

Original Article

Strategic Transition of Ankerslot B.V.: From B2B Dominance to B2C Market Entry in Germany

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Abstract: *Ankerslot B.V. is a Dutch company, founded in 1946, that develops, designs, and manufactures practical, high-quality keys using computer-controlled machinery (Ankerslot, 2023). Ankerslot now sells mechanical locks in the B2B market in the Netherlands. Using the 'Contract manufacturing' business method, they enter into contracts with B2B customers (other companies such as Noxxa and Isero) and generate patent locks and keys in the customer's company name. Ankerslot also sells it to the general public, including banks (Rabobank ABN, ING), universities (Saxion and Twente), the government, and prisons, but not to end users directly. Ankerslot has primarily used word-of-mouth strategies to raise brand awareness in the neighborhood. They intend to grow their customer base into overseas countries like Germany and Serbia. They intend to join the B2C market in Germany for the first time, but Ankerslot will face a difficulty due to a lack of prior experience. Germans take pride in their own local products, so Ankerslot would face a hurdle entering the mechanical lock market as a foreign organization, given there are already many competitors in the market. Explaining each component of DESTEP to demonstrate the customer demographic, the economic environment in Germany, market trends, and the state of the mechanical lock market in Germany. Marketing research and analysis are critical to understanding and developing Ankerslot's German market entry strategy. The study structure begins with Ankerslot's internal marketing strategy and then moves on to macro and meso-level analyses to better understand German market dynamics and rivals' communication methods. Ankerslot's internal strengths and weaknesses, as well as external opportunities and threats, were assessed using a comprehensive SWOT and TOWS analysis.*

Keywords: *B2B to B2C, DESTEP, SWOT Analysis, TOWS Analysis, Germany, Mechanical Lock Industry.*

I. INTRODUCTION

In Europe, the need for security is as high as ever. Many manufacturers of security products are already developing products to meet these demands, such as locks. With a Revenue expected to show an annual growth rate (CAGR 2024-2028) of 10.10% (Statista,2024), resulting in a projected market volume of US\$6.9bn by 2028, it makes sense for many companies to dwell in this market.

Ankerslot is a relatively tiny corporation with a projected income of 2 to 10 million EUR. The total value of their assets is 3.279.984 EUR. Established in 1946 as Kiels Fijnmechanische Industrie NV in Hengelo, the company has a long history. Initially, the production of padlocks was their first concern. That being said, Ankerslot relocated to Enschede in 1950 and expanded its product offering to include more locks, particularly cylinder locks.

Ankerslot began providing parts for steel office equipment and producing compass boxes. Ankerslot obtained independence in 1986 through a management buyout. They have continually produced a variety of high-quality mechanical goods throughout its history. Ankerslot moved to a new building in the Enschede-West Marssteden business park in 1999. Marijn van der Wal bought the company in 2008, and in 2017, it expanded its offerings to include an electronics line. Ankerslot maintains a strong balance sheet. Ankerslot has also collaborated with Q-lock, providing them with patent-protected cylinder systems.

Most of their products are successful in many ranges, such as offices, hospitals, healthcare institutions, and industries (Ankerslot, 2023)

Being the dominant force in Enschede, Netherlands' key cylinder manufacturing sector with an impressive 80% market share, faces increasing challenges from globalization and emerging competitors. Maintaining and increasing market awareness is critical to the company's long-term performance as the industry evolves. Van der Wal's (2023) duty of ensuring Ankerslot's recognition for the next two decades is critical to the company's long-term health, as consistent brand visibility is required for acquiring and maintaining customers as well as creating significant commercial alliances. In today's information age, retaining recognition is critical for capitalizing on opportunities and being competitive.



To deal with the main research question of “What strategic approach can Ankerslot adopt to effectively penetrate the German market through B2C channels for the sale of their mechanical locks and how can it be implemented?”, the research questions have been formulated:

- a. Which theories and models could be relevant to the B2C market strategy plan for Ankerslot?
- b. How are internal operations/analysis at Ankerslot going right now regarding the company's general position, export initiatives, strategic approach, marketing campaigns, and supply chain management procedures?
- c. Which external factors of the German market are relevant to the strategy that shows the strategy for Ankerslot?
- d. What are the behavior and preferences of the consumer when purchasing mechanical locks?
- e. How can Ankerslot enhance competitiveness and strategic decision-making through thorough competition analysis in the German market, considering rival tactics, market positioning, product offerings, and consumer perceptions?
- f. How could the SWOT analysis conclude the research to help define the objectives and strategy for Ankerslot in the B2C market?

