

Baden Sports Public Relations Campaign



Situation Analysis

Client Overview

Baden Sports is a 3rd generation family-owned sporting goods company operating in Kent, WA that was founded in 1979. Their mission is to “create products that athletes love, inspiring play in all [they] do” (About Us Baden Sports). The company prides themselves on providing high-quality products to athletes, looking to optimize this quality to near-perfect status. Their first innovation was the women’s sized basketball, adopted by the NCAA in 1984. Since then, innovation has been a top priority for Baden, coming up with cutting-edge technologies for “basketball, volleyball, soccer, football, baseball, and softball, including Axe baseball and softball bats, a line of ergonomic bats, which are changing the face of the game,” (About Us Baden Sports). Baden’s slogan, “Passion for a Better Game” constantly keeps the company asking, “How do we make the game better for the player through new innovations?” (About Us Baden Sports).

Baden’s home page says, “The official ball of you,” which gives a nod to their popular customizable sports balls available for purchase. They also partner with several youth sports organizations that use their brand for their teams as well as non-profit organizations to sell balls

with their logo on them to spread awareness. Their most notable sports-related partners are AAU Volleyball and the Harlem Globetrotters. The main non-profits they partner with are BYOP/GoKids and Side-Out Foundation. In addition to partnering, Baden provides its products to high schools across the country for them to use as their official ball in competition.

External Environment

The sporting goods industry, which includes many different product types including athletic footwear and apparel, licensed sports merchandise and exercise equipment, is a billion-dollar industry. In 2020, sporting goods stores alone brought in 53 billion U.S. dollars (Statista). The sporting goods industry includes retail giants such as Nike and Adidas, but also retailers such as Big 5 Sporting Goods, Dick's and Bass Pro. The industry has fairly high barriers to entry, since such well-known brands are the leaders in the industry. This could pose a challenge for a smaller company like Baden, who brings in about \$17.5 million annually in comparison to Dick's Sporting Goods, who brought in \$9.58 billion in 2020.

One external factor that could potentially affect Baden is how culturally accepted their manufacturing practices are. In 2019, Nike was popularly criticized for allegedly having sweatshops in China where their products are manufactured. In the case of Baden, their game balls are “manufactured in Chinese factories as well as in the Dominican Republic, Vietnam, Pakistan and Malaysia,” (Hobbs, 2013). If Baden Sports were to become more recognized nationwide, the public may start to look more closely at their manufacturing practices when choosing which brand of ball to purchase. Also, if someone were to look into Baden's manufacturing and find out that there was something unethical going on, that information could get out, which would create bad publicity.

Another external factor is the current and rising demand for sustainable products and equipment. According to the Baden Sports website, the company technically uses composite leather to manufacture their balls, which is a mix of authentic and synthetic leather, while fully-synthetic balls do not contain any real leather. The issue with this is that Baden's main mission is to create high-quality products, and sometimes that can't be achieved with fully-synthetic materials. The company may have to be ready for a challenge in the future of innovating a material that can achieve the same standard of quality while also being sustainable.

SWOT Analysis

Strengths: One strength that Baden has is that it is partnered with many different credible organizations which enhances their brand credibility. For example, one of its most notable partners is the Harlem Globetrotters, who are known for putting on shows doing fun tricks with basketballs. The quality of the basketballs would clearly be important to them, because their job requires them to essentially have a ball in their hands 24/7. Another well-known partner is AAU Volleyball, which is the organization that is in charge of putting together tournaments for club or travel teams for youth volleyball. This means that at every AAU-sanctioned volleyball tournament, Baden balls will be used, which is huge for brand visibility. The same goes for National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA) volleyball, which is a collegiate league separate from NCAA.

Another strength that the brand has is its focus on manufacturing personalized sports balls. Other brands also have this available, but not to the extent that Baden does. For instance, basketballs and volleyballs can be ordered with a name engraved into them. Customers can also go as far as to order custom sports balls, where they can choose the design, colors and logo that goes onto the ball.

Weaknesses: A main weakness that Baden faces is that their brand image is weak compared to the retail giants in their industry like Big 5 or Dick's Sporting Goods. To use their Instagram feeds as an example, Baden Sports has 13,000 followers while Big 5 has 40,700 and Dick's has 640,000. Another popular ball manufacturer is Wilson, and their Instagram has 75,100. All three of these competing accounts are also very active on Instagram, while the last post that Baden has is from almost a month ago. The competing accounts also frequently post on their story, even when they don't post on their feed. Baden rarely posts on their story. Their website also does not seem the most updated, as they have a section called "Blogs" where their last blog is from March of this year.

