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Developing corporate image

Key words: identity, image, business model, strategy, corporation

S u m m a r y: Building image of a company accepted by the environment is a long and expensive process which requires time and consistence as well as work of many persons, but comparison of expenditures and benefits justifies undertaking such actions. The actual image of the corporation produced in the consciousness of the recipients highly deviates from the desired, perfect characteristics of corporate identity. The degree of consistence of image and identity depends on the effectiveness of the image communication process. Building the image of the company cannot be based on the image alone (logo, graphics, forms, lettering, colours, interior design style). Other factors have high or possibly the most important significance in the process of developing the positive image of the company. Supplementing the image of the company with communication and behaviour gives the possibility of producing the appropriate image in the client's reception, as the actual image is developed by the client only during direct confrontation with the product, the service or the employees of the company. Only these organisations may grow which will know the needs of the market and which can adjust their resources to them and leave the competition behind along the way.

Only positive image may be the source of competitive edge. Achieving competitive edge related to having positive image may be gained with: strengthening it (if its potential was not used so far) or building a new positive image from the scratch (if the previous did not bring about the planned results).

The financial consequence of active building of the company image may be in the form of adding value to it by the investors, which is expressed in creating positive goodwill. It constitutes, on the one hand, specific resources of the company (intangibles), and on the other hand it brings about new equity to the companies and business entities.

Success is achieved when the future is better planned, permanent strategic choices are made, and conducive circumstances help overcome competitors. However, it is related to the risk of failure.

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1. Preliminary notes

Any company which intends to have a strong market position must have individual identity which is distinct from that of the competitors. The identity of the company consists of its behaviour, image and communication. These elements shape the image of the company or its perception by clients, partners, investors.

The company which intends to take the proper position in the market needs individual, distinguishing identity. In this approach, identity may be defined as progressive and active management over all assets of the company, creating information about what the company is, how it changes and where it aims and what makes it stand apart from other companies of similar profile of activities. Identity is a modern and permanent element in building competitive edge in the market. Building positive image of the company cannot be based only on visualisation and unified logo, graphics, lettering, colour, interior design style. Other factors also have major, or possibly even greater importance in the process of developing the image of the company. Concentration only on the image of the company leads to the phenomenon of building the façade—however beautiful it be, there is nothing behind it. Supplementing the image of the company with communication and behaviour gives the possibility of producing the appropriate image in the client's reception, as the actual image is developed by the client only during direct confrontation with the product, the service or the employees of the company.

Building a commonly accepted image is a long and expensive process which requires consistency, but comparison of expenditures and effects justifies undertaking the actions. The actual image of the corporation or the image of it produced in the consciousness of the recipients deviate from the desired, perfect characteristics of corporate identity. The degree of consistence of image and identity depends on the effectiveness of the image communication process. In large and complex capital structures it is difficult to achieve.

Power capital groups are expanded structures which consists of many companies with the assigned roles within the activities of the entire corporation. There are various operational relationships between particular companies which make up the holding.

Developing competitive edge is a special benefit of the positive image of the company. This paper is an attempt at discussion of the relationships between the image of the company and developing its competitive edge. The directions in the theoretical analysis are illustrated with the example of the Tauron Company.

2. Essence, conditions and consequences of gaining competitive edge with business model

The main objective of any company is growth. It may refer to various areas of the activities of the company: procurement, production, investments, sales, finances, research, accounting. Gaining advantage over the competition is one of the methods to ensure such growth. Competitiveness is the skill of winning in the competitive fight: overcoming rivals, being better, achieving and/ or maintaining competitive edge, which applies also to the capacity of competing with competition and subsequent assessment of this competition. The commonly used “competitive edge” term is not clearly interpreted. Its multiple views refer to both the essence of competitive edge and its types, sources, and conditions of gaining and maintaining. Irrespective of differences in interpretation, one may assume that competitive advantage appears when the offer of the company is perceived by the clients as more attractive than that of the competitor (1, p. 9). The superiority of the company above its competition is the visible manifestation of this advantage.

The concept of description of the company’s activities with business models is a relatively new view on the company, and it changes in several aspects the current attitude to the problems of management, e.g. in the area of management strategies and methods. Traditional thinking about profitability of the company loses importance and gives way to the thinking which assumes competitive fight mostly in the area of innovation. Business models form the solution built on this way of thinking. Business models and their use are not regarded as another fashion but as a formula, a vehicle suitable for a business idea which often allows execution, implementation of modern management trends and concepts in a complex business reality (2, pp. 37–66).

