

# Brand Competition Reveals Progress in Marketing Communication

By [Alexander Panin](#)

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The Russian consumer is selective, does not trust advertising the way that he used to, demands quality but stays loyal if a chosen brand continues to meet his requirements, the winners of the country's No. 1 brand competition said at a news conference Friday.

The best brands in the country are chosen in an annual competition that is considered one of the most objective ranking processes because consumer votes from across the country determine the winners.

There were winners in 50 different categories in this year's contest, based on perceptions of brand recognition and product quality, chosen by more than 100,000 respondents.

Consumer preferences have changed over the last few years, the 2013 winners said, as did the communication means to reach them.

"We are today in a transition phase, when people change their information preferences from getting it passively while watching television to actively searching. And user experience here becomes the key factor," said Artyom Agabekov, the founder of Fabrika Okon, a company that produces windows.

The amount of advertising that is channeled at the consumer today is immense, which makes old methods ineffective. In this regard, the Internet and social networks are becoming the main way to communicate with the customer, executives of the winning companies said.

"Before, we advertised our brands on television, placed ads on big outdoor billboards and used other means, but today the customer first checks social networks to see what others think of the product and then decides whether to buy it or not," said Vyacheslav Zhukov, sales director at StarLine, a car security company.

In this way, the Russian consumer today is very much similar to the one in Europe, with a high percentage of people that have daily access to the Internet, he said.

"What we are closely working on today is establishing good feedback from the consumers, providing them really helpful online consultation," Zhukov said.

Thanks to social networks, there will come a time when it will be impossible to work badly, other executives said. If a company cheats, the consumer will quickly find out about it.

Just to make a good product is not enough these days, said Vyacheslav Guller, sales director at Golder Electronics, a company that produces household appliances.

"The customer can be won with a combination of quality, promotion, good service and brand recognition," he said.

But even understanding that old marketing tricks do not work anymore does not mean that companies will stay on the top list year after year.

"The environment is changing very fast. What we discuss today is already history, and we have to think of other ways of adapting to the new world," said Andrei Voinov, marketing director at medical laboratory Invitro.

An example of such forward thinking, he said, was a 3D bioprinter laboratory that the company has set up this year.

"Today, a consumer can buy a 3D printer and print simple things, like a hairbrush, at home," Voinov said. "But in 20 to 30 years it could be possible to print organs. That is why we plan to manufacture Russia's first bioprinter next year."

Contact the author at [a.panin@imedia.ru](mailto:a.panin@imedia.ru)

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