

The Power of Branding: Dover Downs Entertainment, Inc.

By Cynthia Mayo, George Fiorile and Richard Mahee

Introduction

The Power of Branding case is an analysis of the development and implementation of a branding strategy developed by Dover Downs Gaming and Entertainment, Incorporated, located in Dover, Delaware, USA and Diageo, one of the world's largest beverage companies. The Poker Room at Dover Downs Gaming and Entertainment, Incorporated was named the Crown Royal Poker Room, a "one of a kind" arrangement to develop a sustainable brand and to address key emerging competition. Further, the case provides a brief analysis of Dover Downs Gaming and Entertainment, Incorporated from the humble beginnings of horse and car racing to a diverse, multifaceted gaming, entertainment and retail venue.

When the downward trend in horse racing was enhanced with the development of Dover Downs Casino (original name), featuring slot machines, the need to capture a broader base of persons seeking exciting gaming opportunities was inevitable. Operating as a team, the Executive Council was charged with the tasks of assessing, monitoring and designing new venues to remain competitive. The team consisted of the President and Chief Operating Officer, the Vice President and General Manager, the Vice President of Marketing, Vice President of Finance and Operations. The Council was charged with the task of designing innovative venues, working directly with state legislators, as each group monitored new trends, consumer behavior and most importantly new and intense competition. The President and CEO was the lead person to facilitate the planning process. The Council members served on many local, state, national and international boards to monitor new trends and initiatives in the process of "staying ahead."

As Delaware continued to promote its gaming venues, more states realized the potential for regulated profitable gaming venues. As economic theory predicts, as more venues become available, a downward trend in profits emerges, due to increased suppliers and stimulated demands (McConnell, 2012), signaling a continuous need to design innovative "new" sub-venues in the gaming and entertainment arenas. Therefore, continuous proposals were generated by the Executive Council with the President and CEO taking the lead for

legislative actions and this became a constant task. State laws were developed providing for the implementation of more slot machines, sports betting and table games. Restaurants, sports bars, and retail outlets were also created to enhance Dover Downs Gaming and Entertainment, gaming experiences and strategies were developed to market and brand its venues and services. The introduction of the Crown Royal Poker Room: a first ever "naming rights" with Diageo proved to be a profitable and successful partnership. As a result of its actions, Dover Downs Gaming and Entertainment continues today to be a "one of a kind" venue.

A brief history of Dover Downs Gaming and Entertainment, Incorporated (will be referred to as Dover Downs); the emerging competitive and legislative threats and the branding strategies developed will be discussed in the paragraphs to follow. A financial capsule of strategy results is also included at the end of the case.

Case Objectives

The objectives of this case are to review historical events of organization and development of venues at Dover Downs; identify and evaluate branding theories and strategies implemented to gain a competitive edge, given intense competition; and track the steps taken by Dover Downs, to plan and implement extended venues and a "naming rights ordeal."

Historical Briefs of Dover Downs Gaming and Entertainment

Dover Downs was incorporated in 1967 to begin a "one of a kind" motorsports and harness racing operation. It was designed as a dual-purpose complex to provide horse racing and motorsports operations. The facility was noted as a dual-purpose complex that offered winter-time horse racing and yearly motorsports operations. The design of the facility included a 5/8 mile horse race track, surrounded by a one-mile asphalt track. The uniqueness of Dover Downs is that the facility was built for two types of races: car racing and harness racing. The first motorsports event took place as a NASCAR Grand National Series race called the Mason-Dixon 300 (now Sprint Cup Series). It was held on July 6, 1969. On November 19, 1969, the first harness race took place. Following 1969, a thoroughbred meet was held each spring and winter and it is an event that occurs today. An all-time record attendance of 5,971 fans occurred on February 4, 1973 (www.doverdowns.com/our-history).

Cynthia Mayo is affiliated with Delaware State University. George Fiorile is affiliated with Dover Downs Hotel and Casino. Richard Mahee is affiliated with Delaware State University.

