“Guerrilla marketing – structuring the manifestations and critical evaluation”

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Guerrilla marketing – structuring the manifestations and critical evaluation

Abstract

Guerrilla marketing designates the selection of atypical and non-dogmatic marketing activities that aim to achieve the greatest possible impact – in the ideal case with a comparable minimum investment. Guerrilla marketing has developed into a basic strategy overarching the marketing mix, a basic marketing policy attitude for market development that goes off the beaten track to consciously seek new, unconventional, previously disregarded, possibly even frown-upon possibilities for the deployment of tools. It is a fine line between innovative, creative marketing and producing reactance in the minds of the audience by exceeding limits. While guerrilla marketing activities can be seen more and more in the marketing practice, the phenomenon is either discussed very controversially in the marketing science or even neglected completely in the scientific marketing literature. The paper gives an overview of guerrilla marketing. It describes and structures guerrilla marketing in a novel form and shows illustrating examples. Finally, guerrilla marketing is evaluated from a neutral perspective and developmental trends are traced.

Keywords: guerrilla marketing, marketing communications, marketing mix, innovative marketing.

Introduction

These days, companies are primarily engaged in a communications competition and no longer in competition over products. Due to intensified communications efforts, the attempt is being made to counter the increasing homogenization of products by achieving a needs-oriented differentiation. The communications market is undergoing economic, communicative and social changes that are making reorientation of communications policy a necessity. The willingness of the public to be subjected to a static, continuously repetitive and thereby allegedly boring constant stream of information and communication continues to drop. According to various studies, the level of information overload of a consumer amounts to between 95 and 98 per cent – i.e. only a minute fraction of the information being offered has even the slightest chance of being absorbed by consumers (Homburg, 2012; Kotler, Armstrong, Saunders and Wong, 2010).

To keep scatter loss as low as possible, an inter-instrumental shift is taking place in favor of non-classical communications tools, as the failure of classical, conventional forms of advertising to be effective becomes increasingly evident. This is giving rise to a demand for innovative new marketing strategies such as guerrilla marketing. Guerrilla marketing offers new and unusual opportunities to counter the increasing consumer aversion to advertising.

1. Characterization of guerrilla marketing

The term "guerrilla" originates with the military. "Guerrilla" is the diminutive of the Spanish word for war, "Guerra". Thus, "guerrilla" is equivalent to "small war" or "partisan warfare" whose goal it is to weaken the opponent in certain spots (Schulte, 2007).

The transfer of the guerrilla concept to marketing terminology results in diverse interpretations and opinions as to the implementation and functions of guerrilla marketing. The fundamental determinant in characterizing guerrilla marketing is its unconventional nature. "Guerrilla marketing is a body of unconventional ways of pursuing conventional goals is a proven method of achieving profits with minimum money" (Levinson, 2013).

For the following analysis a comprehensive definition of guerrilla marketing is applied: Guerrilla marketing is as an alternative, holistic marketing approach. The concept designates the selection of atypical and non-dogmatic marketing activities that aim to achieve the greatest possible impact with a minimum investment. Guerrilla marketing has developed into a basic strategy overarching the marketing mix, a basic marketing policy attitude for market development that goes off the beaten track to consciously seek new, unconventional, previously disregarded, possibly even frown-upon possibilities for the deployment of tools (Zerr, 2003; Schulte, 2007; Levinson, 2013).

There are many other approaches to defining and attempts at circumscribing the term guerrilla marketing. In reviewing these, one can identify constantly recurring constituent characteristics of guerrilla marketing. According to these, guerrilla marketing is (Levinson, 2008; Patalas, 2006; Jäckel, 2007):

- unconventional;
- surprising;
- original/creative;
- cheeky/provocative;
- cost-efficient/effective;
- flexible;
- unusual/atypical;
- funny/witty;
- spectacular;
- contagious.

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In summary, it can be stated that the philosophy of guerrilla marketing consists of attaining conventional marketing objectives with unconventional methods. Thus, surprising content can turn a classical advertising vehicle or medium into a guerrilla marketing activity. In this way, guerrilla marketing does not make traditional marketing obsolete, but has a supportive point-to-point effect and helps the marketing mix, mainly the communications mix, to take on an innovative new face. At its core, guerrilla marketing aims to be different and to attract attention. As a rule, a comparatively smaller investment (than is common for traditional marketing) should achieve as great an impact as possible (Patalas, 2006; Jäckel, 2007; Schulte, 2007).

