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BUSINESS BLOG AS A MARKETING COMMUNICATION TOOL

A Marketer's Guide to Blogging

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ABSTRACT

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The aim of this thesis is to explain why blogging is a valuable tool for marketing communications, and to define the characteristics of a good business blog. At first theory framework is presented and then a blogging guide is introduced.

Theory was collected from various printed and non-printed sources. The theory base starts with theory about marketing overall. Then holistic marketing approach is discussed. Marketing communications is described and communication channels are introduced as well as strategic communication. After that blogging is discussed in more detail and it is addressed from marketing communications' viewpoint.

Based on the theory framework as well as the author's previous experiences of blogs a blogging guide was put together. The blogging guide can be utilized by any company that is interested of creating a business blog but is hesitant of how it should be executed. Technology of website building is not discussed in this thesis, and neither are different blogging platforms since they are more relevant to personal blogging than business blogging.

In conclusion a business blog can be a very effective marketing communication tool if executed correctly. Integrated marketing communications should be practiced and the blog should be in the core of the company's marketing communications strategy. The blog should be of high quality, posting should be frequent and the author's personality should show.

Keywords: Marketing communications, social media, blogging

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Tämän opinnäytetyön tavoite on kuvata mikä tekee bloggaamisesta arvokkaan työkalun markkinointiviestintään. Tarkoitus on myös määritellä hyvän yritysblogin ominaisuudet. Aluksi käsitellään teoriaa, jonka jälkeen esitetään bloggausohje.

Teoriaa kerättiin lukuisista kirja- ja internetlähteistä. Teoriapohja alkaa markkinoinnin kuvauksella yleisesti. Sen jälkeen käsitellään holistisen markkinoinnin määritelmä, jonka jälkeen siirrytään markkinointiviestintään. Viestinnän välineet ja strategia esitellään, minkä jälkeen käsitellään tarkemmin bloggaamista markkinointiviestinnän näkökulmasta.

Bloggausoheen pohjalla on sekä markkinoinnin teoriaa, että kirjoittajan omia kokemuksia blogeista. Bloggausohjetta voi hyödyntää yritys, joka haluaisi aloittaa yritysbloggaamisen, mutta on epävarma siitä, miten se tulisi toteuttaa. Internetsivun rakentamisen tekniikkaa ei käsitellä tässä työssä, eikä myöskään blogipohjia, koska ne liittyvät enemmän henkilökohtaiseen bloggaamiseen eivätkä yritysbloggaamiseen.

Johtopäätös on, että blogi voi olla hyvin tehokas markkinointiviestinnän väline jos se toteutetaan huolellisesti. Integroidun markkinointiviestinnän periaatteet tulisi ottaa huomioon, ja yritysblogin tulisi olla markkinointiviestinnän strategian ytimessä. Blogin tulisi olla korkealaatuinen, sisältöä tulisi tuottaa säännöllisesti, ja kirjoittajan persoonallisuus saa näkyä.

Asiasanat: Markkinointiviestintä, sosiaalinen media, bloggaaminen

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1 INTRODUCTION

Communication is everywhere. It is in the way we speak, and in the words that are left unspoken. This makes communication and especially marketing communication an interesting subject. The use of digital media is growing rapidly, and more and more companies have realized the potential of social media when it comes to marketing. As technology evolves and traditional media are replaced by digital media, marketing has to evolve as well. The internet is an ideal environment to do marketing communications since it offers so many different possibilities for businesses.

While browsing through social media the author stumbled across a company's Instagram account and on there a link to their business blog. That sparked the idea of doing research on business blogs as a part of marketing communications and creating a blogging guide for businesses.

The aim of this thesis is to create guidelines for utilizing weblogs in marketing communication strategies. The topic is contemporary and many marketers could take advantage of this thesis. A business blog, when executed properly, could offer marketers a very powerful tool for communicating with consumers, share information and ideas, and hence create value for the customer. In return a company has a good chance of enhancing their brand image and gain credibility within consumers.

1.1 Research question

The author reads a lot of personal blogs but business blogs were a rather unfamiliar concept at the beginning of the research work. Through research it became clear that there are a lot of advantages that a business blog could offer if done correctly. The core research questions that this thesis aims to answer are the following:

1. What makes a business blog a good tool for marketing communications?
2. What are the key elements in a business blog that make it good?

Answers to these research questions are based on theory on marketing, marketing communications and digital marketing from printed and non-printed references.

1.2 Methodology

Due to the nature of this topic qualitative research was used. Theory framework was collected from various printed and non-printed sources. As the subject is digital marketing, it is natural that many references were internet-based.

The knowledge base starts with defining some basic concepts of marketing in order to create a strong foundation for the subject of marketing communications and digital marketing. Digital media is defined, as well as key concepts of digital marketing and search engine marketing. The blogging guide is based on theory as well as the author's own insight on what makes a good blog.

