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# ONE-PAGE STRATEGIC PLAN: THE CASE OF AARONG COMPANY FROM BANGLADESH

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## ABSTRACT

Strategic development and planning predetermine all the major fields of activities. Marketing activities are the key tool of communication with a company's customers, suppliers and other stakeholders. Nowadays, short but informative presentation solutions are becoming more attractive and popular. Companies are using more visuals with a short text in their communication channels as well as in building strategies. One of the tools is the one-page strategic plan (OPSP). The research problem of the paper is how to develop a strategy in its compressed version for the organisation that can have a format which is easy-to-understand and communicate. The paper aims to propose the OPSP model for the Aarong company, which should include both the commercial and non-profit activities. As a research method, the case study of Aarong company was chosen, using the secondary data. The proposed OPSP for Aarong company clearly showed the connections of all key elements of a strategic plan. The practical implications of using the OPSP tool in the Aarong company are clearly visible in terms of synthesis of a complicated strategic plan and having an attractive form of the company strategy for the external communication.

## KEY WORDS

**strategic planning, one-page strategic plan, marketing strategy, non-profit, Bangladesh**

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## INTRODUCTION

Modern companies notwithstanding the size or the type of activities, base their operations on strategic plans (Jalkala et al., 2010; Majetun & Mikoláš, 2017). Companies need to develop a strategy and establish clear goals before taking appropriate actions to increase the probability of achieving the results (Bartkus, Glassman & McAfee, 2006; Buzzell, 2004).

Marketing activities, including trade fairs (Siemieniako & Gębarowski, 2016; 2017), are related to the key tools of communication with a company's customers, suppliers and other stakeholders (Kotler & Keller, 2014). Nowadays people are overloaded with information. That makes short and informative methods of information presentations more attractive. That is why companies are using more visuals with a short

text in their communication channels. It is not surprising that brief graphical representation is used in building strategies as well, and one of the most popular tools is the one-page strategic plan (OPSP) (Vishnevskiy, Karasev & Meissner, 2016). From a corporate point of view, a strategy is a background for designing all the marketing activities because it helps to recognise the company's philosophy and values; it shows key targets and milestones; and ensures acknowledgement among company's customers and other stakeholders (Phaal & Muller, 2009).

This research explores how to develop a short version of the strategy, namely, the one-page strategic plan, which encompasses both the commercial and non-profit activities. Furthermore, it explains how to elaborate a format of the strategy that is easy-to-understand and communicate. The paper aims to propose the model of the one-page strategic plan for the Aarong company from Bangladesh, which should include both the commercial and non-profit activities. As a research method, the case study of the Aarong company was conducted, using the secondary data.

## 1. RESEARCH BACKGROUND

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Aarong – “village fair” in Bengali – is the most popular lifestyle retail chain in Bangladesh (Anon, 2016a). This ethical brand originated in 1978 as an easy and natural way to empower rural artisans, especially women, to rise above poverty (Anon, 2016a). The idea of this company belongs to BRAC (Building Resources Across Communities) – the world's largest development organisation (Anon, 2016b). For a start, it has engaged a small number of rural women to produce crafts and established Aarong to pay them for their goods on time. The company kept growing: in 1978, its retail space was only 1.6 thou. sq. ft, and in 2013, it already had 194.1 thou. sq. ft.; the company's sales grew from Tk 2400 Million in 2008 to Tk 4530 Million in 2012 (Anon, 2016b).

Aarong uses decentralised manufacturing process to accomplish its goal as a social business by employing production workers in various rural and semi-urban areas; while a purely commercial business would locate its production centres in concentrated areas where infrastructure and low-cost labour supply are available. Many of the products are produced in off-site locations by workers who have very

little exposure to the final products that are sold at the retail level (Anon, 2016b).

The Aarong company produces a wide range of goods, such as clothing, jewellery, fabrics, non-textile crafts, leather goods, footwear, houseware. All of the products are made in traditional Bengali style by women from villages in Bangladesh. Aarong is among the first companies that identified itself as “Made in Bangladesh” (Anon, 2016a). The positioning makes a huge impact on designing all the further marketing activities and communication with their key stakeholders. From the authors' point of view, the main difference of Aarong from other companies is that it follows both commercial and social goals. For the purpose of this paper, the research was made in two directions. First, the company's policies towards the manufacturing process, promotion, product distribution, and motivation towards the personnel were analysed. Secondly, the research included analyses of the microenvironment, such as culture, economic situation, the situation of the women in terms of equality, professional life, etc. In other words, the analyses considered all the essential factors that contribute to the functioning of the company as well as its employees, customers, donators, and other stakeholders.

