa resolver sua problemática de ampliar as vendas através da execução no território nacional.

Contextualização: O caso retrata o percurso e o desafio profissional vivido por Stephanie Lozano, Gerente de Marketing e Inovação da Neutrox. A protagonista enfrenta um mercado altamente competitivo, que contém players globais com altíssima capacidade de investimento, mas que, ao mesmo tempo, possui boas oportunidades de atuação e rentabilidade.

Tema Principal: A investigação é uma reflexão teórica que utiliza a metodologia do caso de ensino, criando condições e situações que exijam resoluções gerenciais reais por parte dos estudantes para experienciar as dificuldades e os desdobramentos de suas ações ao administrarem um negócio.

Público: O caso pode ser aplicado em cursos profissionalizantes/técnicos, assim como na graduação e na pós-graduação que tenham como escopo a Administração, a Comunicação e Publicidade, a Propaganda e o Marketing.

Originalidade: O trabalho evidencia como o caso proporciona ferramentas para o empreendimento de um ensino baseado na prática que favorece a melhora da relação ensino-aprendizagem, auxiliando a formação de profissionais de excelência e futuros empreendedores.

Palavras-chave: Caso de Ensino. Neutrox. Administração.

RESUMEN

Dilema: El caso presenta el dilema de la Gerente de Marketing e Innovación de Neutrox, que necesita fortalecer la relación con un público más joven en todo Brasil, en la misión de rejuvenecer la marca, sin dejar de lado el carácter democrático de la empresa y su conocimiento y penetración en un nivel superior. grupo de edad.

Objetivo Educativo: El objetivo principal del caso Neutrox es incentivar a los estudiantes a reflexionar sobre posibles soluciones para que la marca en cuestión pueda solucionar su problema de crecimiento de ventas mediante la implementación en el territorio nacional.

Contextualización: El caso retrata el recorrido y desafío profesional vivido por Stephanie Lozano, Gerente de Marketing e Innovación de Neutrox. El protagonista se enfrenta a un mercado altamente competitivo, que contiene actores globales con altísima capacidad de inversión, pero que al mismo tiempo tiene buenas oportunidades de rendimiento y rentabilidad.

Tema Principal: La investigación es una reflexión teórica que utiliza la metodología de enseñanza del caso, la cual crea condiciones y situaciones que requieren resoluciones gerenciales reales por parte de los estudiantes, para experimentar las dificultades y consecuencias de sus acciones al administrar un negocio.

Audiencia: El caso puede aplicarse a cursos profesionales/técnicos, así como a cursos de pregrado y posgrado que se enfoquen en Administración, Comunicación y Publicidad, Publicidad y Marketing.

Originalidad: El trabajo destaca cómo el caso proporciona herramientas para emprender una enseñanza basada en la práctica que favorezca la mejora de la relación enseñanza-aprendizaje, ayudando a formar excelentes profesionales y futuros líderes empresariales.

Palabras clave: Caso de Enseñanza. Neutrox. Administración.



THE TEACHING CASE

Introduction

The teaching case in question (problem case) goes from the beginning of Neutrox's activities, which date back almost five decades, through its acquisition in 2011 by Flora - a company focused on the hygiene and beauty industry, belonging to the J&F Group holding company (which contains brands such as Friboi, Seara, Swift, among others) - to the challenges faced by Stephanie Lozano, Marketing and Innovation Manager, in the face of a deeply competitive and exciting Brazilian hair care market.

The protagonist of this article, a professional with more than ten years of experience in marketing (her area of training), has a great appreciation for working with both branding and the development of new products. The professional is faced with the need to boost Neutrox's brand awareness and, therefore, generate a desire to buy, in order to increase sales through implementation in the national territory. The choice of Brazil is in line with her area of expertise and the prospect of commercial expansion.

The challenges posed by the context of the existence and history of a pioneering brand in its category (moisturizing) help us to understand the difficulties imposed by the market, especially in one with so much complexity and competition, such as that aimed at beauty and personal well-being - but which also has family and community aspects, since the process of self-care relates to other members of the family and friendship circle that the person attends - as observed and experienced within hair care.

Bringing this marketing context closer to the geographical circumstances that need to be observed, Brazil is a continental country with more than 200 million inhabitants, all of whom have different origins, characteristics, outlooks and hairstyles. In addition, it should not be forgotten that each of these aspects has its own adversity, such as the dispersion of goods over a large area, where there are limited means of transportation, as well as its conditions. To show the difficulties more clearly, let's take as an example the different ways in which individuals understand the world and act, which in turn can affect the use of products, meaning that in some parts of

the country there is a need for greater explanation of a product's functionalities and application methods than in others.