A second weakness is that Baden does not have physical retail stores, they are mainly an e-commerce business that distributes to clients. This makes it even more important for their online presence to be strong, but it only further contributes to their weaknesses. Baden's main competitors have retail stores all over the country, so their brand does not get as much visibility, and target markets across the country aren't as aware of their presence. For example, Big 5 has the type of presence where a customer can say, "I'm going to run to Big 5 and get a baseball glove," whereas that can't be said about Baden. The brand is seen to be available for purchase in certain sporting goods stores, but they are still at a disadvantage not having their own stores purely for Baden products.

Opportunities: A big opportunity that Baden is currently missing out on is capitalizing on their Pacific Northwest presence. In addition to their strong Washington market, they've begun distributing official game balls to a high school in Idaho and a couple Wyoming and Montana schools, but none in Oregon or Alaska (Partners Baden Sports). Not only could they expand out to more Pacific Northwest states than the three that they already have, they could also expand

more within the states they've acquired. This may require a lot of negotiating; perhaps many high schools have long-standing contracts with other brands.

Since quality is very important to Baden and they are always trying to think of ways to make the game better for the player, another opportunity that they could take advantage of is the insight of actual players. There are already three videos on their website with credible people telling the audience why they endorse Baden, but the customer is not just the coach, it is also the individual player. Seeing other players on Baden's social media tell why they like using Baden products would be an interesting and effective technique to show why these particular players chose Baden over a more well-known brand.

The use of pop-up stores could be another opportunity for Baden, since they don't have a retail presence. There are always sports tournaments going on, and Baden could start with setting up pop-ups at tournaments in the Pacific Northwest. This would also help build word-of-mouth promotion amongst the target publics.

Threats: Due to inflation after the COVID-19 pandemic, "the rising costs of raw materials are now more aggressively cutting into company profits, and could force them to control costs by slowing down production or even shedding workers," (He, 2021). Since inflation is an ongoing obstacle that companies have been facing the last two years, and Baden manufactures some of its products in China, this could be a future if not current threat.

Not only are the costs to manufacture products in China rising, but also the costs to import these products have risen since former president Donald Trump imposed tariffs on \$300 billion worth of imports in 2018, which has "[quadrupled] the trade-weighted average tariff rate Americans pay for Chinese imports, and a doubling of the trade-weighted average tariff rate Americans pay for imports generally," (Smith, Lee, 2022). For a smaller company like Baden,

who doesn't enjoy the tremendous amount of revenue that their competitors do, these increases in costs are not helpful for them. It has and will cause Baden to have to budget more carefully, and perhaps not produce as much as they would really like to.

Opportunity Statement

Baden Sports could benefit from a public relations campaign because there needs to be more engagement with their website since their business is mainly e-commerce. This can be done by utilizing pop-ups, highlighting athlete stories and heightening their online presence on social media.

Target Audience

The primary audience that would be most beneficial to target would be youth athletes from the age of 12-18, since they would be more active online than their parents might be, for example. Around this time is when a lot of kids become more serious about training for their sport, and decide if they want to play in college or not. Therefore, kids are looking for equipment that they can use outside of organized practices to get extra training in. This target market would likely be part of a middle to higher income family, and they would be athletes who are very committed to their sport. They would likely be very self-motivated and value hard work. Their parents would be part of the secondary public because they have the money to purchase the equipment for the kids.

Possible opinion leaders could be well-known high school athletes or coaches in the Pacific Northwest who could endorse Baden sports balls. The brand already has well-known women's basketball travel team coach, Barbara Berry, as an endorsement, but could use other coaches. They are also endorsed by former NBA All-Star, Brandon Roy. Getting the perspective of someone who is a high school athlete would build credibility for the brand and would look

good for the target audience who would be contemplating which brand of equipment they should buy. If they see that this successful athlete uses Baden, they will be more likely to also want to use that brand.

Campaign Plan

Goal

The goal for this public relations campaign is to increase Baden's customer base in the Pacific Northwest in 2023. One of the organization's weaknesses is that it has not expanded very much into the state of Oregon, even though they are a widely popular brand in Washington. Even if the target market in Oregon has heard of Baden, we want to work on moving them from an aware public, to an active public who makes the decision to purchase the Baden brand. This campaign would start January 2023.

Objective 1

The first objective is to raise awareness about the quality and backstory of the brand in 2023 by targeting youth athletes ages 12-18 and their parents. Teenagers are more accessible through social media, where we will be promoting Baden PR campaign events. Since the target market's parents are likely funding their participation in sports, teenagers would be able to tell their parents about the Baden brand the next time they need to purchase sporting goods equipment.

The theory that this campaign is based off of is the Diffusion of Innovations Theory. It describes a five-step decision-making process: awareness, knowledge, evaluation, trial and adoption (Page & Parnell, 2018). The target market must first be aware of the Baden brand and its benefits in order to consider buying it. They would then want to be educated about the brand,

which could be accomplished through our campaign events and through social media. The customer then thinks about whether or not the product would be useful to them and what they actually need the product to do for them in the evaluation stage. Trial involves the customer testing out the product to see if it's something they would enjoy before committing to actually buying it. Adoption is the stage where the customer decides to go through with purchasing the product and incorporating it into their lives.

