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Introduction

Engagement with costumer is a key part of business success. Firms need to decide which customers to target and simultaneously, plan on how to reach and win new costumers. So, CEOs of companies are always looking for opportunities to use consultation to improve these connections. Walther Strong, as a small and agile corporation, has been faced with a similar situation.

Walther Strong produces adhesive products. Its main focus is solving problems relevant to house builders and the construction industry. Thus, the main portfolio products include tapes, specialist adhesives and a range of other task-specific solutions (Project brief, 2019).

Although Walther Strong has a vast network to sell directly to businesses involved in the manufacturing, assembly and installation of buildings, the management team is seeking for new methods to foster merchant sales and improve engagement with potential users. As such, they are looking to re-assess and improve its engagement strategy.

Team A (International Strategists), as part of a collaborative project, took a substantial in-depth research to find the main problems with Walther Strong's strategy. This research, which includes academic views, observation and analysis, found that main corporation issue of Walther Strong is the marketing strategy, that can be solved by adapting digital platforms and applications to reach more customers and build a deep connection with its current and future users. The following report has a detailed view of the research and solutions conducted by the International Strategists team.

The Business

Walther Strong & Company Limited started activity in 2014 (LinkedIn, 2019) in the United Kingdom. The business is based off Carlby, Lincolnshire in England and it was founded by Fred Dunn, its present managing director. Its mission is to make life easier for professionals. Currently, the company manufactures premium task specific tapes, developed specifically for professionals. These tapes have several applications ranging from construction to arts & crafts and DIY installations. However, their best-selling product, *Cleanroom Construction Tape*, is developed for construction professionals and, as such, the company has arguably a higher focus on the construction industry.

Since it is their best-selling product, and as recommended by the client, there will be a special emphasis on this product. This means that any market strategies suggested for products and not the company will be in reference to this product, *Cleanroom Construction Tape*. As such, in accordance with the company, the team believes this product is innovative and aims to compete through differentiation and not it's cost. The product has attributes of easy tear ribbing and no residue. The packaging tells in specific what the product does, with easily recognizable icons (Martin, 2015). These icons are also presented in the packaging of the remaining range of products. Hereafter are presented the icons displayed in the *Cleanroom Construction Tape* package.

Figure 1 - Icons in Cleanroom Construction Tape package (source: Walther Strong & Company Ltd, 2019)

Walther Strong sells its products not directly to the final consumer but through a series of merchant stores. According to the management, small and medium contractors rely on the merchant workers as a source of knowledge (referred to as “champions”). As perceived by the company, the *champions*’ advice is what determines if a contractor buys or not their products. As such, and as displayed in the following figure provided by *Walther Strong*, the merchant is the important link that enables *Walther Strong*’s products to reach the final consumer.

Figure 2 - Value chain according to Walther Strong (source: Walther Strong & Company Ltd, 2019)

Observations

The project began with a presentation given by the managing director, Fred Dunn. The company representative explained his expectations for the brief, how the market works, the innovative features of their main product (*Cleanroom Construction Tape*) and, the relationship they have with their clients. Through the explanation, the client highlighted the role of merchants in distributing the product. These stores sell materials and tools required for construction. Therefore, they oversee reselling the products to contractors that go to those stores to acquire the supplies needed.

The company’s website provides a map to guide their potential consumers on where to buy their products — five merchants that are located in London where selected. The goals of visiting these places were to analyse how the product is displayed, how the physical space was distributed and, what interactions happen between buyers and employees.

The merchants listed below were selected:

- B&Q Leyton - E10 5NH
- Home Build Supplies - E5 8AY
- Brewers Decorator Centres - E3 4JN
- Acrelane Timber - SW2 5TN
- London Decorators Merchants - SW2 5QN

Based on the observation in merchants, the team decided to divide the findings into the following categories: Type of merchants, Market Categories, Counter Assistants and, Product Placement.

TYPE OF MERCHANTS

The team identified three types of merchants.

SUPERSTORES: Ample warehouses where customers can find all products related to construction. They can find different brands for every product in each category. These stores are a part of big enterprises that have multiple locations in different parts of the country.

CHAINS: Medium-size stores that have multiple locations in the city. The same brands are sold in the stores, and they follow specific guidelines on product placement, pricing and store layout.