This model is used by the companies which have strong advantages in the fight against the competition, most often of the market nature which distinguishes the company in the market. These may be: a strong brand in case of the model of profit from the brand. The business model used by the company may be based on the concept of value (3, p. 60) for the clients, for the company, and on its key resources or products. Image is one of the components of the business model, and brand plays a major role in this case. It is one of the basic key resources of the company, significant from the point of view of value. Thus business model consists of various elements and is a concept tool which combines a set of elements and relationships between them, the tool which presents the logics of activity of a given company. In a specific field, it includes the description of the value offered by the company to a group(s) of clients, along with the statement of the basic resources, processes (activities), as well as external relationships of this company, used for creation of value and ensuring competitiveness in the given field and allowing increasing its value (4, p. 57).

The business model for a power company is the connection of the competitive edge concept with a set of actions and resources necessary for its execution, allow-

ing the organisation to achieve profitability and its contribution to ensuring power security. Obtaining the competitive edge by the company and maintaining it, which is the condition for effective functioning in the market, is expressed in added value obtained by it which is higher than that of the competition, which in turn allows achieving profitability that is higher than the average (in the scale of the sector).

Companies are not operating individually. Contracts of cooperation have become the key factor for achieving success in changing markets. Few companies can create and deliver goods and services working alone, and even fewer handle the latest technologies:

- many skills and resources necessary for success of the company are located off its limits and beyond direct control of the board of directors in a higher degree than ever before;
- to fully use the opportunities, companies must be capable of establishing, developing and keeping a broad range of strategic alliances;
- the effect of synergy is the objective of any cooperation—jointly more can be gained than when acting alone, although the result of this cooperation may be varied.

The basic reasons for cooperation include: merging of forces—neutralisation of threat, supplementation of resources and skills, gaining knowledge and internationalisation, more effective research, stronger impact, higher probability of success, faster, better, cheaper development of products, services or markets, delivery of products or services, meeting external requirements, optimisation of costs. Business model as a general concept formulates the framework for the logic of managing business and such its features as innovativeness, competitiveness. Thus it includes the description of the value offered to the clients, the basic resources, activities and relationships with partners, which are used for creation of this value and ensuring competitiveness to the company.

To maintain a good position in the given sector for a long period of time and achieve better results, three basic competition strategies may be defined (5, p. 50): the leading position in terms of the total costs (cost leadership), differentiation (diversification), concentration (a larger scale of specialised activities).

Each of the presented strategies assumes a different method of achieving competitive edge. The characteristics of the basic competition strategy in the market indicates that the basic condition for effective action is emphasising this element or area in which the company will have advantage over the competition, as maintaining the leading position in all three areas is difficult and rather impossible.

Modern companies, to actively exist in the market, must build and create their competitive edge based on more and more original elements. The image of the company becomes important, right along with attractive price, the promise of high quality, reliability or specific method of distribution.

3. Building the image of the company in the competition and cooperation processes

The image of the company, or its imagined perception, has gained special importance. Every company needs individual identity distinguishing it from the competition and clear forms of communication. In this context, identity may be defined as progressive and active management over all assets of the company, creating information about what the company is, how it changes and where it aims and what makes it stand apart from other companies of similar profile of activities. The image of the company is a modern and—what is important—permanent element of building competitive edge in the market.

In practice, many types of images may be described in view of various criteria. Depending on the degree of its beneficial effect for the company, the image may be positive, negative or neutral. The client assesses quality of a product or service before their purchase on the basis of the image of the company.

Creating a positive image is one of the basic strategies aimed at building competitive edge. Creating a positive image is not easy, and often, when the deliberate policy of communication is missing, the negative image of the company may develop. Improper communication among the employees of the company may create a bad image of the employer, negative assessment of the management, effectiveness and quality of production and atmosphere at work. This affects the opinion of the clients about the company and its products, as well as the opinion of the suppliers about the image of the company. That is why planned and correct communication of the company is necessary, and it should create a good image of the company among all the social groups.