Dover Downs is one of three casinos or racinos operating in Delaware. One (Harrington Raceway and Casino) is located in the southernmost part of Delaware and is less than 90 miles from Washington, DC and 85 miles from Baltimore, Maryland. Dover Downs is in the middle of Delaware and the third casino is Delaware Park, located near the northern city of Wilmington. Delaware Park is less than 40 miles from Philadelphia, and less than 60 miles from Atlantic City and thus faces intense competition from many regional casinos. However, Dover Downs is the only casino in Delaware with a luxury five-star hotel; it can draw and serve a larger base, limiting potential losses to other local and regional gaming venues. As new competition continued to emerge from surrounding states, the need to enhance venues and services with possible branding opportunities to attract a loyal and dedicated customer base continued (Pakko, 2005, p.6).

Threats to Economic Threats

Racing profits were good, but a downward trend in horse racing occurred in the 1980s, with competition from surrounding states, such as Atlantic City, the Meadowlands in New Jersey and state lotteries. New long term creative ideas had to be developed and institutionalized for Dover Downs as new competition emerged constantly. Questions generated by the Executive Council, officers and administrators were: What more can be added to the gaming entertainment when we know Dover Downs is already a “one of a kind” venue? What are the major threats: casinos or some other venue? What, if any will the impact be to profits? In May, 1994, the Delaware General Assembly passed legislation authorizing slot machines at pari-mutual horse racing facilities to include a video lottery casino. In 1995, Dover Downs received authorization to conduct video lottery operations as a “Licensed Agent” under the Delaware State Lottery Code. Dover Downs Slots opened on December 29, 1995, with 500 slot machines. The casino was designed to provide entertainment experiences for primarily residents of Delaware, Maryland and Pennsylvania, but with its luxury five-star hotel, it was able to serve customers from virtually anywhere. Soon Dover Downs began to realize substantial profits and its success served to increase the state’s coffers.

Yet, there remained an economic dark cloud in the air, which was a signal for Dover Downs Executive Council to plan for growth and sustainability, which had to come with the development of innovative ideas that would make the current and emerging competition and competitors irrelevant (Aaker, 2012). According to David Aaker, the current marketing strategy of “my brand is better than your brand” creates little if any change in sales or market share, mainly due to market inertia (Aaker, 2012). He contends that one way to compete is to build brand relevance, by creating barriers that would make it difficult for other businesses to become relevant. David Aaker’s article explored the difference between brand preference and brand relevance. He

contends that brand relevance is the key to growth and sustainability (Aaker, 2012, p.43). Dover Downs Gaming and Entertainment, Incorporated executives stayed focused and completed additional planning. The Executive Council was destined to produce a relevant brand for Dover Downs Gaming and Entertainment, Incorporated, that would create a “must have” perception and one that motivates customers to continue to “Come Play at Dover Downs.” A brand was needed to make Dover Downs stand out, not only in the State of Delaware, but in the other surrounding states, as well (Alexander, J., Schauten, J. & Koenig, H. (2002).

In the article “Towards a strategic place brand management model,” the authors contend that place branding should be the model that is developed for hospitality venues. The authors surmise that due to the excellent infrastructure that allows people to move freely from place to place, place branding must encompass models that provide consistent experiences at all levels of the brand contact (Dev, C. and G. Withiam).

Dover Downs continued intense planning with emphasis on brand relevance and place branding and continued developing expansion plans as competition became a true “reality.” In 1998, the number of slot machines was increased by 500, giving a total of 1000. With expanded growth, in 2002, a tax-free spin-off of the gaming operations was split away from Dover Motorsports, Inc. and the harness racing, slots, entertainment and the newly built hotel, named Dover Downs Hotel and Conference Center all were placed under the title of Dover Downs Gaming and Entertainment, Inc. (NYSE-Symbol: DDE). Dover Motorsports, Inc. remained the administrative unit for the operation of Dover International Speedway Events and similar venues held at Nashville Superspeedway, Memphis Motorsports Parkway and Gateway International Raceway in St. Louis, Missouri. The Dover Downs Hotel and Conference Center was also built with 232 rooms, an indoor pool, sauna, fitness center, 18,000 square feet, of conference space named Rollins Center® Ballroom, and Michele’s Gourmet Restaurant. A 425 seat buffet restaurant and the renovation of the harness racing grandstand with a simulcast facility were also a part of the expansion in 2002.

