

## **Methodology to Implement the International Business Plan of CubaRon Ltd. Exports**

Metodología para el plan de marketing internacional en la exportación de la  
empresa CubaRon, S.A.

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### **ABSTRACT**

**Aim:** To design a methodology for implementation of an international business plan of CubaRon Ltd.

**Methods:** The theoretical research methods included historic-logical, analysis-synthesis, and induction-deduction. The empirical methods included surveys and scientific observation; and the statistical methods used were simple regression analysis, the Kendall and Cronbach Alpha coefficients, goodness of fit, Chi square test, and SPSS, version 2. Some of the tools used were BCG and SWOT analyses.

**Main result:** A new methodology was designed for implementation of an international business plan of the company.

**Conclusions:** After implementation of Cubay rum production, strategies of growth, differentiation, ranking, and marketing mix oriented to the Spanish market, were achieved.

**Key words:** Cuban rum export; Spanish market; international business plan.

## RESUMEN

**Objetivo:** Diseñar una metodología para el plan de marketing internacional de la empresa CubaRon, S.A.

**Métodos:** Entre los métodos teóricos de investigación empleados se encuentran el histórico-lógico, análisis-síntesis e inducción-deducción; entre los empíricos: encuestas y observación científica; entre los estadísticos: el análisis de regresión simple, los coeficientes de Kendall y Alfa de Cronbach, la bondad de ajuste Chi cuadrado, mediante el empleo del software estadístico SPSS versión 2; entre las herramientas: las matrices de motricidad, BCG y Dafo.

**Principal resultado:** Se diseñó una metodología para el plan de marketing internacional propio de esa empresa.

**Conclusiones:** Con su aplicación para el ron Cubay, se obtuvieron estrategias de crecimiento, de diferenciación, de posicionamiento y de marketing-mix, enfocadas al mercado español.

**Palabras clave:** exportación de rones cubanos; mercado español; plan de marketing internacional.

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## INTRODUCTION

The Cuban economy faces new challenges in terms of diversifying exports of goods with high-added value, as an ingenious form to cope with the restrictions of a harsh economic, financial, and commercial blockade implemented by the US government. Also

important is to gain a higher position in a market dominated by the large hegemonic powers (Hernández, 2015).

Accordingly, state policies are being implemented to raise the efficiency of company management in terms of foreign trade, as a way to increase and consolidate income from the export of goods and services, create a true exporting vocation at the executive level (especially in the business sector), conduct marketing studies to support the most important and strategic decisions, and continue to promote greater foreign trade flexibility by Cuban entities (Communist Party of Cuba [PPC], 2017a and 2017b).

Particularly, one of the most internationally awarded Cuban products, since the very beginning, is Cuban light rums, due to the clean and complex aroma, soft and fruit-like flavor without the use of artificial flavoring, that came as a result of years of history, tradition, and inheritance. This beverage summarizes the essential characteristics of a mixed culture, and results from a creation process that goes from the manufacture of molasses, distillation to produce spirits, to aging in American white oak casks. The CubaRon Ltd. company is rescuing the mission and tradition of rum making by embracing every aspect of the Cuban rum-producing culture, the renovation of distilleries, and the development of new products that satisfy the most demanding tastes.

This company has identified the main current trends of the sector, new investment to broaden the productive capacities, and product portfolios to promote exports with their own distinct means. This direction is supported by a team of highly qualified rum-manufacturing masters, and a potential market in the European Union and particularly Spain, as the entry gate. Counting on the previous, the company expects to achieve production over the planned figures. However, in 2017, the plan was not met, causing a decrease in expected income, due to a cut down in exports, compared to the previous year. The main reasons for that were:

- The absence of foreign investment capital to access destination markets, and allocate the company's products.
- The lack of an international distribution channel.

- The inexistence of partnerships for the company's exported brands.
- The existence of harsh competitive conditions.
- The non-implementation of a marketing philosophy that promotes sales, contributes to brand recognition, and cause increases in the number of universal clients.

The last item owed mainly to the lack of a sound methodology to design an international marketing plan, which has limited Cuban rum exports. In that sense, the aim of this research is to design an international marketing methodology for CubaRon Ltd.

