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# **The Corporate Museum: A New Type of Museum Created as a Component of Marketing Company**

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**Abstract:** A new type of museum appeared – the corporate museum. The museum institution in this instance has been used as a new marketing device for building corporate identity strategies. Their inception is not based on the existing context of a place, but appears to be integrated with the corporate identity program, exposing the company's values and philosophy. The corporate museums are thematic, commercial buildings, owned by a particular firm, where the history of the company brand and products development is presented. Architecture of corporate museums must doubtless be identified with the brand, reflecting the high quality of a brand's products. The surveys were carried out on freshly constructed corporate museums like Porsche, Mercedes and BMW Welt. They are located next to the factories where the brand products are manufactured. The immediate vicinity of the corporate museum to the production zone allows the exhibition to extend to the production line. Corporate museums generate considerable benefits, as the cultural potential of a space where the museums are built increases. Their outside-the-city location economically activates forgotten zones of the town. Corporate museums extend the city's tourist and cultural offer and their buildings become a recognizable element in a city's marketing image. These facts prove that museum institutions can be successfully used for commercial purposes.

**Keywords:** Corporate Museum, Corporate Architecture, Architecture in Branding Process, Marketing Strategy, Commercialization

**Introduction:** A new type of museum has appeared – the corporate museum. The museum institution is used as a new marketing device for building corporate identity strategies. Generally museum planning is the analysis and practice enabling the preservation and interpretation of the physical culture by arranging all components that made up the museum as a whole for better functioning and optimal efficiency of this institution (Lord, Lord, 2001). Social and economic factors play a significant role in the process. At the same time it is essential to elaborate the museum program based on market analysis describing the group of target consumers (Silberberg, 2001), to define the museum's mission, to set aims and objectives of created collections and to define its cultural or historical potential (Lord, Lord, 2001). The demand for the traditional museums arises due to individual and social needs (Frey, Meier, 2003). In the case of corporate museums, the cause is quite the opposite and refers to the precisely planned financial calculations of a particular company. Therefore, nowadays the museum institution plays not only a service role, but is used as an instrument in promotion strategies creating corporate market advantages. The corporate museum benefits from the key part of social understanding - originally reserved for traditional museums – and establishes competence in defining identity as the basis for marketing strategies and successful sale of branded products. Identity and any movements striving to determine it are a very hot issue due to globalization identity crises (Korzeniowski, 2006). At the same time a museum is the social space competitive to other, common city public spaces. Corporate museums exploit this quality of the traditional museum too, inviting the visitors into social but branded space, dedicated to one

company, concentrating the consumers' attention on a deliberately formulated marketing message: 'come, admire and buy!'. 'Come and admire' perfectly suit to the mission of the traditional museum, the imperative 'buy!' might – in the light of understanding the museum institution's loftiness – arouse opposition and be construed as a dissonance. So is the term "corporate museum" inappropriate? Is then the exploitation of association with stately, respected institution an abuse? The aim of this research, therefore, is to answer the question if the museum institution can be used for commercial purposes and to determine the competitiveness of a particular corporation?

In the next section, the research state is summarized, the concept of the corporate museum is considered and the methodology employed in the current research described. Following this, the research results are presented, and in the final section, conclusions are drawn and an agenda for future research into the phenomenon is set out.

### ***The Corporate Museum***

James B. Lane states that the corporate museums have been in existence for over a century (Lane, 1993), but have been underexplored in the general academic management and marketing literatures. One of the few works in this area is Nissley and Casey's (2002)<sup>1</sup> paper or some articles in professional journals, magazines or Internet pages (Buchanan, 2000; Griffiths, 1999; Danilov, 1992; Danilov, 1991; Quintanilla, 1998; Lehman & Byrom, 2009)<sup>2</sup>. Apparently the topic has been unexplored at the level of scientific analysis of the role of corporate museums and the practical applications of its concept.

Lately the corporate museums have become a favoured destination for visitors (Buchanan, 2000). Often, their exhibitions include elements of the specific firm, including both product-related collections and aspects of the 'corporate memory' (Nissley & Casey, 2002), but also the broader industry sector of which they are a part (Danilov, 1991). With growth of turnover and market significance of a particular company comes a desire to document aspects of the firm, both for posterity and as a means of communicating aspects of the firm's heritage and current operations, hence the emergence of the corporate museum phenomenon (Lehman & Byrom, 2009).

