

Jaroslav Kita

Pavol Kita

Marta Grossmanová

PRESENT APPROACHES OF ENTERPRISES TO OFFER WITHIN THE CUSTOMER-SUPPLIER RELATIONSHIPS IN THE SLOVAK INDUSTRIAL MARKET¹

***Abstract:** Development of new business opportunities of enterprises assumes positive decisions concerning offer within the customer-supplier relationships, which have an important task in development of competitiveness and making a long-term profit. The paper presents the results of research which has been done in the industrial enterprises in the territory of the Slovak Republic. Its main aim is to clarify the present approaches of enterprises to offer from the aspect of its conformity with customers' expectations and to verify the formulated hypotheses related to this issue.*

***Key words:** industrial enterprise, customer-supplier relationship, offer, value, research*

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Introduction

Enterprises constantly face changes of environment and sudden turns in their development cycle, which requires changes in the offer within the customer-supplier relationship. For this reason enterprises should endeavour to prefer such marketing approaches which will ensure conformity between offer and market and are not only the source of competitiveness and value creation, but also of a long-term profit.

The aim of this article is to clarify the present approaches to offer from the point of view of conformity of offer with expectations of customers of industrial enterprises in the production sphere market of the Slovak Republic. The first part of the article presents the theoretical aspects of offer and development of marketing approaches to offer in the industrial market. The second part of the article

¹The issue of this article results from the research carried out within the scientific research project VEGA 1/0228/08 "New Approaches to the Offer Management of Industrial Enterprises".

deals with verifying the hypotheses related to the competences and approaches of industrial enterprises. This part of article results from the research which was done in the environment of industrial enterprises running on the territory of the Slovak Republic and the methodology of which is presented in the introduction of this part of the article. With regard to the fact that business policy of enterprises made this way covers a wide range of decisions of marketing managers of micro-enterprises, small enterprises, medium-size enterprises and large enterprises, the results of research help clarify the mechanism of creation of conformity of offer in the Slovak industrial enterprises with their customers' expectations. The final part contains some facts which could be the subject matter of further research.

1 Theoretical Aspects of Offer and Development of Offer Concepts

Securing conformity between offer and market is one of the most important tasks of industrial enterprise marketing with neither of the two mentioned elements being static, because the needs and motivations expressed are in a permanent development. This requires marketing managers not only to identify, quantify, follow and foresee them, but especially produce new ideas, new suggestions and new offers.

On the side of demand of industrial enterprises, since the seventies of the last century there have been changes [Castagnos, Retour 2002, p. 186] which are related to the change of position of purchase in enterprises. Transition from the production orientated economy to the market economy deeply modifies the structure of activity and organization of all enterprises. As far as purchasers are concerned, the method of calculation of product prices has been changed: whilst in production orientated economy product price expresses total costs plus profit, in market economy price is determined by market forces. All parts of enterprise participate in reaching lower market price. In this process, purchase has a leading position, as more than 50% of production price is made up by purchase, i.e. purchase directly influences profit and becomes a strategic function of enterprise. Realizing the fact that purchase is an activity of exchange with a long-term impact on the customer-supplier relationships also leads to changes on the side of offer.

Offer in the industrial market is the first part of the chain of relationships which are starting between supplier and a potential customer. It is a complex set of different attributes ([1], p. 201) of material products and immaterial services which connect market and enterprise and which reason the existence of enterprises and the right to ask for a financial compensation for offered products. It is done on the basis of customer situation, which is expressed in the basic requirements for the product. Production investments, purchase of raw materials and understanding the value-creating process of customer are directly connected with the offer value [17]. Part of management of relations with customers is the approach to offer resulting from the fact that it is not enough to offer customer the products produced

but to create such an offer which will be in favour of creating his own value. Without proper understanding the value creation it is difficult to develop relationships with customer. Supplier investigates the basic elements suitable for value creation in his own enterprise. In the process of its creation supplier must take into account the obstacles of sales, arguments of customer related to the competence of enterprise with the aim to transform them in the attributes of the offer determined for sales. Importance of cooperation of customer and supplier is in many industrial markets often documented also by the fact that e.g. the character of technical operation made by supplier is of the same importance as the very equipment which has been the subject-matter of purchase and sales. Offer optimization expects enterprise to know whom the offer is addressed to, i.e. it knows the target market and can define the offer value by taking into account the knowledge of production process and costs of creation of each attribute ([21], p.368-395). Proactive conformation of offer to customers' needs is becoming a more decisive factor of success of supplier's enterprise ([15], p. 91). For this reason offer becomes the core of interest of managerial disciplines [7]. The emphasis is no more on the enterprise's identification of demand but on creation of new growth conditions on the basis of abilities and competence.

