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STRATEGIES IN MEDIA PLANNING

Peter KRAJČOVIČ

ABSTRACT:
Strategies serve as a means for achieving set objectives and goals. By selecting and applying the right strategies, many business entities have become successful on the market; they have been able to beat their competitors and face a number of risks. Therefore, business organisations may consider these strategies as a key to their successful establishment on the market. However, there are no clear definitions of such strategies; an exact 'manual' for selecting and implementing the ideal strategy is also hard to determine. That is why, in practice, we often come across a combination of several types of strategies. However, their common features leading to market success include the focus on thorough planning and detailed knowledge of the market. Addressing the issue of media planning, we have to take into consideration so-called media strategies or strategies of media planning. The main purpose of these strategies is to fulfil the set media objectives. It cannot be denied that media play an important role in the processes of marketing communication. They function as bearers and distributors of advertising messages which are to be delivered to the target audiences, helping the advertisers achieve their goals as well as – especially if we place emphasis on the broader contexts – related communication and marketing tasks. Therefore, we may see the media as communication tools and significant elements of advertising or communication campaigns. Selection of suitable media space is thus the basic principle of media planning and an inherent part of media strategy. The article focuses on the significance, role and position of strategies in the process of media planning; the author defines the basic types of media strategies and the main criteria for selecting the appropriate media strategy.

KEY WORDS:
management, media, media planning, media strategies, strategies

1 Introduction

The media market, similar to any other type of market, can be defined as the communication environment that includes all existing and potential customers. Taking into consideration the individual preferences of these customers, various types of media, their characteristic aspects and the environment which they operate in, we are able to identify the specifics of the media market and media marketing. Although the attributes of media market and media marketing differ depending on the particular types of media, they generally share a few common features. First of all, media marketing attributes are influenced by the economic and cultural environment within which the media operate; however, they are also affected by the nature of various kinds

of media products as well as by the market in which they are established and implemented practically.[1] These exact specifics are also applicable to media strategies, i.e. strategies functioning within the media market.

The particular media, their recipients and any other subjects contributing to communication processes in the sphere of selling advertising space or producing media content may be defined as subjects of the media market. These subjects mainly include media institutions, advertising agencies and other business entities that represent potential advertisers.[2]

It is important to note that nowadays advertising revenues are continuously declining – along with the total amount of financial resources invested in media advertising. Due to the limited marketing budgets and thus decreased advertising expenditure, advertisers and media agencies (acting on behalf of their clients, buying media space in their name) behave rather cautiously when doing their media planning.[3] Today the emphasis placed on efficiency of the expenditures – that are associated with both the media planning and purchasing media space – is much greater than ever before. On the other hand, preferences and interests of the target audiences related to selecting particular media (and the diverse ways individual audience members use specific media contents) are also changing dynamically. Carefully selected media strategies therefore constitute an essential prerequisite for successful functioning on the consumer market and advertising media market.

2 Defining the Term 'Strategy'

Using a rather simplified terminology, any 'strategy' may be defined as a way of achieving set objectives. However, in a bit narrow sense, we could see it as the way of planning, as the management of all business activities which are designed and implemented in order to accomplish set objectives. Scholarly literature distinguishes between several definitions of the term strategy and considers various perspectives of its essential meaning. The variety of academic opinions also represents the complexity which is associated with involving strategies in business management as a whole.

However, most of the authors focusing on the given issue unanimously claim that 'strategy' is the basic tool for fulfilling objectives and it is thus closely related to business management. Lesaková understands the term strategy as "a tool companies use to define their long-term objectives, select procedures for their fulfilment and allocate resources for their achievement."[4] Jedlička sees strategy as "a specific management approach connected with strategic activities in corporate practice."[5] He also defines strategy as "a set of rules or principles which help drive the processes and activities designed to fulfil a particular objective, or alternatively as a way of planning and managing these activities."[6]

Kusá and Pizano point out that the role of a strategy is to "ensure a real match between the company's objectives and resources and its constantly changing market opportunities."[7] Štefánik and Laššák characterise strategy as "a plan or direction of an activity which is of vital importance, omnipresent within the whole company and permanently active throughout the whole organisation."[8] Schendel and Hatten introduce a more detailed definition of the term and claim that "strategy represents the basic goals and objectives of the organisation, the major programmes of procedures chosen to reach these goals and objectives, and the major patterns of resource allocation that are used in order to adapt the organisation to its market environment."[9] Slávik perceives strategy as a "united, comprehensive and integrated plan, which is designed to reach the basic goals and objectives of a company."[10]