Strategy 1

The first strategy to help raise awareness about the Baden brand is to put up a pop-up shop or booth at youth sports tournaments throughout the year featuring Baden's products and brand representatives to raise awareness about the brand. We want to begin our efforts in Oregon, since Baden has yet to have a strong presence in this state. The target market of kids aged 12-18 will be playing at these tournaments and parents likely go with them. This would be a prime opportunity to accomplish a few different steps of the Diffusions of Innovations Theory. If the potential customer was not already aware of the brand, they would be made aware. Then, they would have the opportunity to be educated by our brand representatives, which will cause them to evaluate the potential effectiveness of Baden sporting goods for them. We also plan on having sports balls available to show so that potential customers can try it out and see if they like it before deciding to make the purchase.

Tactic 1

At the booths that we set up, we will display an infographic about what makes Baden different from other brands and also its message so that potential customers can be quickly introduced to the main things that make Baden unique. This will also assist them in the

evaluation stage because they will be able to see how Baden has benefits over the brands that they might be purchasing instead.

The effectiveness of tactic one will be evaluated by how people respond on the surveys that I will expand on and also based on their reactions and level of interest in Baden after hearing about the brand. We can take note if customers had not heard about the brand before and if the infographic seemed to help them understand more what Baden is about.

Tactic 2

The next tactic that we will use is conducting in-person surveys to get an idea for what people already know/don't know about the brand. This would be a form of primary research for Baden since we are conducting the surveys ourselves. We will have people record their answers via Google Forms for easier analysis of the data. To encourage participation in the survey, we would offer a 10% discount on their next Baden purchase.

The effectiveness of this tactic will be evaluated by counting how many surveys were filled out throughout each day that the booths are set up. We can also analyze survey results to see where Baden may need to improve and what they are already performing well in according to potential customers.

Tactic 3

To further move the target market along in deciding to make a purchase, we will have a ball on display to show people and to explain what makes Baden technology different from other sporting goods brands. Once people have seen what Baden balls are like, they will be more likely to decide to adopt the product.

In order to evaluate this tactic, we could include a question within our survey that asks whether or not the person would consider switching sports ball brands and why. If the customer specifies particular parts of the ball that were highlighted in the trial, we will be able to see that the trial worked in informing the potential customer about the brand.

Strategy 2

Our second strategy is to create a 10-week social media campaign that expands on “Baden Stories” from their website, featuring a new athlete or coach every week and tells the customer what makes Baden unique. This will assist in the knowledge and evaluation stages of decision-making. Since these stories would be featured on the Baden social media, the target market would learn about the product through the posts. When they are evaluating whether or not they want to purchase, the target market will look at people who have credibility and who they feel like they can trust. If a well-known high school or college athlete were to shoot a video using Baden equipment and talking about what they like about the brand, the target market would be more likely to buy it.

The social media aspect also helps for members of the target market who can’t necessarily “try” the product out before they buy it. A large chunk of Baden sales are completed online and if they see someone using the equipment that they can trust, the potential customer won’t necessarily feel as obligated to go through the trial stage of the decision-making process.

Tactic 1

In order to get this social media campaign up and running, we must secure 3-5 well-known high school or college athletes and/or coaches in the Pacific Northwest to endorse the product. There are a lot of athletes and coaches in the sports world that have become famous

through social media because of something they do in a game or something they said went viral. Because of this, it shouldn't be incredibly hard locating the athletes, but it may take trial and error before we figure out who will endorse the product. There are a few athletes who already use Baden equipment, so we would start there with our recruitment efforts.

This could be evaluated by likes and mostly comments on social media because we will be able to see which athletes were the most popular choice and which ones may not be generating a ton of additional buzz that we need about Baden.

Tactic 2

The next tactic would be to simply shoot videos and take photos of the athletes and/or coaches using Baden products during training or practice. There could be voiceover along with the video with the athlete talking about why they love the Baden brand and how they think it helps to elevate their game.

How this tactic could be evaluated is by how well people interact with the content on social media. We can look into analytics like how many times posts were liked and shared and whether or not website visits have gone up after releasing the stories. We can also keep an eye out for any comments about what they liked about the videos and photos themselves instead of just what the athlete is saying.

Tactic 3

Tactic three would be to link their full story back to the company website. While the video will only feature snippets of what they have to say about the brand, the feature on the website can break it down even further and convince potential buyers even more about why they should purchase Baden. "Baden Stories" already exists on the website, but right now, only three

stories are on there. The revamped page could dedicate an entire page to the athlete or coach, with an introduction page listing the names of everyone that we recruit from a variety of sports.