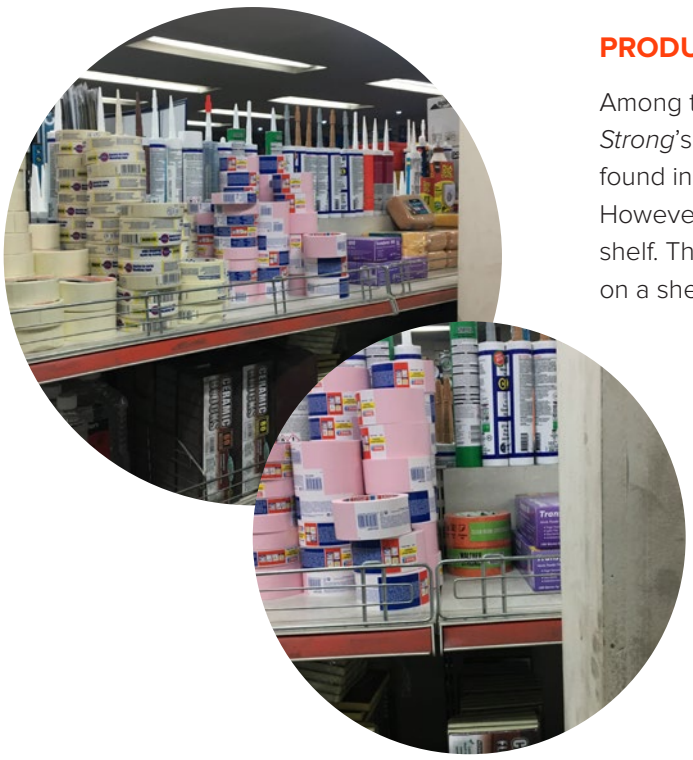
INDEPENDENT: Merchants that have only one store and the owner or the management team decide on what products to sell, how to distribute items in the store and control customer service. Even though these merchants sell the same kind of products as the previously described types, they tend to have one or two brands for every product. Therefore, customer choices are limited.

MARKET CATEGORIES

These stores follow the same structure of supermarkets; products are grouped by categories on aisles. Superstores and chains merchants have specific guidelines on the layout of their stores; they follow similar patterns. However, in independent merchants, product placement varies from store to store, and no recognizable pattern was identified.

COUNTER ASSISTANTS/CASHIERS

During the observation it was evident that in chains and independent merchants, which are the main clients of Walther Strong, the employees of the store were behind a counter. Their main task is to check-out products. Consequently, when clients ask for advice on any product, they will first finish the check-out process for other clients, and then they will attend to these asking customers. A vital aspect of this interaction is those counter assistants will provide suggestions on products, but the clients will have to go to the aisles to find those items themselves. Any given solution needs to keep in mind that the counter limits the mobility of employees.



PRODUCT PLACEMENT

Among the five merchants explored, *Walther Strong*'s Cleanroom Construction Tape was only found in one store (Acrelane Timber - SW2 5TN). However, the product was almost hidden in the shelf. The aisle only had 2 units of the product on a shelf, which was full of competition products that were displayed in bulk. On top of that, the available units were behind a pillar inside the store. It is crucial for the company to take action on supervising how their products are displayed.

Analysis

SWOT ANALYSIS

SWOT analysis is a technique that enables to match the company's strengths to the opportunities present in the environment and to eliminate or overcome the weaknesses while minimizing the threat. It emerges as an effective tool to understand the company's positioning in the market and allows highlight the features that the company should build on. The analysis is made from an internal point of view (strengths and weaknesses) as well as an external one (opportunities and threats). Hereafter is presented the SWOT analysis performed by the team for *Walther Strong*.