Scholarly writings also offer a more systematic explanation of the term strategy with emphasis placed on the interconnection between strategies and other activities within the enterprise. Lesáková[11] mentions so-called hierarchical, eclectic and comparative definitions of strategy. The hierarchical definition of strategy is based on seeing strategy as a part of certain hierarchy: corporate mission – corporate objectives – strategies – tactics. In this regard, the term strategy is defined as the process through which a company achieves its objectives and fulfils its mission. Any strategy is thus determined by the company, i.e. its management.

The eclectic definition, however, views formulating and designing a strategy as a process that results from daily monitoring of activities on the market. According to this definition, strategy is a manoeuvre which aims to eliminate competition; a certain type of behaviour, position and perspective. The comparative definition describes strategy as all activities through which a company reacts to opportunities and threats in the external environment by using its strengths and eliminating its weaknesses.

3 Basic Types of Strategies and the Process of Strategic Management

Depending on their hierarchical arrangement, we may distinguish between several types of strategies: (1) corporative; (2) entrepreneurial and (3) functional. In accordance with the given types, we also distinguish between the corporate strategy that is related to the ways corporate objectives are achieved; entrepreneurial strategy or the so-called strategy of strategic entrepreneurial units, i.e. independent business activities which the enterprise engages in, and, finally, functional strategies that include various corporate functions such as finance, marketing, human resources, production, etc.

The main difference between the particular types of strategies is best displayed at the management level, where the main decisions on the future direction of the enterprise or its parts are made. This relationship between the particular types of strategies is hierarchical; it is thus very important to find the ideal balance between the strategies applied at the lower levels of management and the global strategy of the whole enterprise.

Strategies are an integral part of the strategic management; they define the strategic direction of a company and its organisational units and parts. The essence of strategic management may be defined as "a systematically controlled process which, in the long run, reacts to the changes in the internal and external environment while aiming to maintain a balance between the fulfilment of internal needs, societal needs and, most importantly, the needs of customers."[12]

The process of strategic management, as depicted in Scheme 1, can be divided into 5 basic phases: (1) identification of the corporate mission, vision and objectives; (2) analysis of the internal and external environment of the company; (3) formulation of corporate strategy; (4) implementation of the strategy and (5) evaluation and control of the achieved results.

1 Compare: ČÁBYOVÁ, Ľ., KRAJČOVIČ, P.: Consumer Behavior of Generation Y on the Print Media Market. In MATÚŠ, J., PETRANOVÁ, D. (eds): *Marketing Identity: Design that Sells.* Trnava : Faculty of Mass Media Communication, University of SS. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava, 2013, p. 119-136; KRAJČOVIČ, P.: Innovation in Printed Media. In MATÚŠ, J., PETRANOVÁ, D. (eds): *Marketing Identity: Explosion of Innovations.* Trnava : Faculty of Mass Media Communication, University of SS. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava, 2014, p. 406-421; SOLÍK, M., VIŠŇOVSKÝ, J., LALUHOVÁ, J.: *Media as a Tool for Fostering Values in the Contemporary Society.* In European Journal of Science and Theology, 2013, Vol. 9, No. 6, p. 71-77; ČÁBYOVÁ, Ľ., PTAČIN, J.: *Benchmarking Comparison of Marketing Communication of Universities in Slovakia.* In Communication Today, 2014, Vol. 5, No. 1, p. 55-69.

2 See also: MENDELOVÁ, D.: Ability to Create and Adopt Innovative Concepts on Slovak Advertising Market. In MATÚŠ, J., PETRANOVÁ, D. (eds): *Marketing Identity: Explosion of Innovations.* Trnava : Faculty of Mass Media Communication, University of SS. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava, 2014, p. 123-133.

3 Compare: KRAJČOVIČ, P.: A Media Market and Current Aspects of the Print Advertising Sale in Newspapers and Magazines. In PETRANOVÁ, D., MAGÁL, S., ČÁBYOVÁ, Ľ. (eds): *Globalizácia marketingu a zrútenie časopriestoru v médiách.* Trnava : Faculty of Mass Media Communication, University of SS. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava, 2014, p. 101.