Aarong has achieved rather high results in fighting rural poverty. Its current services to the artisans include free skill-building, the supply of raw materials for production, transportation of goods, quality control, storage, management, finance, marketing, and microfinance loan options through Aarong (Anon, 2016a). Working mothers have access to day-care centres for their children while they work, and senior workers receive a retirement benefit. Aarong employees are also provided with various support from BRAC, including services, seeds, agricultural, poultry, livestock, and fisheries support; free schooling for their children; subsidised tube-wells and sanitary latrines; healthcare including free eye check-ups and glasses, free treatment of tuberculosis and severe illnesses, and health education; as well as legal awareness and support. Currently, a health security scheme for artisans and their family members is being piloted to protect artisans against catastrophic health expenditures (Anon, 2016a). All this shows that Aarong successfully builds its non-profit activities on the outcomes of the commercial processes.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The term “strategy” originates from the Greek words “strategos” (the army) and “agein” (to lead); thus, “strategy” is “the art of leading the army” (Aartsengel & Kurtoglu, 2013). The paradox of strategies is that on the one hand, they refer to strategic plans to guide the company’s future and, on the other hand, to the current strategic position (Grünig & Kühn, 2015). Strategic planning is a methodology used to guide the work of an organisation with the focus on the long-term objectives, vision and mission and their deployment (Chiarini, 2015). Strategy arises from many small steps that are not oriented towards overall long-term goals, but towards solving urgent short-term problems (Grünig & Kühn, 2015). Strategic planning is used to recognise and describe alternative courses of action.

Marketing is always one of the central elements of strategic planning because it covers all the important aspects connected with the company’s products, clients, partners, and communication with them. Marketing is focused on the description and explanation of widely understood social phenomena (Mitreğa, 2014). Marketing plays a significant role in determining the strategic orientation and performance outcomes of the firm (Hunt & Morgan, 2005). It is mainly marketing, which is responsible for developing relationships with customers and building their loyalty (Siemieniako, 2010; 2011; Mitreğa, 2013). Strategic marketing planning is a process of creating marketing strategies by a company and planning their implementations. A marketing strategy plan has a dual nature because it focuses on two key components: target market and product, or value proposition (Smith, 2003). Strategic marketing plays a critical role in linking the organisation to its environment and helps it to be proactive (being prepared to adapt to the environment or impact on it); it is important for the organisational success; marketing strategy can be vital for achieving the objective of the superior performance (Aghazadeh, 2015).

The main function of the strategic planning is to develop a shared vision of its policies, goals, objectives, and activities; and to verify the planned trajectory of the organisation (Bernstein, 2014). The main components of strategic planning are a vision, mission, goals, and the identification of key stakeholders, followed by tactical or operational goals. The vision represents an ideal state, long-term aspiration to the future, for over five years, which shapes a possible

and desirable development of an organisation (Ciucescu, 2015, p. 63). As Fig. 1 shows, the key attributes that should be included within the vision are: (1) it should be a short sentence, (2) it should be easy to understand for the company’s employees as well as the public, (3) it should not contain any quantifiable elements (Ciucescu, 2015, p. 63).

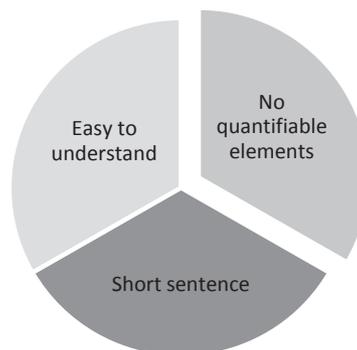


Fig. 1. Attributes of a vision

Source: elaborated by the authors on the basis of (Ciucescu, 2015).

Sometimes, there can be some confusion between mission and vision, because both of them communicate the purpose of a company’s existence. The key difference between them is that a vision of a company is focused on tomorrow and what the company wants to become, while the mission is focused on today and what the organisation does (Skrabanek, 2017). In other words, a mission statement can be defined as a broad declaration of the basic, unique purpose, and the scope of operations that distinguish the organisation from others of its type (Gulati, 2013).

