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**MARKETING OF AN INNOVATIVE FINNISH SPORTS PRODUCT IN GER-
MAN-SPEAKING COUNTRIES**

CASE: HighRoller

Thesis

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<p>The purpose of the thesis was to create a marketing plan and to explore opinions about an innovative Finnish sports product, HighRoller, in German-speaking countries. The main aim was to provide the commissioner, OVK Sports, with information about the market situation and reactions towards their new product, if they were to launch it on a new market. This thesis also aimed at developing the author's competence in marketing and market understanding, as well as bringing value to the KAMK by widening the range of topics regarding sport marketing, which is a relatively new field of studies at the KAMK.</p> <p>The research tasks and questions included the following: what was the reaction of potential consumers towards the product; what methods of marketing could be used for promotion and would e-mail marketing be effective; which sports organisations was the marketing of the product targeted at; and what characteristics of the product seemed to be most effective in market positioning?</p> <p>In this thesis Kotler's marketing model was applied to market HighRoller and organise presentations on HighRoller to customers or managers in various sports organisations. The methods of data collection and analysis included a questionnaire survey and observation of the behaviour of potential customers, both businesses and individuals. During the research it was established that the reaction towards the product was positive on the German-speaking market with 71% of the respondents giving positive feedback about HighRoller. E-mail advertising proved to be ineffective in this particular situation with 0% rate of positive outcome, while the only successful method was personal visits and direct communication with managers. Moreover, gyms and professional level teams and athletes seemed to be the most suitable target group. In described cases managers were interested in their customers' opinions about the product; they, however, believed that initially it was their or coaches' responsibility to determine which equipment was suitable for their customers. Most positive feedback was given on the ease of use of the product, which could become the main characteristic for market positioning in the future. The acquired data gave a basic overview of market opportunities for HighRoller and could be applied when the methods and marketing campaign direction are chosen for the German-speaking countries.</p>	
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PREFACE

First of all, I would like to thank my family for supporting me during the whole time of writing my thesis, which took the whole academic year. It was a long and difficult process, and each time I was lacking enthusiasm along the way, my family helped me to find solutions and gave me the motivation. Many thanks to my mother, Tatiana Dorokhova, who found time to make professional photos of a HighRoller that were used for marketing and by the commissioning party in promotion campaigns of HighRoller in Finland. Also I would like to say thanks to the supervisors for keeping me on the right track and to all the teachers for giving advice and answering my questions during the process. Special thanks to the commissioning party, OVK Sports for introducing a HighRoller to me and giving me an opportunity to write about the topic I was interested in. In the beginning, when I was choosing the topic, I did not know anything about self-massage, HighRoller or about the original foam roller. So, along the way not only I familiarized myself with a new method of massaging and recovery, which I will probably use in my trainings, but I also gained valuable knowledge and experience in marketing, the field I hope to work in in the future. Even though thesis writing was a tough process, I never regretted that I had chosen to write about a marketing subject and being involved in marketing activities for HighRoller. The market of German-speaking countries was chosen, because when starting to plan my thesis I was going on an exchange program for the whole academic year to Austria and decided to write the thesis while I was there. I was living in Kufstein, a small town with around 18 000 inhabitants, which is right on the border with Germany. Organisations for the presentations of the roller were found in the closest destinations.

I hope that my work will be beneficial for the commissioning company and the received data will be taken into account when entering the market of German-speaking countries. I tried to research the reaction towards the new product of both sports organisations and individual users to understand the full perspective. I tried my best to get the insight into the new market and provide relevant and objective data. I would be glad if students of KAMK can also find useful information for themselves in my thesis work and I am ready to share my experience further.

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1 INTRODUCTION

In the modern markets it is becoming more and more difficult to attract customers. The range of products is so wide and the competition so intense that only smart marketing decisions can win customers for a company (Trout and Rivkin, 2000). The author of the thesis is interested in the topic of marketing and, therefore, decided that assisting launching of an innovative product on a new market would be an attractive challenge. The thesis includes a practical element of plan creation and implementation combined with a research element of exploring opinions about HighRoller, an innovative foam roller created by a young Finnish company, OVK Sports, on the market of German-speaking countries

The thesis is supported by the theoretical background which combines the classic postulates of marketing, established by such experts as Kotler and Trout, with the current view on it from modern literature. The main practical element, completion of a marketing plan and its implementation, is based on Kotler's marketing plan model (Kotler, 2003). Other theory supports practical activities, such as creating questionnaire and marketing materials, with additional and deeper knowledge.

The goal of the thesis was to create and implement a marketing plan for introducing HighRoller on the market of German-speaking countries and to explore opinions about this new equipment. The commissioning company was interested in the opportunities of selling the roller to other countries besides Finland, and it was important to research if sports organisations in these countries might be interested in such a product. The thesis will also help to analyse the effectiveness of some marketing methods and to assume which of them could be used in the real marketing campaign in the future. As a personal goal the author aspires to experience practical application of marketing strategies in a real situation of launching an innovation product on a new market.

The thesis includes an introduction about foam rolling and HighRoller, theoretical background relevant to the topic of marketing, description of Kotler's marketing plan, research tasks, the plan that was created for marketing of HighRoller in German-speaking countries, and presentation and discussion of results. Considering the limits of time and the fact that all the work was performed by one person, it was only possible to perform a small-scale pro-

ject, and when launching an innovative product on a new market, a marketing campaign should be of a much bigger scope.

The author hopes that this thesis will bring benefit to the commissioning party and will facilitate their entrance with HighRoller into German-speaking countries' sport and fitness market. For the author the project has particular learning benefits, giving the opportunity to gain new knowledge and at the same time apply this knowledge in practice. The author hopes as well that her work will be useful for Kajaani University of Applied Sciences and its students who can find popular marketing theories in it, read about the application of them in practice and seek inspiration for their own theses.

2 FOAM ROLLING

The author believes that, since HighRoller is an innovative product used in physical exercises, it is necessary to briefly describe its purpose of use and benefits that it might bring. Below are discussed differences between original and new roller, importance of recovery in training and benefits of foam rolling.

2.1 Difference of the HighRoller from the Original Foam Roller

Obviously, to date little information exists about the new model of the roller; therefore the theory about the original way of foam rolling is used as basis. HighRoller is made of the same material as some of the original foam rollers and has the same shape. As it can be seen in the pictures 1 and 2 below both pieces of equipment are similar, however HighRoller has detachable legs (refer to picture 3 and 4), which, makes the process of using it more effective and comfortable, as claimed by the product creator, OVK Sports.

2.2 Foam Rolling

Foam rolling is a form of self-myofascial release by applying pressure on the tightened muscles (refer to the flyer in Appendix 2/1 or 2/2 to see examples of rolling exercises). Previously this technique has been used mainly by professional athletes and therapists. However, nowadays it is becoming more and more popular among athletes of different levels in their everyday trainings (A Guide to the Foam Rolling, n.d.). Foam rolling is a form of massaging that assists in faster recovery of muscles and in getting them to normal function, which means that muscles regain elasticity and stay healthy. It is also a good way to warm-up cold muscles before deep stretching or an activity (Robertson, 2008).

Recovery is highly important in training process, especially when involving in intensive exercises or trainings for prolonged periods multiple times per week (Hoy, n.d.). However, the topic of recovery is hugely underestimated and under-researched (Hauswirth & Mujika, 2013). Recovery is an ultimate part of a training process for athletes to be able to enhance

future performance by muscle adaptation (Hoy, n.d.). It prevents muscle stiffness and severe muscle soreness, which helps to maintain and improve the level of performance (Recovery n.d.). As part of recovery, self- myofascial release, which can be performed by foam rolling, adjusts tone of muscles and assists in improvement of mobility and motion range, reduced adhesion and scar tissue, and improvement of movement quality (Robertson, 2008).



Picture 1. Original foam roller (www.google.at).



Picture 2. HighRoller (photo by Tatiana Dorokhova).

Detachable legs:



Picture 3. HighRoller with one set of legs (photo by Tatiana Dorokhova).



Picture 4. HighRoller without legs (photo by Tatiana Dorokhova).

3 MARKETING

Emerging in the early 1900s, marketing is considered to be a relatively new area of business, compared to disciplines, such as accounting, production or economics. The main aim of marketing is to create mutually beneficial relationships between organisation and its customers (History of Marketing, 2015).

3.1 General Overview of Marketing

A broad definition of marketing suggests that it is all activities “designed to generate and facilitate exchanges intended to satisfy human or organisational needs or wants” (Etzel, Walker & Stanton, 2001, 4). All activities could be divided into four areas: analysis, planning, control and implementation (Chisnall, 1995). In its evolution marketing has gone through two stages (product-orientation and sales-orientation), and now it is in the market-oriented stage. It means that most of the modern companies focus their activities on finding out the needs of customers and then trying to find a way to satisfy those needs as fast as possible (Etzel et al., 2001).

The main concept of marketing is managing markets with the purpose of creating value and satisfaction of needs. This process involves a lot of work and includes various aspects; to name a few: identification of needs, design of products and services, promotion, storage and delivery, research, communication, product development etc. (Kotler et al., 2001). Next some of the aspects related to marketing are discussed in more detail.

3.2 Marketing Research

Research is a useful tool in examining the marketplace and consumers’ wants, assessing their expectations and wishes, and identifying ways to entice consumers to use sport products and services (Smith, 2008).

According to Malhotra, marketing research is a combination of “systematic and objective identification, collection, analysis, dissemination, and use of information for the purpose of

improving decision making related to the identification and solution of problems (and opportunities) in marketing” (1999, 11).

As a part of marketing system, marketing research plays two important roles. First, it can be used as a tool for receiving feedback, which “provides decision makers with data on the effectiveness of the current marketing mix and offers insights into necessary changes” (McDaniel & Gates, 2006, 5). Second, marketing research assists in exploring new opportunities in the market. Both strategies help businesses discover most attractive opportunities (McDaniel & Gates, 2006). Marketing research is not limited only to products, but it can be conducted in any area of marketing, for instance, pricing, brand name or market segment (Etzel et al., 2001).

McDaniel & Gates (1999) suggest a plan for marketing research process. The first step is to identify and formulate the problem or opportunity that needs to be tested. The second step is to create research design, which is “a structure of frameworks to answer a specific research problem/opportunity” (p. 68). The third step is choosing a basic method of research between survey, observation and experiments. After that the selection of sampling procedure occurs, which is actually part of research design, but is considered a separate step. It is followed by data collection and analysis, which is later turned into form of a report. The final step of follow-up is important for companies, because they make use of the results; and not following recommendations can be also considered as usage, since it indicates a decision made based on the results (McDaniel & Gates, 1999).