In principle, the considerations connected with offer and related values concern the expected satisfaction of future users: the problem for supplier is not the value creation for customer but the value creation with customer. The contribution of supplier is a supplement to the know-how of customer, to the resources and to the equipment the customer already owns.

Depending on the fact whether enterprise is orientated at making use of the price, at stressing the attractiveness of offer or at identification of the value for customer, according to H. de Bodinat ([4], p.10) it is possible to differentiate between three basic approaches to offer: the approach based on price, the approaches based on attractiveness of offer and the approach resulting from value.

These approaches make it possible to situate the level of enterprise orientation towards its markets and teach to choose the strategy to be able to develop towards the policy of partnership and loyalty of customers and to ensure the development of enterprise.

a) The approach based on price.

In the area of sales, price has an important information function and it is often a criterion of purchase for customer. Difference of individual markets is reflected in the price policy of suppliers. Price itself as an instrument of marketing mix contains individual elements of the price mix (the method of payment, price differentiation, the way of stating the price and similar), which can be updated [11]. The aim is to create offer at acceptable price. The type of such an offer depends on the changes and structure of the supplier market. According to F. Perrotin ([13], p. 35-37)

by the seventies of the last century the purchasing policy of customers was based on the price stated by the enterprise. The eighties of the last century were the period of gradual taking into account customer purchase as a strategic function of enterprise and impact of purchase on the results of enterprise. Market price and production costs of customer became a decisive criterion of offer. According to the author this period lasted by half of the nineties when the terms competitive advantage and efficiency of suppliers in the sense of reliability, securing the quality, prompt deliveries orientated at total purchase costs and selling price became the issue of a special research.

In the case of monopoly, the only producer or the major competitor having an exclusive position determines the price. Profit to sales ratio of the supplying enterprise which chooses the above mentioned access is based on the absence of an alternative offer. Having no opportunity of choice, customer is a vassal of enterprise because he is made to buy its products although the value offered in relation to price is lower.

The dominance of price in the offer can also be related to the existence of several competitors in the market as can be seen e.g. in the petrochemical industry. It can also be created on the basis of legal regulations such as inventions (chemical sector). In this model the enterprise tries to repudiate the competition by targeted attacks or by protectionism of the state and the like. At present some markets are in the position of shortage due to the growth of world demand conditioned by the increased number of needs in China. This results in revival of purchases and dissatisfaction of customers who have problems with deliveries. In case the barriers of access to the market are strong enough to keep the monopoly or oligopoly, the aim of the enterprise is to maximize profit to sales ratio not on the basis of the best value given to customer at the lowest costs but on the basis of reaching the highest incomes under the conditions of specific sales.

In market economy supply is often higher than demand and therefore it is not enough just to produce to sell; it is not even enough to be able to sell in order to be successful in the market. Success of the enterprise in the market depends on its ability to conform its supply to demand and to know the conditions of operation. It often requires change of internal enterprise organization of supplier, i.e. instead of a traditional organization which tries to optimize the activity of each function of an enterprise, it is optimization of interaction between enterprise functions which participate in the creation of each attribute of offer and of costs.