As Fig. 2 shows, in defining the mission, an organisation should focus on three dimensions: (1) consumer groups (who are to be served and satisfied); (2) consumer needs (what are to be satisfied); and (3) approaches (how consumer needs are to be met) (Bernstein, 2014).

A mission should be achievable, motivating, and distinctive (Bernstein, 2014). To achieve the ideal future described in the vision, a company should specify its actions into smaller steps that can be called goals. Goals are broadly worded statements that set a framework for the delineation of a series of clear, specific, and measurable objectives (Dolan, 2003).

Nowadays, companies realise the importance of the stakeholder management, that is why they include this group in the development of a strategy (Bartkus, Glassman & McAfee, 2006; Feurer & Chaharbaghi, 1995). Diverse stakeholders in a company may have

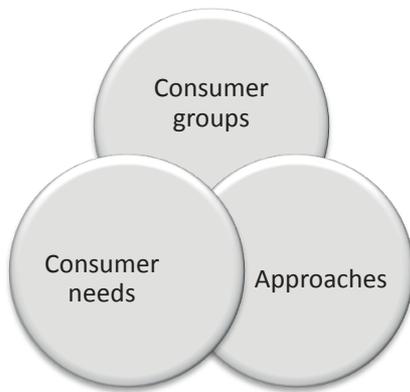


Fig. 2. Chief dimensions for designing a company's mission

Source: elaborated by the authors on the basis of (Bernstein, 2014).

different perceptions of what they most value (Bernstein, 2014). The statistics show that customers are the most commonly mentioned stakeholder groups, followed by employees, and investors; among the least frequently mentioned are the society and suppliers (Bartkus, Glassman & McAfee, 2006). The order can be changed depending on the types of activities of a particular company. It is believed that including the most critical groups of stakeholders into strategic plans can help keep the focus of a company on the right efforts (Bartkus, Glassman & McAfee, 2006).

Processes of the strategic planning can vary depending on the type of company's activities. Whereas companies whose main aim is profitmaking have a possibility to set a well-defined goal of profit maximisation, non-profit organisations have to elaborate on a more complex set of goals and apply different measures of success (Bernstein, 2014). Strategic planning is the process through which a company determines its strategy (how it will get there), identify the necessary resources (what it will take to get there), and evaluate the results (how to understand if it has gotten there) (Bernstein, 2014; Aghazadeh, 2015). According to Bernstein, the strategic planning process consists of the following steps (Bernstein, 2014):

- strategic analysis: (a) assess the organisation's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, and (b) analyse the organisation-wide mission, objectives, and goals;
- market planning: (a) determine the objectives and specific goals for the relevant planning period, (b) formulate the core marketing strategy to achieve the specified goals, and (c) establish

detailed programs and tactics to carry out the core strategy;

- marketing plan implementation: put the plan into action;
- control: measure performance and adjust the core strategy, tactical details, or both as needed.

The strategic plan describes the target markets' and the firm's value proposition based on an analysis of the best market opportunities (Kotler & Keller, 2014). The strategic planning process does not attempt to detail the specifics of how the strategic initiatives are to be achieved; it aims to identify key milestones (Dolan, 2003). The tactical (or operational) marketing plan is more detailed and specifies the marketing tactics, including product features, promotion, merchandising, pricing, sales channels, and service (Kotler & Keller, 2014). Short term marketing plans specify the marketing goals and objectives of businesses and outline how resources will be used toward achieving the marketing results (Camilleri, 2017).

The one-page strategic plan (OPSP), as the name explains, is a type of presentation of a company's strategy that fits one-page. It includes information about the mission, vision, goals, as well as other vital information, normally in an image format (Vishnevskiy, Karasev & Meissner, 2016). Other information includes the most important strategic value-creating actions and entities that are involved in a relationship with the company (Vishnevskiy, Karasev & Meissner, 2016). The OPSP scheme or visualisation should also contain appropriate connections between all kinds of elements.