3.2.1 Questionnaire Design

If the chosen basic method of marketing research is survey, then usually a questionnaire should be developed. A criteria that can identify a good questionnaire deals with the following questions (McDaniel & Gates, 1999, 2006):

Does it provide the necessary decision-making information?

Does it consider the respondent?

Does it meet data editing and processing requirements?

When designing a questionnaire it is of significant importance to make sure that decision-making manager agrees with all questions and that respondents will not be bored or confused, and to keep in mind the processing of the data that will happen in the end.

3.3 Segmentation and Targeting

According to Blythe (2006) and Dwyer et al. (2009), segmentation is dividing the whole market into customer groups that have similar needs. Greengrove (2002) writes that there are two types of segmentation: needs-based and characteristics based. A needs-based approach, obviously, divides the customers according to their needs. Characteristics that are used in the second approach will be presented next. Segmentation and targeting are very important for all companies because they assist in ensuring that resources are directed at individuals and organisations that are most likely to generate profit.

There are several variables that help to divide a market into segments: behavioural segmentation, geographical segmentation, demographic segmentation (age, gender, income, and ethnicity), psychographic segmentation (lifestyle, and personality characteristics). In practice, marketers often use more than one variable to determine a target group, which helps them to focus on very specific profiles of customers (Blythe, 2006).

Moreover, further analysis of customers allows to group them into the 'Core', 'Star' and 'Marginal' markets. It is very important to understand that it is impossible to please everybody, and a company should be able to sacrifice big numbers of customers for smaller numbers, but more loyal and profitable. This is the basic concept of targeting that suggests choosing the best customer groups to aim for and developing variations of a basic product to satisfy the needs of different groups (Bradley, 2003).

3.4 Positioning and Differentiation

The connection between positioning and differentiation works as follows: "the outcome of successful market positioning should be a differentiated (sport) brand or product" (Smith, 2008, 96).

As the name of the book “Differentiate or die” (2000), written by Jack Trout and Steve Rivkin, suggests, it is highly important to position a product on the market to the best advantage and differentiate it from competitors. Fuchs and Diamantopoulos also underline the importance of effective product positioning as it is key to ensure market acceptance (2012). Differentiation also allows to set higher prices and ensure high volumes. The task of advertisers consists of the communication of information about the product and of reasons to buy it (McDonald and Wilson, 2002).

Marketers should pay attention to the fact that a person is able to apprehend and remember only a limited amount of information. One of the methods to overcome the natural closedness of consciousness to new information is to make a message associated with important news for audience. If people think that something important is being communicated to them, they “open their eyes” and attentively consume everything said and shown to them (Trout & Rivkin, 2000).

It is believed that the best way to penetrate into people’s consciousness, which is constantly trying to avoid difficulty and confusion, is to make a message as simple as possible. Many effective promotional programmes are based on only one word or phrase. Trout and Rivkin (2000) suggest that it is not necessary to try to tell about all benefits of a product at one time. It is advised to focus on one impressive attribute of a product or service and try to communicate it to the audience’s consciousness. It is also considered a good strategy to choose one word, with which a company wants its product or brand to be associated, and try to create an image around this word in the customer’s mind (Ries and Trout, 2005).

Another important factor for marketing department is to thoroughly study the products which are produced by their company. In many cases this analysis allows to identify a powerful differentiating idea that was unclaimed in the past. The advantage might be found even in the process of production or in any other aspects related to a product (Ries and Trout, 2005).

It is also highly important to be careful with developments of products and their positioning, because what is called “improvement” in the company often causes misunderstanding in consumers’ minds. Differentiation should keep pace with the dominant perception of a product in consumers’ consciousness, and not go against it (Ries and Trout, 2005).

3.5 Sport Marketing

Different opinions exist among experts about sport marketing: some believe that it is just another form of business and standard management and marketing practices apply; others claim that if it is considered a business, it loses some of the main principles such as centrality of fans and emotionality or passion, and attempting to retain these unique features makes it difficult to apply standard procedures. There are two generally accepted types of sport marketing: marketing of sport and marketing through sport. Marketing of sport is the direct marketing of sport products, services or events. Marketing through sport means marketing non-sport products by associating them with sport (Shilbury, Westerbeek, Quick & Funk, 2009).

As any other sector, sport marketing is aimed at satisfying the needs of customers and keeping them long-term. There are different groups of sport consumers; for example, people who watch sports, participate in sports, surf sport web-sites or buy sport products etc. All of them are target groups for sport marketers (Smith, 2008).

Sports marketing is one of the fastest growing disciplines in the area of marketing communications (Kahle & Riley, 2004). According to Smith (2008) the process of sport marketing consists of four stages: (1) identify sport marketing opportunities; (2) develop sport marketing strategy; (3) plan the marketing mix; and (4) implement and control the strategy. All the steps are described in detail in the Sport Marketing Framework (Figure 1). It can be seen that the sport marketing process is similar to any other marketing process.

In sport marketing the same strategies of positioning, differentiation and branding are used. However, it is important to remember that sport is a special form of business and sometimes standard procedures do not work, and marketers should take into attention the special features of this unique market place, such as consumer involvement, unpredictability, competition and cooperation, sponsorship, publicity, and distribution (Shilbury et al., 2009).

Figure 1. Sport Marketing Framework (Smith, 2008, 9)



3.6 Marketing Mix

A marketing mix is a central element of a marketing campaign. According to Smith (2008, 98) it is “a set of strategies and activities that cover product, price, promotion and place” (shortly called 4 Ps). It is important to understand the connection between the four elements and coordinate them coherently in marketing initiatives. In sport marketing Smith adds two more components to the mix: sponsorship and services. However, in case of this thesis research they are not as relevant as the four original elements.

Each of the main elements or strategies of a marketing mix covers its own matters. Product strategies determine the design of product, production volumes, number and variety of products, and product innovation (Jain, 1997). Pricing is based on a review of four factors: demand, objectives, cost, and competition and its flexibility in price setting. “Strategically, the function of pricing has been to provide adequate return on investment” (Jain, 1997, 393). Place or distribution deals with channels through which a company makes its products available to customers (Jain, 1997). Finally, promotion strategies include advertising activities, promotion of sales and personal selling; and their function is “planning, implementation, and control of persuasive communication with customers” (Jain, 1997, 461). As it was mentioned above, the connection and coherence of all four elements is of high importance for the success of a marketing campaign.

3.7 Influence of Culture on International Marketing

The definition of culture suggests that it is “the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another” (Hofstede, n.d.). According to Wursten and Fadrhonc (2012), German-speaking countries (e.g. Austria and Germany) compose one culture cluster, a well-oiled machine cluster, where expert opinions are highly valued and the approach to customers should be structured and precise.

Culture is the basic determinant of a person’s wants and needs and, therefore, it bears the major influence on consumer behaviour around the world (Albaum et al., 2005). The main aspects of culture that directly influence marketing activities of a company are material culture, social institutions, education, belief systems, aesthetics and language (McAuley, 2001;

Albaum et al., 2005). All of them affect building relationships with customers and partners in a new market.

There always exists, among political and legal risks, a demand-level risk (Brennan et al., 2008). Usually companies have difficulties securing buyers in new countries and the level of demand changes significantly over time. There are only a few products that can be standardised for use throughout the world, and generally some adaptation is needed for the product itself or for the marketing mix and the way it is presented on a new market. It is even assumed that researching the cultural condition may be the most difficult task when assessing a market (Harris and McDonald, 2004).

3.7.1 Language Barrier in Marketing

The most natural barrier in international marketing is language. Even though, the business language and language of most deals is English, the “actual language of the market may be very different”, and it is the basic requirement in attempting to understand the client (McAuley, 2001, 61).

McAuley (2001) claims that in the modern world companies competing internationally are paying more and more attention to communication and try to keep it professional and sophisticated. Learning the language of a host culture also assists in getting a deeper understanding of its values. An important advantage is that it helps to avoid misunderstanding and frustration that might happen because of incorrect word usage, and build stronger relationships with customers on a foreign market.

3.7.2 German-Speaking Countries

German is one of the most widely spoken languages in Europe. According to BBC, it is the official language in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Liechtenstein, and Luxembourg (A Guide to German, n.d.). Flippo writes that German has an official status in Belgium and Italy as well (Where Is German Spoken?, n.d.), and, moreover, there are many countries around the world where German is a regional language or is used in specific communities (BBC, n.d.; Flippo, n.d.). In this thesis the research was limited to two German-speaking

countries: Austria and Germany. Since the concept of personal presentations of HighRoller had been chosen, it required travelling to the destinations. Austria and Germany were the closest countries, and due to the limited resources they had been chosen to represent German-speaking countries in this thesis.

3.8 E-mail Marketing

The first e-mail was sent in 1971 by Raymond Tomlinson, who is an American programmer that first used an “@” symbol to connect his computer to a mail-box. Already in 2012 there were more than 3 billion e-mail accounts in the world, and approximately 294 billion e-mails were sent every day, about 78% of which were spam (The 41-Year History of E-mail, 2012). Nowadays e-mail is one of the most popular means of connection and communication, and, according to research, an average knowledge worker spends 28% of their working time managing e-mails (Vanderkam, 2012).

In 2011 corporate e-mail accounts represented 25% of mailboxes worldwide. According to statistics by Radicati Group Inc, typical users receive around 105 e-mails per day, 19% of which are spam, not including those that are going to spam folder with the help of filters. The 19% contain as well so-called “graymail”, which usually consists of unwanted notifications and newsletters (Radicati and Hoang, 2011).

Considering the load of spam, it is not surprising that many marketing e-mails might not be opened, and even less likely they are to provoke any reply. The method of buying ready-made e-mail databases and send advertising material to huge numbers of people that previously was popular is believed not to be effective anymore; and for B2B e-mail marketing it can be advised to produce white papers and how-to guides for their potential clients to maintain effective e-mail communication. Definitely it may be advised to use other means of connection to a customer, when quality e-mail database is not collected yet, however, considering limitations in budget and customers’ location it might appear to be a great challenge (Baetu, 2015).

3.9 AIDA Model for Marketing Materials

The model that the marketing materials in this thesis were based on is the AIDA formula. It was created in the 19th century (AIDA (Marketing), 2015) and was connected to evoking engagement of people towards printed advertisements. Later it was introduced as a “sales approach strategy”, and was referred to as part of a “simple form of selling” by the guru of sales management Brian Tracy (2014). Even before that it was widely used and in some marketing literature referred to as a “persuasive communication technique” (Lee and Hoffman, 2015, 1).