The company, while creating its image, is committed to a number of activities which make other companies perceive it as modern or enjoying traditions, producing goods of perfect quality, responsible, or as an important competitor in the market. Whether the company is well perceived in the market or not manifests in the consumers wanting to buy its goods at high prices or not, the prospective investors are willing to acquire shares of individual companies or not.

Until recently, reputation of a company and its image were a vague notion and were not within the direct interest of the most important management level in the company. The duties related to developing the image of the company were entrusted to the departments involved with public relations in the company or to the consultants hired in these companies. The awareness of the management level in the company is continuously increasing, and the factors related to developing the positive image of the company are more and more often listed among the elements which affect the market success, decisive for the significant competitive edge. The proper management of the image and reputation of the company is necessary, but the crucial element comes in the managers understanding significance and essence of such notions

as identity and communication of the company, as well as interdependencies between these elements.

The image and reputation of the company arise in the minds of those who are in any way related to the given organisation. The image is the view which begins to function in the consciousness of the person when he/ she hears the name of the company or sees its name or logo. The reputation of the company is in fact its assessment by the persons interested in it: clients, competitors, market partners. Thus it is necessary to create the proper image of the company with these entities in the market. It is nothing more than achieving the appropriate level of recognition among the target partners along with immediate identification of the industry and products of the company. Taking care about the proper reputation with the partners is also necessary. Very often identity is connected with the image of the company, which is a wrong approach. Identity is a set of features which the company wants to present to the environment, while image is their real projection in this environment (6, p. 9).

Positive image of the company may be developed with a coordinated campaign related to building the image of the company, including the formal system of communication taking into account its logo, mark name, advertising activities and public relations. The proper reputation of the company requires substantial identification which may be developed in continuous activities. The situation is possible in which the company has a perfect reputation but it has not achieved as positive image as the competition. Not only the perfect offer and perfect attitude to clients create the global image of the company. Some other activities also affect the image, such as good employees and strong investors.

The identity of the organisation creates the image of the company with the appropriate reputation. Communication is the element combining the identity of the company with its image and reputation. To achieve the intended objective, the company should apply various methods and channels of communication at the same time. This is the way to reach a broad group of the interested (7, p. 59).

Deliberate development of the image of the company brings about measurable benefits. A good, positive image and a clearly marked identity, appropriate for the target segment of the clients, help the company prosper well and easily enter the markets. It is so because in the market where competition offers goods of similar usable value, quality, price and appearance, the final decision of the buyer may be based on the impression caused by the company of better image and clearly marked identity. The image is never a static term. It is changing along with the changes in opinions and likings. It arises and grows independently of the willingness and will of the interested, because its creation requires continuous observation of the market and controlling whether the created image corresponds with the actual needs of the clients (8, p. 149).

4. Identity and image

It is interesting to find out what is identity and what is image. These terms are often wrongly considered equivalent. For this, it is important to differentiate their actual and desired conditions.

The actual identity is the way the managers see their brand, its features, the resulting benefits and the values which it represents. The desired identity is the condition which they would like to achieve. It includes all their plans, objectives and aspirations in reference to the brand. The image is a perception in the minds of the buyers. Companies strive to cause specific associations related to the brand (the desired image). However, they often deviate from the assumptions, to a higher or lower degree. The clients then perceive the offer in a different way than planned (the actual image). Identity is thus the beginning of the road, and image is its goal. The positive or negative effect of the actual identity on the desired identity, thus on further activities, depends on the effectiveness of the feedback. The information about the actual image of the brand developed its perception by the managers (9, p. 203).

If we assume that the chosen desired identity is under given conditions the most appropriate, then the skill of translating it into the corresponding actual image has major effect on the market success. Obviously, achieving the state of equality (the desired identity = the actual image) would be the perfect result. It is not always possible in reference to each of the current and prospective clients of the brand. Work on it should continue, though, and the means used for it is placement (8, p. 149).

Placement covers the activities related to development of the offer and image, leading to taking over a clear, significant place in the memory of the target recipients (10, p. 283). If identity is the strategy, image is the context of this strategy which exists in the surroundings of the brand, its reflection in the reality of the competitive environment, then placement is the tactics of achieving the condition of maximum closeness of the image with the identity (11, p. 181).

Placement is aimed at defining and promoting differences which will allow standing out in the crowd of competitors, persuading to purchase, leading to loyalty and evoking associations compliant with the adopted desired identity.