4 LESÁKOVÁ, D. a kol.: *Strategický marketing.* Bratislava : Sprint dva, 2011, p. 11.

5 JEDLIČKA, M.: *Marketingový strategický manažment.* Trnava : Magna, 2003, p. 12.

6 JEDLIČKA, M.: *Marketingový strategický manažment.* Trnava : Magna, 2003, p. 12.

7 KUSÁ, A., PIZANO, V.: *Marketingové analýzy a stratégie.* Trnava : Faculty of Mass Media Communication, University of SS. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava, 2011, p. 11.

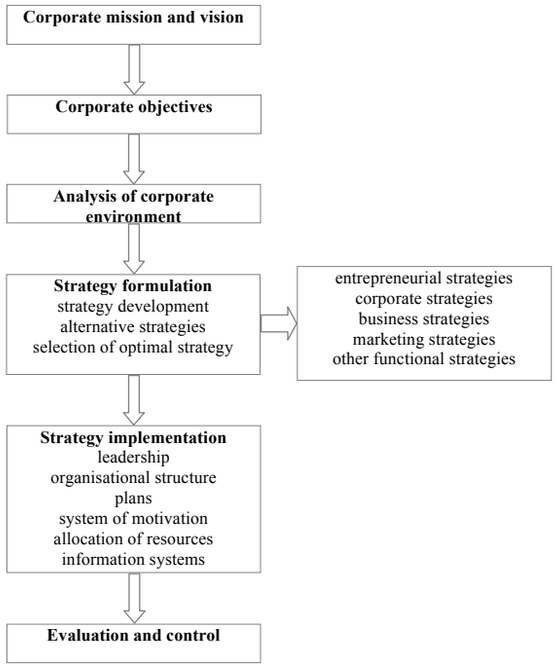
8 ŠTEFÁNIK, J., LAŠŠÁK, V.: *Strategický manažment.* Žilina : VŠDaS, 1994, p. 15.

9 SCHENDEL, D., HATTEN, K. J.: *Business Policy or Strategic Management: A Broader View for an Emerging Discipline.* Indiana : Academy of Management Proceedings, 1972, p. 99.

10 SLÁVIK, Š.: *Strategický manažment.* Bratislava : Ekonóm, 1997, p. 21.

11 LESÁKOVÁ, D.: *Strategický marketing.* Bratislava : Sprint dva, 2011, p. 17-23.

12 KUSÁ, A., PIZANO, V.: *Marketingové analýzy a stratégie.* Trnava : Faculty of Mass Media Communication, University of SS. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava, 2011, p. 12.



Scheme 1: The process of strategic direction

Source: KUSÁ, A., PIZANO, V.: Marketingové analýzy a stratégie. Trnava : Faculty of Mass Media Communication, University of SS. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava, 2011, p. 14.

Focusing on media planning specifically, we speak of the so-called media strategies which are parts of the communication strategy and, in a broader context, also parts of the marketing strategy. These are thus classified as functional strategies and aim to achieve set media objectives.

Considering the notions and concepts as stated above, media strategy is a series of activities that consists of several alternative ways of achieving media objectives – to put it simply, media strategy is a way to fulfil these objectives by using the media. Strategy related to media planning identifies, for instance, recommended parts of the day that are suitable for including advertisements in the media airtime or type(s) of programmes to be used (mostly in case of TV advertising). Strategy also accurately identifies the particular types of selected media, defines the frequency and estimated impact on the target audience as well as the estimated expenditures related to the purchase of advertising space in the media.

4 Media Planning and the Selection of Suitable Media

Media planning is the essence of any successful media selection. As stated by Čábyová, it is 'a process whose purpose is to create an effective media plan.'[13] According to Pelsmacker, an effective media plan must be able to answer 5 basic questions: 'Which media will be used in the campaign?; What kind of media space will be purchased?; When will the media campaign be run?; What about its frequency?; What target group should the campaign be aimed at?' [14] In other words, a media plan answers the basic questions associated with the use of particular types of media, the size and structure of media space, the time and spatial frame of the media campaign and the questions connected with identifying the target group and determining the optimal reach of the campaign.