Smoke Free Law: Threat to Economic Profits

In 2002, as Dover Downs Executive Council was planning for additional expansions of the casino, a profit reduction law was enacted. Just as the hotel and conference facility were completed, in November, 2002, the Delaware’s Clean Indoor Air Act was passed and the casino became a 100 % smoke free facility. Executives immediately posed questions to the legislators regarding the legislation’s potential impact on the business. The major question was: Will the no-smoking law affect revenues at the casino and if so what are the potential losses? How can Dover Downs Gaming and Entertainment, Inc. continue to

be the “entertainment of choice,” with a “no smoking” law, when the casinos in competing states allowed guests to “smoke”? The managers assessed what they could do to create a brand that would render their competitors “non-competitors.” Dover Downs administrators continued fierce planning of expansion, new venues and future gaming options. In the interim the “no smoking” band was analyzed by Michael R. Pakko, Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, Missouri. He published a working paper entitled: “No Smoking at the Slot Machines: The Effect of a Smoke-Free Law on Delaware Gaming Revenues,” and his research indicated that revenues declined at Dover Downs based on the availability of alternative casinos at resort hotels.

Pakko estimated the effects of the smoke-free law on net proceeds of the casinos, using a simple regression model. The model included a dependent variable at calendar-adjusted real net proceeds, converted to constant dollars using the CPI-U. The regression model included a constant, trend, and trend-squared terms. The model also included the variable MACH (variable not defined), the number of VLTs (Video Lottery Terminals) in operation at the facility. An index of Coincident Economic Activity (ICEA) for Delaware as compiled by the Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia was included to control general economic conditions. Dummy variables for seasonal effects (Month) and for the snowstorm of February 2003 were included along with a dummy variable, (SMOKE), which took on a value of one in December, 2002, and thereafter, zero. An adjustment for potential first-order serial correlation of the residual was also included in each of the regressions (Pakko, 2005, p.4-6). The results of the smoking ban indicated that average monthly revenues declined 8.6 percent for Dover Downs. He further determined that consumer flight occurred as a result of the availability of alternative smoking gaming venues in the region, especially Atlantic City New Jersey. Efforts to reduce profit losses through advertising and promotions further reduced the profits of the gaming facilities in Delaware (Dunham and Marcel, 2003). A comparison of the other three Delaware casinos (Dover Downs, Harrington and Delaware Park) Dover Downs declined in revenues was the lowest.

By 2005, total statewide revenues grew at a rate of 7.4 percent annually, compared to 8.7 percent in the two years preceding the smoking ban (Pakko, 2005, p.7). This was perhaps an indication that the ban on smoking resulted in a reduction or shift in revenues. It was also known that Dover Downs had estimated that 70 percent of its customers were from Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia and the District of Columbia (Dover Downs (2004b)), but when 70 percent was not achieved, it was perhaps an indication that some customers from these states were choosing other states gaming venues during the promotion of the smoke-free law. Other states were assessing how they could increase revenues and receive some of the gaming money and customers currently in the market place. Just as the smoke-free law emerged, new competition emerged from Pennsylvania and later

Maryland. In 2004, Pennsylvania legislators enacted a law that authorized the opening and operation of 14 casinos: seven at race tracks, five at non-track locations and two smaller casinos at resort hotels. On the brink of Pennsylvania’s casino laws (Barnes, 2006), Maryland legislators approved casino operations four years later in 2008 (White, 2012). The Maryland law authorized 15,000 slot machines at five locations, with the first casino opening in Perryville Maryland, September 2008. These announcements intensified the need for Dover Downs Gaming and Entertainment, Inc. executives to develop strategies to gain a competitive advantage, brand and place relevance that would sustain a guest base for years to come. Questions, such as: What can be done to promote brand relevance and the desired perception and image to motivate people to “come play” at Dover Downs, rather than go to the new casinos in their home town?

Dover Downs Gaming & Entertainment, Incorporated administrators viewed these legislative changes in the states where Dover Downs draws its customers as a real threat to the continual sustainability of their venue. However, with new competition the customer base was certainly doomed to decline. Each administrator realized that creative and innovative marketing strategies that create a distinctive brand had to be met. In addition, it was felt that customer behavior had to be influenced by the brand, since strong brands tend to improve financial performance (Dev and Withiam, 2012). New ideas had to be created and legislation had to be developed and passed.