The company needs not only prepare a clear placement strategy but also effectively deliver information about it to the recipients. The point is not only about the promotion policy but about all the available marketing instruments. Product, price, distribution and promotion are all for the consumers the source of information about the brand. The buyers create its image on the basis of all the signals sent by it. Therefore marketing mix must be inherently consistent if it is to faithfully reflect the selected position. The brand must "speak" the same on all the fronts. The effect of synergy obtained with it multiplies the strength of the interaction.

The integrated marketing communication leads to generation of the desired image. This image is received by the minds of the recipients. If placement and marketing

mix have fulfilled their roles, the image is consistent with desired identity. The brand is presented as it was assumed. At this stage, many companies, especially those with less experience in marketing, end the process of building the brand and then it often turns out that the objective was not achieved. The image perceived by the buyer is not a simple reflection of wishes of the managers.

Uncoordinated actions of the owner of the brand are dangerous for the image. In effect, the brand, apart from the desired image, is also the source of a different one. The causes of this are not limited only to errors at the stage of defining the marketing mix, and may arise in the earlier stages as well:

1. Several alternative versions of the desired identity may be created in the company. It is dangerous when various departments/ persons work on the brand and their work is in no way coordinated. If this is the case, everyone has his/her own vision and will try to make it true. Further activities, as it goes, have to result in image schizophrenia.
2. One strategy of identity has been developed, but placement is conducted under the conditions as stated above. The result will be pursuit to achieve one image in various, often mutually exclusive ways.

Then the actual image will be created in the minds of the clients but it will be a product of many factors. If it is compliant with the desired identity, the brand is successful in this field. If not, correction has to be implemented. The source of knowledge in this case is the feedback in the form of marketing studies. The information obtained in this way affects the perception of the brand by its managers (the actual identity), which thus becomes the source for further actions. The whole process should be repeated until the maximum consistence is obtained between the desired identity and the actual image.

5. Corporate identity of Grupa Tauron

TAURON Polska Energia S.A. was established on 6 December 2006 due to the execution of the government electrical power engineering programme (12). This programme assumed establishing four large business entities which were to consolidate distributors and producers of energy. The objective of the consolidation was to create entities effectively competing with other European companies in the energy market. On 9 May 2007, the State Treasury contributed to Energetyka Południe S.A. the shares of Południowy Koncern Energetyczny S.A. of Katowice, Enion S.A. of Krakow, EnergiaPro Koncern Energetyczny S.A. of Wrocław and Elektrownia Stalowa Wola S.A. Other entities, apart from the listed four companies, are also included in the holding: in the scope of energy trading these are Enion Energia sp. z o.o., Pierwsza Kompania Handlowa Polska Energia sp. z o.o., and EnergiaPro Gigawat sp. z o.o.; in the scope of producing energy from renewable sources: Jeleniogórskie Elektrownie Wodne sp. z o.o. and Zespół Elektrowni Wodnych Rożnów sp. z o.o.; in the scope of

coal mining Południowy Koncern Węglowy S.A. Moreover, TAURON Polska Energia S.A. took control over Elektrociepłownia Tychy S.A. and Przedsiębiorstwo Energetyki Ciepłej Katowice S.A., and with the heat assets of PKE S.A., these companies are the base for building the Tauron Ciepło S.A. holding.

Tauron Polska Energia is one of the largest business entities in Poland and has the capital of 14 B PLN. The holding employs 28,000 persons and sells electricity for the value of over 9 B PLN. The corporate strategy was prepared for Grupa TAURON for the years 2008–2012 with the perspective up to 2020 developed in 2008.

When Tauron Polska Energia SA adopted a new logo and visual identification system, the process was initiated to clarify the corporate identity of Grupa Tauron. This process was the consequence of the implemented business strategy aimed at establishing a uniform operational holding. One of the assumptions of this model is consolidation of all the constituent elements of the holding, also in the dimension of the communicated corporate identity. Building the coherent identity within companies of the group will allow communication of legible and credible structure, thus affecting clarity of perception of the elements of the group which build its competencies and potential.

Strong corporate identity affects both internal and external processes in the holding. Within the group it deepens consolidation processes, building in the employees consciousness of belonging to one strong economic organism, and developing pride in the employee and affecting his/ her feeling of stability and safety. Externally, under conditions of market competition, it manifests the strategic position and helps build the planned image for both the entire holding and individual companies. In the future, it will be a clear confirmation of the potential of the group for prospective stockholders.