The process of media planning can be divided into several steps; it is therefore a series of decisions, whose aim is to discover the best way of delivering the advertising message to the target audiences, i.e. towards the potential buyers of a product or service. Media planning results in development of a clearly defined and prepared media plan. Such a plan practically implements the particular steps ranging from selection of the particular types of media to purchase of media space offered by them. Pelsmacker defines 5 basic stages of formulating a media plan: "(1) Assessing the communication environment; (2) Defining the target audience; (3) Setting the media objectives; (4) Determining the geographical and time frame of the campaign; (5) Purchasing the media space."[15]

Well-developed media plans must answer several specific questions, for instance: How much money (financial resources) is it necessary to allocate for the selection of media? Which media should be used for advertising, so that we are able to fulfil the set objectives? What criteria shall we use to select particular media? How often should our potential customers (our target audiences) see our advertisement in the media? During which months should our advertisement appear in the media?

Apart from the selection of suitable media, another role of media planning is to thoroughly analyse the media environment. The aim of media planning is to find an early answer to the questions related to the constant change of the market structure or to the conditions on the market. The need to react to the recent changes in customer's buying habits (these changes are also associated with the ways media are used as sources of information, entertainment, education, etc.) or the question of how to effectively allocate the available finances to buy the desired media space are just a few of many appropriate examples which illustrate the point stated above.

Therefore, media planning can also be seen as a process or a series of decisions which help us find the best possible answers to all the questions related to the selection of suitable media space. Consequently, the media plans are the material outcomes of these processes –they serve as practical tools for selecting the adequate media and purchasing the advertising space offered by them. The media strategy thus represents the way of fulfilling the tasks and objectives that are set within the media plan.

5 The Process of Media Planning

The basic aim of the media planning process is to identify and understand the marketing problem which is supposed to be solved through media communication. This kind of problem might be, for example, a significant drop in sales – the objective here is, naturally, to increase the sales through persuasive advertising or to attempt to raise the consumers' awareness of a new product through an image advertising campaign or a launch advertising campaign. Media, as means of communication, should be able to help us find a successful solution to a marketing problem; they also provide a space for implementation of the measures which have been adopted within the sphere of advertising.

The process of media planning should begin with a thorough analysis of the marketing environment as well as with obtaining detailed knowledge of the target market. Once the marketing strategy and marketing goals have been determined, the so-called media objectives are built upon them; moreover, these media objectives are also influenced by the specific goals related to the field of advertising.

All decisions associated with media planning are therefore affected by 'higher' objectives whose fulfilment always depends on meeting the partial goals (media objectives included). The role of media planning is to react to important matters and issues arising from the marketing strategy and implement them in practice by selecting the suitable media.

13 ČÁBYOVÁ, Ľ.: *Marketing a marketingová komunikácia v médiách.* Łódź : KSIĘŻY MŁYN Dom Wydawniczy Michał Koliński, 2012, p. 132.

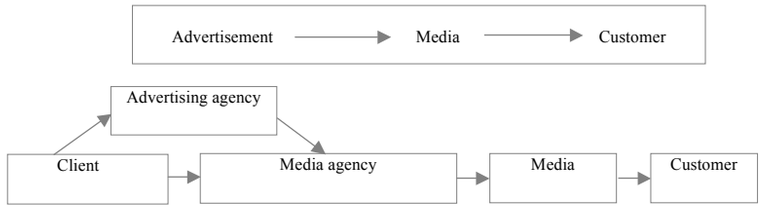
14 PELSMACKER, P.: *Marketingová komunikace.* Praha : Grada Publishing, 2003, p. 241.

15 PELSMACKER, P.: *Marketingová komunikace.* Praha : Grada Publishing, 2003, p. 241.

The media selection is also influenced by the basic characteristics of the product in question and respects the ways potential consumers use or follow the media; this process necessarily reflects the demographic, economic, cultural and social aspects of the target audiences. The final decision – namely, which media to choose – is also affected by creative advertising strategy as it is more appropriate and effective to disseminate certain kinds of advertising campaigns only through certain types or sorts of media.

For the reasons stated above, media planning must be a part of the process of creating communication strategy; it also functions as an integral part of the marketing plan on which it is based. The whole process of media planning is depicted in Scheme 2. The client – together with the advertising agency – defines the marketing and communication objectives of the product as well as the basic framework of the media campaign – timescale, budget and expectations. Taking into account this information, the advertising agency prepares a strategic plan and an advertising brief, which serves as a basis for the further work of particular departments. In accordance with the advertising brief, the department responsible for buying media space elaborates a detailed plan for the particular type of media, including precise specifications of the advertising campaign.