2 MARKETING

What every business wants and needs is recognition. Whether it is a non-profit organization or a company aiming to make as much money as possible, it will not succeed if people don't know it exists. This is why every business needs marketing.

Armstrong and Kotler (2015, 30) define marketing simply as a process of managing profitable customer relationships. Marketing consists of actions that aim to increase sales and bring in money for a company, and at the same time create value for the company's customers as well. Marketing is an entity that includes almost every aspect of doing business, from product development to pricing, advertising, and the actual sales process. Customer-oriented marketing means shifting your focus from your needs to your customers' needs; instead of finding a buyer for your product, you create a product for the customer.

In order to understand marketing communications, it is important to know the key concepts of marketing. In the following chapters those concepts are discussed.

2.1 Strategic Marketing

With strategic marketing you aim to differentiate your company from your competitors. To do strategic marketing you should answer the questions of where, how, and when. Firstly you need to decide on where you want to compete, i.e. which markets to enter. The question 'how' makes you think about your competitive advantages: what is it that sets you apart from your competition? The last question is when do you enter your chosen markets. With answers to all of those questions you have a basis for strategic marketing. (DAVIESBDM 2011, date of retrieval 5.11.2015.)

2.2 Segmentation, target marketing, and positioning

It is quite difficult for a marketer to meet every customer's needs. After all, people do have their own opinions, interests, and ways of living. Therefore it is important to

determine who the customers are that a company wants to satisfy with their product. That starts with segmentation. By dividing the market into segments, a marketer can select exactly what customer groups to go after. (Keller & Kotler 2009, 53.)

There are several different ways of dividing the market into segments. It can be done based on customers' age or gender, or their geographic location. The goal is to make groups of people with specific attributes, so it is easier to determine which customer groups to target with marketing. With internet and social media segmentation has gone from diversifying people just based on their physical attributes to also considering their attitudes, interests, and feelings. (Weber 2009, 37.)

After segmentation a marketer decides on which segments, i.e. customer groups they want to attract. This is called target marketing. Time and effort is not wasted on trying to get every customer's attention but instead marketing can be customized in order to get the most profitable results. (Keller & Kotler 2009, 53.)

How a company wants to be seen and thought of by customers is called positioning. Every company should have a feature that differentiates it from its competitors. Customers see it as a benefit that they do not get elsewhere. (Armstrong & Kotler 2015, 37.) For example Volvo has positioned themselves as the safest cars in the market, and safety is continuously emphasized in their marketing communications.

3 HOLISTIC MARKETING APPROACH

Holistic marketing concept thinks about the business as a whole; it aims to control every aspect of marketing within an organization. By managing all marketing, both internal and external, a company is more likely to succeed. As presented in Figure 1 holistic marketing consists of four components; internal marketing, integrated marketing, relationship marketing, and performance marketing. (Keller & Kotler 2009, 59-61.)

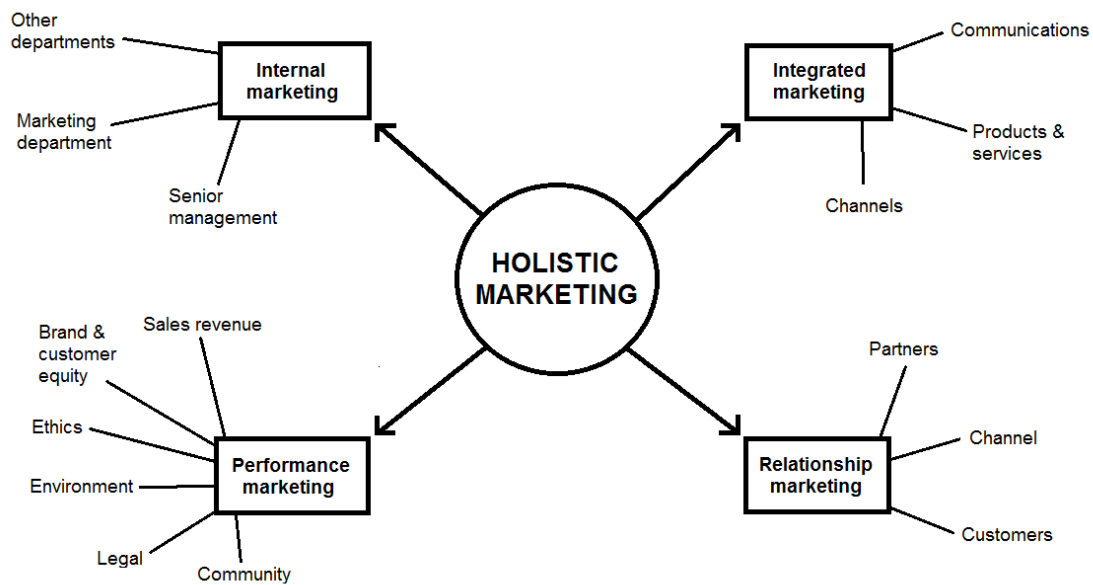


FIGURE 1. Holistic marketing dimensions (Keller & Kotler 2009, 61)

3.1 Relationship marketing

Relationship marketing aims to create long-lasting relationships with key constituents that benefit both parties. These key constituents are a company's customers, employees, marketing partners, and members of the financial community. (Keller & Kotler 2009, 60.) Marketers need an understanding of the constituents' needs and wants as well as their capabilities in order to create relationships that help them grow and prosper. Stable relationships can reduce operating costs which can result in lowering of prices.

