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METHODS AND INSTRUMENTS OF DISTRIBUTION CHANNEL MEMBERS' LOYALTY FORMATION

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ABSTRACT

The paper examines the problem of selection of methods and instruments for loyalty formation of intermediaries in the household appliance distribution channels based on the peculiarities of relationships between the manufacturing company and trade intermediaries. It gives more precise definitions of the "method" and "instrument" terms in the context of building distributors' loyalty, presents the authors' classification of methods, offers various loyalty instruments depending on the subjects of loyalty, as well as the stages of establishment and development of relationships with such subjects.

Keywords: loyalty, loyalty methods and instruments, distributors, distribution channels, household appliances

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The relevance of the problem connected with the choice of methods and instruments of loyalty formation of wholesale and retail intermediaries in the household appliances market is determined by their growing role as logistics chain members. Manufacturers are deeply interested in building loyalty of the efficient intermediaries capable to bring the products to end users without compromising the quality, within a reasonable time, and also to consult on the choice of existing products, or recommend new products. Distributors not only ensure the manufacturer's access to the market and contribute to the process of bringing the products to end users, but also are capable of affecting the choice of end users in favor of the manufacturer's products. Therefore, loyalty within the distribution channel affects the loyalty of end users to certain companies and their brands. Distributors' loyalty formation is very important to household appliances manufacturers using one or more distribution channels. Whether the manufacturing company reaches its planned volume of sales and profit, or whether the end buyers obtain good recommendations from a wholesale or retail company and whether they continue to buy the manufacturer's products heavily depend on the type and level of loyalty.

There are several drivers influencing the process of distributors' loyalty formation:

- level of competition in sales and distribution;
- product quality and closeness of cooperation with manufacturers;
- personal relationships between salespeople of a household appliances manufacturing company and procurement managers of a distributor;
 - participation in common projects;
 - incentive system for distributors implemented by the manufacturer.

Before we proceed to the choice of methods and instruments of distributors' loyalty formation based on the peculiarities inherent to the process of delivering household appliances to end users, we shall analyze how various researchers interpret these concepts. Y. Bugorskaya [1], Y.I. Zefirova [2], S. Kartashova [3] distinguish such loyalty instruments as bonus and discount programs. V.V. Nikishin and I.P. Shirochenskaya [4] insist that the basis of any loyalty program is formed by such instruments as discounts, gifts, and benefits to regular buyers. K. Emelyanov interprets loyalty program as "a marketing instrument aimed to establish long-term relationships between companies and their customers based on client's loyalty to a product or service" [5]. K.A. Balashov notes that that the structure of loyalty should include both tangible and intangible benefits [6]. In our opinion, this concept is close to the concept of "loyalty formation method", and by "tangible and intangible benefits" the author probably means the instruments of loyalty formation. A. Boyarshinov distinguishes direct and indirect methods of customer loyalty stimulation [7], among which he specifies customer recognition, advertence, free services, etc. Y.M. Pustynnikova distinguishes tangible and intangible loyalty factors, meaning the instruments of loyalty formation, as to the first group of factors she refers to are "the entire set of financial benefits", while the second group contains "customer's convenience of dealing with the organization" and "service level" [8]. S.A. Dunayev mentions such components of loyalty to a product or vendor as the price, quality, location of warehouses, company's image, delivery terms, service level, attitude of organization's personnel to the customers, paying special attention to such method of distributors' loyalty formation as a promise of a reward for reaching of certain volume of sales [9]. O.Y. Abramova contemplates such methods of distributors' loyalty formation as competitions, training programs and conferences [10]. M.V. Belousova distinguishes permanent, episodic and strategic activities aimed to maintain loyalty; probably, the author's classification of instruments of loyalty formation is based on the "duration" criterion [11].



THE MAIN MATERIAL OF THE RESEARCH

Thus, having analyzed the definitions of the concepts related to loyalty formation instruments we came to a conclusion that scientific literature dealing with the matters of loyalty somehow lacks conformity of professional opinion on the definitions of "method of loyalty formation", "instrument of loyalty formation", and "loyalty program". When speaking about instruments of loyalty formation, some authors imply activities, factors or components of loyalty, others define them as methods and benefits, and some consider that there is only one instrument – loyalty programs.