The four letters of AIDA model stand for attention, interest, desire and action. In practice it means that an advertisement must catch attention and create awareness of the product, cause interest by underlining the product’s benefits, stimulate desire and show competitive advantage, and finally clearly state calls to action to have people purchase the product or at least visit a web-site/make a phone call (Lee and Hoffman, 2015).

In some literature the model is still described as a tool that controls the effectiveness of written advertising materials and makes slogans catching and brochures attractive with a clear call to action (AIDA: Attention-Interest-Desire-Action, n.d.). Others see it as a wider term and describe its effectiveness in many aspects. Some authors believe that if actually at the fourth stage of action a purchase is made, then the relationship building starts and the model turns into AIDAR where “R” stands for a retention of customers (Hanlon, 2013).

3.10 Branding

A brand is an image of a product or service in the consumer’s mind and everything that is associated with it, for example, a logo. A brand represents the product value for consumers. Consumers can have either a positive or a negative impression of the brand, which is based on their previous experience with it, promotional activities and brand reputation (Cateora and Graham, 1999).

Brand elements, such as names, logos, symbols and package design, are mainly visual aspects that make a brand unique and differentiate it from competitors. It helps consumers to identify the product with its manufacturer and associate it with a certain level of quality and at-

tractiveness. When creating or developing a brand, initiatives of market segmentation, positioning and differentiation are involved. The process of strategic brand management is complex and consists of four main steps (Keller, 2013):

1. Identifying and developing brand plans
2. Designing and implementing brand marketing programs
3. Measuring and interpreting brand performance
4. Growing sustaining brand equity

Brand equity is a highly important factor and represents the level of consumers' awareness of the brand and, therefore, the brand value (Keller, 2013).

3.11 Previous Cases in Sport Marketing

In order to understand the importance and width of application of the marketing tools and techniques discussed above, it might be useful to look at how some of them are applied by famous brands in their marketing campaigns. Next three short cases about sport marketing are presented.

3.11.1 Nike Barefoot Shoe

Nike is a well-known sport apparel brand with an internationally broad mission statement to “bring inspiration and innovation to every athlete in the world” (Nike: Product Development, n.d.). When introducing an innovative model of shoes, Nike Free, Nike carefully worked on its positioning. The aim was to position the shoe as an additional shoe for athletes and not necessarily as a replacement of the traditional running shoes. Nike's marketers were aware that positioning required careful communication and application to inform the consumers about product's features. All campaigns were carefully crafted in order to create a solid image of a shoe that builds additional strength and therefore allows athletes to train longer (Nike: Product Development, n.d.).

3.11.2 Adidas Successful Marketing Strategy

Adidas successfully applied sponsorship strategy at the 2012 Olympic Games in London (Planning effective marketing strategies, n.d.). The plan was to provide athletes from the Great British team with Adidas Olympic sportswear in order to increase awareness of the brand and market share. The goals of the campaign were clearly stated: to ensure association as Sportswear Partner of Olympic Games 2012, engage the 14-19 years old audience in order to drive brand preference in the UK, deliver a licensed product ROI, and become the most talked about sports brand in 2012. These goals were a part of a marketing plan that was created well in advance, and the preparation of sport clothes for British athletes started two and a half years before the London Olympic Games. Promotional activities were based on the AIDA model (refer to 3.9 for AIDA model description). Marketing mix was also taken into consideration when preparing for the marketing campaign.

The campaign proved to be highly successful for Adidas and resulted in generating the biggest amount of articles among local sponsors, increasing sales volumes, stimulating activity in social media and increasing market share by 2% (Planning effective marketing strategies, n.d.). These are the indicators how planning marketing strategy in advance and using such tools as marketing mix and AIDA model are working effectively in marketing campaigns of famous brands.

3.11.3 JD Market Research

JD is a leading retailer of sports and leisure clothes in UK. It is believed that thorough market research helps the brand to keep the leading position on the market. One method used by JD is its check-out survey that builds up detailed consumer profiles. Market researchers at JD are also interested for whom a customer purchases a product: for themselves or somebody else. The data is also collected from online ordering service. All this information allows JD to know how far consumers are ready to travel, identify new store location opportunities, adjust product ranges to meet consumer needs and target consumers more effectively with their marketing strategies. Market research is an ongoing process and it should constantly follow changing customer trends in order to stay competitive and develop the business. Thorough understanding of consumer needs and buying behaviour enables JD to maintain

the leading position on the market of sports and leisure wear in UK (Using Market Research to Support Decision Making, n.d.).

4 KOTLER'S MODEL OF MARKETING

The main framework determining the methods of the thesis (i.e. for organizing presentations of HighRoller and making surveying possible) was Kotler's marketing model. It was compiled in form of a marketing plan. In his book "Marketing Insights from A to Z" (2003) Kotler claims that a company needs a vision, which requires strategy, which requires a plan, and a plan needs actions. If a company does not have a plan on how to win a battle on the market, it does not have enough confidence to win. Moreover, Kotler advises not to enter the market if a company does not offer something new, of higher quality, faster or cheaper. Since the creators of HighRoller believe that it has obvious advantages over its competitors, they would like to enter the international market. Therefore, they need a plan to be more confident and prepared for competitive battle.

A marketing plan defines what will be done, when, how, and by whom, how much money will be spent and what result is expected (Cateora and Graham, 1999). The plan format that was used in case of HighRoller, Kotler's marketing plan, consists of six concrete steps: analysis of the situation, goals, strategy, tactics, budget and control; all of the steps are described below, and in the sixth chapter the marketing plan for the HighRoller is presented (Kotler, 2003).

During the process of making a situation analysis the company analyzes macro forces such as economic, political, legal, socio-cultural, and technological. The second component of the analysis is the players that are involved, such as the company itself, its competitors, distributors and suppliers. In addition, the company makes a SWOT analysis. Kotler writes that it might be more reasonable to call it TOWS analysis and start the procedure from threats and opportunities. Otherwise, the mistake of concentrating on inside factors could be made, therefore restricting identification of threats and opportunities to those that correspond with company's strengths (Kotler, 2003).

Based on the identification of the best opportunities found during situation analysis, the company assesses them and defines goals and time set for their achievement. For big companies it is important to take into account shareholders' interests, at the same time paying attention to its own reputation, technology and other issues directly related to business (Kotler, 2003).

Having defined its goals, the company can start forming the strategy for achieving them. Obviously, any task can be completed and any problem can be solved in several different ways. The function of the strategy is to choose the most effective course of actions for attaining the goals set (Kotler, 2003).

According to Kotler, any strategy must be described in more detail, concerning the 4Ps (refer to part 3.6) and actions that will be taken by the assigned people in the defined calendar terms. Further detailed elaboration of strategy is called tactics and is included as the fourth step of the marketing plan (Kotler, 2003).

When the strategic planning is finished, the next step will be to estimate budget needed for its implementation. Any company, when planning defined actions, must include into the budget additional costs necessary for goal achievement (Kotler, 2003).

The last step of marketing plan is controlling. A company must set periods, when it will be defined if there is any progress in goal achievement. As soon as implementation falls behind the plan, the goals, strategies or actions must be reviewed in order to correct existing situation (Kotler, 2003).

Kotler writes that the advantage of the plan is not in the plan itself, but in the process of planning. In "Marketing Insights from A to Z" (2003) he cites Dwight Eisenhower, the 34th President of the United States, who said that when preparing for a battle plans are useless, but planning is obligatory. There is no plan that has remained invariable after the first trial, and plans need constant review and adjustments. Trout and Ries (2005) confirm that it is impossible to predict the future, and marketing plans are not able to do it as well.

5 RESEARCH TASKS

The purpose of the thesis was to create a marketing plan and to explore opinions about an innovative Finnish sports product, HighRoller, in German-speaking countries. The main objective was to provide the commissioner, OVK Sports, with information about the market situation and reactions towards their new product, if they were to launch it on a new market. The work is also aimed at development of author's competence in marketing and market understanding, as well as bringing value to KAMK by widening the range of topics about sport marketing, which is a relatively new direction of studies at KAMK.

Research tasks and questions are the basis of thesis, and assist in keeping the right direction of activities. The author developed a clear purpose and objectives of the project, and the research tasks and questions in this particular thesis included the following:

What was the reaction of potential consumers towards the product, positive or negative?

What methods of marketing could be used for promotion and would e-mail marketing be effective?

Which sports organisations was the marketing of the product targeted at?

What characteristics of the product seemed to be most effective to use for market positioning?

It was assumed that during the research it might also become clear if managers of sport organisations rely on their customers' opinions when purchasing new equipment. It seems important to pay attention to this aspect as well. Knowing the patterns of choosing new equipment in sport organisations and with whom to seek a connection and lead negotiations will assist in stating the objectives of the future marketing campaign more clearly and effectively.

6 RESEARCH METHODS

The main research method was quantitative research, which included developing a questionnaire and collecting answers from the target population. It was taken into account that HighRoller is an innovative product and yet unknown in German-speaking countries, and therefore in order to receive reliable and objective data, it was important to organise testing of the product in a real situation before asking for opinions. The aim was to give presentations to customers or members of different sports organisations. Obviously, in order to attract their attention and get permission to organise presentations it was necessary to perform marketing actions. Kotler's marketing model (2003) was chosen as guidance in planning those actions, which were implemented and made surveying of people with real experience of the product possible. Next the plan that had been compiled is presented.

6.1 Analysis of the Environment

First of all it is important to mention the global trend of healthy lifestyle, which leads to people consuming more sport services and products. It is a positive factor, because more sport clubs and organisations are needed to satisfy the demands and therefore more sporting equipment is bought to provide various types of trainings.

Moreover, it is logical to assume that higher levels of income result in the ability of leading healthier lifestyles. According to the OECD report in Austria the average income of a household is 22% higher than OECD average. Austrians are satisfied with their lives, and 82% of them claim that they have more positive experiences during the day than negative ones (Austria OECD Better Life Index, n.d.). The figures of Germany are close to Austrian with the life satisfaction of 8.1 out of 10, and income 21% exceeding the average (Germany OECD Better Life Index, n.d.). As a result, the level of income and life satisfaction in Austria and Germany favour the desire of leading healthy lifestyle and doing more sport activities.