When it comes to building a relationship with the customer, the goal is to create such a relationship between a company and a customer, that it will be long-lasting and provide both the company and the customer increasing value. It is more affordable to keep up existing customer relationships than to acquire new ones.

3.2 Performance marketing

The role of performance marketing within the holistic marketing approach is to measure and interpret the effects of marketing. Not just profitability and money, but also market share, customer satisfaction, product quality and other measurable variables. (Keller & Kotler 2009, 66.) Performance marketing's role is also to consider intangible variables such as brand value, social responsibility and ethics.

3.3 Internal marketing

When using the holistic marketing approach, internal marketing means that everyone within the company understands the company's marketing strategies and works for the same goals. (Keller & Kotler 2009, 64.) For example if a company communicates to the customers that it offers a quick response in problem solving situations, the company must make sure to have employees in customer service who are able and willing to deliver that what is promised to customers. The same goes with all departments from manufacturing to senior management, employees should know what is the company's mission statement and what are the customers expecting. As stated by Kotler (2012, 28.) "marketing is effective only if the whole company delivers the promised value and satisfies the customer."

3.4 Integrated marketing and the Marketing Mix

Integrated marketing means taking different marketing activities and making them cohesive; every aspect of marketing is designed with other activities in mind. (Keller & Kotler 2009, 63.) A commonly used tool for understanding and managing all aspects of marketing is the Marketing Mix. It helps marketers to view marketing from several perspectives.

The traditional Marketing Mix consists of four P's: product, price, place and promotion. By defining these four P's a company can sum up its marketing strategy and make sure that all of the marketing activities are in cohesion with each other.



FIGURE 2. The Four P Components of the Marketing Mix (Keller & Kotler 2009, 63.)

Product

At the core of every company is a product or a service they want to sell. How the product performs, how it is produced and packaged are all equally important parts of marketing. Without a product, a company does not have anything to offer its customers, and therefore there can be no successful business.

When developing a product, there are many things to be decided when it comes to design and packaging. What does the product look like? What colors are used? What is the unit size, and should there be different sizes available? Does the product come with a warranty? With a good product a company can create content based on the usability and benefits it offers consumers. Content marketing will be discussed further in the following chapters.

Price

Pricing of a product or service defines a lot of how a company is presented to customers. Products that are priced high can be seen as luxury products, and the target

market for products like that will most likely be people with higher income and thus more money to spend.

A marketer should also consider other aspects of pricing besides just the list price for a certain product. Discounts, coupons, and payment periods are marketing as well, and offer different kinds of value to customers.

Place

In the marketing mix place defines where the product is made available to customers. Some companies only sell their products in their own stores, whereas other companies sell their products through wholesalers. Digitalization allows goods to be sold online, which means that having a physical shop is not necessary in order to make sales.

Promotion

Promotion is in the simplest way described as advertising, though it involves other attributes like public relations and sales force as well. Promotion is how a company makes itself known to the customers. Traditionally promotion has taken place in mass media and direct marketing, but the new digital era has broadened the opportunities for marketers. Different marketing channels will be discussed later in the thesis.

In conclusion marketing is an all-around function that cannot only be tied to one single department in a company's organization. Marketing is most likely to be successful when all of the four P's support each other. They should all send out a coherent message.

4 MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS

Business dictionary defines marketing communications as “coordinated promotional messages delivered through one or more channels such as print, radio, television, direct mail, and personal selling.” (Business Dictionary 2015, date of retrieval 10.10.2015.) Marketing communications is everything you say, write, or in other ways publicly display about your company and its products.

The goal of marketing communications is to make a positive effect on consumer behavior. In chapter 2 strategic marketing was discussed, and it was established that in the core of strategic marketing was targeting the right consumers. There are several different ways of communicating, and a marketer’s job is to find out what the most effective communication channels are for reaching the target market and what kind of messages should be created.

With new digital media channels more and more marketing has started to take place online. This does not mean that traditional mass media marketing is coming to its end. Armstrong & Kotler (2015, 399.) see it as “a more gradual blending of new and traditional media”. The main focus is to communicate with consumers on a more personal level and interact with them instead of aiming messages to large masses without any personalization.