These sub-questions facilitate a thorough analysis of demand, revenue, cost, and risk that helps the decision-making for Ankerslot B.V.'s expansion to the German market. This research aims to understand the challenges and opportunities that Ankerslot might face in Germany.

An appropriate research methodology is necessary in order to successfully address the research questions and subtopics. The methods that have been selected will be the basis for obtaining the information required to offer meaningful responses. This methodology guarantees a profound look at Ankerslot's penetration into the German market: It is a combination of qualitative and quantitative elements. Independent and dependent variables are defined.

The methodology employed in this study for data collection was a review of literature; the research overlaps with various studies, theories, and academic literature that are related to the topic (Morse & Cheek, 2014). The literature review process in this study shall also entail the exploration of reputable academic journals to gain knowledge on growth methodologies that can assist forecasting. Senkus et al. (2021) state that: "Desk research is the search for information, data, and insights using existing literature, documents, and resources available from your desk or on the internet." Desk research as a method will be adopted in this study for data regarding market size, growth, players in the competition, expansion strategies, and benchmarking. To generate forecasts, this data will be sourced from reputable statistics bodies and public company submissions. Interviews are used to gather data with the aim of obtaining insights and information related to their study by engaging participants in a structured or semi-structured dialogue between the researcher and participant (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). According to Guetterman et al. (2020), these interviews cover a range of topics, including participant engagement, choice of data collection tool, recruitment feasibility, and overall study protocol.

The approach is employed to accumulate recent data on market entry strategies, industry trends, and B2B and B2C models. Central theoretical concepts such as SWOT analysis and the four Ps of marketing are based on the review of literature, which is done from books, online materials, and reports by experts. This method gives you a baseline for understanding how the German mechanical lock market works and where Ankerslot currently stands.

This qualitative design involves interviewing company staff, such as the management and sales teams, in order to get a taste of what Ankerslot is doing, where it is headed, and the challenges being faced. These interviews reveal Ankerslot's operational capabilities and opportunities for improvement, as well as a clear vision of the company's target to move from B2B to B2C.

SWOT or TOWS analysis would also be implemented in this study. A SWOT analysis of Ankerslot is, therefore, included in the report. Combining internal and external, the TOWS matrix also utilizes the SWOT analysis to develop actionable strategies for penetrating the market. The internal abilities and the uncovered threats of the market to which Ankerslot has to respond in order to survive in the German B2C market. The competition in the German market for Ankerslot was compared by an analysis. This involves the analysis of competitor strategies, product offers, market positioning, and customer perception through the use of market studies, benchmarking, and publicly available information. The goal is to find opportunities for differentiation and entrance by comparing Ankerslot to well-known competitors such as Dormakaba and Assa Abloy. The primary purpose of this quantitative technique is to understand German consumers' preferences, habits, and hopes for mechanical locks. Data on consumer demand, price sensitivity, and product attributes are acquired through online polls and questionnaires; this information is critical for tailoring Ankerslot's product lineup and marketing strategies.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

This research will be the groundwork of this paper. Understanding B2B and B2C (similarities, differences, transition process, considerations, and uses) is crucial to understand. The use of Porter's 5 forces, the 4Ps of Marketing, SWOT, and the

TOWS matrix will be used to help the research and the final product itself.

Peter LaPlaca (2013) defines B2B as trade between businesses, and B2C as transactions between businesses and individual customers. Because businesses purchase more costly goods and services, business-to-business transactions usually have higher monetary values. B2B models can occasionally involve B2C interactions, but their primary purpose is to help other businesses.

B2B businesses can expand their operations to include individual consumers in addition to their business clientele. There are various ways this expansion can occur: Offerings diversification: To further diversify its offerings, a business-to-business (B2B) organization may include offers that are tailored to individual clients. Extension of Brands, B2B businesses can leverage their existing brand experience and reputation to launch consumer-focused brands or product lines. They can thereby access new consumer markets while still conducting business-to-business transactions. Participation in markets: B2B businesses can participate in online marketplaces or platforms that cater to both B2C and B2B customers. This allows them to reach a wider audience by using the same platform to promote their products and services to both businesses and individual consumers. Because of the increased value of the goods and services and the need to lower risks, the decision-making process in business-to-business (B2B) sales can take days, weeks, or months.

Businesses that primarily operate in the B2C space can also engage with other companies by integrating B2B elements into their operations: B2C businesses with their own product brands can offer other businesses white labeling or private labeling services. This involves manufacturing products under the business-to-business client's brand so they can resale them to their own customers. A partnership connection is the second. B2C businesses may collaborate or affiliate with B2B businesses to increase their customer base or offer complementary services.

