

## **3D PRINTING AND CRAFTSMAN TOOLS: A BRANDING CASE STUDY**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This case is designed for junior and senior level classes in marketing, management, or information systems that deal with strategy, branding and the impact of technology on business and legal processes. The primary purpose of this teaching case is to identify the potential impact of 3D printing technology on a well-known brand, such as Craftsman Tools and the potential response to this threat by the company's branding manager.

The case provides students with the opportunity to consider the ramifications of losing the value of a solid reputation held by a strong brand such as Craftsman Tools as well as learning some potential steps to mitigate any damage to the products' brand identity.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Traditional (brick and mortar) retailers have faced increasing pressure from the forces of technology, particularly e-commerce, resulting in many filing for bankruptcy and closing many stores (Ivanova, 2017). Another technology with the potential to disrupt traditional business models for many retailers and manufacturers is 3D printing. The ability to "print" objects with a strong brand identity can wreak havoc on the reputation of that brand. If the brand identity is

positive, with a strong reputation, it can be even more valuable than the other assets of the firm (Berthon et al., 2007).

Sears Craftsman Tools is one of the most valuable items contained in the Sears portfolio. During earlier years when sales of “softer goods” such as clothes, toys, and linens were dramatically down, it was the sales of tools and hardware which kept the retailer afloat. There are endless stories of parents handing down Craftsman Tools from parent to child and from mentor to apprentice. Craftsman Tools carry with them not only this tradition, but they also come backed by a lifetime warranty as well.

Kevin Parker is the Brand Manager for Craftsman Tools and has worked his way up the company ladder for the last twenty years, through many of the tough times that Sears has faced. Kevin is proud and excited about heading one of the top departments in his company. Yesterday, a friend sent a YouTube video to Kevin that they thought he would be interested in seeing. The video was done by an amateur in what appears to be his workshop or garage and features a Craftsman wrench. Kevin at first thought that this was just another “see what I can do with a Craftsman wrench” video, where the Craftsman item is handled badly and afterwards still able to be used. This, however, was a different story. It was a video of a person using a 3D printer to

“print” a copy of a Craftsman wrench and then show that the “printed” copy was a usable wrench.

Kevin was intrigued by the video and sent it around to his colleagues to view. All of them thought of it as something interesting, but nobody indicated any outward concern. Over the next few weeks, Kevin started thinking about the video and decided that the scenario needed to be discussed among the marketing staff and, maybe, that the legal staff should be brought in as well.

### **Short Term Issues**

*Should Sears apply to Google/YouTube to have the video removed from the site?*

Part of the group believes that this video is good public relations for the company. But others believe it sets a dangerous precedent in that consumers will not see any issues in copying their products, much as consumers usually see no issues in copying digital products such as music or movies. In the past Sears has not policed videos with their products in it, especially if it looked to be an amateur video and was not controversial. *Should Sears put up their own video of a Sears employee printing a Craftsman wrench?*

This was a suggestion by one member of the marketing group since Sears would control the content of the video and make the point that the “printed” wrench was not as good as the true Craftsman wrench.

## Long Term Issues

*What if 3D printing reaches a point where the printed version is as good as the original version? What are the implications for distribution processes and related issues? Consumers can print at home, so why go to a retailer?*

One of the marketing team members suggests that the designs/specifications for the tools could be as valuable as the tools themselves. In order to minimize damage to the brand identity, selling the actual designs of the tools could mitigate the damage to the brand from cheap 3D printed copies.

*What does selling the design plans/specifications do for product and pricing tactics?*

The marketing team recognizes that in order to protect the value of the Craftsman Tools' brand and reputation, it might be in the best interest of the company to consider selling the designs as a means to retain the brand identity as well as maintain revenue. If Sears still sells Craftsman wrenches, how do they price the plans/specifications to print a Craftsman wrench at the consumer's home or at another business? Is this something they even want to do? Is it possible they will be forced to offer the designs/specifications, perhaps bundling the items together – a customer can buy a wrench and the plans/specifications together.

*What if the Craftsman brand is damaged by someone using a 3D printed Craftsman tool that is not nearly as high quality as a true Craftsman?*

The consumer may not know the 3D printed wrench is not a true Craftsman. Bring in info on how it is difficult to tell originals versus fakes from China and other areas- brake pads, pills, etc.

The consumer may know the 3D printed wrench is a not a true Craftsman, but not care If it is cheaper and looks like a Craftsman, that may be all the consumer is looking for.

## References

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Berthon, P., Holbrook, M.B., Hulbert, J.M., & Pitt, L.F. (2007). Viewing brands in multiple dimensions. *MIT Sloan Management Review*, 48(2), 37-43.