One of the factors which affect the decision about building uniform corporate identity for Grupa Tauron are the trends and directions assumed by competitive power holdings both in Poland and in other European countries. With the intention of effective maintenance of the market position, that is aiming at improving it in the future, it is necessary to manage communication and marketing activities which may meet the challenge of the actions by the competition.

Development of clear architecture of brands within the holding is the condition for implementation of uniform corporate identity of the group. It should be understood as a legible structure which indicates the place and role of each company within the holding organism. The best (fully executing the assumed consolidation objectives of the group) of the possible models which clarify the relationships between the companies in the capital group is the so-called monolithic model of corporate identity. It assumes full and unanimous identity of all the constituent elements of the holding at both lexical and visual levels. At the lexical level, that is the one related to the names of the companies, unification of the names is planned. The assumed naming strategy is the principle of building the names of the companies from two elements: the name of the brand “Tauron Polska Energia” and the competition determinant expressing the

role of the company in the chain of value of the group. At the visual level, the logo of the Tauron Polska Energia brand is the element which builds corporate identity.

The time scale for the implementation of the target model of brand architecture will depend on execution of consolidation activities of the companies in accordance with the implemented business strategy of the group. The monolithic model is regarded as a target which defines the direction of evolution of the current structure of brands, as well as determines the selection of an intermediate concept of implementation of the visual identity of the group within the companies.

The current architecture of the brands of the group which are not clearly related to the Tauron brand prevents the use of the communication synergy effect and excludes quick building of the uniform visual identity of the group.

During the work on the strategy, different possible concepts of implementation of visual identity at the level of companies were analysed. The adopted assessment criteria were helpful in assigning value and selecting the concept. First: the degree of coherence of the intermediate model with the assumed target model. Second: the scale of costs necessary for implementation of the intermediate model and then the target model. Third: the degree of legibility of changes at the visual level for both employees of the companies and their clients. The analysed concepts communicated in various degrees the uniform corporate identity as well as various forms of maintaining the current, often long-term tradition and organisational identity of individual companies. The analysed concepts were presented to the marketing services of the companies during the training in which the new business strategy of the group was presented, along with the strategy of the Tauron brand together with a new system of visual identification. The opinions and comments on the presented concepts expressed by the participants of the training were taken into account in the final selection.

The adopted concept of implementation of the new visual identity is based on the term of “foundation identity”. The model of foundation identity in reference to the companies in Grupa Tauron may be understood as building corporate identity of the group on the foundation of the entire chain of values which constitutes the scope of competencies of the Tauron Polska Energia brand.

This model assumes the companies using at the visual level the main assumptions of the visual identification system of the Tauron Polska Energia brand and the logo of Grupa Tauron, along with simultaneous maintaining of the current names of the companies. The advantage of the adopted concept is the possibility of quick gaining the effects of communication synergy at the visual level and building the consciousness of belonging to one organism among the employees. According to the principle of building the Tauron brand on the foundation of constituent elements of the chain of values, using the logo of Grupa Tauron by entities beyond the chain of values (medical companies, holiday resorts, etc.) is excluded. Each of the companies in the group is not only an item in the structure of the holding but first of all the people who work there, even several dozen years. During the implementation of the new corpo-

rate identity, special attention should be paid to the process of informing the employees about the implemented projects. Apart from the actions planned at the corporate level, involving the marketing and public relations departments in each of the companies of the group in the information process is of special importance.

The technical condition of the implementation of the new corporate identity is harmonising the rules of visual communication for each of the companies and development of own systems of visual identification which take into account individual communication needs of the companies.

6. Final remarks

The image communication may be successful when the corporate identity is easily recognisable and stands apart at the background of the environment of the industry and when it has, if possible, characteristic and unique features. Achieving this objective becomes more and more difficult. This is caused by the dynamics of expansion of the power engineering corporations, mostly by way of acquisitions and mergers with the existing companies. Organisms of varied cultures and traditions are combined to create international structure of global nature. The Polish power engineering capital groups have come into existence relatively recently and are now only in the process of developing their corporate identity. The activities undertaken by Tauron should be included in purposeful actions of strategic nature. Tauron has applied the model of group identity which is the basis for specifying the architecture of the portfolio of brands of the given corporation: the monolithic model—a capital group uses one name and a uniform system of visual identification in all interactions with the environment.