2. Guerrilla marketing as a strategy

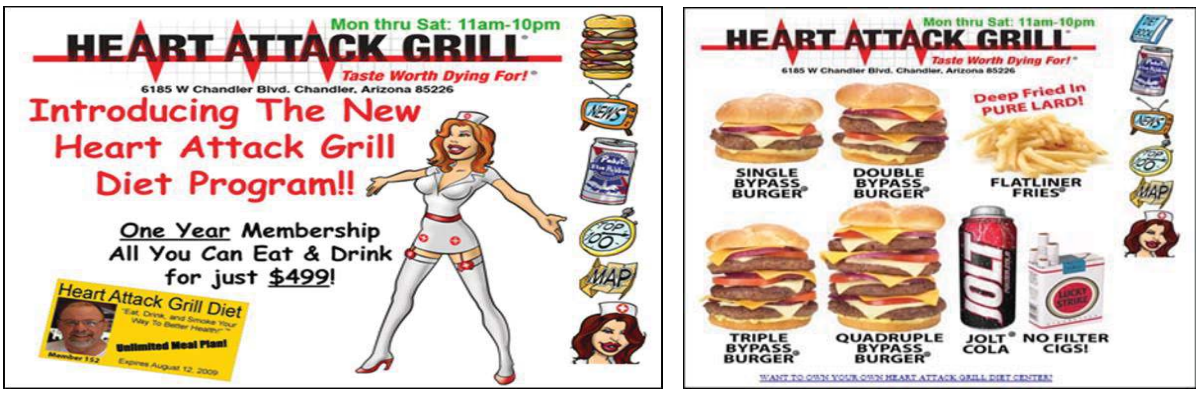
Guerrilla marketing is a philosophy and an attitude that must be deeply ingrained in the company (Patalas, 2006). At the same time guerrilla marketing varies with the size of the company, which is why Levinson (2007) states "different wars require different tactics". In literature there can be found a differentiation of three distinct strategies that can be implemented using guerrilla marketing. Guerrilla marketing as an attack strategy, as niche marketing and as a strategy for small and mid-sized companies (Schulte, 2007; Kotler, Armstrong, Saunders and Wong, 2010; Patalas, 2006; Zerr, 2003).

2.1. Attack strategy. Based on the military origin of the term guerrilla and the obvious association, guerrilla marketing may initially be designated as an attack strategy. This is a competition-directed marketing strategy, focusing on a particular competitor, the recipient of this unexpected attack (Welling, 2005; Durö and Sandström, 1986).

There are five different types of attack strategy (Kotler, Armstrong, Saunders and Wong, 2010): The frontal attack and the encirclement strategy aim at the general weakening of the market leader. They relate to all areas of the marketing mix. Sufficient financial resources are essential for the success of both strategies. A focus on the competitor's unprotected or unattended market segments due to concentration on the core business is the essence of the flank attack and the circumvention strategy. These strategies are particularly applicable if the challenger has fewer resources available than does the market leader. In contrast to the above, the guerrilla attack is comprised of multiple small, point by point attacks with a cumulative effect. The element of surprise is the decisive component of this strategy. The strategic expediency of the guerrilla attack is primarily suited for smaller companies with weak financial resources due to its short-term concentration of power.

2.2. Niche strategy. The objective of a niche strategy is the focus and concentration on a very specific and narrowly confined buyer segment. Companies who serve niche markets are distinctive for the "otherness" of their range of products and services. As a niche strategy, guerrilla marketing incorporates the requirement for the development or creation of new niches and the defence of traditional market niches (Porter, 1992).

The example of the American fast food restaurant "Heart Attack Grill", that serves only unhealthy products, is an impressive personification of the niche idea of guerrilla marketing (see Figure 1). The name of the restaurant itself already allows to draw inferences as to its unconventional positioning and the promotion of a counter-trend in nutritional behavior. The high-calorie orders are served by attractive young "nurses" in skimpy nurses' costumes, who also offer carafes of beer and unfiltered cigarettes. This unusual niche positioning provided the Arizona enterprise with a great deal of media resonance in the American and even in the Japanese press. In addition, they established an extraordinary pricing model: "All You Can Eat & Drink" for 499 dollars a year.