Given the lack of unified terminology among the researchers, we shall examine the definitions of "method", "instrument", and "program" as they are given in dictionaries.

"Method". The Russian Language Dictionary by S.I. Ozhegov gives the following definition: "Method is a mean of theoretical research and practical realization of something" [12]. F.A. Brockhaus and I.A. Efron define "method" as "the right way, means, or plan to achieve a certain goal; it is a means and procedure for researching the subject in order to obtain a more definitive and veracious result" [13]. Large Economic Dictionary edited by A.N. Azrilian interprets "method" as "a technique, means or a manner of conduct" [14]. According to L.M. Dorogovtseva, A.N. Tsvetkova, A.P. Dorogovtsev, "method" is "a means to achieve a certain goal, solving a specific problem. It comprises a complex of techniques or operations aimed on perception of reality in practical or theoretical terms" [15].

"Instrument". S.I. Ozhegov defines this term as "an instrument, or a way to achieve something" [12]. Sociological dictionary interprets "instrument" as "an instrument to achieve the set goal" [16].

"Program". The Russian Language Dictionary by S.I. Ozhegov gives the following definition: "Program – 1. A plan of activities, work, etc.; 2. An outline of scope and objectives of activities ... of an organization or a single doer" [12]. F.A. Brockhaus and I.A. Efron define this term as "a summary of what should be done" [13]. A.N. Azrilian provides the following definition: "Program – 1. An outline of planned activities, or work; 2. A complete and accurate description in a formal language of an information processing procedure resulting in a solution of a certain problem. A program has a certain objective for which it is employed. The core of a program is its algorithm" [14]. "Algorithm" is defined by Azrilian as follows: "1. A specific set of instructions for conversion of source data into the ultimate result... 3. A fairly strict sequence of actions, and organization of such actions" [14].

Based on the above definitions, by "method of loyalty formation" we shall mean the use of a combination of instruments, or any one instrument by the household appliances manufacturing companies in order to build loyalty in its various forms depending on the influencing subject. By "loyalty instrument" we shall mean a voluntary instrument of achievement of the goal of building a sustainable, highly positive attitude of a subject to the object of loyalty, which is used as part of a method. "Loyalty program" shall mean a subject's plan to build loyalty of the object of loyalty, which implies application of a certain method and respective instruments developed by a certain organization under specific conditions with the use of dedicated resources (time, finances, human resources).

It should be noted that many instruments of loyalty formation are based either on stimulating the subject directly, or on creating conditions, or situations when the subject becomes indirectly interested in the object of loyalty despite of to the lack of any immediate benefit. The most frequently used methods are direct and indirect stimulation methods [7].

Our research allowed to classify the methods and instruments of loyalty formation of the intermediaries involved in the household appliance distribution channels based on two criteria - type of stimulation and type of attitude element being created (Fig. 1).

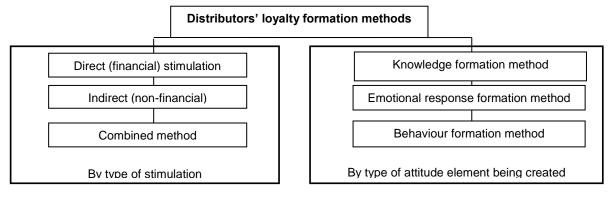


Figure 1. Classification of distributors' loyalty formation methods

1. There are three categories divided by type of stimulation: direct, indirect and combined.

Direct stimulation method implies the usage of a set of instruments (or a single instrument) to stimulate financial or material interest of the subject. This interest takes the form of a desire, eagerness to derive benefit from the display of loyalty, particularly to get a partial refund for a purchase in the form of a bonus, discount on any further purchases, prize or invitation to a lottery. When using this method, manufacturers of



household appliances may apply certain instruments to stimulate the distributors to reach the required volume of sales. They are: bonuses paid for certain volumes of purchases; discounts on any further purchases; deferred payments; product discounts to distributors' sales staff; training programs for sales personnel of distribution companies; provision of equipment for retail stores; distribution of booklets, catalogues, corporate magazines, newspapers, news releases; arrangement of joint events or incentive tours; provision of service support, call center services; invitation to participate in joint projects (promotional programs, researches).