## **DEVELOPMENT**

A marketing philosophy is assumed as the social and administrative process by which groups and individuals satisfy their needs by creating and exchanging goods and services, targeting both new clients on the premises of higher value, and staying with known clients by meeting their needs (Kotler and Armstrong, 2012). Therefore, it requires strategies that can be implemented in keeping with the company's resources, in order to increase long-term living standards, by ensuring a sustainable advantage over competitors, regarding consumer needs (Ministry of Foreign Trade and Tourism of Peru [Mincetur], 2013).

Some of these general strategies are those of growing, distinction, market positioning, and marketing mix, which refer to the development of concrete programs, centered on the exclusive traits of each market and consumers chosen (Stanton, Etzel, and Walker, 2007). On its own, marketing cannot create higher value for the client. Nevertheless, a plan helps establish the types of deals the company takes part in, and their goals (Kotler and Armstrong, 2012). This type of plan is an instrument to successfully run and coordinate activities, actions, and tasks during the business practice. This tool consists in modeling, structuring, and adjusting business goals and resources in face of ever-changing opportunities that surround the company. Hence, a company should experience development and growth, and reach satisfying benefits (Cohen, 2001 and González, 2017).

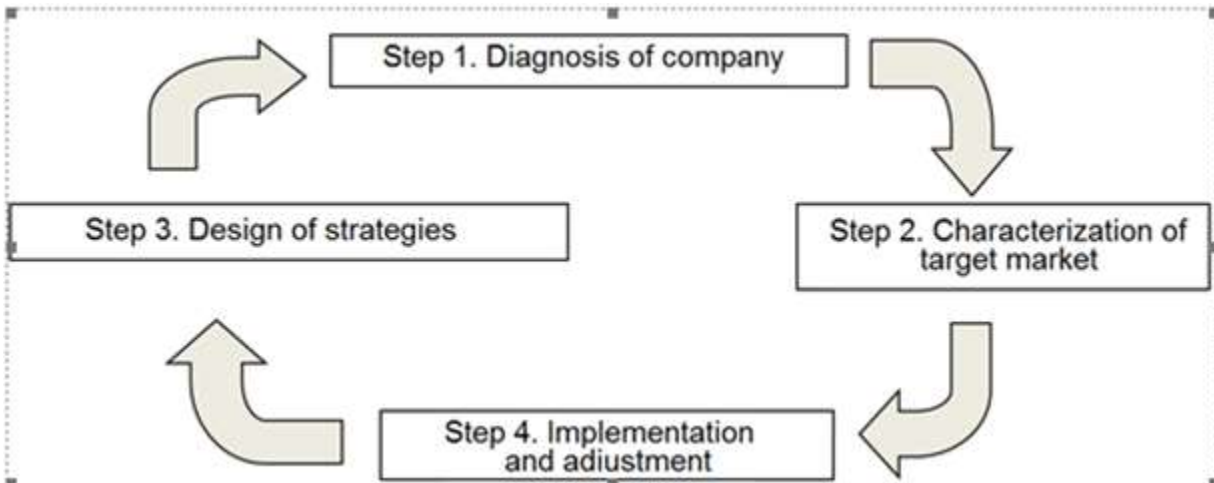
International marketing is the set of knowledge aimed to promote and facilitate processes of goods, services, and value exchanges between suppliers and customers from two or more countries, to meet customer needs and desires. Meanwhile, suppliers (companies, institutions or individuals) fulfill their purposes in relation to income, profit, services, aid or persuasion, which are the reasons for action and existence (Lerma and Márquez, 2010). Consequently, it is materialized through a marketing plan, where strategies are designed.

In Cuba, Resolution 50 issued by the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Investment, notes that, among other aspects, the elements that should be submitted by a company interested in implementing foreign trade strategies (Ministry of Foreign Trade [Mincex], 2014) are:

- A summary of the situation faced by entities in terms of sales.
- A brief description and analysis of the characteristics of the international market in relation to the goods sold by the entities.
- SWOT analysis of goods and entities, in order to meet the set goals.
- Evaluation of the economic effectiveness of export goods sales.
- Selection of target markets.
- Projection of exports according to geographical areas and goods.
- Brand, registration, and patent policies.
- Price policy.
- Methods and ways that might be used for international sales and distribution of merchandise.
- Publicity and advertising.
- Research and development of new products.
- Suspension, control and quality improvements policies, and presentation of export goods.
- List of national goods, management systems and/or quality certification implemented in the facilities.
- Safe transport policy, including selection of the nearest shipping ports.