4.1 Traditional marketing communication channels

Traditional marketing channels include radio, television, print media, and direct marketing. The first three are what we call mass media. The advantage of mass media marketing is that it reaches a large amount of people in vast areas at once. The downside is that it lacks personality and direct communication with consumers.

Direct marketing has a more personal approach. It aims to target individual consumers instead of masses, and gives the consumer a chance to communicate back to marketers. The traditional direct marketing tools include catalog marketing, direct-mail marketing,

face-to-face selling, telemarketing, direct-response tv-marketing, trade fair marketing, and kiosk marketing. What all of these have in common is that they aim for personal contact with a consumer, and building a relationship with a consumer in order to make a sale.

While all of these traditional direct marketing tools are still being utilized, digitalization has brought a new set of tools for marketers to add to their marketing. As the subject of this thesis concentrates on the new digital marketing communication tools, traditional marketing channels are not discussed in much detail.

4.2 Digital marketing communication channels

Digitalization has made marketing shift from one-way to two-way process. It is not just the marketer who influences the customer, but the other way around as well. Consumers give feedback, express their needs and wants, and as a result marketers get valuable information about the market. As more and more people have access to the internet and are spending time online, it is natural for marketers to go where the consumers are.

Digital marketing is done on the internet and it includes online marketing through web sites, online advertising, online videos, blogs, e-mail, and social media and mobile marketing. (Armstrong & Kotler 2015, 466.) Digital media allows companies to be close to consumers and interact with them on a more personal level.

Users of digital media create content and share it with other people. All users are equal. Anyone can create content, share their own creations and enjoy and comment on other people's creations. You can get to know people on social media that you would never come across in real life. The world is in reach of you no matter where you are physically located.

Digital media can be roughly divided into two different types. First is social media, which are meant for interacting and networking. Some social media are meant for keeping in touch with the people you already know, whereas some are for networking and finding new acquaintances. The second type is content sharing media, which as the

name says are mainly for sharing content (for example photos and videos), commenting on the content and finding inspiration and inspiring others.

Different digital media channels serve different purposes, and in reality the dividing of digital media into two categories is not as strict. You can use content sharing media for networking as well as you can use social media for sharing content. The most relevant digital media channels in relation to marketing communications are explained below.

4.2.1 Content sharing media

YouTube

YouTube is the biggest video service on the internet with more than a billion users. (YouTube 2015, date of retrieval 30.11.2015.) It has become an alternative to traditional search engines. If you want a tutorial on how to use a certain product, you will most likely find it on YouTube. YouTube and other video services have created a culture of video blogging, or vlogging. There are a growing number of young adults that make a living of filming their everyday life and sharing it on YouTube.

Pinterest

Pinterest is a service where users can create boards of photographs based on their interests. These boards can be used as an inspiration in different categories (for example interior design or fashion), and they can be shared on other websites.

4.2.2 Social media

Facebook

With almost 1.5 billion active users Facebook is the largest social medium at the moment. It is a service that connects people with their friends and families, and lets them build their own network for communicating with each other. Facebook also provides companies a way to communicate with consumers, and promote their products and services.

Twitter

Twitter offers a chance to post short messages that express your feelings or opinions on current topics. There are a limited amount of characters so you really need to be concise with your message. You are able to follow any user that posts messages that interest you. Twitter is a good channel for commenting on current events or news, and sharing information that can be expressed with a short message.

Instagram

Instagram is a mobile application for posting photographs, and it provides users with a number of filters which make it easier to achieve a good looking photo. With keywords, “hashtags”, you can describe your photo and allow people to see it even if they are not following you. Instagram provides a visual outlet for self-expression. Like Twitter, Instagram allows you to follow almost anyone of your choosing and see the content they share. Liking and commenting of pictures brings in the social aspect to Instagram.

Blogs

A blog is a website on which blogposts are posted. These posts are usually rather short. A blog can have one or several writers who publish content in the form of text, pictures or video. A blog usually has a subject that it is centered around. The main purpose of blogs is most commonly to voice an opinion or inform people about something. A blogger can have a very personal take on the content that is published. Blogs are explained in more detail later on in this thesis.

LinkedIn

LinkedIn is a networking service for the working life. Users add their education and work history to their profiles. Companies can share news about job opportunities or basically anything related to their business. Most of all it is about professionals and companies coming together and enlarging their networks. A good LinkedIn profile can help a person find work opportunities, and it can also help a recruiter to find the right person for a particular job.

4.3 Integrated marketing communications

As explained earlier, the holistic marketing approach thinks of the business as a whole. Every function within the business should work with the same goals and ideals in mind. When the holistic marketing approach is applied to marketing communications, we talk about integrated marketing communications (IMC). What makes IMC vital to marketing is that it spreads brand messages in every possible media, not just traditional mass media. (Arens & Arens & Weingold 2013, 251.)