Level of price is also influenced by other factors such as the competitive situation in the market. Under the conditions of competition of several suppliers, transition from the selling price stated by enterprise to the market price ([16], p. 44) makes enterprises deal with supply because market prices are changing depending on the level of customer satisfaction with products and services which they got by the purchase.

b) The approach based on attractiveness of offer

Creation and selling of image (we are the best) makes supplier more interesting for customers, and it is a priority aim of approach which is based on attractiveness of offer. Attractiveness has also been used as a dominant instrument of enterprises for a long time. Attractiveness of offer is supplemented by the brand which evokes imagination of a high quality offer. Industrial enterprises also use this strategy in the area of sales offer, especially if it is addressed to various customers seeking a supplier. Attractiveness is a strategy of winning the market by persuading customer to buy, because perceiving the offer is the first phase of purchase. By means of perceiving the offer and by means of competence of enterprise in this area it is possible to turn to enterprise of supplier. On the basis of perception of enterprise and components of its image, customer decides between the purchase and the rejection of the product. Supplier represented by sales force must decide if he is famous in the market and evaluate if his endeavour has increased the awareness of his offer. Sales force is one of the key bearers of image of enterprise and at the same time also one of the main users of its advantages. At present it is not enough just to realize the existing level of image but they themselves must help create it in the sales market. A communication plan of enterprise must take into account requirements of sales force concerning offer. The function of this plan is to activate and reactivate the customer need. It makes the synergy of institutional communication of brands and products with the possible substitution and complementary effects easier. In extreme cases the approach based on attractiveness of offer can be an effective strategy only from the short-time point of view, as the value promised to customer may be separated from the real offer due to the fact that the product may not meet its promised functions. In this case the image of offer lies in creating an illusionary value in the image of customer. The strategy of offer based on attractiveness is used e.g. by enterprises of food sector, if offer is addressed to final consumers.

c) The approach resulting from value.

In the nineties of the last century the change in approach to the offer which is orientated at value was influenced by two factors ([10], p.13) ([13], p. 39) as follows:

- turbulent changes of economic environment
- process of making the purchase function professional, which requires a purchaser's partner to be an absolute professional in the area of sales.

Since the mentioned period, in the tactics used in the area of customer-supplier relationships in industrial market, there have been tendencies towards development of long-term relationships between both parties, which finally lead to global partnership. This approach is based on permanent seeking of innovations. The term price is substituted by the term value ([7], p. 13), which is understood in different ways depending on identification of value chains of customers ([10], p. 389).

There is a key question if under the competencies of supplier, customer can be offered something which will be of benefit to him in creating his own value. Value, in the meaning of the conception of management of relationships with customers, is created during the process of relationship with customer. Purchase in industrial market is always an activity with a long-term lasting and for this reason it expects more global reactions of supplier, which greatly exceeds the framework of product functions, i.e. it passes to a higher strategic level – seeking a partner for increasingly longer period ([3], p. 184). Thus mutual interaction between participants of the relationship becomes the process of value creation on the side of customer. It is not important whether products and services are exchanged within the customer-supplier relationship, because from this point of view the relationship itself is considered as a product ([20], p. 57-59). Customer-supplier relationships represent a mutual purchasing and selling contact or forms of cooperation and partnership, which enterprises enter into in the industrial market when making contractual securing of deliveries and purchases and when realizing them. Products are an inseparable part of this relationship and create the subject-matter of these relations. From this point of view product offer cannot be defined independently of these relations, but it must be taken as part of the relationship. Then it is not a problem of product development but it is rather a problem of development of relationship. Management of relationship brings a new dimension in differentiation of offer. It is no more a problem of how to differentiate the technical aspects of products to be different from the competitive ones or how to differentiate offer from the competitor's one. The principal problem is the ability to manage the processes which concern relationships with customer. The whole process of relationship with customer must be analyzed with the aim of finding the way of its differentiation so that enterprise will gain competitive advantage.

The model of offer value makes it possible to simultaneously reach two aims, namely the profit cost ratio and the growth of market share. In contrast to the model of offer based on price and model based on offer attractiveness, the emphasis is put on offer perfectly orientated at market needs, which lies in priorities and optimal compromises for customer, who is given a real satisfaction due to its use. In this relationship supplier and customer create value together. This offer attracts the attention of customers by supplier giving higher value at competitive price, he says what he does and does what he says. It satisfies the needs in a moderate way, without senseless waste of raw materials, thus creating an accessible and adequate price in ratio to the value delivered. Conforming to customer's expectations and needs is a very complex challenge, as customer does not analyze only the advantages due to lowering the price but at the same time he finds out what the social, environmental and ethical impacts of this price are. Enterprise which is successful in realizing the strategy of such an offer is an emphatic one. It tries to identify the actual needs and measure their relevant importance without neglecting

some of them. On the basis of business negotiations, exchange of information and emotions it deeply understands the reasons why and conditions under which customer uses its product. By transfer of its knowledge and abilities to customer, it creates an extraordinary value, which makes it possible to be different from competition and to better satisfy customer's needs.