Figure 3 - SWOT Analysis for Walther Strong

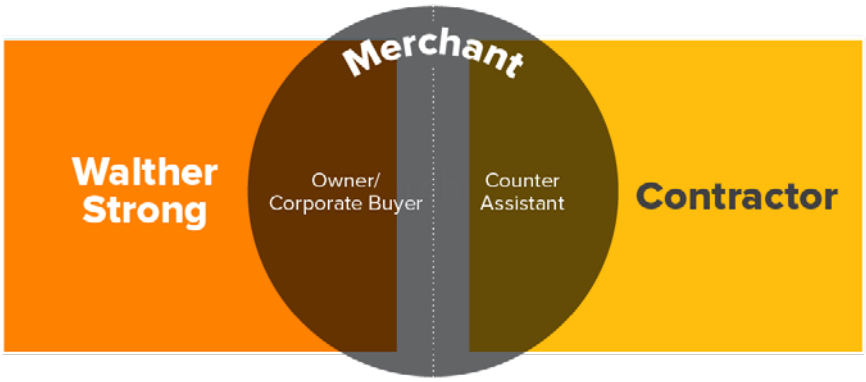


Figure 4 - Value Chain Analysis

VALUE CHAIN ANALYSIS

After the observation period, it was understood by the team that the value chain is not depicted to its best in the diagram provided by *Walther Strong*. As such, there was a need to better present the actors in this value chain in order to realize how to address the problem presented. In the diagram displayed hereafter, it is visible a clear separation between *Walther Strong* and the contractor, given that they do not engage in any way during the sale process. At the same time, the merchant is the responsible to establish the connection between the company and the contractor, given that it is the one ultimately selling the product. Also, after observing how merchant stores operate, the team concluded that there is also a separation inside the merchant itself. One entity is represented by the owner/corporate buyer who oversees procurement decisions and the other represented by the counter assistant responsible for selling the products displayed in the stores.

Theoretical Fundamentals

TRADITIONAL MARKETING

Marketing emerges as a field that provides powerful tools to better address a market. Traditionally, marketing follows a four-step cycle approach of analysis, planning, implementation and control. In the context of this project, the first two phases appear to be more relevant with a bigger emphasis on marketing planning. It is in the planning stage that the concept of marketing mix emerges.

Marketing mix presents itself as “the set of tactical marketing tools that the firm blends to produce the response it wants in the target market” (Kotler et al., 2017). It consists of the factors that the company can manage to impact the demand for its products. These factors can be grouped into four variables such as *product*, *price*, *place* and *promotion*. The referred conceptual framework is known as the 4P approach. It was first developed by Maccarthy and Perreault in Basic Marketing: A Managerial Approach (1960) and it is still one of the most widely used marketing approaches.

The first category – product – refers to the combination of goods, and its features, that the company supplies to the market. Other concepts such as packaging and further aspects related to the brand identity can also be encompassed here. Price is the amount of money customers should pay to attain the good and also every

notion concerning payments. Place refers to the business actions that make the good available to the customer which can include everything from logistics, inventory and market choice to shelf placement. The last P – promotion – are the activities that the business performs to persuade their target customers into buying their products. It covers everything from advertising to sales and public relations.

The last notion of promotion strictly correlates to the concept of brand equity. As per Kotler et al. (2017), brand equity "is the differential effect that knowing the brand name has on customer response to a product and its marketing." As such, it measures the ability of a business to capture customer loyalty and to appear on costumers' minds when thinking about a range of products (i.e. smartphones - Apple). Therefore, not only is important that a brand positions its products accurately but also incurs in actions that improve the position of the brand name in the current and potential customer's mind.

WALTHER STRONG AS AN SME

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are non-subsidiary, independent firms which employ fewer than 250 employees. Walther Strong & Company Limited as an SME, has got clear potential advantages that can be exploited to create a successful business strategy (Rhodes, 2018; *WALTHER STRONG & COMPANY LIMITED - Overview*, 2019)

SMEs have clear communication channels through their companies, making them flexible and allowing them to fast adapt to customer and market demands. They can assure that by always limiting bureaucracy (Blogs on Tap, 2016). At the same time, it is possible to create closer relationships between Walther Strong and customers or merchants, which can make them build active, reliable engagements (OECD, 2000).

Since Walther Strong is an SME and does not produce on a mass scale, they can take more risks and be more receptive to new ideas to develop and expand (Blogs on Tap, 2016; WALTHER STRONG & COMPANY LIMITED - Overview, 2019).

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Open to new business ideas to better detect and take advantage of small market niches as more prominent companies would not have an interest in covering such small markets (Dominguez, 2017).