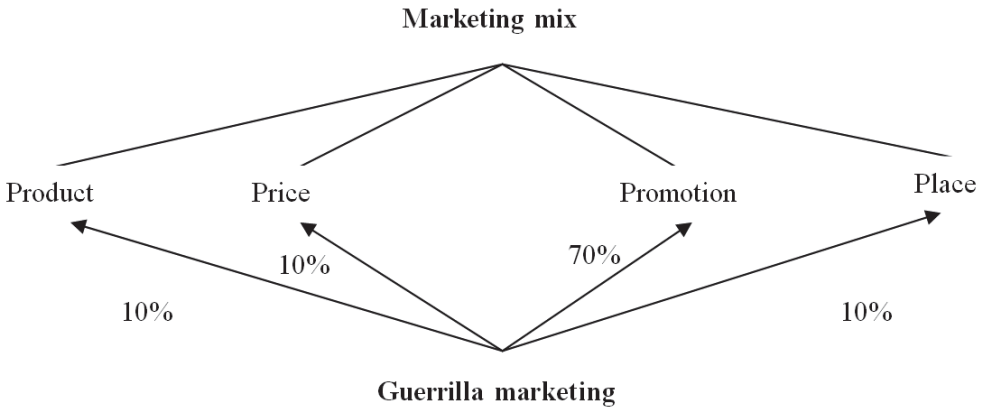
Source: http://www.heartattackgrill.com.

Fig. 1. Guerrilla strategy of the "Heart attack grill"

2.3. Strategy for small- and medium-sized companies. The guerrilla marketing approach that is based on the attributes of ingenuity, unconventionality and flexibility, is often applied by small and mid-sized enterprises, due to their optimal fulfillment of these prerequisites. It is not uncommon for the premise of guerrilla marketing to be the optimum application of scarce available resources. The effectiveness of the marketing strategy is less a factor of the financial budget than of creativity, resourcefulness and unconventional advertising measures (Schulte, 2007).

3. Marketing mix for guerrilla marketing

With its creative and unconventional approaches, guerrilla marketing can enrich the entire marketing mix, although typically in varying degrees of frequency of application (see Figure 2 below). Guerrilla marketing functions as a bundle of accompanying measures that make strategic and tactical modifications to the classical marketing mix to provide the company with an advantage through context-specific unusualness.



Source: Schulte (2007, p. 20).

Fig. 2. Application of guerrilla marketing in the marketing mix

The concept of guerrilla marketing was initially practiced before it found its way, with some delay, into academic literature. Therefore, the following classification of guerrilla marketing within the marketing mix draws on vivid examples of its practical application (see, e.g. Levinson, 2008; Schulte, 2007).

3.1. Guerrilla product policy. Since the year 2000, gherkins of the Spreewaldhof brand have also been available in tins. Spreewaldhof packs its popular 250g gherkins individually, stylishly in ring-pull aluminum tins that are sold at petrol stations, supermarkets, discotheques and fitness centers (see Figure 3). The break with the predominant stereotypical packaging of gherkins in a glass jar as well as with the conventional distribution channels is apparent. These unusual measures aim at gaining a competitive advantage over competitors. In the context of the product policy, guerrilla marketing can, for example, exert some influence on decision-making factors with regard to the actual product, the packaging and the choice of a name.

Source: http://www.spreewaldhof.net.

Fig. 3. Example of guerrilla product policy

3.2. Guerrilla price policy. As early as the 1980's Drypers, then a newcomer on the American nappy market, attacked market leader Procter & Gamble and its Pampers brand with an aggressive pricing strategy with its low-priced nappies. Procter & Gamble reacted with a coupon promotion that offered consumers a generous discount of 2 US$ with the purchase of P&G nappies. But Drypers retaliated cleverly. They offered customers the option of also using the P&G coupons for the

purchase of Drypers nappies – with success. The guerrilla element in this course of action is primarily the flexibility and canniness of Drypers, in turning the weapon directed at them around and using it as their own. Thus, guerrilla marketing decisions are also applicable to price policy.

3.3. Guerrilla distribution policy. Customers who had pre-ordered the fifth volume of the popular Harry Potter-series entitled "The Order of the Phoenix" from the Weltbild publishing house were free to choose the time of delivery. The special aspect here was the option of flash delivery by the German post, at the witching hour between 00.00 and 02.00 hours on the night of the publication date – and without any additional charge. In so doing, Weltbild wanted to offer its customers an unusual service and a time advantage. This makes it clear that guerrilla marketing can also be used in distribution policy.

3.4. Guerrilla communications policy. However, guerrilla principles can be most efficiently integrated in communications policy-related measures. Viewed from this perspective, guerrilla marketing is among the non-classical forms of communications policy ("below the line" activities). The deployment of classical tools of the communications mix forms the basis upon which guerrilla marketing is selectively applied as an additive, surprising component of integrated communications (see Figure 4).