Integrated marketing communications is performed by a company when all the messages about its products from various sources are coordinated in order to create a cohesive message. Arens et al (2013, 248.) describe this as a consumer-centric way of creating brand messages. Integrated marketing communications is a tool for a company to control the brand message.

Integrated marketing communications approach starts with the customer. (Arens & Arens & Weingold 2013, 249.) Marketers need to know what media their customers use. They need to know when customers are receptive to marketing communication. Marketers also need to be aware of what the relevance of their message is to the customer. Technology allows marketers to get an increasing amount of information about customer behavior which helps to achieve goals set to marketing communications.

4.3.1 The integrated marketing communications strategy

To achieve objectives set to integrated marketing communications, a strategy needs to be crafted. To create an effective IMC strategy there are four aspects to consider: target audience, product concept, communications media, and advertising message. By planning all of these carefully and making them support each other, the strategy can be carried out effectively.

Target audience is different from target market which was explained in an earlier chapter. In addition to the consumers within a target market, target audience includes people who affect the purchasing behavior of the target market. (Arens & Arens &

Weingold 2013, 255.) For example babies cannot buy their own diapers, so the parents are considered target audience. Product concept is the values presented to the customer by the marketer. This defines how the product is presented to customers. Communications media are all channels for delivering the message. Both traditional and digital communication channels that were discussed earlier are part of the communications media. What is actually communicated is the IMC message. Besides text, the message often consists of visual content as well. There can be color themes, photographs, or other graphics that are specifically designed for the message.

4.3.2 Messages from different sources

Like it or not, in addition to planned and controlled communication a business always sends out messages it has no control over. Messages are perceived by consumers in many different ways, and word of mouth extends those messages far beyond a marketer's reach. Here message sources have been divided into four categories: planned, product, service, and unplanned.

Planned messages tend to have the least credibility whereas unplanned messages are the most believable. This is due to the fact that planned messages are controlled by the company, and unplanned messages are created by word-of-mouth. Product and service are based on customers' experiences so they have more credibility than planned messages. In the ideal situation messages from all sources are strong and have a positive tone. (Angelopulo & Barker 2007, 44.)

Planned

Planned messages are the kind that the company has complete control over. Advertisement is one example of a planned message. A company decides what to say, how to say it, and where to display it. When advertising is designed thoughtfully and published in the right media, planned messaging supports a company's integrated marketing communications plan.

Product

A product sends a message as well. Not just how it performs, but how it is manufactured, is the price competitive or higher than other similar products, and how it looks. A consumer might appreciate a product that is produced ethically and in an environmental-friendly way. As product is one of the four P's explained earlier, it is automatically in the core of a company's marketing strategy. The same strategy should extend to communications as well.

Service

Customer service sends a strong message to consumers. Service includes customers' online experiences as well as face-to-face buying and selling situations. Good customer service is effective, effortless, and allows a consumer to get what they came for and leave feeling good about themselves and the company. Bad customer service leaves a consumer disappointed and unsatisfied.

Unplanned

Consumers tend to share information about their experiences with companies to people they know, and in the age of social media word of mouth spreads faster than ever. Unplanned messages arise from customers' experiences with the company, and when unbiased consumers share their experiences the message is believable.

4.3.3 Owned, earned, or paid media?

Digital media can be categorized based on whether it is owned, earned, or paid. (Newman 2014, date of retrieval 30.11.2015.) Owned media means content that is created and published by the company itself. For example a company's website is owned media. Everything that is on the website is regulated and controlled by marketers. Owned media also includes a company's social media pages and profiles. Paid media is mostly advertising, that a company is paying someone else to publish. Earned media is totally out of marketers' control; it is created by word-of-mouth and spread around by consumers. For example a blog post in a personal blog about user experience of a product is earned media.

From the perspective of integrated marketing communications, it is rather easy for a marketer to control owned and paid media. All content on a company's website and on social media channels should follow the same guidelines and send out similar messages to consumers. Paid media, i.e. advertising should be designed and executed in the same way as well. Advertising channels should be thought of as well. A company that sells candy might not want to advertise on the pages of a sports magazine.

Earned media is where the control is lost. Word-of-mouth and rumors travel fast and can harm a company's image if it is negative. Therefore all functions within a business should be done according to same principles. That way no matter what a consumer sees, hears, or otherwise experiences, the company's message stays cohesive and brand stays strong.

As stated by Newman (2014, date of retrieval 30.11.2015.) no media works alone. Your holistic marketing strategy should include strong owned media which is supported by paid advertising, so earned media will follow and build credibility for the company.

4.4 Content marketing

Consumers are becoming more and more used to traditional advertising. Ads are easy to ignore when for example reading a magazine or browsing through a website. This is why content marketing is becoming more valuable to marketers. (Steimle 2014, date of retrieval 10.10.2015.)