In order to delve more precisely into hair issues, hair types have been segmented by market so as to be able to take a careful look at multiple consumers and their distinct needs. The types are divided into four groups: (1) straight, (2) wavy, (3) curly and (4) frizzy, each of which is duly segmented into three subcategories (ABC) (L'Oréal Paris, 2021; Meu Cabelo Natural, 2023; Natura, 2021). In this way, type 3 hair, known as curly, can be subdivided into compartments 3A (tends to be the most hydrated strand, but with greater weight, leading to a slight loss of curl definition), 3B (more wavy roots and well-defined curls that are more "closed" than type 3A) or 3C (well-defined and closed curls, with a shrinkage factor, which can be formed from the root and tend to be drier). In time, all these peculiarities of the market will be duly explored in the course of the work.

Despite the existing complexity, the possibilities are interesting, given that Brazil is one of the main countries in the world in terms of the number of sales of hair care products, with prospects that in the coming years the numbers will grow even more and exponentially, according to Euromonitor International (2023).

The construction of a leader

The role of the leader is constantly mentioned and highlighted at different times in a person's life. In this way, family, social and cultural exposure presents us with an individual who permeates over others. Films, series, cartoons, books and videos to which we are constantly subjected explore these different ways of leading, like an organic garment, in which the person who wears it has developed it together with the effort of their birth or genetic lineage.

The perception of inheritance, which is passed on exhaustively, is mistaken because it doesn't present leadership within a framework of existence that is consistent with reality. After all, there are people with more aptitude to perform certain functions, such as athletes or visual artists - not that this becomes an absolute certainty.



To bring this closer to the present study, let us now take a look at the journey of the leader responsible for the brand studied in this case. Having completed her degree in Marketing and Sales Management and Planning at Anhembi Morumbi University in the last month of 2010, Stephanie Lozano (2023a, 2023b), a person who was determined to make the most of her abilities, still had a long way to go before she reached the leadership position she wanted so much and which seemed innate to her.

Stephanie's professional journey began as a Marketing Assistant at the R Cunha Group, which quickly changed in 2011 when she worked as a technical trainer at TAIFF, where she helped the sales team with new ways of presenting the product to the consumer. Always attentive to new challenges, she continued her career as a Marketing Analyst at Restoque, when she focused greatly on the luxury product market, until, in 2012, she was given an opportunity to join the JBS group, specifically to work at Friboi. Within the company, she was constantly promoted, rising from Marketing Analyst to Marketing Specialist and then Marketing Coordinator. Outside the company, she continued her personal development by taking an extension course at Insper focusing on Branding - Strategic Brand Management.

Her climb to the top could not be a mere coincidence, as she has worked intensively to build Friboi into a brand that occupies a considerable amount of the consumer's mind, an experience and action that have won the Top of Mind, Marketing Best and Marketing Sustainability awards for two years in a row. Her career and experience allowed Stephanie to hone her skills and, as a result, she was considered ready to take on a new challenge as Marketing Manager at the J&F holding company's beauty and hygiene division, Flora, more specifically with the Kolene and Karina brands, thus entering the hair care market, a place she maintains, however, within another brand belonging to the group: Neutrox.

From Stephanie's trajectory, we can see how the construction of a leader goes beyond their natural abilities for the strategic management of operational and human actions, and also involves an accumulation of knowledge from practical experience. The professional experienced to polish her characteristics and move towards a new goal, which consists of generating greater relevance and brand presence that goes beyond existing knowledge, accessing a younger audience and promoting greater value for the brand and sales growth throughout Brazil.

Building a company

To put the brand that will be studied in this case into context, Neutrox has been - and still is - on the minds of many women throughout Brazil, in some of them literally. The brand was developed 50 years ago, more precisely in 1974, when it acted as a forerunner in the hair moisturizing process, maintaining this role exclusively for a long time.

Its transparent cylindrical packaging, through which it was possible to see the yellowish cream inside, with the reddish-orange writing and cap (Figure 1), marked different generations, especially those who lived in the 1970s and 1980s. Its inception ended up displacing the wide variety of cream rinse that fought for consumers and were used to detangle hair more easily during styling.

**Figure 1**

Classic Neutrox packaging in the 1970s and 1980s, before the brand was reformulated



Source: Adapted from Garcia (2018).