The above mentioned analyses show that customer should also stimulate suppliers to improve their offer. This aspect of customer's behaviour has been explained by P. Colaner ([8], p. 80), who emphasizes that customer's targets make supplier try to reach "change of the status" through which he would be able to respond to inquiry in a more effective and satisfactory way and at the same time be of support to customer in his activities. The author makes it more precise "...if the change of the status is realized, it evokes an additional profit, which makes it possible to reach the customer's target without influencing supplier's profit made by the product...". Such a regulation of supplier is related to the term global partnership which is based on navigating supplier with the aim to help him improve himself. In value approach supplier expects a fair-minded favourable verdict from a free and informed customer. In this strategy supplier respects freedom and acts transparently.

2 The Results of Research on Approaches of Slovak Industrial Enterprises to Offer

The statement that understanding expectations of customers is the basis of conformity of supplier's offer and market has become an everyday claim, i.e.:

- 1 it is supported by competencies of industrial enterprises from the aspect of offer;
- 2 it is reflected in approaches of suppliers to offer.

To illustrate this claim, which should be followed by majority of marketing policies of enterprises in their approaches to offer addressed to customers, at the beginning of the year 2009 the research was made with the aim to find out marketing approaches of enterprises to offer in the industrial market. The sales managers of 476 enterprises of all sizes running on the territory of Slovakia, i.e. 107 micro-enterprises (0-9 employees), 122 small enterprises (10-24 employees), 132 middle-sized enterprises (25-249 employees) and 114 large enterprises (over 250 employees) were questioned. The mentioned enterprises were operating in different branches of the production sector (Table 1).

Tab. 1

Number of enterprises by industrial branches

Branch	Number of enterprises	Share in %
Mining industry	6	1.26
Metallurgical industry	13	2.73
Energy industry	3	0.63
Engineering industry	149	31.30
Electro-technological industry	34	7.14
Chemical industry	64	13.45
Light industry	43	9.03
Wood processing industry	83	17.44
Food industry	65	13.66
Building material industry	11	2.31
Production and distribution of water	3	0.63
Cleaning and offtake of sewage water and waste	2	0.42
Total	476	100.00

Source: Scientific-research project VEGA 1/0228/08 “New Approaches to the Offer Management of Industrial Enterprises“.

Total number of 476 enterprises was divided into 4 categories according to the European classification of enterprises by the number of workers (Table 2).

Tab. 2

Classification of enterprises by number of workers

Type of enterprise	Micro-enterprise	Small enterprise	Middle-sized enterprise	Large enterprise
Share in %	22.7	25.6	27.7	23.9
Total number of Enterprises	108	122	132	114

Source: Scientific-research project VEGA 1/0228/08 “New Approaches to the Offer Management of Industrial Enterprises“.

2.1 Competencies of Industrial Enterprises from the Aspect of Offer

The key issue of approaches to offer is the problem of competencies of enterprise in managing relationships with customers ([11], p. 45-46). Competent enterprise responds to the market stimuli by means of conformity: market needs/enterprise competence.

Competencies create competitiveness of enterprises ([9], p. 150). In the area of offer, competence of enterprise is reflected in: advising in financial activities, maintenance, risk cover, realization ([8], p. 180). Identification of competencies enables expansion of the way of thinking in enterprise towards offer creation to help solve customer's situation. Instead of offering a previously manufactured product, supplier creates an offer based on the enterprise's competence. It is up to customer if he chooses all or part of competencies of supplier's enterprise. In our research we were verifying the following competencies of enterprises: consultancy, after-sales services, providing maintenance, training customer's personnel, cover of customer's risks, contacts with users, financial activities and other activities expressing the level of product management. Competencies of enterprises relating to offer develop a positive image of supplier. They help maintain the present customer and if the customer is satisfied, he is a guarantor of realization of further sales. According to the research results, recently enterprises in their relationships with customers prefer the competencies which accent mainly the product aspect to development and renewal of relationship from the point of view of new customer's wishes (Table 3). In respect to product the enterprises prefer:

- guarantees securing product quality by means of guarantees of running during the given period (almost 21.8 % of micro-enterprises, 20.2 % of small enterprises, 19.9 % of large enterprises, 19.4 % of middle-sized enterprises);
- after sales services, for example contracts about service (21.3 % of micro-enterprises and small enterprises, 18.1 % of large enterprises and 17.1 % of middle-sized enterprises);
- providing maintenance, i.e. securing permanent operation of product, for example by means of replacement of components, providing spare parts, repairs (16.4 % of large enterprises and micro-enterprises, 15.2 % of middle-sized enterprises and 12.3 % of small enterprises);
- financial activities related to the price offer by means of invoicing and similar (almost 6.6 % of small enterprises, 4.3 % of middle-sized enterprises, 3.5 % of large enterprises and 3.5 % of micro-enterprises).

The following supplier's competencies can be included in the direct relationship aspects:

- advising, i.e. activities expressing the ability to analyze situation and suggest individual solution (almost 16.7 % of large enterprises, 16.1 % of small enterprises, 15.7 % of middle-sized enterprises, 13.6 % of micro-enterprises);

- cover of risks by means of the system of technical help and insurance system (almost 9.9 % of large enterprises, 9.8% of middle-sized enterprises, 9.3% of micro-enterprises and 7.1% of small enterprises);
- contacts with users during the use of product (almost 11.9% of middle-sized enterprises, 11.7% of small enterprises, 11.1% of large enterprises and 10.2% of micro-enterprises);
- training of personnel connected with providing customer with know-how of the use of product (6.1% of middle-sized enterprises, 4.1% of large enterprises, 4.3% of micro-enterprises and 3.6% of small enterprises);
- other activities expressing the level of product management, i.e. information about costs related to the use of product which make it possible to make offer trustful and differentiate it from competition (1.1% of small enterprises, 0.5% of middle-sized enterprises and 0.3% of large enterprises).

Tab. 3

Shares of individual competencies of enterprise in the area of offer (in %)

	Micro-enterprises	Small enterprises	Medium-sized enterprises	Large enterprises
Advisory services	13.6	16.1	15.7	16.7
After-sales services	21.3	21.3	17.1	18.1
Guarantees	21.8	20.2	19.4	19.9
Providing maintenance	16.4	12.3	15.2	16.4
Training customer's personnel	4.3	3.6	6.1	4.1
Cover of risks	9.3	7.1	9.8	9.9
Contacts with users	10.2	11.7	11.9	11.1
Financial activities	3.1	6.6	4.3	3.5
Other activities	0.0	1.1	0.5	0.3

Source: Scientific-research project VEGA 1/0228/08 "New Approaches to the Offer Management of Industrial Enterprises".

2.2 Approaches of Suppliers to Offer

The quality of customer-supplier relationship is much easier to reach if customer's needs are satisfied by supplier's offer. But not all enterprises are able to react to the needs by the offer expected by customer. From this point of view it is useful to understand customer's needs. Effectiveness of this approach requires

taking into account the differences in the offer on the basis of segmentation of supplier's response to offer creation from the point of view of expectations of customers and market position of offer by means of which supplier suggests its modifications in relation to the offer of competition with the aim to better satisfy the needs of segments and thus derive the relevant approaches to offer:

a) segmenting of customers makes it possible to divide them into homogenous groups for which enterprise will decide to suggest its offer (Table 4). The question is if such an approach to offer is more a result of the pressure of enterprise environment or if it is rather a result of seeking new opportunities. The first procedure is a dominant one and prefers conformation of enterprise to the requirements of environment. This procedure includes enterprises which create offer on the basis of competition pressure and respond to the criteria given by customers (31.7 % of small enterprises, 26.9 % of middle-sized enterprises, 28.2 % of micro-enterprises and 13.2 % of large enterprises), or they offer versions of products (33.8 % of middle-sized enterprises, 29.2 % of large enterprises, 22.1 % of small enterprises and 14.9 % of micro-enterprises). The second one is of a proactive character which is characterized by problem solving in which regulations of procedure between customer and supplier are created (31.3 % of small enterprises, 28.2 % of middle-sized enterprises, 21.2 % of micro-enterprises and 19.3 % of large enterprises). These enterprises segment market with the aim to understand customers' wishes. The combination of these deciding procedures is integrated in the managerial approaches of value creation in industrial enterprises but with the dominance of the first approach.