- Training programs.

The authors of this research note that the success of Cuban exporting companies relies in the implementation of an international marketing plan that fits their features, and those of the goods and services to be exported. A plan that responds to the needs of the target market and meets the standards and regulations of international trade (González, 2017). In that sense, the methodology suggested is adapted by González (2017), looking at the international marketing plan of CubaRon Ltd. It is applied in the case of Cubay rum (an emerging product), directed to the Spanish market (the market offering the best export access). The plan consists of four stages, as shown in Fig. 1:



**Fig.1.** A methodology for implementation of an international business plan of CubaRon Ltd.

Source: Self-made.

### **Step 1. Company diagnosis**

Objective: To diagnose the internal and external scenarios, the capacities of the company, the characteristics of the goods to be exported the national competence, and current company strategies.

The economic-financial analysis was performed through the balance sheet of 2017, as well as financial reasons, which helped check if the situation was favorable for export investments:

- The circulating assets are enough to finance passive current liabilities.
- The total assets are financed: 59% with the company's own funds, and 41% with external funding.
- According to the financial reasons, the ability to pay for short-term obligations is adequate (general liquidity, 1.76); there is no risk of payment suspension or idle liquidity (immediate liquidity, 0.73); their assets are financed by others (debts, 41%); most debt burden falls on short term obligations (debt quality, 0.57); for every asset peso invested, the company gets a profit of 0.14 cents before annual taxation (profitability).

The analysis of human capital was made through the modules established in the Cuban standard: NC: 3000 (National Standardization Office [ONN], 2007); hence, it was concluded that the working environment is not satisfying, the work competences are not determined, and employees are not trained, which influences on the lack of market studies and the export reserves of the company.

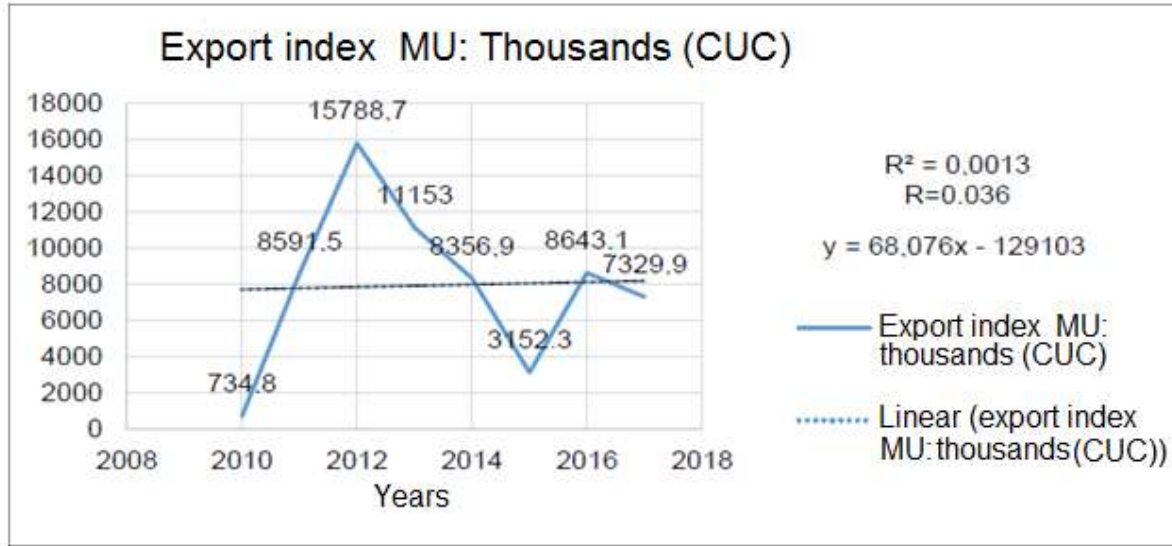
In short, considering the diagnosis performed and the surveys of the Board of Directors, the following deficiencies were detected:

1. Insufficient workforce training at the appropriate moment.
2. Inefficient growth of the company's own brands.
3. Inadequate organizational structure.
4. Existence of financial risk in to acquiring debts and company autonomy.