### 3. RESEARCH METHOD

This paper is based on the example of the Aarong company from Bangladesh. Bangladesh is a developing country where religion, values, and traditions play an important role in a family's lifestyle, the professional perception of an individual, economic and commercial components of life. Connection with traditions can be especially observed in poor and rural areas due to low representation of well-educated people (Anon, 2016b). Based on the analysis of secondary materials, it can be said that historically women were responsible for maintaining the home, including cooking and cleaning, as well as sewing clothing, making accessories, home decorations, and

kitchen utensils. Time passed by, and women gained access to the labour market and needed to earn money. However, according to the authors of this paper, women still lack required skills and knowledge to secure jobs as qualified specialists, and traditions prevent many of them from getting educated (Anon, 2016a). Consequently, there was a clear need to establish a company that would give women access to the labour market, and ensure them with guaranteed earnings using the skills they already have and creating a supportive working environment.

The case study as a research method was chosen because it allows making vast qualitative research of the data from different perspectives of the Aarong company's functioning, in other words, it allows to study both micro- and macro environments of this Bengali company. Aarong's and BRAC websites as well as Aarong's annual reports were used.

The observation method was also used and related to the wider environment of the Aarong company. The following issues were observed and analysed: culture, economic situation, the situation of women in terms of equality, professional life, etc. Considering that one of the authors of this paper is Bengali, has lived in Bangladesh till 2016, and still has some connection, it can be said that the research is based on the experience of this person having a deep understanding of the Bengali's culture, mentality, social layers, especially the position of women. Based on this author's analysis of the local media, such as newspapers, magazines, TV, and radio, the environment of the Aarong company was recognised.

## 4. RESEARCH RESULTS

The OPSP is elaborated from the analysis of the Aarong company and its activity and also based on the analysis of the Aarong environment, i.e. the situation of the Bengali women. Fig. 3 presents the proposition of the OPSP for the Aarong company. The solution was designed by the authors of this paper. It has the following parts: the vision, mission, five-year strategic goals, the indication of the main entities and key Aarong actions directed towards these entities. It also shows different kinds of stakeholders that have some influence on the Aarong activity.

The "commercial flower" contains the following activities: (1) establishing strong partnership, (2) creating common projects of Aarong products

together with distributors, (3) expanding the international retail chain, (4) offering an individual and unique design of the Aarong handicraft products, (5) opening an Internet shop for Aarong products. The leaves of the flower show what measures should be taken to achieve Aarong's goals connected with the increase in the loyalty of partners, expanding the retail chain and increasing sales, i.e. commercial interests of the company are in focus. For the interests of the customers, it is reasonable to open an Internet shop, making access to the products much easier and leaving less importance to the country's borders. This also requires to expand the international retail chain. Unique and individual design helps customers feel more special possessing rare products. Speaking about partners, like in any other business they are interested in strong partnership so that it would be possible to make long-term cooperation as well as financial plans. Also, when there is an option for making personification of products, partners can be engaged in the process of designing those products to satisfy their specific needs. In this case, the leaves "offering unique products" and "involving partners in designing products" are interrelated because sometimes partners can have a better understanding of a particular group of customers and can help design products that fit the market better.

The "non-profit flower" activities: (1) creating more working zones for women, (2) creating a supportive environment for the Bengali women, (3) supporting initiatives that promote women's rights. These activities are taken to achieve the social goal of increasing the share of the Bengali women influenced by the Aarong programmes. In the case with this flower, it is more complicated to identify for which particular group an activity is intended because all the benefits for the Bengali women are the benefits for the society. So, it can be concluded that through the improvement of life for the Bengali women, Aarong makes positive changes in the Bengali society in general.

There are also two leaves that unite both flowers: (1) increase the social responsibility and (2) promote the Bengali culture. They are in-between because those activities are of the same importance for both groups of the key stakeholders: the Bengali women, related society, customers, and distributors. All of them will benefit from the actions mentioned above, including the Bengali women and the related society through the increase of the level of interest towards national culture and, perhaps, growing number of the social support programmes. Customers and dis-