We would evaluate this tactic through analyzing the amount of website visits and sales that we increase by after releasing the stories. There are also ways to track the customers' clicks on the website to see the route that they took in order to make the purchase or at least in order to put something in their cart.

Objective 2

Our second objective is to increase the amount of high schools in the Pacific Northwest that use Baden sports balls by 10%. To start off the campaign, we will be focusing on high schools in Oregon since Baden has not yet expanded to any high schools in this area. This is an important objective to focus on because when more high schools use the Baden brand, the company will not only get more business from ordering sporting goods in bulk, but they will also raise awareness about their brand. At high school games, there are lots of people watching and more people would recognize the Baden brand if it was consistently used in games.

Strategy 1

The main way to reach high schools in Oregon is to reach out to the athletic directors. This can be done through calling and emailing the school. It's important that we include this because as the PR professionals, we can help inform Baden which schools are showing interest and which ones we may need to try a different tactic on in order to convince them to switch brands or upgrade.

Tactic 1

The first tactic would be to email athletic directors a promotional email about the brand and its comparison to competitors. This would be an effective first email to send out in mass numbers because it would at the very least help generate awareness about the brand name if they had not already known about it. If they had, it could also plant the seed whenever they next think about needing to buy new equipment. We may also immediately get a response back saying that they are not interested, which we could take note of, but still be able to reach out to them less frequently with special offers Baden may have.

Tactic one will be evaluated by how many responses we generate from the emails and whether or not they are interested in the Baden products because of the email. We can keep track of positive responses, people that don't reply and people that say they aren't interested at that time. For each of these situations, we would have a different strategy for the follow-up email.

Tactic 2

If a response is given, another email could be sent with a discount offer and perhaps a call to the athletic director to make the interaction more personal. The discount would be a good way to build trust and could be a convincing factor since athletic directors focus a lot of their efforts on the budget for all of their sports equipment. Talking to a representative on the phone would more easily answer any question or concern they may have about Baden or about the purchasing or shipping process.

We will also be able to evaluate this tactic by keeping track of how they respond. If the response is positive, we would offer to schedule a call. If there is no response, we would send more emails once every couple of weeks to make sure they don't forget about Baden when they

think about purchasing new equipment. After the phone call, they could be asked to answer a survey online about the quality of the call.

Strategy 2

Our second strategy in reaching Oregon high schools is to create informational material to send to athletic directors by mail. Sometimes, emails can get lost and there are likely a lot that athletic directors have to go through each day. There may also be other sporting goods brands reaching out. Sending information by mail could help differentiate the brand from others and help Baden stand out as a top choice.

Tactic 1

The first round of mail that we would send would be copies of infographics explaining the positive aspects of Baden and why they would be a more cost-efficient option than their competitors. Since athletic directors are concerned about budgeting, it would be helpful to see the quick and easy facts about the brand and how Baden provides high quality for a bargain price. We would also have to make sure to do research on our competitors so that we are providing potential customers accurate information. We could even take it a step further and look into the current brand that the school is using, if that information is available to us anywhere.

This tactic would be evaluated by any sort of response that we receive regarding the infographic. We would display the contact email on the materials that we sent out so that athletic directors could reach us. Based on their feedback and questions, we could see what information we may want to add to the infographic or take out.

Tactic 2

As a follow-up to this infographic, we could send comments from other schools' athletic directors about why they chose Baden for their sports equipment. This may include additional secondary research such as reaching out to our current customers and asking them for quotes or feedback. This could also be generated through an online survey that we send out to current customers periodically so that we can get a sense of what Baden is doing well. When potential customers see that other schools are enjoying the brand and that they are enjoying the cost-efficiency and high quality that it provides, they will be more likely to buy it. This is similar to our target market of high school athletes seeing well-known athletes use the brand, which builds credibility and the target market's trust in the brand.

We would evaluate this tactic by once again seeing how potential athletic directors respond to these comments from other schools. We would keep track of schools who responded to the first set of infographics, but in general, they are more likely to respond the second time around once they see that the infographics aren't just junk mail. Once we've read their responses, we will decide what the best course of action is depending on if they showed interest or not.

Evaluation of Objectives

In order to evaluate the effectiveness of the first objective – raising awareness about the brand to the target market of high school athletes – we would keep track of how many new customers we have throughout the year, especially focusing on the state of Oregon. We also want to focus our attention on expanding the amount of high schools in the Pacific Northwest that use Baden sports equipment, our second objective. Since we are specifically focusing on Oregon, we

would simply have to keep track of how many high schools that we were able to convince to switch to the Baden brand using the strategies and tactics described above.

Focusing on these two target audiences – high school athletes and athletic directors in Oregon – we strongly believe that utilizing the components of this PR campaign will help to achieve our overall goal of increasing Baden's customer base in the Pacific Northwest in 2023.

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