In 2006, additional rooms were added to the hotel. Two-hundred and sixty-eight rooms, 44 suites and 11 spa suites along with 6,000 square feet of a full service spa were added to the hotel. Also 75,000 sq. ft. was planned to be added to the main floor casino for additional slots, restaurants, a casino lounge, retail shops and office space that opened fall 2008. Between 2006 and 2008, Dover Downs initiated and opened several venues: Toppers Spa/Salon opened December 29, 2007; The Colonnade opened in July 2008 with 500 additional slot machines, Doc Magrogan’s Oyster House, a beautiful casino bar and lounge called Fire & Ice, Sweet Perks, (two areas in the hotel and casino), Fashions of the Colonnade designer merchandise shop and The Marketplace logo stores Swarovski and Godiva. These additions served to expand and diversify guests’ experiences and served to increase the “brand relevance.” It provided venues that offered “something for everyone” and were “must see and have experiences.”

To continue seeking new strategies that would increase and sustain the customer base, a branding strategy committee assessed future gaming venues and strived to create brand relevance. They sought a new venue that would increase options and visibility. The committee encouraged the formation of a committee by the Delaware House of Representatives, where the members discussed the merits of conducting a new venue: sports wagering in the State through its video lottery agents. The committee provided the structure for the

implementation of sports wagering with the potential financial projections. On May 14, 2009, House Bill 100 (Sports Betting) was signed into law. In September, 2009, The Race and Sports Book, opened on September 3, 2009 in the Colonnade and accepted its first parlay wager on a professional football game. The approval of table games became a reality when Governor Jack Markell signed the Table Games Bill (House Bill 310) legalizing table games in Delaware. Table games opened on June 25, 2010 the Poker Room opened at noon on July 14, 2010.

With the advent of creating new and different venues, Dover Downs expanded the operating hours to 24 hours a day, closing on Sunday mornings from 6 a.m. to noon for Easter and Christmas holidays. However, the new competitive threats continued, the question now was how Dover Downs Gaming and Entertainment, Incorporated can sustain the venues with a branding initiative? A strategy to develop a naming rights ordeal ensued for the newly opened Poker Room, which became a branding event.

The Branding Challenge

In 2009, the design and operation of the Poker Room at Dover Downs became a challenge as leaders wanted to create a dynamic inviting venue that would create the best brand, to develop a broad customer base. The challenge was to create a consistent message that would identify the Poker Room as a dynamic style, an innovative poker playing venue and a visual presentation that created consistency of a brand and keeps customers coming back. The real challenge was to create an authentic, visible venue that provided products and services assured to create customer value. Research conducted on Brand Learning noted that there is a positive and consistent link between brand value and the financial reports (Dev, 2012). As business environments continuously change, it has become the norm that brands are redefined to assure that they create appeal amongst the guests base. The brand must represent the company and impact everything the company does from the product to the environment and behavior, as well as the communication channels (Washborn, et.al, 2002). For Dover Downs Executive Council and its Chief Operating Officer this meant that they had to seek partnerships to assist in the brand development for the poker room.

In 2009, Dover Downs engaged various suppliers in the beverage industry by presenting them with a proposal for the “first ever” naming rights opportunity to a poker room in a casino in the United States. The committee employed Brenda Ebert’s model of successful innovation that included four steps: (1) identify and define the challenge and the goal; (2) provide insight (analyze to determine the real issues by mapping customers’ participation); (3) make customers’ needs tangible; (4) create ideas and assess the impact from the customer’s view and from the organizational structure (Dev, 2012, p.9). After several meetings and reviews, Diageo, one of the world’s largest liquor com-

panies, agreed to a two-year naming rights strategy, turning the poker room at Dover Downs into the Crown Royal Poker Room at Dover Downs Gaming and Entertainment, Incorporated. The real challenge was to determine consumer impact and behaviors, by creating an experience through the employees and the enhanced space. The consumption of the beverages and participation in poker gaming in an environment with a tasteful décor adorned with the Crown Royal logo and branded color scheme (Firiole, G. 2010) were the major goals.

The cocktail servers are dressed in Royal Crown uniforms and the food service carts also have the Royal Crown logo, and each greeter ask guests when entering, “May I offer you a Crown”? Influencing consumer behavior was and still is a key to growth and sustaining any consumer product. The success of this venue is presented by providing recapped historical sales figures in typical bars versus those in the Crown Royal Poker Room.