A) Competitive Advantage Theory

According to Michael Porter's Competitive Advantage Theory, in order to obtain a competitive edge, goods and services must be differentiated. According to Michael Porter's Competitive Advantage Theory, in order to obtain a competitive edge, goods and services must be differentiated. Porter asserts that focus strategies, distinctiveness, and cost leadership can provide companies a competitive edge. Each of these techniques enables companies to beat their competition and create more profits (Rubio-Andrés, 2024; Robles, 2017; Ketels, 2006).

Being the lowest-cost producer in the sector is the aim of cost leadership. Businesses aim to reduce manufacturing costs and offer goods and services at a cheaper cost than their competitors by employing this strategy. Leveraging cost advantages, strict cost management, effective production methods, and economies of scale can all help achieve this. (Rubio-Andrés, 2024; Robles, 2017; Moon, 2014).

a. Porter 5 Forces

Michael Porter's 5 forces, first developed in 1979, is used to determine the long-run profitability of an industry by analyzing potential threats posed by the bargaining power of buyers and suppliers, substitute products or services, and competitors (Porter, 1979). Porter's 5 forces has been an influential model in strategic management for approximately 30 years (Kraaijenbrink, 2012)

b. Risk Management Theory

Risk Management Theory considers the identification, analysis, and prioritization of risks as well as the coordinated application of resources to minimize, monitor, and control the probability or impact of implemented adverse events. Because it provides a systematic approach to managing uncertainties that may obstruct the achievement of organizational objectives, this theory is essential for companies operating in dynamic environments (Barraza de la Paz, 2023; Alsaadi, 2021).

Risks must be assessed to determine their likelihood and potential consequences after they have been recognized. This means evaluating the risk's probability of happening as well as the gravity of the consequences if it does. While statistical analysis and modeling are examples of quantitative methods used in risk assessment, expert judgment and risk assessment are instances of qualitative approaches. According to their ability to interfere with the organization's goals and operations, this stage aids in prioritizing risks (Alsaadi, 2021).

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Ankerslot was founded in 1946 in Hengelo as Kiels Fijnmechanische Industrie NV. In the 1950s, they quickly relocated to Enschede (Ankerslot, 2023). They began by producing padlocks, but they soon expanded to include cylinder locks, compass boxes, and other locks. They also started supplying steel office furniture. Ankerslot's current leadership, led by Mr. Marijn Van Der Wal, is an example of how upper management directs and affects staff. Ankerslot demonstrates strong leadership that advances the company's goals, creates a happy workplace, and motivates staff.

To increase its operational effectiveness and competitiveness in the market, Ankerslot is presently undergoing a comprehensive organizational structure reorganization. The CEO is leading the transition by offering leadership and strategic direction. In order to support the company's expansion, the financial department will play a critical role in guaranteeing fiscal discipline and efficient resource management. Currently, serving prospective customers is the main goal of the marketing and sales division.

Ankerslot's current business strategy is centered entirely on business-to-business (B2B) alliances with major wholesale businesses in the Netherlands. Since there is no requirement for product marketing, this approach is significantly more practical than dealing directly with retail outlets, claims Tom Van Verseveld (2023). Instead, it relies on establishing trustworthy connections with wholesalers, who serve as effective go-betweens for the end user. Additional information is provided by Van der Wal (2023), who notes that Ankerslot places a high priority on product development and aspires to lead the industry in terms of security, safety, and use. This commitment is demonstrated by Ankerslot's excellent SKG IKOB ratings, a renowned grading system in the Netherlands for assessing the level of security of items.

Word-of-mouth marketing is one of the primary strategies used to promote Ankerslot. Ankerslot already has a devoted following of customers who help spread the word about its goods. Ankerslot can systematically manage all aspects of its marketing strategy by employing the 4Ps of the marketing mix, ensuring that each element is in accordance with the overall objectives of the company and the current situation of the market.

- The **Product**, the initial element of the marketing mix, ensures that Ankerslot's offerings are appropriate for the specific needs and preferences of its target market. In the German B2C sector, where client expectations may differ significantly from those of its more established B2B clients, this is particularly important for Ankerslot. By continuously improving and changing its product line, Ankerslot can continue to attract and retain customers by upholding its reputation for manufacturing high-quality, secure, and user-friendly locks.
- The **Price** element: Ankerslot develops a pricing strategy that both keeps it competitive and fairly represents the value of its goods. A well-defined pricing structure with options for different levels of customization and service contracts can appeal to a wide range of clients and businesses. Because of this astute pricing approach, Ankerslot is positioned as a luxury brand in the market, which boosts sales.
- The **Place** is a key feature. Ankerslot must expand its digital footprint and improve its online sales channels in order to break into the B2C market. Promotion is another important area where the Marketing Mix shines.
- At the moment, word-of-mouth advertising is the only method of **Promotion**. Since Ankerslot is already a well-known brand in the Netherlands, it only works locally. But if it wants to grow into Germany, it won't do well.