The presented analysis indicates the necessity of continuous analysing (by managers) situations and placement of the companies managed by them. It is reflected in some images adopted by them, that is the assumptions which are identified and described with a specific model of proceedings resulting from the reaction of managers to what presents in itself the market, the clients and behaviour of the competition. No doubt, the business model constitutes an important (if not crucial) tool for the company and its employees to achieve market success.

All in all, one has to conclude that the positive image of the company may be used to gain competitive edge. A good image allows the company to reduce costs related to advertising, to facilitate making decisions for the clients as regards product purchase, to affect trust of the clients in the company and to create a group of loyal clients, to affect positive associations of clients and suppliers, to strengthen the placement of the company in the market with high entry barriers, to affect quality of service, to make differentiations of products and brands, to create identity and personality.

Only positive image may be the source of competitive edge. Achieving competitive edge related to having positive image may be gained with: strengthening it (if its

potential was not used so far) or building a new positive image from the scratch (if the previous did not bring about the planned results).

The financial consequence of active building of the company image may be in the form of adding value to it by the investors, which is expressed in creating positive goodwill. It constitutes, on the one hand, specific resources of the company (intangibles), and on the other hand it brings about new equity to the companies and business entities.

To sum it up, success is achieved when the future is better planned, permanent strategic choices are made, and conducive circumstances help overcome competitors. However, it is related to the risk of failure.

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Kształtowanie wizerunku korporacji

Streszczenie: Zbudowanie akceptowanego przez otoczenie wizerunku przedsiębiorstwa jest procesem długotrwałym i kosztownym, wymaga czasu i konsekwencji oraz pracy wielu osób, ale porównanie nakładów i korzyści uzasadnia podejmowanie takich działań. Rzeczywiste wyobrażenie o korporacji wytworzone w świadomości odbiorców znacznie odbiega od pożąda-

nych, idealnych cech tożsamości korporacyjnej. Stopień zbieżności wizerunku i tożsamości zależy od efektywności procesu komunikacji wizerunkowej. Budowanie wizerunku przedsiębiorstwa nie może opierać się tylko na obrazie firmy: logo, grafika, formularze, liternictwo, kolory, styl wyposażenia wnętrza. Pozostałe czynniki mają bardzo duże, a może najważniejsze znaczenie w procesie kształtowania pozytywnego wizerunku przedsiębiorstwa. Uzupełnienie obrazu firmy jej komunikacją i zachowaniem daje możliwość wytworzenia u klienta odpowiedniego wizerunku, gdyż rzeczywisty wizerunek kształtuje się dopiero w trakcie bezpośredniej konfrontacji z produktem czy usługą, z pracownikami firmy. Tylko te organizacje, które będą znały potrzeby rynku oraz potrafiły dostosować do nich swoje zasoby i pokonać przy tym konkurentów, mogą się rozwijać.

Źródłem przewagi konkurencyjnej może być tylko wizerunek pozytywny. Osiągnięcie przewagi konkurencyjnej związane z posiadaniem pozytywnego wizerunku można uzyskać poprzez: wzmacnianie go, jeżeli jego potencjał nie został jak dotąd wykorzystany, lub budowanie od początku nowego pozytywnego wizerunku, jeżeli poprzedni nie przyniósł zamierzonych efektów.

Finansowym skutkiem aktywnego budowania wizerunku przedsiębiorstwa bywa między innymi dowartościowanie go przez inwestorów, co ma swój wyraz w kreacji dodatniej wartości firmy. Stanowi ona z jednej strony swoisty zasób przedsiębiorstwa – wartości niematerialne i prawne, z drugiej zaś przysparza nowych kapitałów własnych spółek i pomiotów gospodarczych.

Sukces osiąga się wówczas, gdy lepiej przewiduje się przyszłość i dokonuje trwałych wyborów strategicznych, a dzięki sprzyjającym okolicznościom pokonuje się konkurentów. Wiąże się to jednak z ryzykiem poniesienia porażki.

S ł o w a k l u c z o w e: tożsamość, wizerunek, model biznesu, strategia, korporacja