Source: http://www.adverblog.de.

Fig. 4. Examples of guerrilla communications policy

Guerrilla marketing is primarily used as a communications policy. Therefore, the following section will deal with the various application possibilities of guerrilla marketing in terms of communications policy in greater detail.

4. Guerrilla marketing tools

Guerrilla marketing can be implemented with diverse tools. Thereby, until now no uniform categorization of these instruments has prevailed. In the following the most important instruments of guerrilla marketing are structured in the three categories "infection guerrilla marketing", "surprise guerrilla marketing" and "ambush marketing". "Low budget guerrilla marketing" is a special case that can be subsumed to all other categories (see Figure 5).

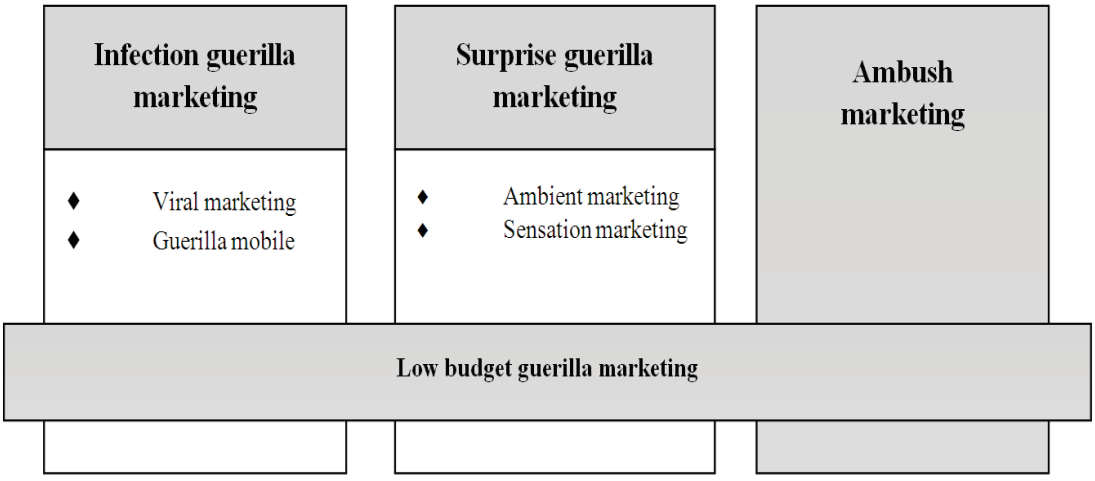


Fig. 5. Overview of tools of guerrilla marketing

Low-budget guerrilla marketing is particularly suited for small and mid-sized companies that have only very limited budgets at their disposal. While infection guerrilla marketing attempts to make use of the opportunities especially provided by the new media, surprise guerrilla marketing concentrates on communications instruments that are employed in the public space or at special locations. Finally ambush marketing mainly occurs in the context of sporting events.

4.1. Low-budget guerrilla marketing. For small and mid-sized companies the emphasis of their communications policy is on the direct address of the (often regional) target group with creative, unusual and quirky ideas. Their aim is to underscore special features and "otherness", thereby imbuing the company with a special significance in the eyes of consumers. This approach thrives primarily on a long-term, consistent commitment (Schulte and Pradel, 2006; Jäckel, 2007). Examples as to how awareness can be attained with cost-efficient low-budget marketing activities include eye-catching calling cards that project a clear and simple message or specially dressed-up promotion teams distributing original flyers and give-aways.

4.2. Infection guerrilla marketing. Infection guerrilla marketing includes viral marketing and mobile marketing.

4.2.1. Viral marketing. The infection strategy of viral marketing is similar to that of biological viruses: however, instead of the proliferation of pathogens, the focus here is on the exponential dissemination of a marketing message. By recommending a product or service to friends or acquaintances, consumers themselves become the advertising vehicles – whereby neither the transmitter nor the receiver of the message perceives the recommendation as advertising. The dissemination of the message can take place offline by word of mouth communication (mouth to mouth propaganda, buzz marketing) or online, virtually "from mouse to mouse" (Förster and Kreuz, 2006; Langner, 2005). For example, within only half a year Johnny Walker's free PC game "Grouse Hunt" was downloaded from the internet by a total of 40 million users, thus propelling the brand to immense awareness levels.