When compiling a marketing plan it is always necessary to analyse the competition. Five forces analysis, which was developed by Porter in 1980, is the most common tool to perform it (Smith, 2008). The five forces are: intensity of competitive rivalry, bargaining power

of customers, bargaining power of suppliers, threat of new entrants and threat of substitute products or services (Harvard Business Review, 2008). The author is not very involved in the business of commissioning company, therefore it seems difficult to analyse the bargaining power, especially of suppliers, and therefore only 3 other forces will be mentioned. If thinking about self-massaging the threat comes from original foam roller. It threatens as a substitute product and is provided by many companies, which creates intense competition. In German-speaking countries the brand of Black Roll is widely popular. The author could not find specific information about its market share, however, in all visited sports organisations, managers and customers were mentioning this brand, if they were aware of the original roller. Moreover, self-massage can be performed with own hands as well, but is not as deep and effective as massage with a roller. The technology of HighRoller is patented, and considering that patenting is an effortful and time-consuming activity, which usually involves a lot of experimenting and trial cases, it may be assumed that the threat of new entrants is not high.

Another frequently used tool is a SWOT analysis. Following Kotler's advice mentioned in part 4.1, it is started with analysis of threats and opportunities.

Table 1. SWOT analysis for Marketing of HighRoller in German-speaking countries.

<p><u>Threats</u></p> <p>Strong position of original foam roller on the market (Black Roll in Austria and Germany)</p>	<p><u>Weaknesses</u></p> <p>Resources (personnel, finances etc.)</p> <p>No support of expert opinion</p> <p>Foreign product</p>
<p><u>Opportunities</u></p> <p>Find out opinions about the product on new market</p> <p>Make first steps to a new market</p> <p>Overtake part of sport market share owned by Black Roll (for future, with bigger marketing campaign)</p>	<p><u>Strengths</u></p> <p>Innovative product</p> <p>Patented technology</p> <p>Improvement of already popular product -> easier to advertise</p>

6.2 Goals

Most likely expected outcome of a marketing plan would be selling of a certain amount of products. However, in case of described project an element of research was strongly involved in the process. Understanding the lack of resources and time limits, the firm that commissioned the thesis, did not put purchases as a goal, instead it was finding out opinions about HighRoller in the German-speaking countries. If during the process a purchase happened it would be the best possible outcome.

The main goal of the activities that were being planned was to arrange presentations of HighRoller in 5-7 sports organisations and find out what they and their customers or coaches/sport instructors/managers think about the innovative equipment.

6.3 Strategy

To be able to organise HighRoller presentations in 5-7 sports organisations, it would probably be necessary to contact about ten times bigger amount of organisations. Considering the limitation of resources, only nearby sport organisations could become a target. The closest places could be visited personally and others could be contacted by e-mail or phone. In general, the main strategic line was to determine the distance range within which sports organisations can be contacted, find necessary contact details, prepare materials about HighRoller and then contact organisations with the offer of presentation; in case of positive answer, discuss the details about presenting, present the product and analyse the outcome.

6.4 Tactics

Product: HighRoller

Place: German-speaking countries, more precise: cities and towns in the range of 100km near Kufstein (contact personally), 300km near Kufstein (contact by e-mail or phone)

Price: already determined by OVK Sports

Promotion: e-mail, personal contact, phone calls, presentations, marketing materials (flyer and poster)

The creation and implementation of the marketing plan had started in October 2014 and was planned to end in May-June 2015. It might be assumed that gyms are most likely to buy such equipment as HighRoller and, therefore, initial focus was on the gyms, which are located in Kufstein. However, Kufstein is a small town with only three gyms, and if at least 5 places were needed it was necessary to contact gyms in other towns and cities as well. It would also give an opportunity to collect research data from various places.

The first step was to create a questionnaire and a poster, which were the most necessary things to be ready for presentations. It was assumed that the best situation to demonstrate HighRoller (for sport's organisation's customers) was natural sporting environment: after training, instructing the exercises and letting people try all of the movements themselves. It restricted the time for filling in the questionnaire, because commonly people plan their training times and are not eager to answer many questions, therefore questionnaire was kept as short as possible. The main aim of it was to determine if the general opinion is positive or negative, and to find out to which feature of HighRoller people in the German-speaking countries respond more (comfort, effectiveness, massage of many muscles), in order to use it for future advertising and branding.

The plan of actions was as follows: in October and November 2014, after preparing a questionnaire and a catching poster to use during presentations to attract people, the gyms in Kufstein were visited personally and offered product demonstration. If some organisation(s) agreed to it, a presentation(s) was organised, which gave an opportunity to analyse the process and make corrections if needed, as well as provided first data for the research. At this stage it seemed also reasonable to find sport organisations other than gyms in Kufstein to have them in reserve if no gyms from other towns and cities would respond to e-mails.

From December 2014 until the middle of February 2015 marketing materials for contacting distant gyms were created. It involved writing the text of the e-mail and translating it into German, and designing a flyer that was sent as an e-mail attachment. The flyer was planned to depict HighRoller, its function and advantages and would help to get a visual image of what was being offered. Moreover, at that time contact details of fitness studios in Munich, Innsbruck, Stuttgart, Salzburg, Nuremberg and some smaller towns near Kufstein were browsed on the Internet. Afterwards a break was planned from the middle of February until the middle of March.

In April e-mails were sent out to all fitness centres. In case of not receiving any replies, it was planned that several gyms would be visited and some centres would be called. It might have been a more effective way to reach the needed person, because the e-mail addresses available at web-sites were mainly for customers and could be read by personnel instead of a manager; or there could be a filter in the e-mail box and some e-mails might have not been received. If still not enough gyms agreed to the presentations, other sports organisations in Kufstein that had been in reserve from the beginning would be contacted personally with the same offer.

6.5 Budget

The project was small-scaled, performed by one person as the chosen thesis topic, and therefore there was no actual budget. The printing of questionnaires and all marketing materials was supported by an outside company. The expenses of transporting the rollers from Finland to Austria was covered by the commissioning party, OVK Sports. All the costs connected with transportation or any other activities during the process were covered from personal funds and were kept as minimal as possible.

6.6 Control

Considering that the project was performed by one person and as a thesis task, there was control from the supervisor and commissioning company. However, the precise following of all activities and deadlines was mainly under self-control. The most important issue was that all presentations must have been finished in June 2015 at the latest, because the author's stay in Austria ended in July 2015; and it would have been preferable to organise them even earlier and complete the whole thesis by June 2015, so that in case corrections were needed there would be enough time left to add or change something.

6.7 Overview of Plan Implementation

First of all, the schedule of tactical plan was followed with minor changes, for example, organising presentations in more random times. For presentation purposes the commissioning party provided the author with three rollers. All marketing materials (e-mail, flyer and poster) were created and translated with the help of a person, who is an expert in marketing and has been working on the Austrian market for many years (refer to Appendix 1/1 – 3/2 to review all materials and their translation into English).

During the whole project 53 sports organisations were contacted, most of them were gyms. The e-mail was sent to 48 organisations and one of them replied claiming that they were not interested, from others no replies were received; five more organisations were contacted by personal visit only. Out of 48 organisations contacted by e-mail six also received a phone call with the offer of presentation, ten were visited personally. As a result, presentations were organised in six different organisations: three gyms, two football teams and one tennis hall.

The process of giving a presentation was different depending on the organisation and its managers. In football teams presentations of 10-20 minutes were given to a whole team at one time and players took turns in testing the product, and afterwards each of them answered the survey. In tennis hall there was arranged a place for the presentation and the poster on the wall was attracting tennis players to come and test the equipment. Presentations of 10-20 minutes were given individually or in a maximum group of two people, and all participants filled in the questionnaire. In one of the gyms the same method as in tennis hall was used. This method required to make presentations of about three to four hours on two or three different days and seemed to be highly time-consuming. In the other two gyms presentations were made individually to the managers, and, since a discussion was involved, they could last longer, for up to 1 hour. All in all, the questionnaire was filled in by 67 participants of presentations, and some other individual feedback was received from them as well. Next the results are presented.

7 RESULTS

Here the results received in each organisation are presented. They include short description of the organisations, charts analysing the percentage of positive, neutral and negative feedback, and, in some cases, pictures and more detailed feedback received from discussions.

7.1 ImPuls Fitness, Kufstein

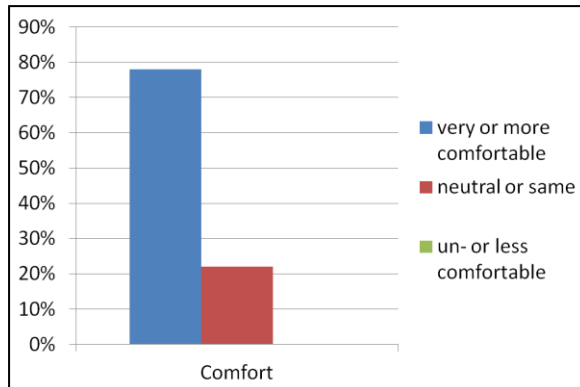


Picture 5. Presentation in ImPuls Fitness.

Impuls Fitness is a big fitness studio in the centre of Kufstein, which offers different sport services including gym training, cycling, fitness, yoga and sauna (Official web-page of ImPuls Fitness, n.d.). In this studio presentations of the HighRoller took place on the 13th and 17th of November 2014 (see Picture 5). The audience, to whom the product was presented, was quite diverse and included people of both genders and of an extensive age category (from student age to senior age). Altogether, 22 people responded to the questionnaire. Exactly half of the respondents have used foam roller before, and another half did not know the product. The results of the survey can be observed on the graphs below (Table 2 – 5).

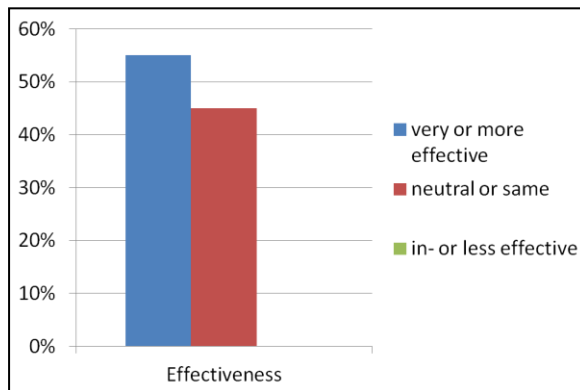
The owner of the gym showed significant interest in buying the roller, however, when the survey results and the offer were sent to him, no reply was received.

Table 2. ImPuls Fitness, comfort.



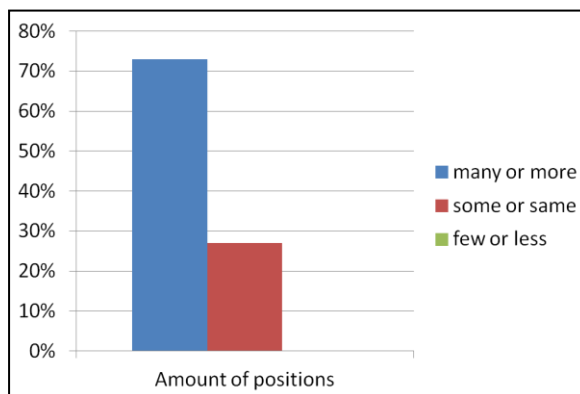
The comfort of using HighRoller was rated highly. 17 respondents claimed that it is very or more comfortable. More than half of those people (9) had previous experience with foam roller.