However, life is made up of “ups and downs” - an expression commonly associated with the movements of ocean waves - and it was no different for the product, which saw new competitors emerge on the market, while at the same time it became increasingly attributed to consumption on beaches and in swimming pools, as they are considered environments that promote greater dryness of the hair strands and, therefore, they need more intense moisturizing to remain healthy and beautiful.

In 2006, the Coper Cosmetics Industry sold its personal care division - which contained Neutrox, Karina, Kolene, among others - to the Bertin Group in an attempt to solve the financial difficulties that had plagued the company for years (Equipe Istoé, 2021; Velluto, 2007). This group, in turn, developed and promoted its acquisitions until 2011, when it decided to focus more on its more exponential activities, such as energy and infrastructure, selling the hygiene and hair division to the holding company J&F (Olivon, 2011). The products were incorporated into the port-

folio of Flora, a company dedicated to personal care line of business.

Flora, which turns 44 in 2024, has 14 brands (Minuano, Francis, Neutrox, Albany, OX Cosméticos, Brisa, Assim, Phytoderm, Kolene, Karina, Mat Inset, Capi Vida, Hydratta and No Inset) and 300 products. In addition to an extensive industrial structure, with factories in Itajaí (Santa Catarina) and Luziânia (Goiás) and different distribution centers, which, in addition to the cities already mentioned, are in Itapeva (Minas Gerais) and São Paulo (São Paulo). In this way, the company has the infrastructure and knowledge of the market in which it operates, due to decades of experience, always striving to combine innovation and quality in order to deliver a pleasant and special experience when applying its products.

In 2017, Neutrox was relaunched and has been constantly evolving ever since, with changes to its packaging (Figure 2), communication with shoppers and consumers - using personalities such as singer and TV host Ivete Sangalo and gymnast and Olympic medalist Rebeca Andrade - as well as expanding its product range (Neutrox, 2023).

Figure 2

Neutrox classic line reformulated in 2017



Source: Izquierdo (2017).

The brand in evidence, as explained above, has a place in the minds of consumers, a factor desired by many companies. However, the Brazilian hair care market is extremely competitive, with varieties and multinationals vying for the public's prevalence and loyalty.



The hair care market in Brazil

Brazil is the fifth largest country in terms of land area and the sixth largest in terms of population (Worldometer, 2023). This information not only reveals different aspects, but above all highlights the existing market potential, a perception that is enhanced by a minimal understanding of the different nuances that make up this unique and peculiar country.

The nation in question was formed as a result of the contact between different communities - in this respect, it is worth remembering that this contact did not always occur in a cordial manner or within an equal correlation of strength and perspective. Thus, in the territory now called Brazil, the so-called original peoples (Guajajaras, Terenas, Kaiowás, Ianomâmis, Guaranis, among many others) already existed here before Portuguese colonization and still live here, as well as migrants from other nationalities, such as the Portuguese, Italians, French, Germans, Japanese, Poles, Lebanese and Syrians, in addition to the different ethnic groups brought from the African continent. This context created an environment rich in diversity.

This diversity also manifests itself in countless types of hair, curves and textures. As a result, both in terms of identifying and better understanding the particular needs of each curvature and in marketing terms, hair is commonly divided by specialist companies and consultants into four different types, which in turn are categorized into three sub-types, as already briefly mentioned.

The first category (1) corresponds to straight hair: among its variants, there are those that are very straight and fine, with little volume (1A), as well as those that mix thicker and thinner strands (1B) and, finally, the thicker and shinier ones (1C). The second category (2) encompasses wavy hair: there are those with an almost straight appearance, fine, with a slight curvature (2A), those that are more voluminous and have more tortuosity (2B), and those that have a thicker texture and are more defined than the previous ones (2C). Following the flow, the third type (3) is curly: there are those with a more open, looser look (3A), those with wavy roots, with closed and symme-

trical curls (3B), and those with a thinner, closed shape (3C). The fourth and final group (4) is frizzy hair, which can be more voluminous and retain its texture even when wet (4A), while others have a slightly thinner thickness, with smaller curls (4B), or, finally, with more voluminous aspects, without a specific definition, and with a greater tendency to the dryness factor (4C).

The multiplicity evident on every walk along the beaches, streets or squares is expressed through the abundance of possibilities for action. Thus, the plurality of Brazilians exposes a hair care market with different means of contact. However, life is full of challenges and, obviously, such a prosperous and powerful sector would be watched with affection and ambition by many companies.