Once the client has agreed with the plan and/or the necessary corrections have been made, the department responsible for buying media locates and reserves the desired media space, and then elaborates the orders. Another important part of this process is the so-called production plan aimed at the production of advertisements. Following the details of the submitted order, the department of media organisation responsible for selling advertising space (i.e. media sales department) ensures that the advertisement is published or aired in the requested time, extent and place.



Scheme 2: The process of media planning

Source: own processing

6 Basic Types of Media Strategies

As it was already mentioned, media strategy ensures that the media plan is implemented in practice. Its role is to adjust the adopted measures in order to reach the set objectives. Media strategy thus functions as the way of achieving a competitive advantage through suitable media selection, timely ad placement, appropriate combination of media types and optimal amount of financial resources provided for buying advertising space. The following list includes the most frequent types of media strategies we can come across in practice:

The Strategy of Optimal Frequency

Nowadays, media planning is commonly based on buying a small number of media, mostly due to limited advertising funds. As a result, the target audience often fails to even notice the advertisement or media campaign. In other words – too little media space rarely brings the desired effect. However, selecting a limited amount of media may also be the result of an efficient process of media planning. There is a rule which determines a certain minimal amount of 'power' that is needed to exceed the threshold which represents achieving the desired effect.

As a general rule, buying a lot of media space means having a greater chance to achieve success – on the other hand, getting dominant position through allocating more funds to buy advertising space than competitors does not automatically result in achieving better results. We may say that the optimal strategy here is to be seen – to maintain a recognisable presence in the media.

Advertising at Times When Customers Make Their Purchases

Applying a certain amount of simplification, it may be assumed that customers buy the product which they have seen advertised. Naturally, it is not possible to confirm this assumption categorically, although its significance is greater in case of some types of products, e.g. seasonal goods, etc. A good opportunity to place advertisements in the media often seems to be the moment when customers start buying competing products. Moreover, seasonal placement of advertising in the media aimed at substitute products may spark an increased interest of customers in the whole product line. Seasonal placement of advertising in the media may – to certain extent – also provide an opportunity to assess the effect of advertising in terms of seasonal sales and thus evaluate its efficiency. The aim of this strategy is to find the suitable timeframe and run the advertisement campaign precisely at the time when it brings the greatest increase in the sales of our products. On the other hand, at least according to this strategy, the ideal time for placing advertisements for products sold all-year round would be constantly – throughout the whole year.

The Strategy of Spasmodic Advertising

If we concentrate media advertising at one particular time of the year, we speak of the so-called spasmodic advertising. A typical example is the increased concentration of advertising in the media at a particular year period. This might be the result of long-term planning or additional budget increase meant for concentrated media buying that results from an unexpected situation on the market. This principle is based on the conviction that a higher frequency achieved in a shorter period of time may lead to increased sales of the products compared with the competitors. The concentration of advertising within a certain time period may bring the desired effect but it is effective only in the short run – therefore, this kind of advertising strategy can only achieve short-term objectives.

The Strategy of Strong Initial Impact

In case of launching a new product, the ideal solution in terms of media planning is buying more media space in the initial stages of the product launch (or, alternatively, just before the launch) that is followed by a gradual advertising decline. The given principle is based on the effort to raise the awareness of target customers. The length of this phase thus depends mainly on the size of budget, the nature of the product and the amount of potential (or target) customers. Depending on other following objectives, it is advisable to regularly intensify the campaign in order to relive the customers' awareness of the product.

Acting When the Sales Drop

Most companies decide to advertise in the media when the sales of their products or brands are decreasing or they have already decreased. In such a situation, it is necessary to recognise the suitable opportunity and present the advertisements through the media immediately. It is also vital to analyse the activities of competitors. In case there was an increased concentration of advertising aimed at presentation of the same products, the effect could be none whatsoever. This approach offers an opportunity to act quickly in order to outrun the competitors; it also enables the company to gain a competitive advantage based on better product awareness, etc.

The Strategy of Geographic Concentration

In case there is a higher potential for the sales of a product in a particular geographic area or part of the market, we may consider using the type of media planning strategy which concentrates advertising in that particular area. Both regional and local media play an important part in the decision-making process regarding media selection. However, it must be pointed out that advertising in national media should be retained, at least to some extent. Media planning aimed at specific parts of the market is based on detailed knowledge of the particular market opportunity.