Tab. 4

Segments of customers by reactions of supplier to offer creation (in %)

	Microenterprises	Small enterprises	Middle-sized enterprises	Large enterprises
Understanding customers' wishes	21.2	31.3	28.2	19.3
Pressure of competition	17.4	32.6	27.5	22.5
Responding to the criteria given by customer	28.2	31.7	26.9	13.2
Offered versions of products	14.9	22.1	33.8	29.2

Source: Scientific-research project VEGA 1/0228/08 "New Approaches to the Offer Management of Industrial Enterprises".

- b) In the case of market position or factors by which enterprises define their original offer against the offer of their competitors with the aim to better satisfy customers' expectations ([12], p. 158) there is a homogeneity of behaviour of enterprises in one aspect: all enterprises prefer price of sales (21.3% of micro-enterprises, 22.2% of small enterprises, 15.7% of middle-sized enterprises and 16.7% of large enterprises) as a criterion of market position of their offer (Table 5). At present, through their prices of sales, enterprises can better express the position of their offer in relation to competition. But this approach has disadvantages especially in the period of economic problems and in the cases when customers make pressure on the price. In these situations suppliers must persuade customers about the values which are connected with their offers. Thus enterprises also use other factors of market position (Table 8), and they are as follows: product attributes (15.4% of micro-enterprises, 13.2% of large enterprises, 12.4 % of middle-sized enterprises and 10.4 % of small enterprises), customer care (13.1% of middle-sized enterprises, 12.0% of small enterprises, 9.6% of micro-enterprises and 9.1% of large enterprises), comparing quality of products with products of the competition (8.3% of large enterprises, 7.9% of small enterprises, 6.8% of micro-enterprises and 6.6% of middle-sized enterprises), availability of offered products (8.8% of large enterprises, 6.8% of middle-sized enterprises, 5.9% of micro-enterprises and 5.2% of small enterprises). The factor of market position is also the category of users which the offer is addressed to (10.2% of large enterprises, 9.9% of micro-sized enterprises, 9.3% of small enterprises and 8.8 % of middle-sized enterprises). Enterprises strengthen market position of offer on the basis of solving customer problems (13.1% of middle-sized enterprises, 9.0% of small enterprises, 8.5% of large enterprises and 8.3% of micro-enterprises). Innovation, which is brought by product into the production process of customer, is also of an important role (16.1% of large enterprises, 15.2% of middle-sized enterprises, 13.4% of small enterprises and 8.6% of micro-enterprises). Other factors of market position (31.7% of small enterprises, 26.9% of middle-sized enterprises, 28.2% of micro-enterprises and 13.2% of large enterprises), are represented by the media used, positive relationships with customers and willingness of supplier's staff.

Factors of market position (in %)

	Micro-enterprises	Small enterprises	Middle-sized enterprises	Large enterprises
Product attributes	15.4	10.4	12.4	13.2
Customer problems solved	8.3	9.0	13.1	8.5
User categories	9.9	9.3	8.8	10.2
Comparing quality	6.8	7.9	6.6	8.3
Innovations	8.6	13.4	15.2	16.1
Raw materials used	12.0	9.8	7.8	9.1
Price of sales	21.3	22.2	15.7	16.7
Customer care	9.6	12.0	13.1	9.1
Product availability	5.9	5.2	6.8	8.8
Other	2.2	0.8	0.5	0.0

Source: Scientific-research project VEGA 1/0228/08 "New Approaches to the Offer Management of Industrial Enterprises".