Brazil occupies fourth place in the world hair care market, a position that stands out in the eyes of multinationals that control a large part of the business, both nationally and internationally, such as Unilever, Colgate-Palmolive, P&G, L'Oréal, Coty and Johnson&Johnson. In this scenario, Neutrox faces a competitive market with major players. At the same time, we can't forget the existence of local competitors which sell to a loyal and more limited audience, but who present themselves as an opportunity with great potential.

In addition, Neutrox sees itself as democratic and therefore dedicated to all types of hair, as shown above. Its audience ranges from women aged 15 to 55, who are very busy and who are looking for practicality and cost-effectiveness, aspects which underline its generalist and pluralistic concept. The brand can also be seen through its 53 SKUs (Stock Keeping Unit, which is the variety of items in its portfolio), divided into seven lines (Classic; SOS Curls; Xtreme; Ultra; 24 Multibenefits; Aqua; and Sea and Pool), which have treatment creams and combing creams as their most profitable products.

Its positioning - in other words, the way it places itself and the way the shopper and/or consumer perceives it - is expressed through moisturizing, through which it tries to invest in the idea that the good times in life (a moment at the bea-



ch or pool, or other fun occasions) end up damaging the hair and that Neutrox is the best way to repair it, so that the person can enjoy these occasions much more, as the care is already guaranteed. However, widespread communication ends up making direct and effective contact difficult, since there is a risk that, in trying to communicate to everyone, there will be no real dialogue with anyone, since people's ways of relating, perceiving and interacting change according to the generation to which the individual belongs.

Does an advertisement have the same access, contact and impact on a 16-year-old as it does on a 45-year-old? Does a young girl want to be placed in the same group of people as her mother or grandmother? The answers to these questions shed some light on the challenges faced by Neutrox, meaning that interesting points, such as 100% vegan products, contained in packaging with the "I'm green" seal - technology developed by Braskem, which makes plastic from sugar cane rather than oil - may not reach their full potential with an audience that sees value in these elements and would be willing to pay more for their presence.

In terms of marketing and communication, Neutrox is mainly present on Instagram, which it uses to present and teach how to handle and apply its products. At the same time, it seeks to take advantage of influencers and personalities known to the general public, such as singer Ivete Sangalo, in May 2021, and Olympic medalist gymnast Rebeca Andrade, at the end of 2021 (Figure 3). In turn, the advertising helps to reinforce the brand's image of breadth and democratization, since they represent audiences in different age groups.

Figure 3

Enveloping action on a train in São Paulo promoting Neutrox campaign starring Ivete Sangalo and Rebeca Andrade, brand ambassadors in 2021



Source: Grandes Nomes da Propaganda (2022).

It seems that, as part of its strategic planning, the complete portfolio is present on Cash & Carry shelves and is accessible to B and C socio-economic groups, social classes in which it purposely aims to operate and solidify itself. An expansion into other sectors, such as perfumeries throughout Brazil, could imply a re-signification of its brand awareness, as well as a possible gain of new consumers and, ultimately, an increase in its turnover.

Therefore, considering all the context discussed, Neutrox has the challenge and Stephanie faces the dilemma of overcoming the brand knowledge it has - which is rooted in a population that lived through the 1970s and 1980s - in order to access a younger audience, without dissociating its positioning in terms of hydration and its democratic approach, while at the same time having to promote all the lines in the wide geographical space of Brazilian territory.



TEACHING NOTES

Educational Objectives

Using the challenges faced by Stephanie and Neutrox in a competitive market with a wide range of products and competitors, the main objective of the case presented is to lead students to reflect on possible solutions so that the brand in question can solve its problem of increasing sales through execution in the national territory. Thus, students will have to take into account the need to increase relevance, knowledge and value for a young audience, while also expanding understanding of all the brand's lines, without giving up their democratic quality and focus on hydration.

The specific objectives of the case are: (i) establish and set the drawing up of a strategic plan defined in three parts, based on the teaching case model defined and carried out by Rocha, Galetti and Motta (2022) - 1st. Diagnosis, 2nd. Strategy and 3º. Action plan; and (ii) show the alleged real impact of its actions through the contribution of the income statement (DRE), reinforcing the need for a critical and reasoned analysis of its choices and decision-making.

Data sources

The information and data that led to the production of this teaching case (Roesch, 2007) was gathered from the internet from academic, journalistic and business sources. In order to produce the author's background, her CV was used.

In the excerpts that explored the creation of the company and the brand's journey with greater precision, information obtained from Flora's own website (2023) was observed and used, as well as articles written in widely circulated newspapers and magazines, both regional and national, in addition to an academic article that also focused on Neutrox and its performance in the national market (Antonacci & Cordeiro, 2011).