Content marketing means creating and sharing valuable content to consumers, not just in order to create sales but to share information and create brand awareness and that way build long-lasting customer relationships. Content marketing can be for example videos or blog posts about using and utilizing products.

As described earlier, there are some digital media channels that are meant specifically for sharing content. These media are crucial to know and utilize when practicing content marketing. After creating the content, it should be shared in every possible media. If

you put a video on YouTube, you want to link that video to your Facebook page and Twitter as well, and not just rely on people to stumble upon it in one place.

Before publishing content, a marketer should always consider the risks. You want to eliminate any negative consequences of publishing content. Make sure your content is not offensive or otherwise harmful. Always remember to stay in line with your company's policies and regulations. It is now wise to post content in an angry state of mind. Your statements should be based on facts, and you should always be honest. (Flynn 2012, 189-191)

Content marketing is especially important regarding this thesis, since a business blog is a great channel for sharing content. It allows posting different types of content and adds value to customer relationships, while being company's owned media.

4.5 Inbound marketing

Inbound marketing is a new way of looking at marketing and it works especially well in the online world. In the more traditional offline marketing environment you would buy ads and hope to create customer relationships, whereas inbound marketing starts with creating content and aiming it to the right people in order to build a relationship. (HubSpot 2015, date of retrieval 21.11.2015.) As seen on Figure 3 inbound marketing consists of four steps that turn a stranger into a customer and eventually a promoter for your products.

First you need to attract consumers. The first step is to create content on your website or blog that you want people to see. Then you need to make sure that people are able to find you. For this step effective use of search engine marketing is crucial. Search engine marketing will be discussed in more detail later in this thesis.

When you have turned strangers into visitors, they need to become leads. This happens by getting information on the people. Get them to fill out forms with their contact information, and keep a record of all the information. Keep the process simple and easy for the visitor.

After your visitors have turned into leads, you want to utilize customer relationship management (CRM) systems to keep record of all the information. You can use e-mail marketing, newsletters and other marketing tools to share content that is useful to each individual person. That way your leads may become customers.

The last step is all about nurturing the customer relationship that you have successfully created. Run customer surveys in order to know what they think. Tailor marketing to continuously offer value to the customer. Listen to the feedback you get and adjust your performance accordingly. A satisfied customer has a possibility of evolving into a promoter who shares his/her positive experiences with other consumers.

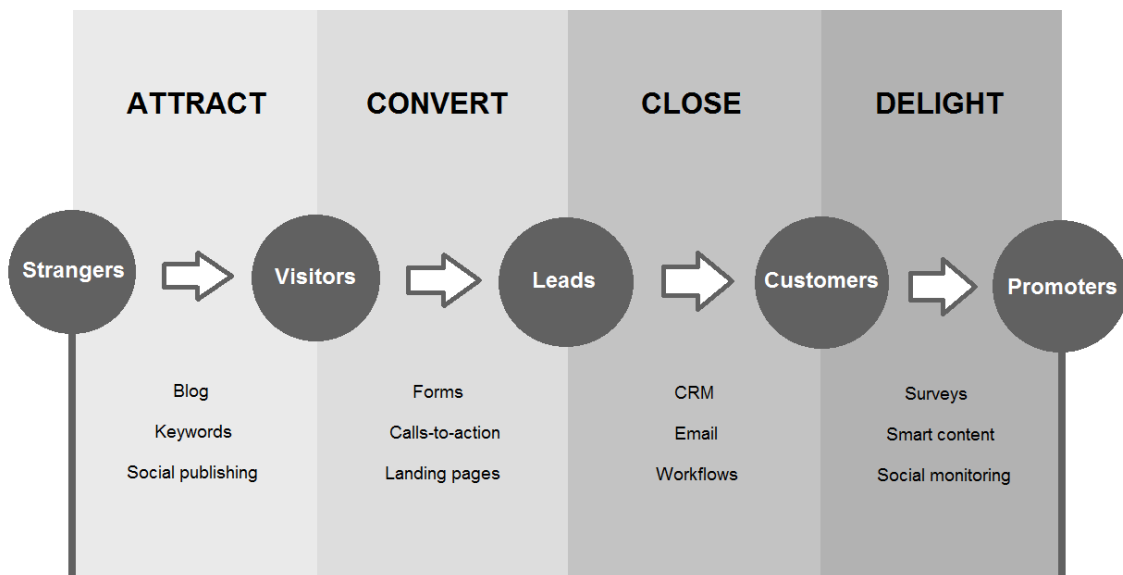


FIGURE 3. The inbound methodology (HubSpot 2015, date of retrieval 21.11.2015)

4.6 Comment marketing

Comment marketing allows you to be present in social media and create awareness for yourself and your brand. It is about participating in discussions and earning recognition. This is done mainly in blogs and discussion forums on the internet.