Which, under the motricity index score gradient (1, low; 3, mid; 9, high), and after surveying the members of the Board, showed the highest value for the second (24 points). This behavior affects the foundations of the entity, income to the nation, and its position in the international market, compared to the other competitors, which corroborates the importance of this research and the pertinence of the marketing plan designed.

As part of strategic goals, exports are an important indicator for the entity. Therefore, a performance analysis was conducted, as shown in Fig. 2, with a slight positive trend, and a very low  $R^2$  value, evidencing the existence of a great dispersion among export

indexes in relation to the trending line, with peaks in 2012 and 2015. Accordingly, it is impossible to perform a precise forecast of the future behavior of exports, based on the equation of the straight line.

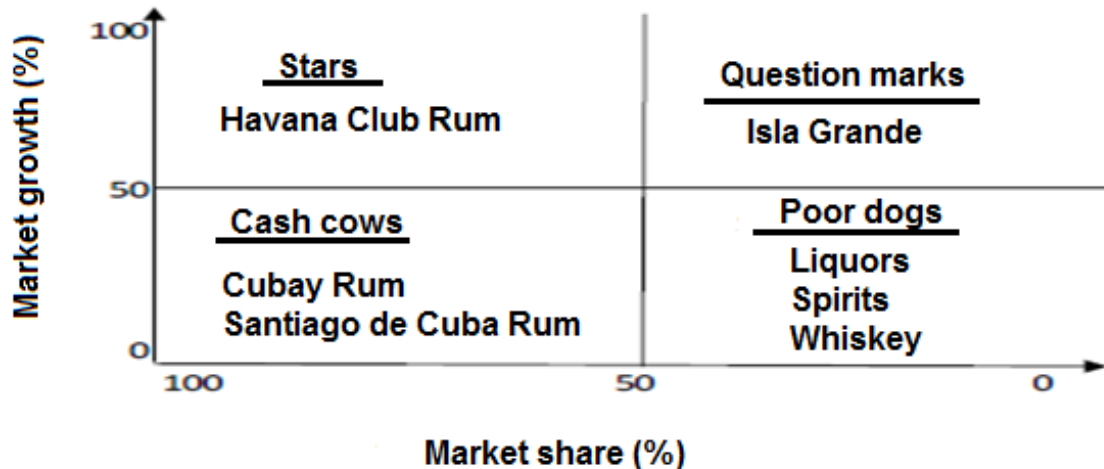


**Fig.2.** Performance of exports (2010-2017)

Source: Self-made.

The brands sold by CubaRon Ltd. compete among themselves, both in the international and national markets; hence, their success in the market only depends on the strategies established, depending on individual brand performance, as shown in Fig. 2, resulting from the strategic planning of the company done in 2017.





**Fig.3.** BCG Matrix

Source: Board of Directors of the company.

As shown in the figure, rums *Cubay* and *Santiago de Cuba* are in the “Cow” product box. These products are mature and belong to the Premium group, which has high acceptance indexes in the national market, with the highest rankings, followed by rum *Havana Club*. However, its insertion in the international market is weak and slow, since it requires investment to boost sales overseas, the incorporation of new markets, and increased commercial publicity, which can be achieved through the design of an international marketing plan.

Cubay rum is directed to the adult segment of the population (18 and older), whose purchasing power is mid, mid-high or high. The selection includes:

- Aged and soft aged
- White
- Extra aged white
- Golden
- 5 and 10 years' reserve
- 10 year superior aged
- Elixir 33
- Extra-aged 1870 Premium
- 330 Premium

- 500 Remedios Premium

Accordingly, the company has identified that the male section of the market prefers aged rums, and the female is more familiar with cocktails made of soft rums, such as the White Dry.

The list of competitors is made of Brugal, Bacardí, Pampero, Havana Club, Contessa, Cacique, Captain Morgan, Old Cask, Barceló, and other brands, including other alcoholic beverages that compete as alternative products, such as whiskey, vodka, Gin, tequila, wine, and so forth.