Table 3. ImPuls Fitness, effectiveness.



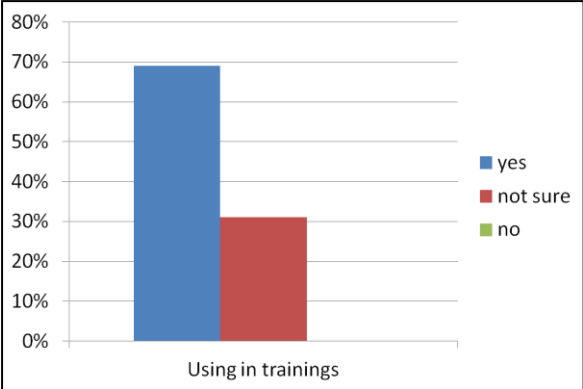
12 out of 22 considered HighRoller very effective or more effective than the original foam roller, 5 of those people have used foam roller before. 10 people answered that the product has neutral or same effect and nobody said that it is ineffective.

Table 4. ImPuls Fitness, amount of positions.



Bigger part of respondents (16 out of 22) also believed that with HighRoller it is possible to do a lot of/more position and reach many/more muscles.

Table 5. ImPuls Fitness, using in trainings.



Nearly 70% of respondents claimed that they would like to use HighRoller in their training process. 9 out of 11 people that used foam roller before and 6 out of 11 that did not, would like to start using new product.

For general overview of the survey in ImPuls Fitness studio refer to Appendix 5/1.

7.2 Bea's Fitness, Oberaudorf

Bea's Fitness studio is a small gym situated in Oberaudorf (Oberaudorf, 2015), Germany, a small place with less than 5000 inhabitants. It is one of the gyms that the author had a chance to visit personally in the beginning of May 2015. The owner of the gym decided not to make presentation for their customers, instead HighRoller was presented to the management, and therefore questionnaire was answered by one manager. The manager seemed impressed by the new roller and gave only positive answers to the questionnaire. He put the stamp of the fitness centre, which can be observed on Picture 6, as confirmation of his answers.

Would you like to use HighRoller in your trainings?

yes	no	not sure
X		

Describe the experience of using HighRoller with one word.

Bea's Fitness www.beas-fitness.de
 Patricia Baardies - Rosenheimer Str. 20
 83080 Oberaudorf Tel. 0 80 33/40 40

Other comments

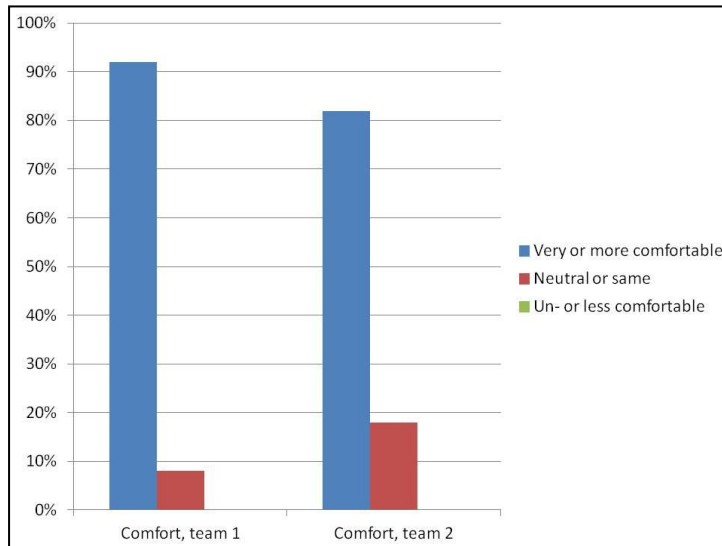
Picture 6. Questionnaire from Bea's Fitness.

Moreover, the manager wanted to buy a roller for the gym, and we agreed that after the completion of presentations in all other organisations one of the rollers would be delivered to Bea's Fitness centre. The roller was sold to the gym on the 29th of May 2015.

7.3 Football Teams 1 and 2, Kufstein

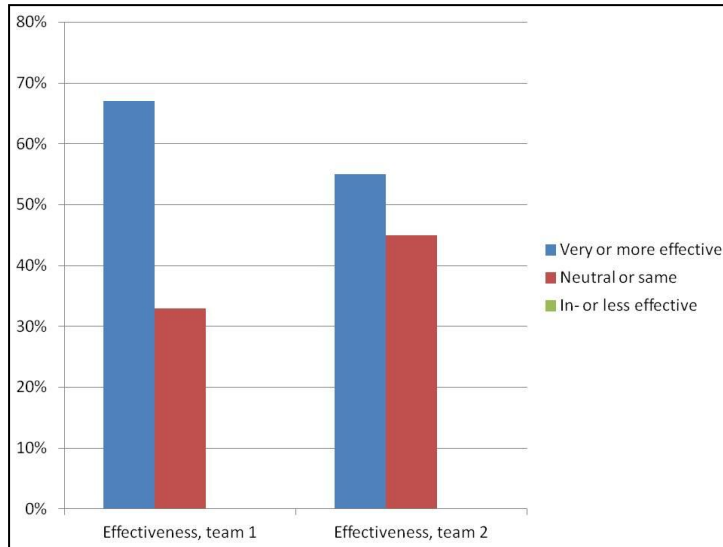
The two football teams are actually two different organisations, and possibilities of presentation organisation had to be discussed with different coaches. Team number 1 is professional, and team number 2 is of lower level. Presentations of the HighRoller were arranged on 27th of May 2015 for the second team, and on 28th of May 2015 for the first team. Altogether 23 football players answered the questionnaire, 12 persons from the first team and 11 from the second. The first team was more familiar with foam roller, since 9 out of 12 players (75%) have used it before; in the second team 6 out of 11 (55%) have tried it. Initially it was planned to analyse the results of both teams together, however, when results were received, major differences could be seen between two teams that might lead to a conclusion that professional football players will be more interested to use HighRoller than average level players. Questionnaire results of both teams can be observed below on the graphs (Table 6 - 9).

Table 6. Football teams, comfort.



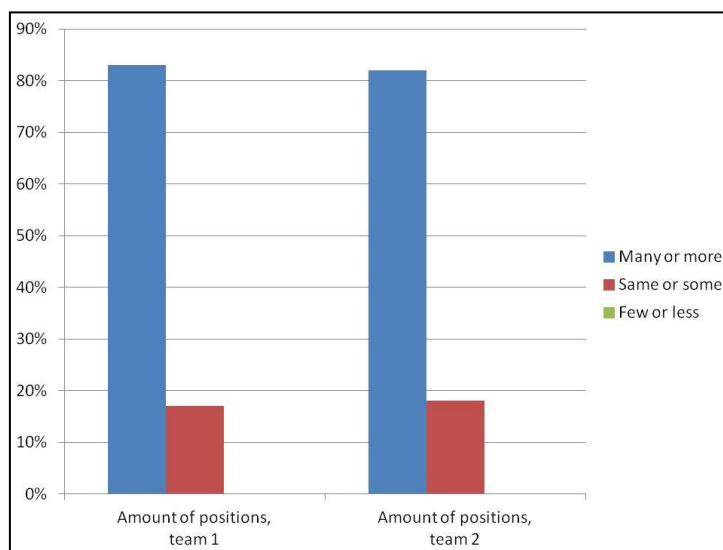
The comfort of HighRoller was again rated highly, with 11 out of 12 players in the 1st team and 9 out of 11 in the 2nd saying that it is very or more comfortable than the original foam roller.

Table 7. Football teams, effectiveness.



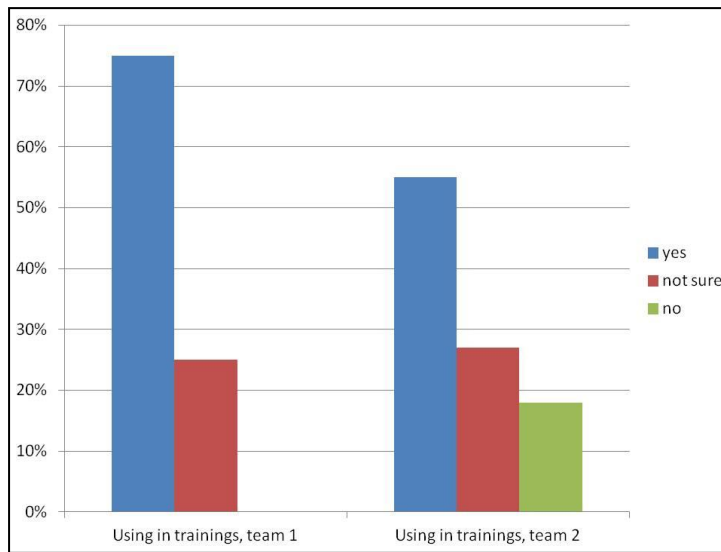
Effectiveness also received positive feedback from both teams, however the difference between two teams is significant. In the 1st team 2/3 of players claimed that it is very or more effective, while in the 2nd team just 6 respondents (55%) agreed with it.

Table 8. Football teams, amount of positions.



Results about amount of positions available with the new roller were quite similar for both teams, 10 out of 12 in the 1st and 9 out of 11 in the 2nd claiming that it is possible to perform many positions..

Table 9. Football teams, using in trainings.



The biggest difference between two teams can be observed in willingness to use HighRoller in their training process. 9 out of 12 players in the 1st team chose yes as an answer, 3 others were unsure. In the 2nd team 6 players wanted to use the roller, 3 were not sure and 2 players gave negative answer. Therefore, it can be assumed that HighRoller

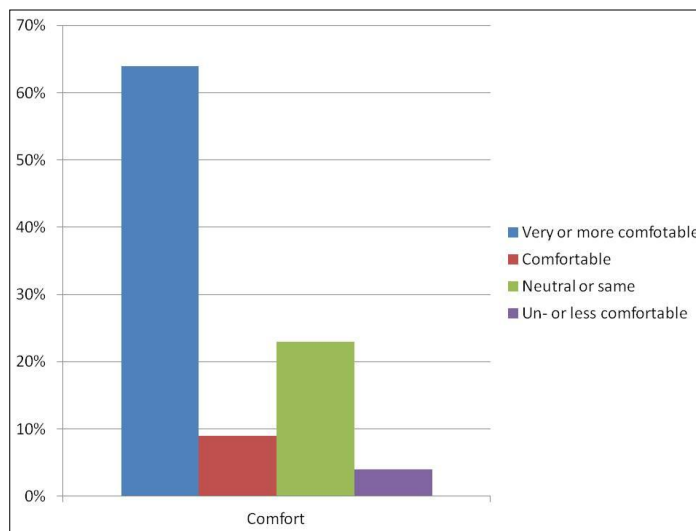
is more needed for professional athletes or for those who exceptionally care about their muscle condition, but not as much interesting for average level sportsmen.

