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OPTIMIZING SOCIAL MEDIA CHANNELS FOR B2B STARTUPS

Case of Odd Expert Oy

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ABSTRACT

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In recent years, the dramatic development of social media and its huge advances on global businesses cannot be deniable. With a large user base and useful analytics support, it helps many companies, especially startups, to reach their target audiences. Additionally, it requires low budget on advertising which stimulates all kinds of businesses to utilize social media channels.

This thesis analyzes the effectiveness of social media marketing from perspectives of business-to-business (B2B) startups by researching current trends of digital marketing, assessing its critical success factors, as well as evaluating three case companies: Trello, Egg Agency and Simple Solutions Joint Stock Company (S3). The primary objective is to assist Odd Expert Oy – the commissioner to discover the most appropriate solutions to optimize social media channels and maximize benefits.

The study used qualitative method to investigate the topic. Various books, online publications, journals, and desktop studies were reviewed to gain basic knowledge of social media marketing and its advantages. Trello, which is considered as the main competitor of the commissioner, was analyzed from social marketing perspectives. Additionally, two interviews with digital marketing experts: Ms. Rachel Nga Phan, Account Manager of Egg Agency and Mr. Duy Huynh, Chief Operation Officer of S3 were arranged to get their insights on social media marketing. The results would explain how to prepare a good social media marketing plan, as well as how to measure its success. Furthermore, it determined that social media marketing helped businesses to achieve three important elements: brand awareness, customer engagement and high conversion leads.

Keywords: Social media marketing, B2B Startups, Critical Success Factors, Benchmarking

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1 INTRODUCTION

With the dramatic development of Internet in recent years, digital marketing has been gradually replacing traditional marketing and becoming the strongest and fastest tool to build relationship between businesses and clients. Accordingly, the geographical and temporal obstacles among countries, religions as well as languages are erased completely. As a result, creating a useful and effective digital marketing campaign is critical for B2B and business-to-customers (B2C) startups. It is obvious that an appropriate marketing plan not only helps firms understanding their businesses, competitors as well as target customers, but also guides decisions and actions in the right track (Mangold & Faulds 2009, 357 – 358).

Social media is a leading concept of digital marketing which startups are enthusiastic to apply for their businesses. In fact, social media channels such as LinkedIn, Facebook, and Instagram fundamentally change how enterprises reach and communicate with their customers, how they offer products and services to end-users, and how their employees cooperate smoothly. In a nutshell, those tunnels are effective marketing platforms which help companies to do businesses. The main reason make social media to emerge among other marketing tools is that it has a large user base, useful analytics supports, and low expense which fit a limited budget, as well as early-stage reputation of startups (Patel 2014, cited 16.12.2015).

There are three important criteria that startups crave to achieve by applying social media channels for their marketing campaigns: building brand awareness, strengthening customer engagement and raising return on investment (ROI). Even though both B2B and B2C startups execute their strategies to utilize social media reach that goals, most of successful stories belongs to B2C. Directly working with customers such as answering questions, receiving real-time feedbacks, discussing controversial topics offer B2C startups opportunities to understand their customer demands, so that products and services are developed quickly to adapt market needs (Mangold & Faulds 2009, 359). In the case that companies encounter problems, it is not difficult for them to find professional helps from a thousand of public tutorials, guidelines and advice of experts. B2B startups, on the other hand, continually struggles in seeking for the right social media marketing plan for their growth. The common issues that most B2B startups have to solve are hardly identifying ROI, disconnecting between social media goals and business goals (Jackson 2015, cited 12.12.2015). The problems are more serious when they cannot select the appropriate

channels out of many of social media platforms (LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube). In an interest to find solutions, this thesis discusses and analyzes in depth point of views of critical success factors and measurement methods to help B2B startups build a successful social media marketing plan. As required by the commissioner, three relevant channels for B2B: Twitter, LinkedIn, and YouTube would be evaluated in this study.

1.1 Commissioner

Odd Expert Oy is a start-up company in Oulu established in June 2015, Finland. It has three experienced co-founders from different backgrounds of business, design and information technology which could give useful perspectives in developing product.

Odd Expert Oy creates a collaboration tool to increase working quality inside companies. It composes a collection of features: instant messaging, calendar, to-do tasks, etc. The product aims to increase effectiveness of business management, and to strengthen relationship among team members. By participating in Odd Expert's social network, communication and interactions between users are enhanced by reducing waiting time for transferring messages. Moreover, companies in long-term vision, can open crowdsourcing tasks to seek for outside supports. The mission of Odd Expert Oy is to "make teamwork simple" and possible for participants regardless devices and locations.