A lot of products are sold better on some markets than on others. The process of media planning therefore aims to make important decisions as whether to choose the strategy of strengthening the market position that is already thriving through media advertising (to maintain or increase the existing market share), or to concentrate the media efforts into the area with a significantly lower market potential in order to boost the sales in these market segments.

Combining Various Types of Media

This idea works with the assumption that the optimal result and fulfilment of set objectives can be best achieved by combining various media. It is also important to understand the ways potential customers use particular media to be able to combine them adequately. Another important thing to consider is the reach (impact) that the individual media provide. By choosing the wrong combination of media, we might not expand the existing reach; quite the opposite, it combining various kinds of media may even lead to duplication that does not result in any increase in the reach.

It is suitable to combine the strategy of various types of media with, for example, the strategy of intensive impact – one of the objectives here might be that the customer sees the advertisement as frequently as possible during a particular time period.

The combination of various types of media is also applicable in case we want to appeal to different market segments or new customers. To make this happen, it is necessary to include completely new (i.e. not used previously) media in the advertising campaign – these media might help us achieve such objectives.

However, when using the combination of several types of media, we have to be careful not to just artificially increase the frequency of advertising without any significant increase in its reach or impact. As a general rule, by adding another type of media into the media plan, we tend to increase the frequency of advertising rather than its reach.

7 The Basic Principles of Choosing the Right Media Strategy

Although every media plan is individual and depends on the particular requirements of the client, different media plans may sometimes use the same or similar strategies. It is also possible to use (combine) several types of media strategies within one media plan. The selection of strategies is mostly influenced by the principles as follows:

The Principle of Prevailing Deliberation

It is unlikely that the strategy which we finally choose will be the best choice. In fact, many strategies that are labelled as "the best" have never been objectively verified. Most of the time, picking a media strategy is based only on a subjective assumption that results from thorough planning and critical evaluation of particular alternatives. A lot of effective strategies have arisen from long-term development and thus have been formed gradually. It seems to be still true that one universal strategy suitable for every occasion is impossible to define.

Moreover, it is impossible to measure the efficiency of some strategies. This fact is related to the complexity of the ways in which various factors affect the achieved objectives. What might at first seem to be a result of selecting the right strategy can, in fact, be a result of combining different variables; one of those is a well-thought-out media strategy.

The Principle of Thorough Planning

Buying media space must always be preceded by thorough planning. Media advertising should reflect on the marketing objectives and the main role of media advertising is to achieve the set goals through media use. Most of the time, these efforts aim to increase the sales of a product or to develop product or brand awareness.

In-depth planning is also important in the long run since competitors might be interested in advertising space in the same media, at the same time. Planning is absolutely essential when it comes to seasonal products; advertising related to such goods mostly appears during the appropriate season (e.g. before, during and shortly after Christmas time, at the beginning of the winter season, etc.)

The principle of thorough planning is also essential when it comes to budget limitations, as we usually have to work with strictly limited financial resources. Such careful planning enables us to use the available financial resources effectively.

The Principle of Emphasising the Creative Side of Media Strategy

The creative aspect of media strategies is another crucial factor involved in the processes of media planning and media selection. In fact, creativity is often seen as the starting point of the whole media planning as such. The need for 'being creative' while selecting appropriate media space thus means that some media are more suitable for delivering the desired advertising message than others.

Conclusion

Media are essential parts of the process of marketing communication. They are able to deliver advertising messages to the target audiences and thus help us achieve the set advertising objectives and, in the broader context, also communication and marketing objectives. The media selection may be seen as the basic principle of media planning and the integral part of media strategy. Generally speaking, media strategy is a series of activities consisting of several alternative options to achieve media objectives. In different words, it is the way how to achieve these goals through media communication.

In the process of media planning, especially when selecting the right type of media strategy, several types might strike us as ideal. As a general rule, every type of strategy is (or rather can be) effective; however, its efficiency depends on a number of factors that, in the end, affect its implementation. Being able to claim that one strategy is markedly better than other(s) is very seldom. Therefore, various combinations of different strategies are used in practice and their selection always depends on the particular situation, marketing objectives, nature of the product, target audience, etc.

Generally speaking, media strategy ensures the implementation of the media plan. Its role is to adjust and creatively combine the measures adopted to achieve the set objectives. Media strategy allows us to gain a competitive advantage through the right selection of media, timely ad placement, and appropriate combination of media – as well as through the determination of the optimal amount of financial resources that are used to buy media space.

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