The surveys presented below were carried out in freshly constructed corporate museums in Germany: Porsche, Mercedes and BMW Welt. A critical observation of their influence on the following areas was conducted: urban, social/cultural and economical. Three privately owned museums were visited in the summer of 2011. The visits involved a comprehensive tour of all parts of the museum. The examples were chosen because of their location (in a single country) and business branch that provides similar general circumstances, which was used as a common denominator allowing the extraction of really important features from the particular cases. The information comes from official corporate materials, professional literature and has been completed with interviews of employees from the particular firms, as well as personal observations and research. The examples below demonstrate how the biggest German automotive companies exploited the museum institution in marketing activities promoting their achievements to date and exposing their significant market position.

Porsche Museum established in 2008, which is located at *Porscheplatz 1 in Stuttgart-Zuffenhausen*, and embedded into the embankment of the fast-city-railway (*SB-Schnell Bahn*) is delimited by *Schwieberdinger Strasse* and *major-Otto-Str.* streets. Today, Porsche is both the smallest independent German car manufacturer as well as the most profitable automotive manufacturer in the world. Marketing messages that appear in the official corporate newsletters argue that the success of the brand is based on decades of experience and experimentation. Efficient production methods, distinctive positioning and the innovativeness of car models entering the market successfully since 1948, have given Porsche a prestigious place in the automotive hierarchy of world power. This is a unique story that testifies to the corporation's honour and commitment.

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<sup>1</sup> They present the corporate museum as a repository of organizational memory, as a strategic asset, and while considering the concept of the politics of the exhibition, did offer a general definition. They consider corporate museums to be: "exhibition-based facilities that are owned and operated by publicly traded or privately held companies, often serving roles such as public relations and marketing (Nissley & Casey, 2002, 536).

<sup>2</sup> Danilov (1992) describes how-to guides for practitioners, or directories or guides for persons wishing to visit corporate museums (1991). His overview on corporate museums might be considered in-depth analysis but not the practical applications. Alike Lehman & Byrom.

Porsche customers, shareholders and fans have often expressed the need to create an inspiring place exposing significant achievements of the brand over its history. In 2004, the company management decided to build a corporate Porsche museum. Three years later, an object of spectacular architecture, which is the emblem of the company, came into existence. So far, this is the bravest object, in terms of the form, which Porsche has produced. Porsche Museum houses the central branch of the whole historical and contemporary body of knowledge about the brand. It is a place that offers a multi-planar experience, from the thrill associated with sports cars to the aesthetic character of euphoria. Designed by the Vienna design team *Delugan Meissl Associated Architects*, the museum building possesses a surprising spatial form of sculpture, with a bold and dynamic architecture that reflects the philosophy of the company. The museum design encourages entry inside to a proposed mystical journey, where the space for sensual experience has been created to validate the authenticity of the branded products and quality of service. The decision to locate a corporate museum in the immediate vicinity of the historical buildings of the factory confirmed the implication of its inception; the layout of the square was transformed, giving this area a priority for entry to the Porsche service centre and production. It features a 5600 m<sup>2</sup> exhibition space, the company archives, a show car repair workshop, two cafes, the restaurant *Christophorus*, a conference area, shop and customer service area. Unlike many other traditional museums, the *Porsche Museum* favours *joie de vivre* and diversity or variety. Instead of a conventional, static exhibition the newly created object offers permanently changing exposition, which in its transmission combines the strong tradition of great innovation (Fig. 1). Visiting this object, it can be clearly stated that the dynamic form of the building symbolises the individuality, dynamism and uniqueness of Porsche cars, and is the spatial expression of its corporate marketing policy.