Odd Expert Oy has many strong competitors in the industry such as Asana, Trello, Redbooth, and Yammer. It requires the company to boost itself to be more creative and competitive in order to enter the market. Odd Expert Oy targets at managers of medium-sized and big companies in both domestic and global scale, and aims to provide them a solution to collect all essential business information into a central place. The data could be stored in local storage, for example, hard drive of customers, on the cloud.

At the time of writing, Odd Expert Oy is totally a fresher and not well-known by its targeting customers, as well as its competitors. It would like to pinpoint the best social media marketing plan to increase awareness within an acceptable budget.

1.2 Research questions

The research focuses to answer two main questions:

- What are critical success factors to be considered in building social media marketing plan?
- How can startup companies get successful in social media marketing plan?

In the thesis, those questions are answered thoroughly in theoretical and practical parts. Besides searching on desktop materials, benchmarking and interviewing are essential methods to answer aforementioned questions.

1.3 Methodology

This thesis uses qualitative research as the main method, and is processed through three phases: literature reviewing, benchmarking and interviewing. The first section, which is theoretically researched in books, professional blogs and scientist journals, reveals the current situation of social media, the effectiveness of social media for B2B startups, successful factors of social media for B2B startups, and social media measurement methods. The second and third sections, meanwhile, are mainly completed by benchmarking and interviewing three companies: Trello, Egg Agency, and Solutions Joint Stock Company (S3). Trello which has a strong reputation among collaboration tools companies could be considered as main competitors of Odd Expert. It is belief that Odd Expert could learn from its successful social media campaign. Egg Agency and S3 are B2B startup companies based in Vietnam with global target customers, so that they could offer their experience perspectives to help Odd Expert to market its products on social media appropriately. The researches were conducted around one month from December to January which included contacting and interviewing times.

Although there is a plenty of available resources such as books, journals and blog posts about social media published in recent years, it is not easy to find exactly critical success factors of social media marketing plan for B2B startup companies. As a consequence, it would take much time and effort to compose and select the most applicable ones.

1.4 Key terms

The study would focus on several key terms: social media marketing, B2B startups, critical success factors and benchmarking. By definition, social media is an e-platform which allow users connect with their friends and relative, allow them to create and share useful contents such as articles, pictures, videos daily. Social media marketing employs social media to create valuable contents to encourage audience interact via like, share, comment on their social networks (Diamond and Singh, 2014). B2B startup refers companies who prefer to sell their products and services to other businesses instead of customers (B2B Definition, cited 10.06.2015).

Christine and John (1981) described a definition for critical success factors in their research:

“Critical Success Factors (CSFs) - CSFs are the limited number of areas in which satisfactory results will ensure successful competitive performance for the individual, department or organization. CSFs are the few key areas where “things must go right” for the business to flourish and for the manager’s goals to be attained.”

CSFs are considered as essential key values that companies must plan to get advanced in their businesses. CSFs not only define how companies are able to achieve goals and objectives successfully, but also increase company competitiveness. Hence, businesses, especially startups which understand clearly their critical success factors for specific products and services would achieve a plenty of advantages in their target markets.

Benchmarking is about to compare company with other similar ones based on specific objectives. It helps managers of company learn professional lessons from precedence, receive suggestions to improve their own products and services, as well as develop high quality business to become outstanding in market. (Håkansson & Nelke 2015, 102).

2 B2B STARTUP AND SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING

2.1 Current trends of social media marketing

Social media marketing is suitable for companies at all sizes and types, ranging from small startups, to medium businesses and multi-continental corporations. There are thousands of successful marketing stories told every year which prove the influence and power of social media in business world. The effects of social media on daily life has been dramatically growing in the last five years; more than 1,730,000,000 users which lead to million pictures, videos, and statuses are posted every minute. The number of users has a tendency to increase sharply in the upcoming years because of their social networking with friends and families. As a result, it is possible that social media could provide statistics and evaluation on how people communicate with their relative online, as well as their online habits via their regular activities. It means that businesses are able to reach their target clients and markets by taking advantages of those useful information. Literally, up to 97% of marketers utilize social media to develop proper marketing strategies. (Gregorio 2014, cited 17.05.2015).