The company sets the price of brand selections, according to Mincex standards, and the characteristics of the product, production cost, and target market, in keeping with those of the competitors (Paéz, 2017). Consequently, prices vary constantly, except for the costs of dry matter offered by providers and production. Then when the target market has been established, attractive sale prices can be offered to the clients, in order to position the brands in the market (Mincex, 2014). The brand chosen for this study has an excellent quality-price correlation, keeping high quality standards, and directly proportional prices, which makes them attractive to consumers, depending on their taste, life quality, and purchasing power.

Concerning distribution, the company's needs are unmet, and occasionally, the negative effects of the crisis have become apparent. This situation affects international distributing partners, since the company does not have the necessary resources to guarantee large sales of the product, but at the local or territorial scale.

The highest export indexes are shown by the European Union, Panama, and Russia, in addition to contracts being discussed with countries like Vietnam, China, and members of the Bolivarian Alliance of the Peoples of Latin America, and the Caribbean Community. Since 2012, the company has been working toward the search, evaluation, and selection of new distributors, placing high interest in investments to sell the rum in the international market.

Regarding logistics, inspection of 100% of exported merchandise is conducted in the points of origin to guarantee quality and integrity of products. Transportation from the factory to the harbor is provided in 20-40 feet containers. The company is in charge of

custom processes, some of them in transit, to cut down costs and transportation charges.

A web site offers information about brands, products, and the company, but international advertising is managed by local distributing partners. The message carried by the rum of this study, and the rest of the brands, strengthens its image in the international marketing. The idea presented and promoted is based on the attributes of this rum, its distinctive features, quality, and the traditional way of manufacturing and aging. However, publicity from the origin country is not the adequate choice, since new products in the market require investment and strategies that position them in target countries and areas.

### **Step2. Characterization of the target market**

Objective: To perform a diagnosis of the target market in terms of demography, economic and legal conditions, their competences and interests of the product in the market.

The target market in this study is Spain, a member country of the European Union, which has historically been one of the main destinations of the company. However, in 2017, the export plan for *Cubay* was not met; therefore, recovering this market is one of the company's goals. It would pave the way to reach other countries of the European Union, a pattern to follow by the other brands of the entity.

The population of Spain is relatively young (about 46 thousand inhabitants), with an average age of 39 years. However, the low natality rates of recent decades are pointing to population aging in the mid-term, which means the occurrence of a possible potential rise to keeping traditions of fidelity to certain brands of rum (Economic and Commercial Office of Spain in Havana, 2018).

It can be said that the increasing number of visitors to Spain will remain as a trend, placing the country as the second most important tourist destination since 2017, with around 78 million tourists arriving in the country, which may effect on alcohol beverage consumption of known brands.

The political and cooperation dialog between the European Union and Cuba, signed in 2016, is the first legal and institutional framework to normalize relations between the two

parties. It is also a platform for dialog and cooperation through which bilateral ties of commerce and investment can be established (Grieger, 2017). Spain has kept uninterrupted diplomatic relations with Cuba since 1902, which include commercial and investment ties. It is the country with the largest number of joint ventures and subsidiaries settled in Cuba, particularly in the area of tourism and services.

The consumption of alcoholic beverages has become a basic need of Spaniards, a commonly accepted form of socializing. This means that in spite of tax increments that levy the consumption of this good, and the way prices are understood, consumers will hardly change this pattern. Sales are controlled by large distributors that manage 100% of liquor entry points, and they are in charge of segmenting allocation channels between *Horeca* (hotels, restaurants, and cafeterias), and foods, directing the product to the final consumer.

There are also sales in the massive distribution channels or customary sales (supermarkets, retail stores, grocery stores, and gas stations), where the main reasons to choose a point of sale in Spain, are price, sales assistance, and customs or preferences of the most commonly visited points of sales.

Rum is the third spirit beverage preferred by Spaniards, as one of the most widely consumed brands. Bacardí (founded in Cuba), Havana Club (Cuba), Barceló and Brugal (both from the Dominican Republic) in their dark versions are mostly preferred (86%), whereas 14% prefers the white rums. The latter, though, is more commonly used in cocktails by the consumer sector.