The aim of comment marketing is to build awareness, trust, and likability, so that other users learn to remember your name and the business you represent. That way they will remember you when you publish content of your own and they have already learned to trust you and appreciate you.

There are a few important rules about comment marketing that should always be kept in mind. You should be consistent and always use the same name and picture. It is important to stay respectful and positive even if you're expressing negative opinions. You should know who the right people are to target and practice comment marketing where they are, in the right blogs and communities. Always promote content, not a single product. Commenting should add value to others involved in the discussion. (Fishkin 2012, date of retrieval 21.11.2015.)

5 BLOG AS A MARKETING COMMUNICATION TOOL

As described earlier, a blog is a website where the author can post content in various forms, not only text. There have been online journals ever since year 1994, and the term ‘weblog’ was introduced as early as 1997. (Weber 2009, 167.) It is an excellent way of communicating with others on the web; to share opinions, interests, and information. Therefore a blog makes a great tool for marketing communications as well.

The difference between personal blogging and business blogging is significant, even though there are some ground rules that apply to both kinds. Personal blogs are usually written about the writer’s interests or his/her everyday life, and for those who write blogs for living, the blog itself is the business. A business blog is just one part of a company’s marketing. The purpose of a business blog is to gain more visibility online and generate traffic on the company’s website.

Weber (2009, 168) mentions three main reasons why blogging is good for a business. The first is to establish thought leadership. Especially for a start-up company it is good to have a channel that offers it to speak with its own words about the business and the market. The second benefit is to make it easier for customers to approach your company, especially when it is a big company with a large customer base. The third reason is to really get to know your customers better by interacting directly with them. By observing the discussion raised by a blog post a marketer gets to know the whole market better.

In order to get the most value out of writing a business blog it should be made the core of your marketing strategy. All other marketing activities should support the blog and the content that is shared in it. In the following chapters the pros and cons of business blogging are discussed, as well as the role of search engine marketing regarding blogs.

5.1 Pros and cons of business blogging

A business blog being owned media, the content creator is in control of the content itself. This makes it easy to keep within the positioning and brand image. A good blog allows comments in order to interact with readers, but comment moderation might be useful in order to keep the control of the message to yourself.

Since you don't have to actually pay someone to publish it, a business blog is an affordable marketing communication tool. It is very accessible to consumers as long as you optimize it for search engines, and as stated earlier make sure to advertise it on every other media that you are using. It is rather easy to track the visitors in a blog, so you know exactly where your readers come from and what channels you need to improve in order to get more visitors. Search engine marketing will be covered in the next part.

A business blog allows you to create huge value for your customers. You can inform people, give advice, and share benefits that come from using your products. Blogging is very current and you are always able to follow trends and alter your content accordingly. It is possible to create content considering the calendar year and holidays. For example a company in the food industry might want to post recipes for Christmas foods in December, and light and refreshing salads during summertime.

The main resource blogging consumes is time, and time has to be spent in order to make the blog the best it can be. The writer has to be aware of the brand and positioning in order to keep the communication coherent. A poorly executed business blog might end up hurting your brand image and that is never a desired outcome.

5.2 Search engine marketing

More and more people are involved in social media, and are finding companies' websites through their favorite social media sites. But even with this kind of involvement, search engines are still a marketer's best chance of getting the visitors they

want on their website. It is important to be visible to a consumer at the specific moment when he or she is looking for your products. (Ryan 2014, 104.)

When looking for a certain product or service on the web, a search engine is the most common place to start. This is what makes search engine marketing vital for every business that in some way operates online. Search engines are constantly changing with technology and trends, therefore search engine optimization should be evolving as well.

The first and most important thing search engines look for in websites is text. Photos, flash content or other graphics cannot be analyzed in the same way by a search engine that a text can. A marketer should always think about the customer who is looking for their website. What are the words typed in the search box? These should be made keywords on the website in order to get best possible visibility among the search results. Keywords should be played with, and different combinations of keywords should be created in order to answer to as many searches as possible.

Besides search engine optimization, you can also use paid advertising as your advantage. This means getting your address displayed above the actual search results. This kind of advertising takes away the pressure of constantly having to work on optimizing your website for the search engine and still get your visibility in the search. (Jones & Ryan 2009, 90.)

6 A MARKETERS GUIDE TO BLOGGING

1. Prioritize

As mentioned earlier, a business blog should be in the core of your marketing communications strategy. By making the blog a priority it is more likely for you to succeed with blogging. When looking at the Marketing Mix and the four P's business blogging falls under the category of promotion. Therefore a blog is a natural part a marketing strategy.

2. Post frequently

Frequent posting lets your readers know that you put an effort into blogging. You also seem more trustworthy than if you were to only post every now and then without any consistency. Remember that your blog needs to provide value to your readers, so posting multiple times a day just for the sake of posting is a bad option. You want to attract people, and turn them from strangers to customers, so it is not good if they find you annoying or your blog irrelevant.