Corporate Museum BMW (BMW Welt) at *Am Olympiapark 1* in Munich, located *vis-à-vis* the historical sites of the 1972 Olympics, combines museum and exhibition functions with commercial functions. Above all, it is a showroom for BMW cars and motorcycles. The building locates the impressive corporate museum exhibition that illustrates the history of the company and the history of its products – BMW cars, from the first specimen up to the latest models. Another component of the whole exhibition includes the cars and motorcycles currently being produced, which are also offered to visitors as if they were potential clients: New models can be purchased at any time. The museum function strengthens the marketing aspect of the showroom and strategically aims to enhance the importance and competitiveness of the brand. In addition, customers are encouraged to personally receive the BMW cars they have bought and experience the unforgettable impression of exclusivity promoted by the brand BMW. This experience forms an inseparable emotional bond between the company and the client and stabilises the existing brand image in the society. BMW corporate museum building, designed by the Viennese company *Coop Himmelbl(l)au* in 2007, attracts interests by its powerful, futuristic architecture. Technical solutions of a pro-ecological nature refer to the fundamental values promoted by the brand. Under the visionary roof covering 16 thousand m<sup>2</sup> area is about 30 thousand m<sup>2</sup> of exhibition space, a cars collection area, restaurants, cafes, bars, shops, the Junior Campus, conference rooms, and customer service zone. Inside, visitors can see the ins and outs of production, and experience the design process of a brand product with all their senses. The interactive exhibition facilitates the understanding of innovative implementations, principles of design and the quality policy of the company (Fig. 2). Due to its attractive form and variety of cultural and educational programmes, the building quickly became one of the biggest attractions of Bavaria, which has hosted more than 7 million visitors since opening in 2007. As per marketing announcements of the company, the Corporate BMW museum combines technology, design and innovation in the promotion of modern life, the dynamics of social change and culture to create a unique public space conducive to meetings and dialogue.

The Mercedes-Benz corporate automotive museum stands out as an example, first of all for the spatial concept of the building, which is based on the geometry of the company logo - a distinctive three-pointed star in a circle - but also for its spectacular architecture. Historical and sentimental in value, the long-standing use of the graphic trademark as a brand marketing activity is strengthening the identification with the architecture and aesthetic expression of the Mercedes corporate museum building. The base of this object, with its unique shape and clearly defined, compositional assumptions was patented years ago. The museum building designed in 2006 by the Amsterdam design bureau *van Berkel UNStudio und Bos* supplies 16.5 thousand m<sup>2</sup> of exhibition space, in which Mercedes presents the 125-

year history of the automotive industry through 1,500 exhibits, including 160 vehicles and illustrates the development of the company and the brand. The exhibition also aims to identify the objectives set by the company in the future and innovative ways it intends to take. The system for exposition is based on a sequence of exhibition spaces linearly arranged in the shape of a double helix winding, which is a record of the human genetic code. The helix paraphrases both the logo and the key intellectual assumptions of the brand that by corporate policy commits to constantly explore novelty to some extent. In the line of exploration can be found the "myths space" (*Mythosräume*) and "collection room" (*Collectionsräume*), with both types merging in the structure of the object. The culmination of the exhibition, which follows the basic assumptions of Mercedes-Benz, is the 800-meter "zone fascination with technology," where numerous interactive stations allow you to glimpse into the future of the automotive industry. The museum complex also features an experimental laboratory in which the prototypical demonstrations of the company's latest technical achievements are prepared and part of the production line utilizing a modern impersonal workstation operates. The architecture of Corporate Museum Mercedes-Benz immerses visitors in the modern culture that they are a part of, causing them to forget they are in a museum (Fig. 3). The architecture does not serve just as a backdrop for works of art elevated on pedestals; it is part of the art, a fascinating and stimulating factor for the senses to step up action.



Figure 1. The view of the Porsche Museum from *Otto-Dür-Strasse*, inside the exposition.  
 Source: *Ksenia Piatkowska, 2011*



Figure 2. The main entrance and interior ramps in *BMW-Welt*  
 Source: <http://www.bmw-welt.com>, 2012



Figure 3. *BMW-Welt* – bird's-eye view– location next to the corporate buildings and the production line  
 Source: <http://www.bmw-welt.com>, 2012

## Research Results

Corporate museums occupy a difficult and often misunderstood position, straddling both the cultural and traditional world of the public museum and the profit-motivated and ever-changing business world. (Lehman & Byrom, 2009) Such museums showcase the development of product lines, emphasizing new products, with the aim of “creating a buying atmosphere for such products” (Danilov, 1991, 19) . The branding strategy sells concept that synthesizes the main corporate or institutional goals via visual and spatial messages. They are components of multi-dimensional communication processes attracting investors and consumers, the local community or prospective employees. The branding strategies concentrate especially on distinctive features singling out a particular firm from the competition. The main emphasis is put on innovative aspects – both in production process and marketing policy. The high degree of originality of offers that creates any brand refers nowadays to the architecture of corporate museums too. The architecture of corporate museums must be doubtlessly identified with the brand, reflecting the high quality of the brand’s products. Therefore uniqueness becomes the corporate architecture’s indicator.