In general, white spirits, namely Vodka outsell every other spirit, particularly brown spirits. The attached chart illustrates beverage sales in the different venues that show that Vodka was not the top selling product. However, the Crown Royal liquors, outsold vodka. This astonishing result indicates that consumer behavior can be modified. Diageo leaders were so pleased with the results of the first year’s operation; they extended their naming rights for an additional two years. Monetary benefits were realized for both parties, but are not released due to the confidential nature of such partnerships.

The marketing and thus branding of the Crown Royal Poker Room received constant marketing coverage through the publication of articles, email blasts and social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.). The differentiated venue served as a subcategory to brand the Poker Room as a “must see/must come to play,” unique opportunity. Poker in Delaware at the Crown Royal Poker Room at Dover Downs became a “hot topic” throughout the region. The marketing conducted through the articles and “word of mouth” by customers served to generate expected revenues, hence profits, Additionally, consumer behavior permeates throughout any guest who visits any casino property, which has also

Table 1
Product Mix Poker Room Year –to Date
(September 2011-May, 2012)

Product	Quantity in gallons sold (In thousands)	Net Sales (in millions)	Percentage of Sales
Crown Royal	22,260	\$7,793.50	35.16 %
Rum	19,240	\$4,134.00	30.37 %
Vodka	18,990	\$3,745.00	29.98 %
Gin	2,850	\$546.00	4.49 %
Total	63,340	\$16,218.50	

led to increased sales for the entire Diageo product portfolio at Dover Downs. Mutually beneficial partnerships such as this allow both operator and vendor to enhance the guest experience with suggestive techniques which are not overly intrusive.

Listed below is Table I showing sales for Crown Royal, Rum, Vodka and Gin. As indicated, Crown Royal outsold Rum, Vodka and Gin.

As revealed, Crown Royal sales represented 35.16 % of total sales. According to the beverage manager, this was a big switch from the sale of the other beverages.

Continuous Competition and New Challenges

Dover Downs Entertainment, Incorporated continues to draw customers from a wide area. The location and the unique diversity of venues have served to keep customers coming. The hotel with its 500 rooms is the largest hotel in Delaware. The venue is the most unique on the East Coast, yet the competition continues. Pennsylvania authorized 14 casinos in 2004. The opening of its first casino occurred in November 2006, with the initial opening at Wilkes-Barre, PA. The day of opening drew 1,800 guests (www.0od.post-gazete.com/pg06319/738406-336.stm). Since, Wilkes-Barre, four other casinos have opened in Pennsylvania. An analysis of customer base at Dover Downs indicates that residents from Pennsylvania are still coming, due

to venues offered. More Delaware consumers are enjoying the Dover Downs venues. Eta Sigma Delta members conducted a study to assess the states guests traveled from to Dover Downs during the spring semester, 2012. Based on the results of the study, the states representing Dover Downs customers indicated that the top three states may now be residents from Delaware (70 percent), Maryland, and Virginia. This study was conducted over a five day span. With the opening of Maryland Casinos, the impact may be different in future years.

Maryland's first casino opened in Perryville, Maryland in the area off of Interstate 95, just 35 miles from Delaware, and 2008. A Maryland casino is also opened in Ocean City Maryland. Maryland is scheduled to open more casinos until five are opened and operating. The important question is will the opening of new casinos erode the customer base of Dover Downs Gaming and Entertainment, Incorporated? Dover Downs challenge is to continue to innovate to always have a moving target for competitors. The innovation must create changing venues or subcategories. Innovation also enhances the relevance challenge, because it is based on energy, credibility, visibility and a sense of leadership (Aaker, 2012, p. 53).