Undoubtedly, the present characteristics of the Spanish market in terms of alcoholic beverages, is an excellent choice for the company, which comes along with various opportunities. One of them is the production of internationally renowned brands, along with the launching in the European Union of Cubay Reserva 10 year, Cubay Carta Blanca extra aged, Cubay extra aged 1870, Cubay 330, and Cubay 500 Remedios (the last three classify as Premium).

Accordingly, this is the right moment for Cuban rum to grow within the Spanish market, as a starting point to increase exports, and diversify the number of clients. A first moment would include a situational analysis to help identify the strengths, weaknesses,

opportunities, and threats of the company, and the product in the target market. The results will contribute to the design of new strategies and decision-making.

### **Step3. Strategy design**

Objective: To design general and marketing mix strategies centered on the product, price, distribution, and communication, based on maximizing strengths to take advantage of opportunities, and encourage growth of the company's exports.

The Department of Exports at CubaRon Ltd. together with the authors of this research, determined the necessary elements to conduct a SWOT analysis of Cubay rum in the Spanish market.

#### Strengths

S1. Rum Cubay is an internationally certified quality brand.

S2. The brand has been registered in Spain.

S3. Cubay distillery has specialized technology, sufficient installed capacity, and excellent equipment to manufacture a product that meets the market demands.

S4. Denomination Cuba Origin has been granted to the product.

S5. The rum masters enjoy a vast experience, and technical support to cope with the challenges of developing new products.

#### Weaknesses

W1. This brand has low exporting indexes.

W2. Almost all the dry matter for production is imported, with an unstable situation.

W3. Limited possibilities to access direct budget for publicity, advertising, and general marketing activities.

W4. The distributors of this market with potential development are not ideal.

W5. Insufficient staff training in marketing studies.

#### Opportunities

O1. Growing demand of Cuban rum and the Cuban image overseas.

O2. Organization of international conferences to promote brands.

O3. Steady increase of alcoholic beverage demand in Spain resulting from a higher number of tourists in the country.

O4. Restructuring the Cuban sugar industry, and strengthening the alcohol-related industry.

O5. Re-establishment of favorable economic levels in Spain.

#### Threats

T1. Leading role of older brands in the beverage market, backed by a massive use of publicity.

T2. Higher special taxation on alcohol in Spain.

T3. Advertising campaigns against alcohol consumption.

T4. World economic and financial crisis, with a particular impact on the Spanish and Italian markets, and growing threats in the United Kingdom.

T5. Higher costs of distribution channels, and serious economic problems of some distributors.

These criteria were weighted by the Board of Directors at the company, based on the Kendall coefficient (values of 0.71-0.93), that shows high agreement among the surveyed subjects. The determination of Cronbach Alpha coefficient (0.9) evidences the consistence of the tool used, and the Chi square goodness of fit (95% effectiveness) ensures the significance of the results achieved.

The cross-impact matrix analysis results rate Cubay in the Strengths-Opportunities square, indicating that the rum in the Spanish market has high opportunities and significant strengths, which must be enhanced to make proper use of these breaks, as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Cuba rum ranking in the SWOT matrix

	<b>Opportunities</b>	<b>Threats</b>
<b>Strengths</b>	Cubay rum	
<b>Weaknesses</b>		

Source: Self-made.

This positioning shows that more aggressive, general strategies must be implemented. Specialization should be included as the way of development, so the entity can maintain

its strategic goal targeting higher exports of the current product, and the possibilities offered by the Spanish market, where growing is a necessity.

Therefore, the market-inclusion rate should be raised, seeking higher consumption volumes, resulting from occasionally consumption and/or more frequent customer visits, new uses of the product, increased advertising, publicity, and/or price reductions, trying to assure the fidelity of current consumers, and attract new customers (Ansoff, 1957).

Another general strategy is distinction (Porter, 1991). The Cuban rum is an internationally renowned product for its quality and origin, a status that must be exploited more, since the consumption of spirit beverages in Spain will become more selective in terms of quality.