A further outstanding example of a viral marketing campaign is the marketing of the low-budget film "The Blair Witch Project". The guerrilla campaign began as early as two years before the film hit the cinemas. The "Independent Film Channel" broadcast an unusual documentary about the disappearance of three students in the forests of the state of Maryland in the US. The television channel associated the disappearance with a spooky witch legend, which was reinforced by the statements of both the filmmakers Myrick and Sanchez during an interview. Their assertions that they were in possession of mysterious videotapes subsequently unleashed curiosity and sensationalist cravings among the public. With the design and launch of a website, the falsification of police documents and photographic evidence as well as accompanying reports in high-circulation magazines (such as Time Magazine and Newsweek) they generated additional free PR (see Figure 6). The website of the documentary film project recorded 100,000 hits after one week, a number that grew to over 2 million by the launch of the film. The public was infected by the Blair Witch virus and captivated (Langner, 2005; Förster and Kreuz, 2006).

Source: http://en.wikipedia.org.

Fig. 6. Example of viral marketing

4.2.2. Guerrilla mobile. Mobile marketing deals with the transmission of messages via mobile phones. Here, the jumping-off point for the use of guerrilla marketing is the fact that today the smartphone has advanced to the status of steady companion for many people in all life situations, thereby making the consumer approachable at any given time. By sending creative and humorous messages, for

example via SMS, the objective is not only to have the advertising messages instantly read and absorbed, but ideally also immediately passed on to friends and acquaintances. The close association with viral marketing is obvious. As the options – with infrared, Bluetooth and MMS – steadily become more diversified, the significance of the mobile communications market for companies continues to grow (Jäckel, 2007; Schulte and Pradel, 2006).

In the run-up to the cinema release of the thriller "Hide and Seek" the film production company Twentieth Century Fox sent 100,000 young people a text message with the following content: "Why don't you turn around…" By scrolling down the message, the initially baffled target persons were able to learn the solution: "You don't see me! I am hiding. HIDE AND SEEK, the horror thriller now at the cinema. www.fox.de" (Jäckel, 2007).

4.3. Surprise guerrilla marketing. Surprise guerrilla marketing encompasses the tools ambient marketing and sensation marketing.

4.3.1. Ambient marketing. Ambient media is a collective term that aggregates all non-classical advertising media. Ambient media are placed and integrated in the direct living environment of consumers – are therefore not perceived as annoying, but rather often seen as likeable and original (e.g. postcards in trendy pubs, shower gel samples in locker rooms of fitness studios). Special hallmarks of ambient marketing are the radical nature, the speed and the creativity with which the public space is co-opted. Consumers are taken by surprise with advertising where they don't anticipate it. The advertising message is transmitted in popular locations such as clubs, bus stops, the baggage conveyer at the airport or petrol pumps while refueling. Here, switching channels is not an option. Ambient marketing can be planned and is repeatable (Förster and Kreuz, 2006; Schulte, 2007).

Public lavatories in particular have been discovered by the advertising industry as a place where "induced forced involvement", thus a high-involvement situation can be generated and used for the placement of advertising messages (see Figure 7).

Source: http://www.sit-watch.de.

Fig. 7. Examples of ambient marketing

4.3.2. Sensation marketing. Sensation marketing is basically very similar to ambient marketing. The main difference being that as a general rule sensation marketing activities are one-time occurrences, and not repeatable. The aim is to surprise and fascinate the consumers and produce an "aha" or a "wow" effect. The terms "guerrilla sensation" and "ambient stunt" represent unusual, spectacular special activities (Jäckel, 2007).

Guerrilla sensation refers to a dynamic activity involving people. An example of this would be the "Street Show" of jeans brand Lee that staged unannounced fashion shows on the streets of large cities. On the other hand, the ambient stunt entails a spectacular static installation whose presentation is no less unconventional. The media-effective activities are conducted at strategic, high-traffic locations in order to generate a great deal of attention. This form of guerrilla marketing also makes use of multipliers such as media dissemination and viral effects in order to inform as broad a public as possible of the stunt. The auto rental company Sixt has been attracting attention for several years with flashy guerrilla sensation activities, and sports equipment maker Nike attempts to regularly surprise its target audience with sensation marketing (see Figure 8).

Source: http://www.adverblog.de.

Fig. 8. Examples of sensation marketing

4.4. Ambush marketing. For many companies, it is major international sporting events (e.g. the Football World Cup or the Olympics) that constitute the ideal platform for the integration of their target group-specific marketing communication into an attractive sports environment. Sports event organizers, therefore, sell exclusive marketing rights for their events to official sponsors, who, in return, acquire exclusive options to utilize the event for their own advertising purposes. Ambush marketing is the method used by companies that do not actually hold marketing rights to an event, but still use their marketing activities in diverse ways to establish a connection to it (see Figure 9).

