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## MARKETING BULGARIA ITS PEOPLE. ITS PRODUCTS. ITS POTENTIAL

R. Pooley

### INTRODUCTION

I have been fortunate to have visited Bulgaria regularly over the past ten years or so and it has been a fascinating and enjoyable journey. In particular, to someone who visits from time to time, the progress that has been made towards establishing a modern State to match some of the best in Europe has been truly dramatic. I have watched Bulgaria establish its own character as a great nation after so many hundreds of years of subservience to outsiders, particularly the Ottoman Empire and the Soviet Union. That's easy for me, I have been here and seen it happen.....but what about the many that have not been here? When I get home to England it is sad to recognise that when we think of ancient history, we immediately think of the Greeks, the Romans and the Egyptians, yet your history and your contribution to the development of civilization is equally important. Many would argue that great men from this area of Trakia, such as Democritus, Herodotus, Protagoras and even Spartacus were more Bulgarian than Greek as were many of the Roman Emperors of the 3rd to the 5<sup>th</sup> century. Yet, at home we do not recognise that. When we think about wine we think about France and yet your wines match the best in Europe, as do many of your fine distilled spirits. You have a rich tradition of fine cuisine, so why should French chefs win all the prizes? You have beaches to match the best on the Spanish Costas, mountains and ski resorts to match the best in Europe. You have land which, in my judgement as an agriculturalist, is of good quality, but underutilised. Above all, you have a unique personality, a Bulgarian character which is itself an asset, well worth marketing. I would be the first to concede that much has been done already to promote all things Bulgarian. I have seen some excellent examples of good marketing. However, the handicap you have, having started later than most to promote

yourself, can also be seen as a distinct advantage, as you can learn from the mistakes of others, and believe me, there have been many mistakes and huge wastage by those who promote their assets. In this paper I will illustrate one glaring example of errors and waste, which amply illustrates the traps and hazards which I hope you will avoid, in the fervent hope that you will not waste one single lev invested in marketing activity which does not work.

### THE FOUNDATION STONES OF GOOD MARKETING.

Most academics in marketing concede that Market Research is an important first step in establishing marketing strategy. I would go further than that, market research is more than important, it is a fundamental prerequisite. Sadly, my enthusiasm for good research is not shared by many who normally for political reasons indulge in expensive promotions simply to prove that they are 'doing something', sadly doing something with no sound basis in research and, worse still, with no facility for measurement of effect and payback. Of course, in order to measure the efficiency of any activity we must have a way to measure where we are, and where we get to, after our investment in marketing. If you have a product it's easy, measure sales before and sales afterwards. With services it is more difficult and is best measured after time has passed so that the level of uptake of those services can be measured. I would urge you most strongly to avoid 'attitude surveys' like the plague. Attitude surveys are often deployed in politics when, of course, you and I know that the only way the public attitude can be measured in politics is in the ballot box. Worse still, politicians are expert at the misrepresentation of figures. For example, we have just had a general election at home and in the early stages of the campaign I heard a politician claim that a one percentage