The marketing mix strategies for Cubay in the Spanish market are:

1. Product strategy: The rum chosen should keep the characteristics that make it a unique and distinctive product in the national and international markets, but adding value that brings benefits to rum consumers, such as,
  - New tips: To insert a label suggesting a variety of cocktails that can be prepared with the product, so that it meets the new trends of the Spanish market in terms of cocktail making and mixing.
  - New attributes: To increase product appeal with a new pack, bottle design or label design, considering the image of a product shows 97% of what it is, as a principle of capturing consumer interest, always under the umbrella of the European Union standards.
  - New services: To offer post-sale and counseling services to the distributing partners in Spain so they can follow the same line when dealing with the final customers, who place high value to on-line and retail shopping guidance in actual stores.
  - Broader product scope: To sign agreements with cigar sales companies to foster combined sales, based on a twin pack consisting of a bottle of rum and a cigar, as icons of Cubanness, either complementing each other, taking advantage of the

cigar consuming market in Spain when selecting the rum chosen as the ideal choice for consumption or gift.

2. Product strategies: The company keeps a price policy similar to that of the competitors, which also includes the costs of raw materials. Lower prices are not recommended, since the main goal of the company is to maximize benefits. Special taxes and tariffs applied to alcoholic beverages and Cuba, in particular, should also be considered. Although the following actions are recommended:
  - To implement convenient discounts to hired distributors for larger amounts, to encourage confidence and motivation.
  - To analyze the prices of competitors, especially the main brands of rum competing in the Spanish market, like Brugal and Barceló, to offer tentative, but still profitable prices.
3. Distribution strategy: The company does not have a distribution network for the target market; it is done through intermediaries. Based on the previous, the following actions are suggested,
  - To follow a selective distribution strategy according to the product's quality.
  - To control and guarantee stability in the supplies.
  - To study different ways of transportation to Spain, in order to ensure the optimization of transportation costs, prioritizing safety and care of the merchandise.
  - To set up a Push strategy in favor of communication with intermediaries, to encourage them to advertise the product in the proper space and spot in the shelves, as a way to motivate costumers. It should be backed by convenient intermediary motivation efforts, with discounts for larger purchases, and the improvement of the lowest satisfaction indicators seen in the survey, such as response time, operation information, post-sale services, additional services, and proper delivery of agreed amounts in time.
4. Communication strategy:



- To offer better services through the website of the company, with more detailed information about the product variety, and the local distributors, along with promotional videos of the brand.
- To set up alliances with other internationally-renown Cuban products, such as cigars, guayaberas (clothing item), musical events, authentic Cuban crafts, and services, which might include rum in their promotions. This advertising strategy will encourage consumers of other products to become interested in rum.
- To sign advertising agreements with one of the most popular television networks in Spain, like Telecinco, Antena 3, La 1, etc., to advertise the chosen rum, and generate potential consumption. Public advertising through television shows the product's quality and tradition, respecting the hours with the highest ratings allowed by the General Law of Audiovisual Communication, and the General Law of Advertising. In the Cuban case, Cubavision International would be useful in that endeavor.
- To highlight the product as Origin Cuba, which Cuban rums have.
- Use international fairs in Cuba and abroad (particularly Spain) to advertise the chosen rum through tasting displays.

#### **Step4. Implementation and adjustment**

Objective: To design a plan of action to implement the strategies mentioned in the previous stage, and adjust it to the new conditions of the company, and the scenario around it.

This plan must include actions, material and human resources needed, start and final dates, and the cost of implementation, and the company will be in charge of implementation and adjustment.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The diagnosis revealed that the main issue affecting CubaRon company was a decline of exports, due to the absence of an international marketing plan.

The methodology for the international marketing plan, designed for CubaRon exports has four steps, the characterization of the target market, design of general and market mix strategies, and proper implementation.

The application of this methodology to sell this rum in the Spanish market provided strategies for growth, positioning, and marketing mix.

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### **Conflicts of interest and conflict of ethics statement**

The authors declare this is an original material, and has not been submitted for publication to another journal. This paper contributes to a master's thesis in which the authors are direct participants, and accountable for the contents published; hence, there are no conflicts among the authors or with the entity object of this research.

### **Author contribution statement**

Roberto López Boudet: Main author Redaction and correction of the manuscript based on peer reviewer suggestions.

Celestino González Breto: Specialist in sales technology. Review and correction of the manuscript according to peer reviewer suggestions.

Oswaldo Campos Hernández: Master student. Application of tools and collection of the results. Review and correction of the manuscript according to peer reviewer suggestions.