Indirect stimulation method implies the usage of a set of instruments aimed to non-financial stimulation of the subject of loyalty. Sometimes, emotional stimulation may be more efficient for loyalty formation of certain categories than the financial one. This is aided by the following instruments: making any purchase a remarkable, special event; paying close attention when providing services; timely solution of any problem; regular provision of information on new products or price drops; paying attention to individual peculiarities and needs (customer preferences database); establishing a separate sales support unit; ensuring availability of standards of service and its compliance; regular meetings with distributors; discussion of current and future purchases; product consulting; congratulations on key dates and holidays; establishing online communities; using the manufacturing company's website to communicate with intermediaries.

Combined method implies combined use of direct and indirect stimulation instruments in order to build loyalty of distributors.

Distributors' loyalty is specific in various aspects as their loyal attitude is largely based on rational factors, therefore the number of direct (financial) stimulation instruments is quite large. They require a significant amount of financial resources from the manufacturers.

Loyalty formation of the intermediaries involved in the household appliances distribution channels is very specific as it requires stimulation both of the distribution company and its sales personnel selling the products to end users. Therefore, methods and instruments of distributors' loyalty formation can be applied to various subjects of stimulation (Table 1).

Table 1

Distributors' loyalty formation instruments (by subject of stimulation)

Subject of	Loyalty formation instruments
stimulation	
Distribution	Direct stimulation instruments
company (intermediary)	• Provision of discounts and bonuses (or payment deferment) for implementation of certain purchase plans;
	Holding of conferences, arrangement of joint events;
	Provision of equipment for retail stores, promotional items and souvenirs, catalogues,
	booklets;
	Availability of manufacturer's support services.
	Indirect stimulation instruments
	Establishment of online communities;
	Establishment of a separate sales support unit and supplier support department within
	the manufacturing company in order to facilitate timely solution of any problem.
Distribution	Direct stimulation instruments
company's	Competitions with awards for the most successful sales consultants;
sales personnel	Annual incentive tours for the most successful employees of the distribution company.
	Training programs for sales personnel.
	Indirect stimulation instruments
	Establishment of online communities for members

2. Classification by type of attitude element being created includes knowledge formation, emotional response formation and behavior formation methods (Table 2).

Knowledge formation method implies the usage of one or more instruments to build a sustainable, highly positive image of the object of loyalty in a subject of loyalty. Such instruments include the following: sales personnel trainings; provision of information booklets and product catalogues to distributors; establishment of online communities to communicate with distributors; provision of updates on company's news to distributors; development and launch of new product models; product consulting; provision of corporate magazines, newspapers, and news sheets.

Emotional response formation method implies the application of loyalty instruments in order to create sustainable, positive emotions towards the object of loyalty. The following instruments should be noted as part of this method: arrangement of joint events, outdoor leisure; congratulations on key dates; paying close attention to the operational aspects and needs of distributors; using corporate website to communicate with distributors; inviting intermediaries to participate in marketing researches to identify customer preferences; advertence; availability of standards of service; arrangement of incentive tours; timely provision of any requested information.

Behavior formation method implies the usage of instruments facilitating the creation of a sustainable behavioral response in the subject of loyalty towards the object of loyalty (persistent desire to buy, etc.), such as:

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provision of discounts on products; holding of award winning competitions for distribution companies' sales personnel; provision of bonuses for reaching the required volume of purchases; availability of manufacturer's support services, call center services; discussion of current and future purchases, deferment of payment; provision of bonuses for certain volumes of purchases; provision of equipment for retail spaces; invitation to participate in joint promotional programs for consumers.