DIGITAL MARKETING

Founders of small companies (especially non-tech firms) usually put their primary focus on finding customers through the traditional forms of advertising (e.g. Posters, Billboards or coupon mailers). Since they believe that their product/service is good enough to sell itself, they do not rely on new marketing methods, like digital marketing, to sell their products.

Although this strategy worked well in the past, today, with conventional daily technologies, there is an easy and reliable way to grow the business. Small firms have to consider the vast majority of online marketplace seekers and engage in digital marketing strategies to seize this majority.

Digital Marketing is the way to exhibit products and marketing for them using internet-based digital technologies, through any digital tools. It uses different channels that can create, accelerate, and transmit product value from producer to a consumer terminal, through digital networks (Key, 2017).

In practice, digital marketing's main focus is on the digital presence of organisations using different forms of company websites, mobile apps and social media pages that collaborate with online marketing methods such as search engine optimisation (SEO), social media marketing, online advertisement, email marketing (Chaffey, Chadvik, 2019) and affiliate marketing. The most relevant elements of digital marketing are discussed hereafter.

SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) concerns the on-page and off-page design principles that can increase a search engine ranking. Design elements and content play a leading role in SEO, which usually does not need significant investment (Ledford, 2015). Based on Google Starter Guide (2019), there are more than 100 elements that can influence the ranking of a specific website. On the other hand, SEM, or search engine marketing, is not just SEO. To be precise, search engine marketing is about ways to ensure that the firm's website ranks as high as possible in search engine results. This means that firms should also employ other tactics, such as using a paid advertising program or investing in content strategies to get a higher ranking. (Ledford, 2015)

SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING

Social media marketing is the use of social media platforms (such as Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, tweeter and YouTube) to promote a product or service (Felix et.al, 2017). Firms can use social media built-in data analytics tools to track the progress and engagement of social media ad campaigns. Businesses, even small ones, can target different stakeholders via social media marketing, including current and potential customers, current and potential employees, and the general public. Social media marketing as a strategic marketing tool includes the management of marketing campaigns, content creation strategies, and broadcasting the firm's product or services, culture and tone.

CONTENT MARKETING

Content marketing (CM) is one of the essential parts of digital marketing (Pulizzi, Barrett, 2009). CM focused on generating, publishing, and distributing content for online targets. The main aims of CM are expanding customer base, attracting attention and generating leads, increasing online sales and increasing brand awareness. Content marketing attracts potential customers and transforms them into users by sharing valuable free content. CM helps firms creating sustainable brand loyalty and creates a willingness to purchase products in the future.

AFFILIATE MARKETING

Affiliate Marketing is a method in which a business rewards affiliates for each visitor or customer brought about by the affiliate's channels. (Brown, 2009) Moreover, Affiliate Marketing refers to using influencers in the industry. The influencer has the power to affect the decisions of potential customers. Thus, digital marketing experts are using these methods (with all its subsidiaries) to reach more customers in digital platforms and make a valuable connection with users of products or services.

Solution

MARKETING STRATEGY

The team believe that in order to achieve and incur in engagement strategies, other issues should also be addressed. As such, the 4P marketing framework emerges as an efficient strategy to address current market opportunities supported by company's strengths. At the same time, it is believed that it will allow to improve and solidify market positioning as well as increase the commercial value that originates from the consumer's perception of the brand name. Hereafter are stated the strategies that the team suggests the company applies in order to achieve the referred goals.

PRODUCT

Walther strong should stage strategies to make their product stand out. The team suggests this to be approached from two fronts.

PRODUCT NAME

Give the product a memorable descriptive name to work the best with the audience language. A name that becomes on the tip of everyone's tongue to remember when they visit the store or search online. The title should explain what the product main uniqueness and function is to reduce a customer's perceived risk, which is the uncertainty of buying an item. At the same time, use the advantage of the brand name to create a complimentary iconic product name to make it catchy to customers. To further illustrate, it can rename Cleanroom Construction tape to CRC and make it stand out as a deferential from other products being sold (Huang, Schrank and Dubinsky, 2004).