- c) Depending on markets and their positions, enterprises realize different approaches to offer based on (Table 6):
- price which is applied by large enterprises (24.6%), micro-enterprises (21.7%), middle-sized enterprises (20.9%) and small enterprises (20.2%);
 - innovations which lead to rescheduling of offer with the aim of creating new conditions for market share growth. New offer is introduced to market by 21.3% of small enterprises, 20.2% of middle-sized enterprises, 18.1% of large enterprises and 17.9% of micro-enterprises;
 - customers, who are the capital of enterprise and who have to be not only maintained but also developed and cultivated. On the basis of strengthening of mutual interactions with customers new business opportunities for permanent enterprises are created. The strategy of maintaining relationships with customers is realized by 21.7 % of middle-sized enterprises, 21.2 % of micro-enterprises, 20.5 % of small enterprises and 18.4 % of large enterprises;
 - offer attractiveness especially on the basis of communication activities. In comparison with the preceding approaches, it seems to be a less used approach to offer by industrial enterprises, which apparently results from the specific features of industrial market. This approach is applied especially by small enterprises (11.7%) and middle-sized enterprises (11.2%), micro-enterprises (9.6%) and large enterprises (8.2%);

- respecting status quo of offer, i.e. following the product life cycle without realizing special activities. The existence of this approach is connected with the character of product probably in specific markets (9.6% of large enterprises, 6.8% of middle-sized enterprises, 5.9% of micro-enterprises and 5.5% of small enterprises);
- completing the existent portfolio of products by other products (11.7% of micro-enterprises, 11.4% of middle-sized enterprises, 9.3% of small enterprises and 8.5% of large enterprises);
- decreasing the share of products showing falling trend in sales which complicate access to market (12.9% of middle-sized enterprises, 12.6% of large enterprises, 12.0% of micro-enterprises, 11.5% of small enterprises);
- other approaches (1.8% of middle-sized enterprises) based on advantages of conforming of product portfolio to the criteria of customer from the aspect of supplying fluency.

Tab. 6

Approaches to offer (in %)

	Micro- enterprises	Small enterprises	Medium-size enterprises	Large enterprises
Respecting status quo of offer	5.9	5.5	6.8	9.6
Introduction of new offers	17.9	21.3	20.2	18.1
Completing existing products by other ones	11.7	9.3	11.4	8.5
Approaches based on price	21.7	20.2	20.9	24.6
Excluding of product from portfolio	12.0	11.5	12.9	12.6
Attractiveness of offer	9.6	11.7	11.1	8.2
Relationships with customers	21.2	20.5	21.7	18.4
Other approaches	0	0	1.8	0

Source: Scientific-research project VEGA 1/0228/08 “New Approaches to the Offer Management of Industrial Enterprises“.

Conclusion

The conditions of economic growth are changing. There is possibility of new perspectives of development for enterprises which want to find new markets on the basis of understanding customer expectations. It requires creation of customer offer which will be in his favour in creating his own value. For this reason enterprises can use their competencies from the point of view of offer creation, seek new factors of offer in their own sources and create such relationships which will exceed product functions to meet customers' expectations. According to the results of research, in the present Slovak industrial market product aspects of customer-supplier relationship prevail.

Although the knowledge of how to gain a customer, understand him and support him in his activities by the offer should be important for supplier; the analysis of results of the research shows that there are two decision-making approaches to the problem of offer in the practice of industrial enterprises. The first approach is dominant and it is a result of the pressure of environment. The second one is of a proactive character and assumes the agreed rules of game between customer and supplier. Combination of both these approaches is an integral part of the managerial practices of industrial enterprises in the process of securing conformity between offer and market expectations. These practices show that the best way for enterprises to be made different from competition is by means of price. The research results also show that at present there is also a combination of other types of approaches to offer, which try to reach conformity of offer with customer expectations in different ways; but as for their character, they are not equal as far as the ability to manage relationships to customers is concerned. Some existing approaches, which are based on offer innovation, development of permanent and equal relationships with customers and similarly, are applied less intensively, but they may be the source of finding the unexpressed needs of customers and thus secure success of offer from a long-term aspect.

To create new markets on the basis of understanding customer expectations requires transfer from traditional approaches to the new ones based on the value which offer enterprises running in the Slovak industrial market the perspectives of growth of market share and a long-term profit.

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