Ankerslot would require a method to track its advancement from every angle in order to stay abreast of all the company's developments and advancements. The ongoing process of gathering, evaluating, and assessing data on several facets of a business's operations to make sure that objectives are being fulfilled and plans are working is known as performance monitoring. Ankerslot uses the Microsoft Dynamics 365 Business Central software to measure its business in order to understand how it keeps an eye on its performance.

It serves as the main data center and is an all-inclusive finance and management program. This enterprise resource planning (ERP) approach is excellent because Ankerslot is regarded as a small to mid-sized company. By accurately tracking finances and forecasting cash flows in both B2B and B2C marketplaces, Ankerslot can ensure financial stability and plan for future developments. Strong vendor relationships and efficient inventory management will help meet customer demand. Integrating CRM (customer relationship management) will improve customer interactions and sales opportunities, both of which are essential for B2C expansion.

IV. CONCLUSION

Initiatives for market awareness, customer acquisition, and digital engagement may all have contributed to Ankerslot's success in Germany. The company's qualities, which include a strong reputation, consistent product quality, and an established presence in the B2B sector, provide it a strong foundation for entering the B2C market. But for Ankerslot to overcome challenges such as low brand awareness in Germany, no digital presence, and a sector dominated by regional and established companies, clear, doable marketing strategies need to be defined.

A major discovery is that there is lack of a clear picture on the Ankerslot marketing objectives, for instance Brand awareness need to reach 30% in year one, get 10 000 new customers within 18 months and improving online conversion rate by at least 20% within in a period of a year. In order to meet these objectives, the firm needs to concentrate efforts in digital marketing, engage in important trade shows, implement a loyalty program, and innovate building lines that join smart technology with mechanical locks. An implementation plan with clear activities, time frames, roles, and responsibilities, as well as funding, should accompany these strategies to ensure they are effective.

Research sub-questions also investigated key dimensions for this strategic orientation. The comparison of B2B and B2C models helped to identify the changes that Ankerslot needs to make, e.g. becoming customer-focused. Utilising direct communication channels to establish consumer trust. Based on Ankerslot's actual operations, an internal analysis revealed that old machinery has to be replaced, and digitalisation as well as communication internally is essential for the successful B2C conversion. External factors like the competitive situation, regulation-restrictions, and customer demand in Germany were also analyzed to identify external opportunities and threats which Ankerslot has to face.

Limitations

This study sheds light on Ankerslot's potential market initiation into the German B2C market, but it is necessary to acknowledge that there are limitations. For one, the research primarily relies on secondary sources (such as market reports and previously published work), which may not fully capture the latest industry movements or potential upstart competitors in the mechanical lock industry. Moreover, an on-off survey and usage study would have resulted in too little additional information regarding the German market.

Time was also a constraint in how much primary data gathering could be conducted, particularly for the competition and customer behavior research needs. Finally, although the study offers strategic recommendations from theoretical frameworks such as SW and TOW, practical implementation could find unexpected challenges, particularly concerning compliance with regulations, market, and trend movements. Therefore, there would be a benefit for conducting an additional analysis with broader primary data collection and continuous scanning of the market, to further develop Ankerslot's go-to-market strategy.

Recommendation

The article's findings enable a few recommendations for the market launch plan of Ankerslot and prospects for research overall. For consumer surveys in this context, it is recommended that a bigger and more diverse sample size be utilized in future research to further understand the extent of German consumers' preferences and behavior. Another method of inquisitiveness would be by formulating research through focus groups or depth interviews, where different category markets of the target audience can also be tapped into, like small company owners, property management, and homeowners. Moreover, longitudinal research should be considered in the future to monitor the evolving mechanical lock market and assess the sustainability of Ankerslot's approach.

"To increase the brand's reach, Ankerslot needs to drive digital marketing through SEO and social." Local market penetration in Berlin, Munich, etc., and particularly targeted advertising. In addition, Ankerslot should also consider entering into partnerships with local distributors and shopkeepers to have a strong supply chain and increase its reach. Real-time competitor analysis and adapting to customer feedback will ensure that Ankerslot is an agile and responsive company, perfectly poised for sustainable growth in the German B2C market.

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