improvement in an opinion poll was a demonstration of a swing towards his party. From this you may deduce that politicians are not very good at mathematics! ....except perhaps when it comes to filling out their expense claims! A typical opinion poll covers around 1,000 responses. 1% of 1,000 is 10. So I would urge you always to look at the numbers, not the percentages and ask yourself the question, is the view of ten people, who may not have been geographically and demographically selected.....is their view correctly claimed as a swing towards anything? Of course not! Indeed, in a typical opinion survey of anything, 1% is irrelevant. I would argue that in any survey, with around one thousand responses, even 2 or 3% is pretty meaningless. We are lucky in Europe to have rich sources of statistics to guide us through our market research. Government statistic, EU statistics, statistics produced by industry bodies but they all have one basic weakness. They are all a measurement of history, whereas to aid good marketing decisions we need a way to measure future trends and that can be expensive. It's expensive because the best way to judge likely future trends is to use geographically and demographically profiled focus groups, managed by a trained psychologist. Forget about the lady in the street with the clip board. Such surveys are notoriously unreliable. You need a professional psychologist because unfortunately, without professional guidance and cross examination, people will give you the answers that they think you want, not their own view. Indeed, they will often lie about their own view. I am sure that you know too, that the answers you get are very much dependent on the questions that you ask. The important feature of forward looking research is to recognise that most markets are already saturated or over supplied and what we need ideally is to identify potential gaps in the market. People in focus groups don't know about gaps in the market.....otherwise gaps wouldn't be there! No, gaps have to be teased out of the information collected. That is where your trained professionals show their real worth. You may think that I am somewhat cynical about most areas of research. I am not. I simply recognise from more than fifty years of experience that we do need figures to create policy. The skill lies in the interpretation of those figures and the priority given to hard facts is paramount. Sales before, sales after. Services procured before and after. Let us

never kid ourselves that consumer attitudes are important. It's what consumers do with their attitudes that puts money in the bank.

### **GETTING IT WRONG!**

Here is a good example of doing things the wrong way and for the wrong reasons. Way back in 1973 Britain had what was called a 'beef mountain'. British farmers had produced more beef than the nation could possibly eat and it was accumulating at an alarming rate in cold storage. The problem was common across Europe at the time. At that time I was managing the biggest meat business in Britain with a retail market share of 14%. In a state of some desperation and panic the Minister for Agriculture of those days asked me, what I would do to solve the problem. I replied that the only practical way to deal with a mountain was to eat it! I had already doubled my own company's market share by using television and all the modern marketing aids and public relations activities, so I knew what was possible. Britain already had a Meat and Livestock Commission, an inter-professional State aided and tax raising body, charged with promoting the industry, but it had no previous experience in marketing. To deal with this, the Minister authorised three people, myself, my largest retail competitor and the leader of the beef producers to form an ad hoc group of three to urgently set up a campaign. We had no office, no telephone, no staff, no nothing in fact. Nonetheless, we begged and borrowed other people's facilities, worked through nights and the weekend, and in less than two weeks we had a heavyweight television and press campaign ready to go. It was inevitably a bit rough at the edges, but the need was urgent. The TV advertisement, which I wrote and directed, was brash, sexist and rather vulgar. Most importantly, my largest competitor and I bought TV slots to run consecutively with the generic message, with very specific offers of competitively priced beef. So, the three essentials I mentioned in my last address here were in place. Consumers knew what the product was, they knew how much it would cost and they knew where to buy it. Much to the amazement of Ministers and the European Commission, in less than three months British consumers bought and enjoyed eating the beef mountain!....several hundred thousand tonnes of beef disappeared...down the throats of grateful consumers. However, after what was by anyone's judgement a huge success, if you think that our Government was grateful...you

would be wrong! I was summoned to the Minister's office to be told that there had been numerous complaints that the TV advertisement was brash, sexist and rather vulgar. Of course it was! I planned it that way. If you are going to move mountains there is no point in being polite! You have to smash your way through thousands of competitive messages to gain the attention of consumers. Worse still, there had been complaints from all those butchers who failed to seize the opportunity for matching publicity on their part. So the dozy and the lazy, who had not shared in the beef boom, complained to the Minister. Dear me! Worse still again, I was told that the programme was not 'democratic', being dominated and managed by only three people. So, the Minister decided that the idea was attractive but he had to bend towards all those people who complained. A month later he set up a committee! Heaven protect me from industry committees! There had to be egalitarian representation from beef, lamb and pig producers. There had to be three Ministers nominees as public funding was sometimes involved. There had to be good consumer representation, likewise representation of minority regional interests, the Scots, The Welsh, and the Irish. Furthermore, all advertising had to be polite, politically correct and uncontroversial! Have you ever heard of a publicity campaign succeeding by being 'uncontroversial'? There had to be three expert cooks! One Gentile, one Jew and one dietician. So it went on and in the end the committee comprised over thirty people. Fortunately, I had better things to do with my time, so I chose not to participate. From then onwards, to the present day, that politically correct committee has carried on its politically correct promotions, measuring its efficiency by 'attitude' research.....forever claiming that the attitude of British consumers towards meat was improving, while all the time consumption was in a state of more or less permanent decline. Worse still, the cost to the industry since 1973, when it was established, has totalled £760,000,000, without adjustment for inflation, so probably over one billion pounds at current values, or two billion lev. Worse still again, successive Governments, the trade organisations and consumers representatives felt 'comfortable' that something was being done to promote the trade. It didn't do any good, but it didn't do any harm! Sadly, as I have already suggested, a message which