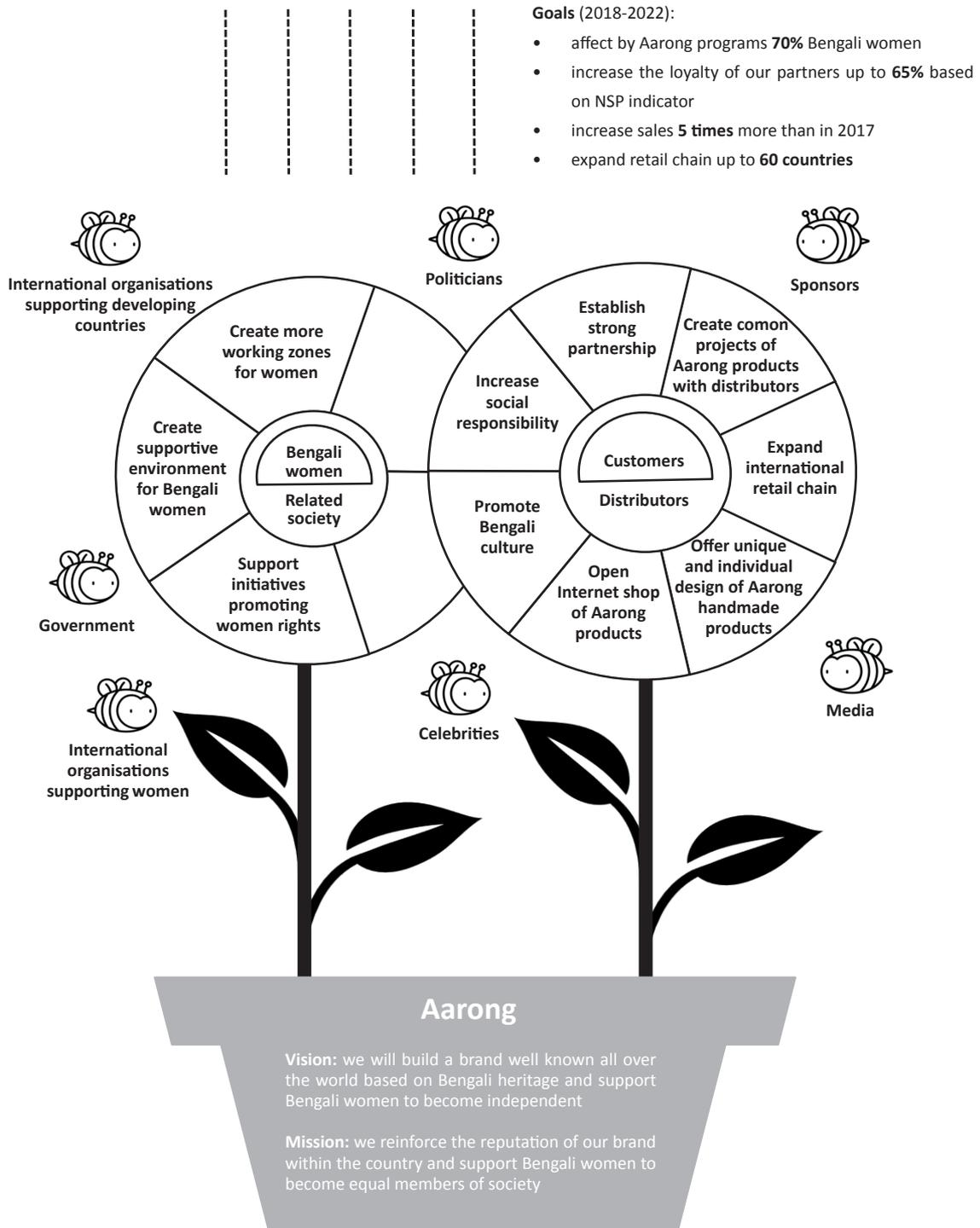


Fig. 3. One-page strategic plan scheme for the Aarong company

tributors do not just act in their commercial interests but realise their social mission through support towards the social company. Although only those two leaves are in common between the flowers, all the activities of the company contribute to both commercial and non-profit goals. For instance, designing and offering unique and authentic products promotes

the Bengali culture. Demand for the products will impact on the demand for labour, giving access to the labour market for more women. And vice-a-versa, providing all the necessary support for the Bengali women will increase the quality and variation of Aarong products, increasing the market share of the company.

Besides those four groups of key stakeholders, there are external stakeholders as well, who are influenced by Aarong activities. Politicians and government, as well as NGOs supporting women and developing countries, for instance, benefit from Aarong taking part in solving important problems of the society; the company spends money and other resources to achieve its social mission. At the same time, those groups of stakeholders can support Aarong's activities and programmes. Media and celebrities can take part in the promotion of Aarong products and social programmes. On the one hand, this makes Aarong's programmes popular, on the other – celebrities and media show their active position in supporting the Bengali culture and helping people in need. Sponsors as well can manipulate their reputation by supporting particular kind of organisations and businesses.