Table 2

Crown Royal Sales Comparison (October 2010 versus October 2011)

Dover Downs Eating and Drinking Venues							
Average Crown Royal Sales October October 2010				Average Crown Royal Sales October 2011			
Venue Name	Average No. of Drinks Sold Daily	Revenue (Average)	Percent of Crown Royal Sales in each venue	Venue Name	Average No. of Drinks Sold Daily	Revenue	Percent of Crown Royal Sales in each venue
Gazebo	381	\$2,214.00	37 %	Gazebo	432	\$2,689.75	36 %
Terrace	111	\$ 638.75	31 %	Terrace	120	\$769.50	28 %
Lobby	22	\$ 142	38%	Lobby	51	\$400.75	53 %
Casino	63	\$ 369.25	29 %	Casino	743	\$2603.50	47 %
Poker	160	\$663.00	65 %	Poker	233	\$762.00	80 %
Waterfall	96	\$561	39 %	Waterfall	-	-	-
Gazebo Service	-	-	-	Gazebo Service	13	\$ 66.00	37 %
Fire and Ice	186	\$1,217.50	47 %	Fire and Ice	5	\$40.00	-
Michele's	21	\$127.25	48 %	Michele's	14	\$106.75	21 %
Sports book	201	\$1,159.75	48 %	Sports book	137	\$905.75	31 %
Frankie's	100	\$ 573.75	53 %	Frankie's	67	\$442.00	50 %
Total	1341	\$7666.25	43.5%	Total	1815	\$8785.25	42.5%
Year to Date Total	13002	\$69,913.75		Year to Date	15991	\$79,730.25	

Conclusion

Creating brand venues in an atmosphere of competition, declining economic conditions required Dover Downs Gaming and Entertainment, Incorporated to expand, create, innovate and initiate projects designed to increase customer base, maintain sustainability and increase profits. Since the humble beginnings of horse and car racing, in 1969, to a diverse, multifaceted gaming, entertainment and retail venue, many changes took place to create brand relevance, using its theme "Come Play" at Dover Downs. The growth occurred from horse and car racing to video slot machines, in an atmosphere of great ambience and a variety of choices of food service venues. As competition intensified, more gaming opportunities were expanded. A hotel was built, which is rated as a 4-Star property, expanded slot machines, table games, retail outlets, sports betting and a Crown Royal Poker venue became the constants of Dover Downs, Incorporated, by 2010. The naming of the Crown Royal Poker Room was a unique adventure because it is the "first only one of a kind." Venue, where a first ever "naming rights" with Diageo (beverage company) proved to be a profitable and a successful partnership.

As more gaming venues become available, in surrounding states, the intensity of the competition will increase for Dover Downs Gaming and Entertainment, Incorporated. As the completion of the writing of this case was occurring, the State of Maryland has celebrated the opening of its most recent casino LIVE, located in Arundel, Maryland, located no more than 65 miles from Dover Downs. Two more casinos are slated for Maryland. As stated in a previous paragraph, a large percentage of Dover Downs customers travel from Maryland. Dover Downs must continue to focus on guests needs, continue to assure that the venues are like no other and provide incentives that would be worth the drive to Delaware. Constant monitoring and planning are essential for Dover Downs Executives: the President and CEO, Council members and Delaware legislators. Additionally, a study to assess the impact of other casinos will be needed in the near future. The Executive Council must continue to develop strategic plans for sustainability and a customer base that enjoys and remain motivated to come and enjoy Dover Downs. Expansion and or enhancement can come in many forms, such as more naming rights for more venues, virtual online gaming that makes you feel like you are in the casino in the comfort of your home, or satellite venues throughout the United States that can generate revenue. The use of social media, which now serves as "word of mouth" strategy may also be expanded. How can Dover Downs executives continue to re-brand as business environments change and competition intensifies? What new branding and marketing strategies will be needed to stay competitive for the next five years, ten years and many years to come? The financial results are positive and profits have been realized. Listed in Table II are the results of sales for two years at each of the Dover Downs venue. As indicated,

sales increased in the Poker Room.

Listed in Table II are the average numbers, with percentages of sales in each venue for years 2010 and 2011.

The Water Fall venue was used as a venue in 2010, but was eliminated in 2011. The Gazebo was placed in service in 2011 and information is reported. As indicated the dollar sales increased from year 2010 to 2011, however some of the percentages of Crown Royal sales declined. Reviewing Fire and Ice venue in 2010 were higher than in 2011. The Crown Royal Poker Room did not open until July 2010, so the change in sales perhaps shifted to the Crown Royal Poker Room in 2011. Perhaps the customers who visited Fire and Ice became customers of the Crown Royal Poker Room once it opened.

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