simply attempts to promote 'meat consumption' is never going to work well unless consumers have all the information they need to make a choice and act on it. So there are some interesting lessons to be learnt from this. First lesson.....the only reliable measure of success is sales. Second lesson.....never expect a committee to produce hard hitting promotions which work. Third lesson....soft, polite and uncontroversial promotions do not work. Fourth lesson.....while, we do need both political support and sometimes Government funding, we must persuade Ministers to select and support people with a track record of success and avoid political nominees and political intervention at all costs. Fifth lesson.....the inter-professional approach, so much favoured by your Government at one time, never works. Putting all sectors of an industry in one room together and expecting them to agree about anything is just plain stupid! Sixth lesson.....give the professional marketers you select the space to act in the way they know best and judge them only by results. If they succeed, give them more space and more money. If they fail, sack them and find someone better. Seventh lesson.....and perhaps the most important lesson....always ensure that every campaign answers Pooley's three golden rules. What is it? How much is it? Where can I buy it? So you always need the collaboration of enthusiasts across the industry to secure success. If this means that those who don't participate are disadvantaged....tough! Perhaps they will stir themselves and join in next time. There is no way that egalitarianism can fit comfortably in the hard world of advertising and promotion. Let me give you a small example of how I managed to get a lot of people dancing to my tune without spending much money. As President of the Agronomy research unit at Cambridge University I had the task of motivating farmers to adopt and utilise the developing plant sciences to improve yields and quality on their farms. We had very limited funds. So, we selected a small band of enthusiastic farmers and supported experimental work on their farms with disproportionate funding....much, much, more money than we could possibly afford for everybody. In no time at all those farmers who didn't get support rushed to enquire what they needed to do to get started. From that moment on we were talking to an audience that really wanted to learn! The time taken to introduce

new techniques reduced from 20 years to only 3! What motivated them? It was jealousy, pure and simple! Jealousy....the World's finest motivator! Academics might call it the 'trickle down effect', because academics are more polite than I am!

### **CONCLUSIONS**

So what does all this mean for Bulgaria? The World needs to know how good you are at producing things, about your culture, your history, your wonderful people, your beautiful countryside, your fabulous coast with its great beaches and tourist attractions. I am delighted to say that I have already seen some great examples of 'joined up marketing'. Flicking through the world wide web the other day I spotted some excellent promotions for all sorts of holidays in Bulgaria, with all the essential details...good descriptions of the tours available, illustrations of hotels etc. all priced competitively...and all we need to do is zap on

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the icon, part with a little money and we are on our way! Just find out who does this and set them to work on all the other things that Bulgaria has to offer.....your food, your wine, your rich labour resource, your industry, your investment opportunities, your agriculture. If you can do that, you don't just sell goods and services.....more importantly you put Bulgaria on the map! This small country has a big heart that the World doesn't know about. To achieve that you will need courage, enthusiasm and a dogged determination to succeed....indeed, all the qualities that Spartacus of Trakia had when he refused to bend before the Roman rule. I know that he didn't win, in the end. But he made a name for himself which the World knows about and respects. I can tell you that at home every man and every woman, every school kid knows about Spartacus.....but they know very little or even nothing....about Bulgaria. Just think about that!