For general overview of the survey in two football teams refer to Appendix 5/2.

7.4 Tennis Hall, Kufstein

Tennis is a popular sport in Europe, and in Austria there are many tennis places, which are situated even in small towns or villages. Kufstein has a tennis centre, which is visited by people from all the nearby places. The presentation in Kufstein tennis hall was organised on the 1st and 4th of June 2015. The aim was to present the roller to tennis players after their trainings and give them the opportunity to experience an after-training self-massage. Altogether, the questionnaire was answered by 22 tennis players, only six (27%) of whom had had previous experience with the original roller. The questionnaire results are presented below.

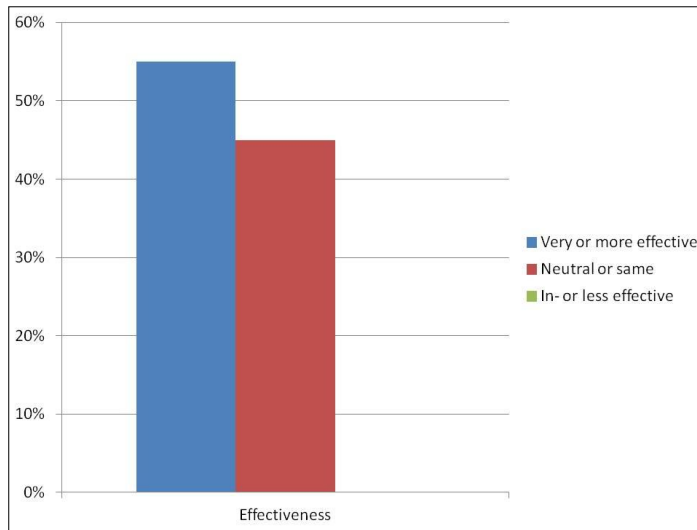
Table 10. Tennis Hall, comfort.



The roller was assessed as very or more comfortable by 14 tennis players (64%). Two respondents neither could say that HighRoller is very comfortable, nor neutral, and gave their own answers assessing it as comfortable. One player, who was attending group for gymnastic exercises with original foam roller claimed that HighRoller is less comfortable.

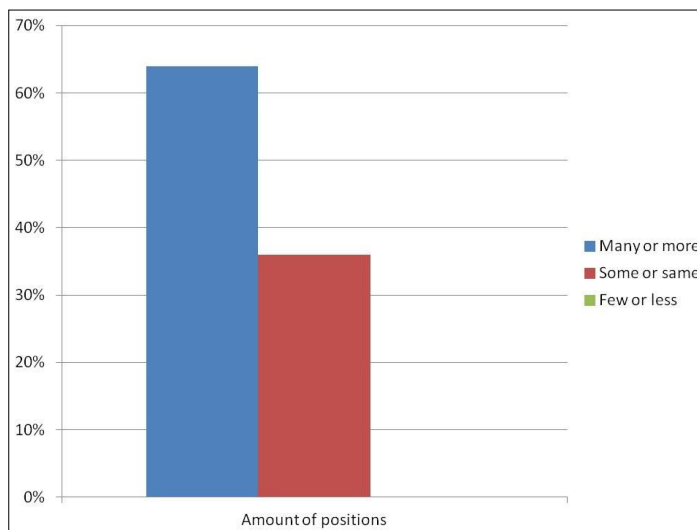
Other 5 (23%) people believed that it is same or neutrally comfortable.

Table 11. Tennis Hall, effectiveness.



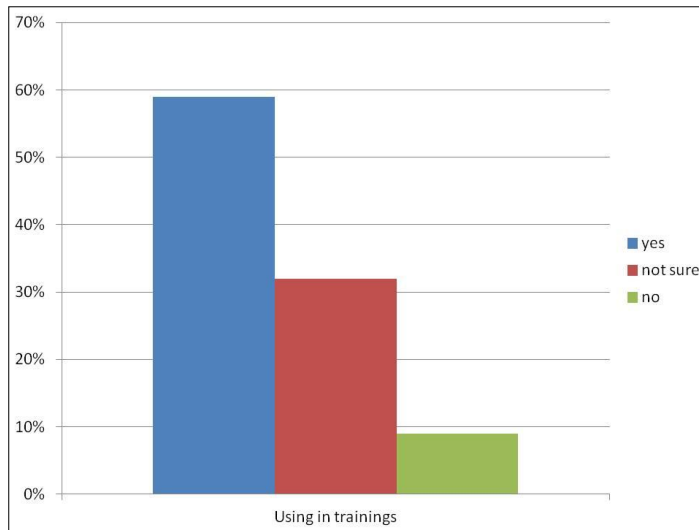
Opinion of tennis players about effectiveness of HighRoller was similar to opinion of respondents from other organisations with 12 (55%) of players claiming that the new roller is very or more effective, and 10 (45%) answering that it is same or neutral.

Table 12. Tennis Hall, amount of positions.



64% of respondents believed that with HighRoller it is possible to do many or more positions than with the original foam roller, 36% (8 players) replied that some positions or same amount is possible.

Table 13. Tennis Hall, using in trainings.



Even though most of respondents (73%) had not used the original foam roller before, 59% of all respondents claimed that they would like to use HighRoller in their trainings, 7 tennis players (32%) were not sure about using it, and 2 were not interested to include the roller into their trainings.

For general overview of the survey in tennis centre refer to Appendix 5/3.

Moreover, two persons from tennis centre were doing running and triathlon as their main sports, and they have tried using HighRoller for whole body massage after their cross-fit training. Below is their short feedback about the experience with the product (original vocabulary and punctuation have been kept):

“Nice product, and nice concept, but the product is a bit heavy and not that easy to transport. But I like the thing that we can work on all the muscles”

“Product very easy to set up and dislock, the good thing is you can do better massages than a simple roller”

7.5 Munich Gym, Munich

Munich gym is a big gym in Munich, Germany. It was visited by the author on June 11th, 2015, and a presentation was given to the managers of the gym (one of the owners and his wife). After the experience in Bea's Fitness studio, it had been decided that questionnaire would not make significant impact, and the attention was focused on the discussion about HighRoller. Language barrier caused significant difficulties, but still it was possible to establish qualitative communication.

The presentation included showing user-guide with pictures, demonstrating various example movements, and telling key points about HighRoller benefits and usage. The roller was positively assessed by both managers; especially positive feedback was received from the female manager, who is also a fitness coach teaching different group lessons, and who referred to HighRoller as very comfortable.

Both managers were interested in buying several rollers in order to organise a new group fitness class. However, they had to discuss the matter with the co owner and find a person who would be able to teach the rolling class; therefore the decision about the matter was delayed until autumn time.

8 DISCUSSION

In order to analyse the results it was necessary to assess if the goals of the marketing plan were achieved and to process the results from questionnaire respondents together with other feedback from presentation participants. Next analysis of results, conclusions, reliability issues, and professional development and suggestions for future research are presented.

8.1 Analysis of Results

First of all, it is important to analyse the implementation of the marketing plan and goal achievement. Generally, all the activities from tactical planning were performed and all schedules were followed. The main goal of organising presentations of HighRoller in 5-7 sports organisations was achieved as well, since presentations were held in 6 organisations (three gyms, two football teams, and one tennis hall). Another positive result was the purchase of one roller, which is the best possible outcome of the created marketing plan. It is also worth mentioning that the design of the questionnaire was appreciated by participants, because it was very short and easy. However, the first question, which divided the questionnaire into two parts, was quite confusing, and some respondents started to fill in both sides, which was not necessary (refer to Appendix 4/1 to review the questionnaire).

Moreover, the author hoped to organise presentations in sport organisations in different places, which would have made the sample group more diverse. However, since no replies were received to e-mails, it was possible to organise presentations only in those places that could be visited personally: Kufstein, Oberaudorf and Munich. One aspect that could have been improved is preparation for personal visits to gyms. The emphasis was put on e-mail connection, and therefore all materials were created for that purpose. A good idea might have been to create a brochure describing HighRoller in more detail and take the printed version of it to leave for the owners or managers of sport organisations to examine, if they were not present during a visit. It could have been a reminder and a good visual image for them and probably some managers could have contacted back, or it could have been a reason to come back and remind them about the presentation offer again. However, it was the right planning in advance to keep Kufstein sport organisations other than gyms in reserve to

contact later, and it enabled to organise presentations of HighRoller in six different organisations and reach the goals.

8.2 Conclusions

According to the received results, it can be assumed that the reaction towards HighRoller is positive in German-speaking countries. On average 71% of the respondents gave very positive feedback about the product, and 64% of presentation participants claimed that they would like to use the product in their trainings. Considering these figures, a healthy lifestyle trend and the level of living standards, German-speaking countries seem to be a reasonable target and a promising opportunity for HighRoller to enter a new market.

One important conclusion that can be made from the questionnaire results as well as from author's observations is that it seems highly important to choose a target group carefully. Even though the answers were quite similar and positive in all organisations, it could be observed that the level of interest towards the product was different. For example, the amateur football team was willing to try the product and to answer the questionnaire, but no additional questions were asked and their coach assumed that HighRoller might be needed only for the professional team; while in the professional team the coach and masseur wanted to learn more about the product and asked to send them more information about it and assumed that it might be necessary to talk to the president of the club about a possible purchase of new equipment. Moreover, the feedback of players was also more positive compared to the amateur team. According to the example with football teams, it seems that HighRoller might be more interesting for athletes of higher level with training experience than for beginners or average level athletes.

It is highly important to choose the right organisations to which to advertise. For instance, in the tennis hall people were not willing to participate in the presentation and participated mainly those who have personal connection to the author and, therefore, it might be assumed that tennis halls are not the most suitable targets for presentations. It is not common for tennis halls to have public equipment, and if some players use a foam roller they usually have it at home for personal use. On the other hand, gyms are meant to provide public equipment, and their customers are concerned about muscle condition and recovery. Not all gym visitors were interested in massage and stretching exercises, and to a large extent those

who have done them before were willing to participate in the presentation of HighRoller. This leads to an assumption that it could be more effective to focus on people who already have experience with the original roller, when entering the German-speaking market.