The purpose of a corporate museum is not based on the existing context of a place, but appears to be integral to the corporate identity programme, exposing the company’s values and philosophy. They are thematic, commercial buildings, owned by a particular firm, where the history of the company brand and products’ development are presented on the background of the local social environment.

Corporate museums are usually located next to the factories where the brand products are manufactured. The physically immediate vicinity of the production zone extends the exhibition route to sectors of the production line. The selection of such a location for the museum lends credence to holding within its interiors the brand’s history and philosophy, due to the placement of the building against the background of a production zone. The museum object and its contents constitute the climax of the linear road of production and the continuity of a brand. It is a place for attractively transmitting and promoting the wide product knowledge through entertainment. From the view of the production zone placed on their borderlines, the corporate museums with their emblematic architecture automatically create a new representative entrance area for the whole factory complex.

Corporate museums generate considerable benefits as they complement the loyalty programmes addressed to current and future owners of the exhibited products. At the same time the cultural potential of the space where the museums are built increases. Their peripheral location economically activates forgotten zones of the town. Corporate museums extend tourist and cultural offers and their buildings become recognizable elements in the marketing of city image. These facts prove, that museum institutions can be successfully used for commercial purposes.

## Conclusions

The museum institution is sometimes used as a marketing device in the creation and realization of the consumers’ needs to achieve notable financial benefits (Kotler, 2005). It creates and stimulates particular consumer – behaviour, becomes the brand and prestige manifestation (Gottdiener, 1998), and is the means of advertisement and promotion (Newhouse, 1998). The museums’ function in command economy realities is functioning in conditions of competition (Kotler, 2005). The basic competition for the museum institution is not other museums but different, alternative ways of spending spare time. To enter into any market competition a museum must be a “thematic” park with attractions: excellent permanent collections, mediocre temporary exhibitions and facilities like shops and restaurants (Piątek, 2006). Corporate museums allude to this model but expand the offer by arousing consumer needs and stimulating loyalty behaviour in relationship to the promoted brand (Silberberg, 2001). For the museums’ future the system of regionalization and decentralization is essential (Sciacchitano, 2007). In the case of corporate museums it is essential to extend the current exhibition’s influence to potential clients and the automotive market sector. It is not the inclusion of local community that is crucial, but creating corporate prestige and building up the popularity of products among visitors. The visitors might be perceived as the actual client prolonging their contact with the brand or as the potential consumer to whom the marketing message is dedicated. Today the needs and expectations of consumers and museum visitors come to the forefront. In the case of traditional museums, the potential visitors are the key *raison d’être* (Baudrillard, 2006). Corporate museums belong to private firms and the amount of visitors will not determine the museum’s existence but will significantly influence the level of interest in the firms and sales of the branded goods. This innovative and controversial way of using the museum

institution for commercial purposes generates benefits both for corporations and local social and economical structures by:

- Increasing the cultural potential of the space where the museums are built;
- Economically activating forgotten zones of the city's periphery;
- Extending the city's tourist and cultural offer;
- Building a recognizable element of the city's marketing image.

The corporate museum being a significant tourist destination is a concept embraced by many firms (Quintanilla, 1998). Many well-known firms in Europe also have a long history of involvement in the process of building the corporate museum institution. The above-mentioned German car manufacturers BMW, Mercedes-Benz and Porsche have museums that are visited by a considerable number of people each year, with the museums actively promoted as tourist destinations. These museums are, as Buchanan describes, "tourist bait", providing a combination of education and entertainment that results in consumers achieving an "unprecedented intimacy with cherished brands" (2000, 119). It reflects a conflict of values between commerce and the collection, which is linked to general disagreement about the purpose of museums. In recent times the recreational purpose of museums has become further asserted (Foley and McPherson, 2000).

Well, it would seem that regardless, museums can be used for commercial purposes, and are already used in this way. And in the case of the three companies described, interest in the brand among potential clients was strengthened, which increased market competitiveness in comparison to other automotive corporations. However, I expect the formula of the corporate museum – like all other novelties – will lose its attractiveness and relevance. How many corporate museums can come into existence and still attract consumers' attention? I wonder which attributes of recognizable institutions will corporations exploit in the future to refresh and strengthen their marketing image?

It is suggested that further research should be undertaken within corporate museums to answer the question of how traditional museums would learn from the corporate kind. And how can they be more inclusive? Other qualitative approaches and investigations amongst consumers would be most effective for this. Additionally, studies into what motivates consumers to visit a corporate museum would be of particular value.

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