Content marketing is getting more and more social nowadays. It is obvious that, once content has been created, one of its primary goals is to reach as many audiences as possible. By utilizing social media, it becomes less complicated to archive that objective. (Gregorio 2015, cited 17.05.2015). DeMers (2014b, cited 17.05.2015) shared the similar perspective and added it was important to develop a strategy for content distribution, since this was one of two core pillars to create a highly reachable and widely visible content. For best results, marketers are advised to select appropriate channels to share their content by identifying specific and attainable goals, desired actions and types of message (McPhillips 2014, cited 17.05.2015). It is worth to note that, besides traditional media such as texts or pictures, audio and video can be utilized in content creation process as powerful tools to improve brand awareness and encourage user engagements (Gregorio 2015, cited 17.05.2015).

However, organic reachability of social media content is usually less than expected due to the high volume of published stories. For example, a typical post on Facebook is visible only for 0.073 percent of total audiences (Gregorio 2015, cited 17.05.2015). Another research conducted by

Forrester Research Inc. also revealed that published contents on Facebook and Twitter could only engage small amount of users with 0.7% and 0.1% respectively. Surprisingly, Instagram was the leading social network in terms of customer engagement. The number of user interactions on Instagram was doubled in 2015 at 4.213%, compared with 2.261% in 2014. (Elliot 2015, cited 26.01.2016). Therefore, paid advertising on social media is a solution that companies apply to increase reach and engagement of their social contents. It is reported to bring vast benefits and profits for businesses. According to marketing report published by Salesforces.com, Inc (2015 State of Marketing 2015), 70% of surveyed marketers spent their budget on social advertising, besides, 38% decide to transfer their traditional mass advertising to advertising on social channels. Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and LinkedIn are mostly popular channels where businesses would like to invest.

Real-time social media marketing is considered as a potential marketing strategy which is preferred by businesses and corporations. As usual, marketers have to spend plenty of time on developing marketing plans for products and services; however, it is completely different when applying real-time marketing. It utilizes the good timing moments such as current latest trends which are followed and controversially discussed by users to evoke engagement. As a results, marketers could receive a bigger benefits of fame as well as profits. (O'Connor 2015, cited 18.05.2015). A benchmark conducted by Immediate Future (2014, cited 19.05.2015) showed that 76% of audience engagement was increased thank to real-time social marketing; customer satisfaction and positive brand sentiment, as well as greater social media effectiveness, were also achieved a high percentage, correspondingly 58% and 44%. However real-time social media marketing is not always a perfect solution for brands in terms of increasing engagements. The problem is due to the fact that marketers do not have sufficient time to consider what they should publish on social media. Nevertheless, real-time social media marketing is worth to try because of its rewarding results, despite of challenges and risks. Among known networks, Twitter is the best channel for real-time marketing since Twitter itself is real-time base platform where users enable to update latest news every minutes. The research of Kerns, author of book Trendology, was revealed that a real-time post during major events would bring 1200% lift in retweets per followers. (O'Connor 2015, cited 18.05.2015).

Focusing on mobile social media is the last hottest trend due to the fact that smart devices become more and more ubiquitous (Gregorio 2015, cited 17.05.2015). Globally there is 1.4 billion users accessing social media by using their mobile gadgets beside laptops and desktop computers

(Ovum 2011, cited 19.05.2015). Kolowich (2015, cited 20.11.2015) revealed that up to 78% of U.S Facebook users accessing their social media channels at least once a month by using mobile. For Twitter, the number was 60%. Other channels like LinkedIn, YouTube, and Yelp also gained high numbers of page views and search; LinkedIn, for example, got 250% higher than in 2013. Bosomwort (2015, cited 19.11.2015) added that the average time of U.S mobile users spending for Internet activities was 2.8 hour per day, 9% higher compared to 2.4 hour of desktop users. As a consequence, marketers are recommended to optimize their contents for mobile marketing campaigns together with social media to spread influences of brands. Moreover, communication between customers and marketers are increased because users prefer to feedback when using mobile phone. It would build a long-term relationship based on trust, belief and satisfaction. (Relander 2014, cited 19.11.2015).

In a nutshell, the digital world changes rapidly so that it is essential for businesses to update the latest marketing trends to adapt to market needs and develop successful plans in specific industries. If they could not follow movement of era of marketing, they themselves would be dismissed from “the battle” (Patel 2014, cited 16.11.2015). After all, companies that update and apply modern social marketing trends to spread information about products and services, attract customers, raise brand awareness have a higher opportunity to be successful.