One of the initial goals was to find out which benefit of HighRoller to highlight in advertising, product positioning and branding in the future. In the questionnaire three benefits, suggested by the commissioner, were used: comfort, effectiveness and amount of positions possible to perform with the new roller. According to the questionnaire results, it seems that the comfort of HighRoller received the most positive reaction out of three options. Therefore, it might be a good idea to use it as the main line of advertisements. If talking about brand building, it might seem reasonable to create an image of “comfortable roller” around the product. Another option might be to focus on the effectiveness of exercising with HighRoller and elaborate on it from the scientific point of view, since people in German-speaking countries like precision and highly respect scientific data.

Concerning the methods of marketing, it can be admitted that e-mail advertising proved to be ineffective in case of this particular project, since no positive replies were received to the sent e-mails. All the presentations were organised as a result of personal visits to the organisations. Moreover, the presentations were given only in those places, where it was possible to personally talk to the owner or a manager. In all organisations, where employees were moderators, the intention of product demonstration did not lead to success. It can be concluded that in the future marketers should seek for personal meetings with the managers of sport organisations. However, it seems to be a challenge, since most managers are busy and prevent any spontaneous contact to them, especially from marketing or sales representatives.

Another conclusion that can be derived from the research is that sports organisations were not relying on their customers' opinions when presented with a new equipment. Managers seemed interested in what clients think, but did not want them disturbed by presentations and questionnaires. Some of them claimed that they prefer to decide themselves what equipment is necessary for the customers. Therefore, the most reasonable option could be to present innovative equipment to managers themselves or to coaches of a fitness centre and let them decide if it is a suitable product for their customers.

Furthermore, it seems undoubtedly necessary to have a team of native speakers to market a product in German-speaking countries. Firstly, not many people know or are willing to

speak English. Secondly, Austrians and Germans are highly communicative nations, where talking and sharing thoughts is popular; therefore, it seems important to build a connection with customer, and it might require good communication skills and ability to engage in active small talk.

8.3 Reliability

The author had assumed that the results would be reliable only if participants of the research had actual experience of using HighRoller. This concept caused quite significant time requirements and limitations. Firstly, in almost every case presentations were individual, which led to spending a lot of time communicating with each participant, and therefore lowered the amount of possible participants. There was no possibility of organising group presentations due to a limited amount of rollers: it was only possible to transport three rollers from Finland to Austria. Secondly, participants tested HighRoller mainly after their trainings or right before it, which limited the duration of the presentations and was the reason of preparing a short questionnaire. However, the concept of personal presentations supported the reliability of results, since the feedback was given not as an assumption, but after a real trial of the product in a real training situation.

It might be assumed that 67 respondents is not a sufficient amount of participants, especially for a quantitative research. However, considering the fact that the target group was narrowed down to people doing sports, who are interested in muscle care, that other feedback was received as well and combined with design of a real situation of using the product, the results could be relied on.

The usage of a combination of research methods assisted in getting reliable results as well. The questionnaire was part of quantitative research, and communication with sport organisations allowed to include an element of qualitative research by observing and analysing their behaviour. This concept enabled to broaden the range of data and to look at the marketing opportunities for HighRoller from different perspectives.

8.4 Professional Development and Suggestions for Future Research

For the author the process of thesis writing was a big step in terms of professional development. Firstly, it was quite an independent project and taught self-control and initiative. Secondly, while preparing for the practical part loads of theoretical material had been researched, which was already useful for studies and, hopefully, will be useful in future working life. Thirdly, the practical component deepened the acquired knowledge. It was a valuable experience to learn that not always the assumptions made before are true in a real situation and that all hypotheses should be checked in practice before assuming them to be right.

For future research the author would suggest further research, of a bigger scope, for OVK Sports on other countries' markets, as well as on the German-speaking market. It might be more reasonable to focus on gyms and find out more about their behaviour when purchasing new equipment. A different opportunity could be making individual selling, which means selling not only to organisations, but to individual people as well. This might require researching deeper the preferences of potential customers, who may buy HighRoller for individual use, which usually involves using it at home as a separate type of training, as well as researching the opportunities for cooperation with retail sport shops.

If talking about research in general and its benefits for students, it might be a good idea for those who are interested in marketing to conduct a research in this field. The topic could be connected to sport marketing or to any other area of marketing, and it should help to gain deeper knowledge and practical experience in this discipline.

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*Betreff: **HighRoller – kostenlose Präsentation***

Sehr geehrter Herr/Frau

High Roller ist die Innovation am Fitnessmarkt und verhilft Ihnen und Ihren Kunden zu höherer Performance und effektiverer Erholung.

Die Weiterentwicklung des Foam Rollers bietet beeindruckende Vorteile:

- Höherer Komfort in allen Positionen
- Leichtere und effizientere Benutzung
- Verbesserte Muskelmassage

Gerne biete ich Ihnen **kostenlos**

- eine **Produktpräsentation**
- sowie eine **Kundenbefragung** per Fragebogen

in Ihrem Fitnessstudio im April/Mai 2015.

Zögern Sie nicht mich zu kontaktieren zwecks Terminvereinbarung:

anastasiia.dorokhova@gmail.com

+43 660 596 1777 (Anastasiia)

Ich freue mich sehr von Ihnen zu hören. Vielen Dank!

Ihre

Anastasiia Dorokhova

PS. Ich bin Student der FH Kufstein. Dies ist ein Projekt im Rahmen meiner Bachelor-Thesis Research. Über Ihre Antwort freue ich mich sehr.

Subject: HighRoller – free presentation

Dear Sir/Madam ...

HighRoller is an innovation on fitness market and help you and your customers to achieve higher performance and more effective recovery.

Benefits:

- More comfort in all positions
- Easier and more effective usage
- Better muscle massage

I gladly offer you for free:

- presentation of the product
- and analysis of your customers' opinion (based on the questionnaire)

in your gym in April/May 2015.

To book a presentation please contact:

anastasiia.dorokhova@gmail.com

+43 660 596 1777 (Anastasiia)

I will be glad to hear from you. Thank you!

Yours,

Anastasiia Dorokhova

PS. I am a student at FH Kufstein and this is a part of my bachelor-thesis research. I would very appreciate to receive an answer from you.

HighRoller

Higher level of performance

- Verbesserte Version des Foam Rollers
- Leichtere and effektivere Benutzung
- Verbesserte Muskelmassage
- Mehr Komfort in alle Positionen

GRATIS
Präsentation in
Ihrem Fitnessstudio
+ Ergebnisanalyse



HighRoller

Higher level of performance

- Advanced version of foam roller
- Easier and more effective usage
- Ability to massage more muscles
- More comfort in all positions

Free ★
presentation in
your gym +
analysis of results





HighRoller

Higher level of performance



**Testen Sie jetzt das
innovative Fitnessgerät!**



HighRoller

Higher level of performance



Try now innovative fitness equipment!



Questionnaire

Have you used foam roller before?

YES

Do you think that HighRoller is more comfortable than the original foam roller?

more comfortable	same	less comfortable

Do you think that HighRoller is more effective than the original foam roller?

more effective	same	less effective

Do you think that with HighRoller it is possible to do more positions and reach more muscles?

more	same	less

Would you like to use HighRoller in your trainings?

yes	no	not sure

Describe the experience of using HighRoller with one word.

Other comments

Thank you!

NO

How would you describe the comfort of using HighRoller?

very comfortable	neutral	uncomfortable

How would you describe the effectiveness of using HighRoller?

very effective	neutral	ineffective

Do you think that with HighRoller it is possible to do many positions and reach many muscles?

many	some	view

Would you like to use HighRoller in your trainings?

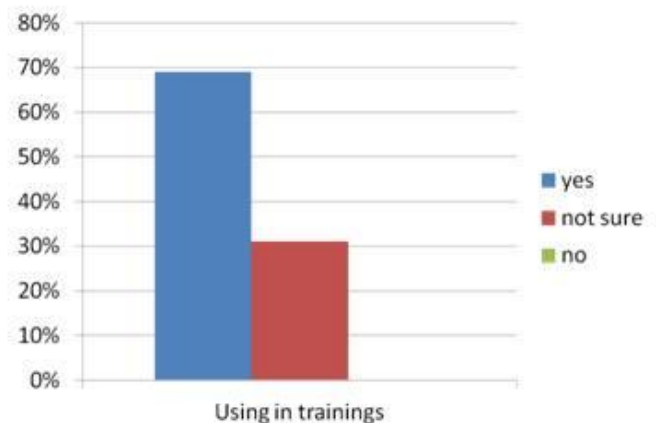
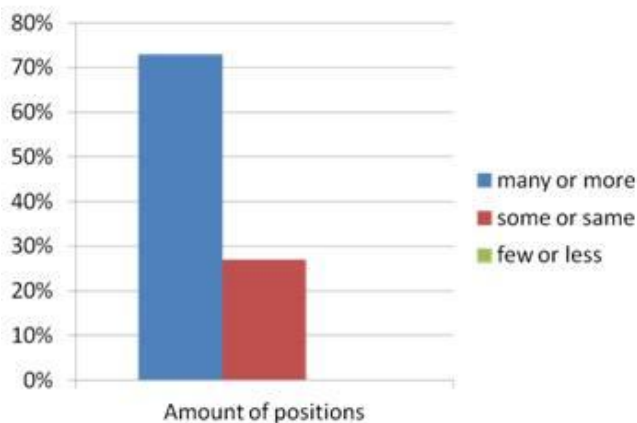
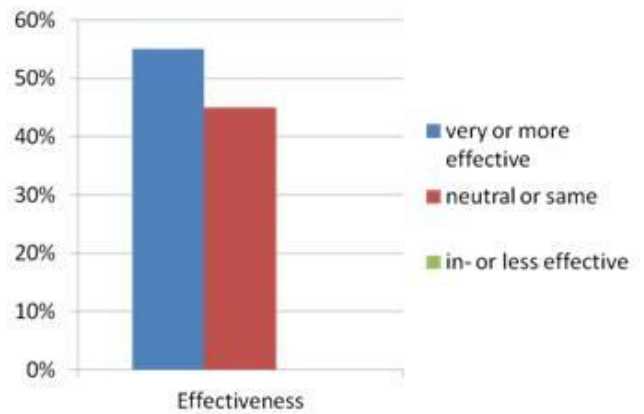
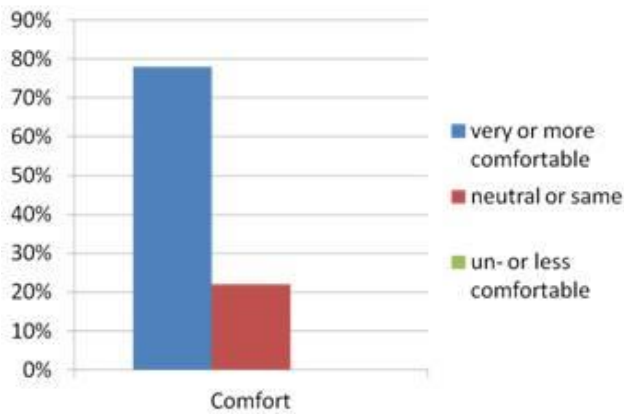
yes	no	not sure

Describe the experience of using HighRoller with one word.