CLAIMS

Tone down the claims for the application and features, even if they are authentic, as it can have the opposite effect. Highlight the essential features for the product to show its unique selling point that differentiates it from other products and ensure it is used at a believable level. At the same time, since the company offers several products, they should be classified in the portfolio. Each should explicitly indicate its functionality and strength using the feature icons instead of wording, when concerning product differentiation (Mayler, 2017).

PRICE

When defining the price for a product, there are several factors that should be taken into consideration. The team found important to address the following factors: competition, nature of the product, customer price sensibility, marketplace and discounts.

In terms of competition, Walther Strong's Cleanroom Construction Tape positions itself as a differentiated product, not fighting for cost leadership. However, avoid surpassing 200% of the price of the benchmark product in this segment. WS should aim for a premium price given that it presents a premium product but must take into consideration the nature of the product.

When referring to construction tapes, they play a role of complementarity when it comes to performing any given construction job. This means that when costumers seek for a roll of tape, they do not view it as the primary product of their purchase but, instead, follow the purchase of other materials such as wood or paint. Therefore, the customer will be reluctant to pay a premium price for the product, especially if they do not realize the benefits of the product and believe it to be overpriced. As such, we believe the costumer presents a large sensibility to the variation of prices within this segment.

At the same time, the team believes that different prices should be allocated for each marketplace, i.e. merchant stores or online. Also, a pricing strategy should be outlined for discounts both for merchants and final consumers.

PLACE

From the research conducted by the team, it was observed that product shelf placement plays an important role in the customer purchase decision. Thus, the business should aim to gain some control over in-store product placement, by conducting deals with store owners/managers. There should also be a follow-up of this process by regularly checking shelf placement in several stores. The team also suggests that the company tries to obtain counter stands for some merchant stores.

Furthermore, according to Walther Strong's website, there are several stores in London which currently commercialize their products. However, by observation the team verified that this information is not accurate. As such, it is of major importance to align the information displayed in the website with the reality of stores where the products are currently available. This accuracy of information should direct customers to the correct points of sale where Walther Strong's products are available.

PROMOTION

Due to the time limitations and the academic context of this project, it was not feasible to elaborate a complex strategy on every component of the 4Ps strategy. Therefore, the team decided that it was suited to provide greater emphasis on this section. The following activities aim to enhance the communication with Walther Strong's clients and final consumers about the benefits and features of the products.

DIGITAL PRESENCE

Although Walther Strong has the main channels of digital marketing, in digital presence, it has negative and positive issues that can be described as follow.

Website

Walther Strong can be found in the digital environment through its website on waltherstrong.com., a well-chosen domain that follows firm identity. However, the website structure has some technical problems:

- The website's site map was not developed properly, so there are multiple duplications in page contents that can profoundly harm user experience and SEO. For instance, the content of Construction and Decoration pages are the same. They should be combined or differentiated;
- The main keywords do not appear on the phrases of content (Duct Tape - Non-residue tape - masking tape - washi tape - double-sided tape);
- The news section should be changed to article blog on the website (discussed further on content marketing);
- More content should be added in the main page;
- For better ranking, Title Tag should be changed from "Walther Strong - Problem-Solving Tapes & Adhesive Solutions" to "Walther Strong – Construction duct Tapes & Adhesive" In case its focus is on the duct tapes;
- For better ranking, the meta description should be changed from "Walther Strong - Task-Specific Tapes. ... If you're a professional you're using Walther Strong™. Previous. Next. Tapes that get the job done. Every time." to "Duct Tape with easy tear and no residue";
- Images do not have alt attributes (61 images are missing the attribute);
- Some pages on the website are not secured (e.g about us);
- Total web-page size is too large (5.5 MB) and should come under 3.5 through different methods (e.g optimizing images or changing server or host provider);
- The website has not been optimized for mobile users;
- The chat platform in the website is not responsive. This platform should be changed to Gupshup with name, email input and message and;
- Champion products should be put in main page of website.