Both flowers grow in the pot which symbolises activities rooted in relation to the vision, mission and strategic goals of the Aarong company. The existing vision of Aarong is “to create a world free from all forms of exploitation and discrimination where everyone has the opportunity to realise their potential” (Anon, 2016a). It is evident that even though among profit generation from Aarong's products is among the key activities of the company, this vision does not cover a commercial part of the activity. That is why the proposed vision is: “We will build a brand well known all over the world based on the Bengali heritage and support the Bengali women to become independent”. The proposed version does not focus on profit maximisation either, although it includes information about the increase of recognition of the company's brand. The situation with the mission is rather similar as it covers only the socially oriented part of the company's activities. The existing mission seeks “to empower people and communities in situations of poverty, illiteracy, disease and social injustice. Our interventions aim to achieve large scale, positive changes through economic and social programmes that enable men and women to realise their potential” (Anon, 2016a). The proposed mission reads: “We are reinforcing the reputation of our brand within the country and support the Bengali women to become equal members of the society”, which has, as it has been described in the previous chapter, consumer groups (the Bengali women), consumer needs (becoming equal members of society), as well as the key direction of the commercial development of the company (reinforcing the reputation of the brand). The existing objectives of the company are: (1) creat-

ing job opportunities; (2) generating the surplus for BRAC to minimise donor dependency; (3) ensuring long-term support and contribution towards the sustainability of BRAC's development interventions such as microfinance, education and skills development; (4) ensuring viable investments in the long run to act as a ‘hedge’ against future liquidity (Anon, 2016a). For comparison, the proposed goals for the years 2018–2022, that are based on the proposed mission and vision, are: (1) 70% of the Bengali women are affected by Aarong programmes; (2) increased loyalty of our partners up to 65% based on the NSP indicator; (3) increased sales by five times compared to 2017; (4) expand the retail chain to up to 60 countries. The goals are measurable and limited in time.

## CONCLUSIONS

On the basis of the analysis in this paper, it can be concluded that strategic planning and designing of marketing activities are the key success factors for modern companies existing in the market because they are based on detailed analyses of a company's internal and external environment. Whether a company has non-profit goals, or its main target is profit maximisation, or it joins both of those programmes, the company needs to understand, what are the main customers, stakeholders, goals, instruments and resources, and how to use the resources to achieve the results. This statement becomes rather clear after the analysis of the Aarong company and the development of the strategic plan. Socially-oriented and commercial goals of a company are quite interdependent. These joining commercial and non-profit areas of activities posit the Aarong company in a service logic (Siemieniako, 2008). By generating profit, a company can finance its social programmes, and vice-a-versa, in the case of Aarong, investments in the development of women and infrastructure, improves the quality and increases the variation of the products that in the end should contribute to the increase of the profits. Consequently, in designing a strategic plan and marketing activities, the specificity of the company that joins both commercial and non-profit activities must be considered, and on the one hand, the activities should be developed in both fields. Although on the other hand, the connection between them should be easy to follow and they should contribute to the common mission and vision.

As the research results of this article show, the OPSP is a practical tool that can be used by com-

panies to communicate their plans with key stakeholders. The main advantages: (1) a short version of all the main outcomes from a strategic plan, (2) easy-to-understand language for all stakeholders, (3) attractive visual form that can be used in different communication channels. It is consistent with the study of visualisation of a strategy as a roadmap, that has “an architecture providing a coherent and holistic structure within which the development and evolution of the business or system and its components can be explored, mapped and communicated” (Phall & Muller, 2009, p. 39). Since the OPSP explains in an easy form what a company wants to achieve and when, what actions need to be taken, who is affected by its actions and who is interested in the outcomes of the company’s activities, it creates a background for the promotional activities.

As the paper suggests, a strategic plan can be more than a document describing the long-term future of a company and the ways how this future can be achieved. The most important outcomes of this document can be extracted and presented attractively so that customers, employees, business partners and other stakeholders can see and realise all the attributes of the strategic plan.

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