Other comments

Thank you!

Customers' opinion about HighRoller. Impuls fitness center, 2014.

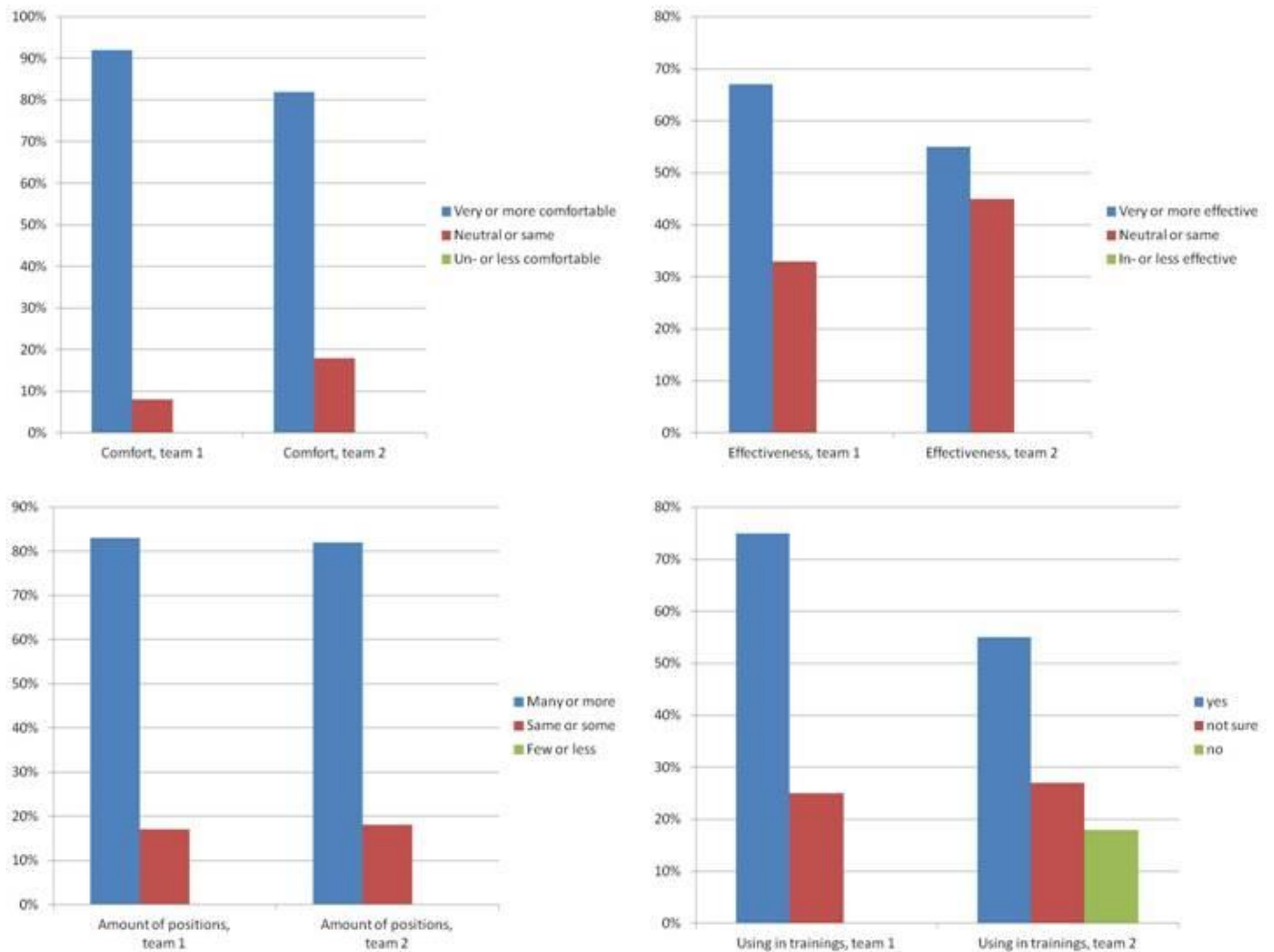


HighRoller described by customers as:
**relaxing, excellent, good, perfect, interesting, innovative,
 pleasant, very good for daily training, super**

Note: for customers who have been already familiar with original foam roller, the questionnaire suggested comparison of two products; therefore words "more" and "less" indicate comparison of HighRoller with original foam roller

Note: the questionnaire has been filled in by 22 customers, 50% of whom have used foam roller before; 80% of respondents who already used original foam roller stated that they would like to use HighRoller in their trainings; 55% of respondents who have not used original foam roller before stated that they would like to start using HighRoller

Opinion about HighRoller in Football Teams 1&2, 2015.

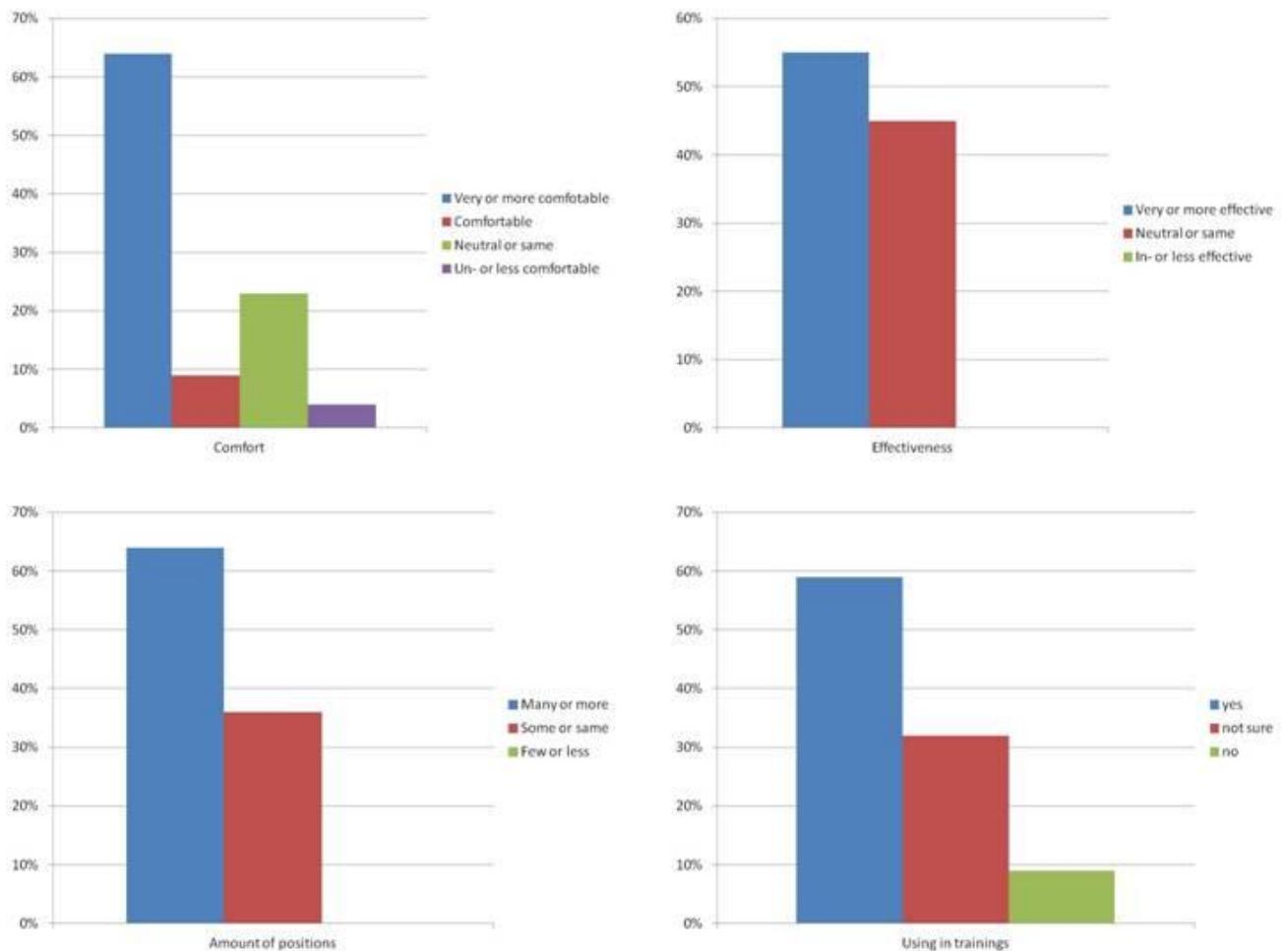


**Comments of football players about HighRoller:
relaxing, perfect, interesting, massage, be fit,
professional, effective, comfortable, hurts at some
positions, very nice, feels good for regeneration, maybe a
good opportunity to prepare for a match**

Note: for players who have been already familiar with original foam roller , the questionnaire suggested comparison of two products; therefore words “more” and “less” indicate comparison of HighRoller with original foam roller

Note: the questionnaire has been filled in by 23 football players from two teams, 65% of whom have used foam roller before; 60% of respondents who already used original foam roller stated that they would like to use HighRoller in their trainings; 75% of respondents who have not used original foam roller before stated that they would like to start using HighRoller

Opinion of tennis players about HighRoller. Tennis centre, Kufstein, 2015.



**Comments of tennis players about HighRoller:
good, effective, surprised, multifunctional, strange, good color, sensitive, better when it is down, cool and funny, relaxing, recovery, good idea, perfect, interesting, super**

Note: for tennis players, who have been already familiar with original foam roller; the questionnaire suggested comparison of two products; therefore words "more" and "less" indicate comparison of HighRoller with original foam roller

Note: the questionnaire has been filled in by 22 tennis players, 27% of whom have used foam roller before; 59% of respondents who already used original foam roller stated that they would like to use HighRoller in their trainings; 63% of respondents who have not used original foam roller before stated that they would like to start using HighRoller