To compose the final excerpt, data from surveys carried out by consistent sources such as Euromonitor International (2023) and Worldometer (2023) were applied, as well as organic knowledge of the market expressed on the websites of major companies in the hair care sector, such as L'Oréal Paris (2021) and Natura (2021).

Activities/Questions for application and discussion

1) Taking ownership of the context:

At this point, students should become aware of the hair care market situation in Brazil.

1.1 They could be asked: What is the size (in numbers) of the Brazilian hair care market compared to other countries? Does the country follow the same international logic as regards the proportion of shampoo and post-shampoo consumption?

1.2 Students should do a Google Trends search on moisturizing to see which places in Brazil have the highest demand, as well as their search peaks, to understand if there is any correspondence between this rise or fall with the time of year (e.g. summer, before celebrations, etc.).

2) Deepening the market knowledge:

It is important for students to gain a deeper understanding of the audience they intend to reach. In this way, they can use qualitative research, especially the ethnography.

2.1 Students should seek out and observe examples of ethnographic research carried out on other occasions, in order to understand how it works methodologically and the possibilities for using the results found.

2.2 Students can adapt the ethnography to a virtual environment, setting up a netnographic study. Thus, they should seek out and enter communities on social networks (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok, WhatsApp, Telegram, among others) that focus on hydration.

2.3 An "Observation Diary" should be used, from which the research group or individual should capture and analyze the daily posts of the community in question.

2.4 After a few weeks of observation and analysis, it will be possible to build an empathy map, which will show what the individuals belonging to the group think, feel, hear, see, say and do. These elements will help build the buyer persona.

3) Building the SWOT matrix:



3.1 After the previous steps, one can ask them: How do the information gathered on the Brazilian national and regional market, the netnographic research and the built buyer persona make it possible to build the matrix?

Table 1. right below, provides a suggestion for the organization of the classes.

Table 1

Suggestion for the organization of the classes

Stages	Proposed Activities	Objective of the Stage	Time of the Activity
Diagnosis	1. Preliminary research on reliable websites	Students should be able to synthesize and observe the main problems and opportunities in the case	Two classes
	2. Critical Reading of the teaching case and class discussion		Two classes
	3. Lecture on the SWOT matrix and preparation of the netnographic survey		Ten classes
Strategy	4. Preparation of the SWOT	Students should be able to list the fronts of action that should be prioritized by the business and to outline the strategic pillars	Four classes
	5. Drawing up the strategy		Four classes
Action plan	6. Lecture on the possibilities for action (action menu)	Students should be able to draw up an action plan that responds to the posed challenge	Two classes
	7. Drawing up the action plan		Five classes

Source: Prepared by the authors.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND ANALYSIS

First element

The first element defines the structure to be used within the “Teaching Notes”. Therefore, a strategic plan divided initially into three parts (Diagnosis, Strategy and Action Plan), as defined by Rocha, Galetti and Motta (2022), helps to better undertake the actions to solve the challenge presented to the students, as it didactically segments what needs to be done, allowing for a continuous and clear progression of what to undertake in order to solve the defined issue, fore-

seeing its possible developments.

Second element

When addressing the challenges faced by Stephanie, the territorial action to be undertaken must be taken into account, therefore a second element that must be taken into account is trade marketing, which works to adapt the company’s strategy, structure and operation to the dynamics of the distribution channels, with the aim of better and in the most profitable way possible serving its customers and, through them, the consumers (Motta, Santos & Serralvo, 2017). Students should be made aware of the contribution that trade marketing has to offer when it helps to implement trade marketing mix plans by channel, in order to measure the results in each one of the different channels, as well as devising specific strategies for each one of them.

Another interesting aspect to work on is the intermediation that trade marketing carries out between the marketing and sales teams. As far as GTM (go-to-market) is concerned, one needs to work on the strategic aspect as a comprehensive plan that describes how a company intends to take its products or services to the market and how it intends to gain a competitive advantage from this. It is well known that, in order to be successful, any go-to-market strategy must take into account the company’s target audience, the market needs, the competition, the company’s unique value proposition and the way the products or services will be priced and positioned in the market. All these elements need to be worked on with the students, from defining distribution and sales channels to marketing and advertising strategies (Farris, Bendle, Pfeifer, & Reibstein, 2006; Friedman, 2022). Finally, it should be emphasized that having a strong brand is of great importance, but in order for this to be underlain and perpetuated, the product must be available in its respective distribution channels.



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