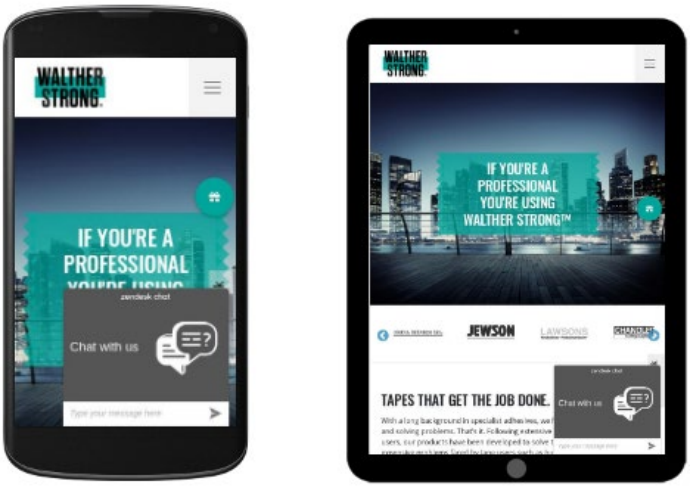

Figure 5 - Non-responsive mobile view of the website

Content Marketing

Despite having descriptive videos of different products on YouTube and its website, it seems Walther Strong does not have a rigid content creation strategy to reach potential users. The following suggestions can act as a main road map for text content development in Walther Strong.

- Use google search suggestion, google keyword suggestion, webmaster, etc to find the most searched topics;
- Link from tail to head;
- Use tags, but avoid overuse;
- Avoid duplicate content;
- Remove old SEO content;
- Deal with orphaned content;
- Use the minimum of 500 words in every blog post and;
- Use keywords in heading.

YouTube channel

The current YouTube channel has 61 videos and 8 subscribers. It shows that videos did not reach potential users. For this channel, the team proposes the following suggestions:

- Prepare professional videos from the production line and process;
- Introduce products in a more professional way;
- Follow YouTube's video specifications;
- Invest in good recording equipment;
- Grab attention early;
- Shoot longer videos;
- Schedule live-streaming events;
- Collaborate with an influencer;
- Organize videos into playlists;
- Fill out YouTube profile;
- Optimize channel to attract followers;
- Add hashtags to video descriptions;
- Produce eye-catching thumbnails and;
- Optimize videos for SEO to get views.

Amazon presence

Although Walther Strong has its products in amazon, it seems that no optimisation occurred in this platform. So, the following guidelines can help Walther Strong sell more products in this platform:

- Target the country and audiences;
- Make Amazon SEO-friendly to get high ranking in Amazon search results;
- Use Keywords for proper placement;
- Optimise product texts for Humans and Machines for better results;
- Insert product images: several photos in high resolution;
- Ask affiliates to place product reviews that can nurture positive feedback;
- Complete questions & answers for the products that can fill missing amazon marketing information;
- Complete product information, which is crucial for filter navigation and;
- Choose a strong price strategy since competitive pricing refines ranking.

