

Our wisdom in our products

Puzzle in Serbian Way

Mirjana Prljevic, economic consultant on strategic positioning, shares the knowledge acquired throughout the world for better results of our businessmen



Mirjana Prljevic: our chance in a combined package of ethno offers

photo by Rade Krstinic

Belgrader, Mirjana Prljevic, lives and works between Paris and Belgrade. Born in Belgrade, she has lived for seven years in the City of Lights. There is some symbolism in it: through her work, she wants to help our businessmen and light their way to even better positioning of Serbia and Serbian products in the selective world market. We have the preconditions, but, as Mirjana says, we do not do business by the world model: we should study everything carefully and only then appear in public with well designed marketing, not for one but for a portfolio of our products – first-class in every respect. Of course, there are exceptions that deserve praise.

– If what you have are the scattered pieces of puzzle that you want to fit together to make a picture, you combine and combine, but it becomes more and more difficult and takes a great deal of time. However, when the picture you want to make is in front of you, fitting the puzzle pieces is simpler and faster. The same is true of the production activities of a company and products. If you know precisely what you need to produce and place in both domestic and foreign market, you will position yourself much easier. The strategy of positioning, which represents the ways and means you need to accomplish assigned objectives, is your plan and programme, but the positioning itself is not what you have done for your product or company but what you have done to the consumer's mind about the perception of your product or company – explains the energetic girl who, at the age of 26, had her own firm in Belgrade, and since 2001, another one in Paris.

Mirjana thinks that in our country there is not a sufficiently developed network for supporting the development of small and medium enterprises which are also a chance to resolve the urgent problem of a great number of the unemployed.

– When you know precisely what economic potential of a country is, in our country it is everything with the prefix ethno, then it becomes easier to achieve the objective: efficient enterprises and a good position in the world. Enterprises networked into clusters would make our offer much more effective as the synergy effect itself would be achieved not only in domestic but in the foreign market as well. If we say that sauerkraut is our specialty, then we cannot use our cabbage and a foreign technology of pickling. Cabbage has to be pickled in the traditional way which has been used here for centuries. The same goes for slatko (preserves). We say: We have slatko, it is, for example, our brand (anyway, I think that this term as well as positioning is not always used properly). We have to bear in mind that the others also have preserves, they just make it in a different way. We should make it as the generations of women from this region have made it and then it will be our product, both for domestic and foreign market –

explains Ms. Prljevic.

Mirjana is convinced that it is necessary to present ourselves to the world through a “Unique Package Offer”.

– For example, you can combine the visit to Kalemegdan Fortress with the visit to our monasteries and ethno villages, include tastings of selected dishes and drinks and thus make a touristic package offer. More such packages would lead, through proper selection and combination, to the final Serbian package.

Mirjana also says that, in the world, they first carefully study their capacity, listen to the demands of the market and cherish tradition. Thus, even today Brazilian coffee is thought to be the best although in the world market Somali coffee is of much better quality... . What is important is the position of a country in the consumer's mind. That's why we are still remembered by Tito, Olympic Games in Sarajevo, perhaps by a sportist or nonaligned nations, but since recently everyone will immediately say: “Aha! Milosevic, bombing, refugees, Kusturica...”.

– For this reason unified package offers are made for a country and they fight at several fronts for a better position in the foreigners' mind – explains Ms. Prljevic, whose narrow specialty is the positioning of products and companies, and the success she has achieved so far has brought her the position of a consultant for the former Yugoslavia region in the Association of Industrialists in France.

Visiting our companies as a professional consultant, Mirjana often meets directors who, instead of listening to her, first talk about what should be done, while abroad, the situation is quite the opposite: if they need you as a professional consultant, they will first carefully read your biography, ask about your references and carefully listen to you as they know very well that economic experts are far more familiar with the trends in the market than they themselves who are busy with the position of their company and its production.

– Younger company owners are more ready to accept a good piece of advice than the older ones. You should bear in mind that a person running a business cannot achieve everything on their own. They should surround themselves with a good team of experts and only then will they reach a desired objective: the success they strive for. That is when the puzzle makes sense: only when high-quality associates are around you, do you improve your own qualities.

The cult of lunch – Here, they will first invite you for lunch and then talk about business. In France, and the West in general, you will first finish the job you came for and then get an invitation to lunch which you can also turn down and nobody will take it amiss. Here, to refuse an invitation to lunch during a business meeting is almost an insult – observes Mirjana.

Snezana Radovanovic

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