Table 2

Distributors' loyalty formation instruments (by type of attitude element being created)

 arrangement of training programs for sales personnel; provision of information booklets and product catalogues; establishment of online communities; updates on the company's news, new products; product consulting; provision of corporate magazines, news phases; loyalty cards; arrangement of joint events, outdoor leisure; creation of a special atmosphere in the trade area; congratulations on key dates; close attention to individual peculiarities and needs; using corporate website to communicate with intermediaries; product consulting; provision of discounts; award winning competitions; purchases; availability of manufacturer's support services and call center services; discussion of current and future purchases; deferment of payment; provision of bonuses for purchases; deferment of payment; provision of discounts; award winning competitions; availability of manufacturer's support services and call center services; deferment of payment; provision of bonuses for purchases; deferment of payment; provision of current and future provision of bonuses for provices; deferment of payment; provision of current and future provision of payment; provision of oursent acreation of discounts availability o	Knowledge formation instruments	Emotional response formation instruments	Behavior formation instruments
• timely solution of problems.	training programs for sales personnel;	 arrangement of joint events, outdoor leisure; creation of a special atmosphere in the trade area; congratulations on key dates; close attention to individual peculiarities and needs; using corporate website to communicate with intermediaries; arrangement of incentive tours; invitation to participate in marketing researches to identify customer preferences; advertence, availability of standards of service; 	 award winning competitions; provision of bonuses for purchases; availability of manufacturer's support services and call center services; discussion of current and future purchases; deferment of payment; provision of bonuses for reaching certain levels of purchases; provision of equipment for retail stores;

Direct and indirect methods of distributors' loyalty stimulation, as well as the instruments included therein, can be used at various stages of establishment and development of relationships – prior to the purchase, during the purchase and after the purchase (Table 3).

Table 3

Distributors' loyalty formation instruments used on various stages of establishment and development of relationships within direct and indirect loyalty stimulation methods

Stages	Loyalty formation instruments
Prior to	Direct stimulation instruments
the	Availability of manufacturer's support services.
purchase	Holding of conferences to introduce manufacturer's products to potential and prioritized
	distributors.
	Indirect stimulation instruments
	Image of manufacturer and its brands in the market;
	Favorable location of the manufacturing company's office;
	Personal sales manager available in the manufacturing company;
	Readiness to answer any questions related to the production company and its products;
	Congratulations on key dates and national holidays.
During	Direct stimulation instruments
the .	Discounts on products and/or payment in installments;
purchase	Readiness to make concessions.
	Indirect stimulation instruments
	Availability of a separate sales support unit and support service for distributors;
	Favorable location of the manufacturing company's warehouses.
After the	Direct stimulation instruments
purchase	Provision of bonus rewards for certain volumes of sales at the end of each six-months / one-
	year period in the form of a discount on any further purchases or partial refund of the amount
	previously paid for the supply;
	Provision of repair and maintenance services at the intermediary's facilities;
	Arrangement of on-site conferences, incentive tours.
	Indirect stimulation instruments
	Establishment of online communities to communicate with intermediaries;



- Congratulations on national holidays and personal memorable dates to the purchase decision makers:
- Provision of updated information on the company and new products.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, we shall note that the above described methods and instruments of loyalty formation can be applied both individually and in a combination. Instruments designed for organizations can be used to stimulate wholesale and retail intermediaries and their sales personnel. The choice of means depends on the current market conditions and the capabilities of the manufacturing company. Stimulation methods and the instruments of distributors' loyalty formation included therein can be strategic or tactical. Tactical instruments are those used during short periods of time within each of the above mentioned methods. Strategic instruments are those related to the combined method as they are a part of long-term loyalty programs targeted on distributors and their sales personnel. This requires thorough preparation and a long period for implementation. Therefore, the logical sequence of activities performed by a household appliances manufacturing company in order to develop a loyalty program of individual members of the logistics chain will comprise several steps: first of all, the company will have to identify the loyalty formation method to be used, then select the most attractive instruments, and afterwards – formalize them as part of the loyalty program specifying the resources allocated for the project.

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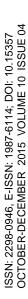
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