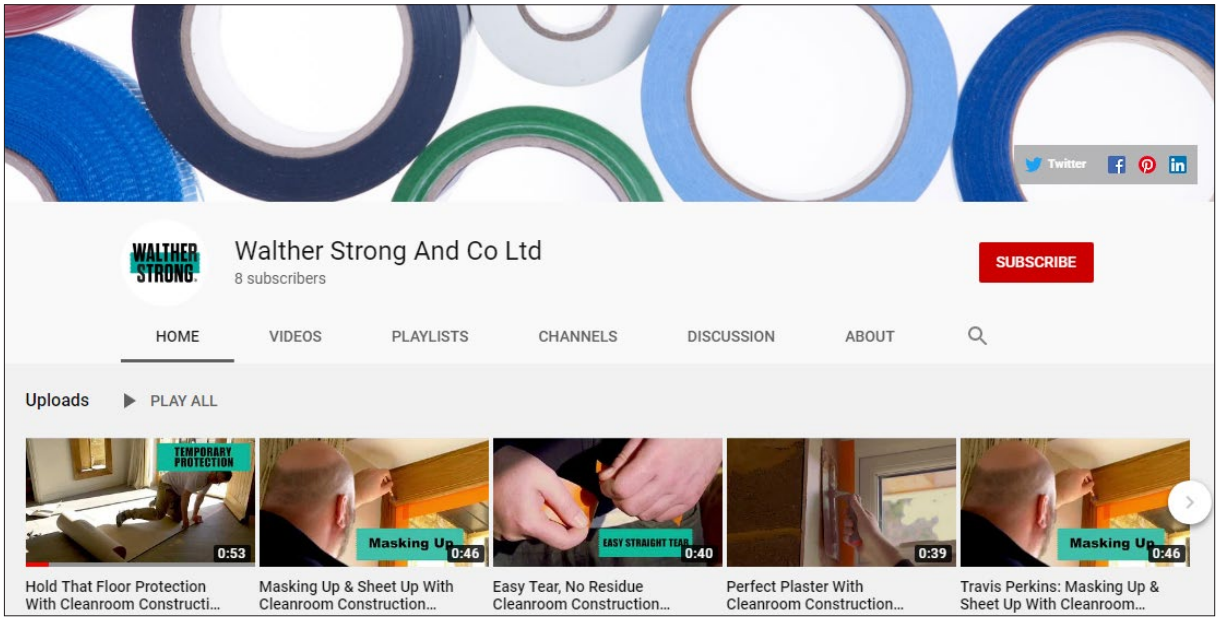

Figure 6 - Current YouTube page

Figure 7 - Current Amazon page for liquid masking tape

Affiliate Marketing

As mentioned before, affiliate marketing is one of the most reliable ways to reach potential users. In the first steps the following strategies can help *Walther Strong* start the affiliate marketing alongside other marketing methods:

- Choose the proper affiliates;
- Attract sales with coupons, deals, and promotions;
- Leverage the power of niche influencers and;
- Build a robust affiliate network by developing an application.

Figure 8 - Contractor App diagram

CONTRACTOR APP

During the brief presentation, the client explained how the company developed a digital solution that rewarded merchants based on their sales. However, information on the platform and the system was scarce. As a result, the team considered a new solution that effectively connects and engages Walther Strong with their final consumers, their current clients (merchants), and opens the possibility to attract more clients in the future. This idea was named "Contractor App". This solution is explained in the following diagram.

Insights

The Contractor App was developed by considering the following findings:

- Tape—and construction tape— is a complementary product that competes and blends with all the products being sold in merchants' aisles. Hence, customers usually by an array of different products when they visit stores;
- Due to the number of brands and products available it is impossible for counter assistants to know and remember all the characteristics and uses for every single product. On top of that, their main task is to check-out products, so giving advice or recommending a specific product becomes a secondary task and;
- The retail construction market is considered to have low digitalised. *Walther Strong* has the opportunity to create a platform that gathers different products and brands under the same ecosystem to become an industry leader and promoting their products effectively.

Description

The Contractor App is a digital platform that gives discounts and promotions for people buying retail construction goods. App users will be guided to specific merchants depending on the benefit that they want to access. Only merchants that sell Walther Strong products are eligible to sponsor or advertise their promotions in the App.

Key partners

Merchants can promote discounts based on their stock or seasonal specials. Also, partner companies that produce and distribute products on merchants can advertise and give promotions for their portfolio items. App users will know through a map which merchants are eligible to access the specific discount.

The app will show users only the merchants that sell *Walther Strong* products. Therefore, if a brand or a company is selling on several stores, only the ones affiliated with a *Walther Strong* merchant will be displayed.

Benefits

With the previously explained solution, the company will achieve the following objectives:

- Bring potential customers only to merchants that sell *Walther Strong* products, increasing the possibilities for clients to buy their products;
- Promote *Walther Strong* products to final consumers, merchants and industry's companies. *Walther Strong* will also have the opportunity to become an industry leader by enabling the increase of sales for critical partners;
- Merchants that currently do not sell *Walther Strong* products will become interested in having these products on their shelves and;
- Collect data and information on potential clients and understand their buying habits.

Conclusion

Walther Strong offers a wide variety of innovative, premium, and task-specific tapes with a focus on making life easier for professionals and solving their complex problems. To obtain the organization's best benefit, by solidifying market positioning as well as strengthening the relationship with current and future users, team A (International Strategists) advises that the company applies two main strategies. First, a plan for the company's in-stores and online presence, together with a marketing strategy to achieve a sustainable competitive lead. Second, the team propose an app called the Contractor, which is a digital platform that gives exclusive deals and promotions for customers buying retail construction goods. By adopting these proposals, the team is confident that *Walther Strong* will secure a substantial market share.

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