Source: http://www.lh2006.com.

Fig. 9. Examples of ambush marketing

Ambush marketing is the practice by companies of using their own marketing, particularly marketing communications activities, to give an impression of an association with the event to the event audience, although the companies in question have no legal or only underprivileged or non-exclusive marketing rights for this event sponsored by third parties. Thus, ambushers want to promote and sell products via an association with the event as official sponsors are allowed to do (Nufer, 2013).

5. Critical assessment

A selective distinction and unambiguous categorization of the various guerrilla marketing instruments is not possible. On the contrary, the individual instruments complement one another and thus function synergistically to produce the actual impact of guerrilla marketing.

New opportunities for marketing arise from the changes taking place in markets, in communications and consumers. Jung and von Matt have determined that "It is good to know the most important rules of communication, for then one can break them more purposefully" (Jung and von Matt, 2002).

Guerrilla marketing attempts to counteract the prevailing marketing monotony and to get a hold of consumers in the space where classical marketing abandons them. Today, guerrilla marketing is, therefore, viewed as an especially spectacular and media-effective complement to the classical marketing mix. The prevailing dynamics and spontaneity of this concept increase the willingness of advertiser companies and consumers to interact. The emotion-spiked messages facilitate the decoding of the encrypted message and its absorption by

consumers. Guerrilla marketing is emotional and effective, and yet at the same time inexpensive. It helps marketers to establish a brand as the friend of the customer (Conceptbakery, 2008).

Guerrilla marketing should be new, brash and provocative. The consequence of this is that guerrilla marketers often find themselves operating in a moral and legal grey area, in a balancing act between morality and bad taste or legality and illegality that results from the requirement to breach taboos and the associated greater attention levels. As opposed to classical marketing methods, the result is higher potential for moral and legal conflict. Cautious and meticulous planning in the execution of guerrilla activities is called for, as guerrilla marketing may thwart the brand building and image of the company with such an activity. Accompanied by the break with conventions and mores, guerrilla marketing ranges between fascination and annoyance, and this can have a negative effect on the image and may even destroy the core values of the brand.

Table 1. Summarizes the similarities and especially the differences between the concepts of guerrilla marketing and traditional transaction marketing

Criterion	Guerrilla marketing	Traditional marketing
Goals	Conventional	Conventional
Methods	Creative, unconventional	Conventional
Orientation	Implementation-oriented	Decision-oriented
Approach	Punctual, focusing, surprising	General, broad, typical
Target group	Often comparably small (but not always)	Mass market
Communication principle	Many to many	One to many
Multiplication	Viral	Action replay
Intensity of contact	High	Low
Time focus	Short term	Long term
Perspective	Evolutionary-dynamic	Static
Application	In the beginning primarily small and medium sized companies, now no limitation	All companies
Classification	Complementary, no substitution of classical marketing	Lead approach

Conclusions and developmental trends

Overall, guerrilla marketing cannot and does not seek to replace the classical marketing mix, but rather to illustrate new directions and, as a comprehensive new concept, support the proven marketing tools and supplement them with unconventional elements (Patalas, 2006; Schulte, 2007). In the future, guerrilla marketing will be more and more integrated into the classical marketing mix. Both concepts will be harmonious when marketers follow the basic rule: first learn the duty (classical marketing mix), then think about the free skate (guerrilla marketing). You must know the principles of marketing as a pre-condition before applying guerrilla marketing.

Guerrilla marketing involves a concept that has been heavily driven by business or corporate practice. The shortage, up to now, of scientifically substantiated knowledge on the subject matter of guerrilla marketing, its instruments and its categorization may be interpreted from two different points of view: guerrilla marketing cannot be classified or guerrilla marketing is difficult to classify.

Guerrilla marketing is increasingly developing into an effective spearhead of the marketing and communications mix, to gain a decisive advantage in the battle for the attention and the receptiveness of the consumer. Guerrilla marketing operates by the simple principle: KISS – keep it simple, stupid (Nufer, 2012).

Guerrilla marketing is a dynamic concept that sheds its skin again and again, as it circumvents the traditional old methods and their application. The release from the bonds of marketing convention has consistently attested to the endlessness of opportunities inherent in marketing. Levinson summarizes it as follows: "Marketing has a beginning and a middle but not an ending" (Levinson, 2007).

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