3. Get committed

As a business blogger, you need to be committed to blogging. Besides the previous remark which was frequent posting you should also keep the quality of your posts in mind. To achieve a steady level of quality with regular posting takes time and effort. Whoever the author is, they should consider blogging an important part of their job.

4. Remember your brand

When writing a blog and posting content, always keep your brand image in mind. If integrated marketing communications is practiced it should show in a blog as well. All content should be designed to support the brand. Think about

your IMC strategy when creating your blog and adjust your content accordingly. Think about your product concept and the core message you want to send, and create content with that in mind.

5. Be transparent

In holistic marketing approach the whole company performs according to marketing principles. With this done thoroughly, transparency only amplifies your brand image. Whether it is the manufacturing process you write about or your human resource policies, it should all include the same values. Openness creates trust.

6. Make it personal

As content creator you want to let your personality show. Display your title within your company to add credibility to your writing. The blog is your owned media, so you are in control. Use that to your advantage and write about things you know and are passionate about.

7. Be visual

A blog offers a huge array on possibilities when it comes to content format. In addition to text, there can be for example photographs and video. Keep the look similar to your company's actual website and other marketing material when designing the graphics for a blog. Don't get carried away with the graphics though; remember that plain text is what search engines recognize in webpages. So in addition to graphics remember to add keywords for search engine optimization.

8. Engage all of social media

When you post something on your blog, do not forget to share it on every other social media as well. Link your blogpost to your Facebook and LinkedIn pages, Tweet about it, and post a picture on Instagram. Optimizing every social media

channel for search engines helps generate traffic from your social media profiles to your blog.

9. Think outside the blog

Whatever you write on your blog, remember that there most probably are some rules about what you are allowed to say and what should be kept quiet about. For example some financial information is strictly confidential and should never be revealed to anyone outside the company. The same principles that were mentioned about comment marketing apply to blogging as well. You should always keep in mind that whatever you publish is in fact public. Therefore do not talk trash about other people or products because that might backfire quicker than you think.

10. Remember to sell

The whole point of marketing is to create value to customers, but also bring in profit for your company. With that in mind, always remember to link back to your actual website or online shop. When your readers are interested in purchasing your product based on a blog post, they should not have to go through big trouble to find out where they can purchase it.

7 CONCLUSIONS

As consumers spend a growing amount of their time online, marketing is shifting from print media and roadside advertising to the internet. It is natural for marketers to seek for more efficient ways of doing marketing communications online. In this thesis business blogging is presented as an option for that.

The first research question was “What makes a business blog a good marketing communications tool?”. This question was answered as the pros and cons of business blogging were reviewed. Some of the points could be reasoned even without the theory base, but you can find much justification to this in the theory.

The answer to the second research question is again partly based on common sense and the author’s own experiences from reading both personal and business blogs, but it holds foundation in the theory framework. Integrated marketing approach is in the core of the theory framework and many of the parts in the blogging guide are based on IMC.

The main finding in this thesis work is that if a company plans on use blogging as an effective marketing communication tool, it should be done according to the marketing strategy. Using the method of integrated marketing communications, the content in the blog should send out the same message as other communication tools. The blog needs to be supported by all other digital media communication in order to get the best results. Sharing the blog in all digital media channels makes it more likely to get customers share it as well.

Even though a business blog should be made of importance within the marketing strategy, marketers still shouldn’t neglect other communication. Digital and traditional communication channels can and should be used side by side so they support each other. Even though the world is shifting towards a more digital era, there still are people who do not have access to or are not comfortable with computers or the internet.

Further research on this subject could be measuring the results of business blogging, and developing your business blog based on those results. Technology allows you to get a lot of information on who your readers are, where they come from, and what do they do on your website. With these tools measuring blogging effectiveness is possible.

8 DISCUSSION

The goal of this thesis was to establish guidelines for business blogging. Through research the basic concepts of marketing and marketing communications were explained and marketing communication tools were introduced. On the basis of the theory a blogging guide was successfully put together. This guide is helpful for those companies that are interested in content marketing and want to establish a two-way communication with their customers. The guide should be combined with a company's needs and objectives in order to create a functional business blog.

At the beginning of the thesis process the actual research question was different. The uncertainty of the research question made it harder to start working on the theory and therefore the schedule was not kept to. During the writing process a new research question came to mind and it was decided to change the plan. After the new research question was decided on it became easier to work on the theory framework and the thesis started to come together.

The subject of marketing communications was relatively unfamiliar to the author as it was not thoroughly covered in the degree programme studies. This made it slightly more difficult to start gathering the theory framework, but at the same time it made the process of researching and writing more complimentary since a lot of new knowledge was acquired. The research and writing process of this thesis has provided the author with an understanding of marketing communications, and great interest towards the subject.

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