2.2 Relationship between B2B startup and social media marketing

B2C startups have realized the advantages of social media and eagerly applied it into their general marketing strategies. However, according to Bodnar and Cohen (2012, 4 – 5), B2B companies are in practice more suitable for social marketing than B2C. Firstly, marketers in B2B businesses tend to have a closer relationship with their customers and prospects to understand their behaviors, habits and desires. That familiarity and clarity provides a major advantage when doing business with them. Secondly, B2B companies are usually leaders in their field in terms of developing new industries or innovating existing ones, thus, they can leveraged social media as a platform for spreading their expertise and educating potential customers. Thirdly, one of the main goals of every businesses is to maximize revenue while minimizing budgets. Social media can be regarded as a lever to help reduce cost per lead and enable businesses to do more with less. Fourthly, it is obvious that one primary advantage of social media is the ease in building relationship. This characteristic aligns with the environment of B2B business where contracts, prices and sales cycles are heavily

relationship-based. Finally, B2B marketers are already pioneers in investing in social media without realizing it. Publishing newsletters, quarterly magazines and other marketing tactics are part of social media marketing methods which provide valuable business stories to integrate with customers via contents.

B2B businesses utilize social media as a first channel to create valuable contents in content marketing. Up to 87% of B2B businesses, especially startups desire to publish and spread their message on social networks for long-term development. The 2014 B2B Content Marketing Trends in North America showed that 91% of surveyed marketers used LinkedIn to distribute their content, making it the most preferable social network for B2B business. Twitter, Facebook and Youtube followed by 85%, 81% and 73% respectively. Depending on the objectives of companies, business leaders should select several appropriate channels to enlarge a solid presence. It not only helps enterprises to have better communication with customers, but also strengthen brand image among target markets. However, many B2B startups disagree and prefer to presence in as many networks as possible. It makes situation even worse because managing multiple channels requires a contribution in human resources and budget, which is challenging for companies with limited incomes. Besides, the useful and meaningful data are not well-prepared to attract customer. (Burdett, cited 22.11.2015).

To utilize social media channels wisely and maximize its benefits, Kiss Metrics (How to Use Social Media to Drive Traffic for B2B Companies. 2015, cited 22.11.2015) suggested to B2B five useful advices. Firstly, B2B companies, which are usually associated with boredom and lack of appealing, should discover interesting angles of their products and services to create advertising. Instead of primarily concentrating on features of products, they are recommended to think of customer cares and satisfaction. Secondly, tone of “human sign” is added to general communication as many as possible. For example, when writing contents on blogs and social media channels, “person voice” is preferred to use because it removes gap between sellers and buyers. Thirdly, it is advisable to recruit employees who have practical experiences and valuable social media understanding to manage social channels. Fourthly, integrating social media with content marketing is to spread messages widely. The better contents are created, the higher customer awareness companies can reach. Lastly, LinkedIn is a first social media channel that B2B startups is advised to develop due to the fact that it is a professional social network where 90% companies, business leaders and workers often access. It also has valuable guidelines from business experts that startups can learn from.

3 CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS OF SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING

3.1 Preparing a social media marketing plan

There are several factors which need to be considered when planning a social media marketing strategy. The four considerations below could be seen as more important for B2B startups.

3.1.1 Setting goals and objectives

To build a successful social media marketing campaign, B2B startups cannot forget the most important phase of defining goals and objectives. The more specifically goals and objectives are set up, the more victoriously companies are able to achieve. It is even critical for businesses who have less or no reputation among their target markets, competitors and potential customers.

Goals explain the desires and expectations of companies in their businesses, and how far businesses should go to reach their target for long-term development. Objectives, meanwhile, are specific purposes in a short-term plan which help firms achieve long-term goals. Hence, it is essential to set suitable, attainable goals and objectives to understand the industry. Depending on situation of the companies, there is a collection of objectives that should be pursued from the beginning: raising brand awareness, strengthening customer relationship, and increasing sales and conversion rates. To gain the best achievement, it is important that objectives should meet four criteria. Firstly, objectives should be arranged hierarchically from the most important to the least ones, and executed sequentially to reach short-term plans for better long-term goals. Secondly, they should be measurable, e.g. increasing 15% of ROI during two business terms. Thirdly, they are realistic objectives, not a wish-list thoughts to prevent companies from bankruptcy. Lastly, companies should follow consistent objectives through their business plan to firmly succeed. Those goals and objectives are necessary for new entries to build the first impression in the competitive market because they would help B2B startups to transform paper plans into practical actions. (Kotler & Keller 2010, 50 – 51).

3.1.2 Understanding target customers, influencers and social media experts

Strong customer relationship is a key factor in business achievements, especially in marketing because it could help companies to increase lifelong development. In reality, companies are unable to succeed without reaching clients. B2B startups are required to understand target customers in order to develop products or services that fulfill customer requirements. Additionally, doing marketing research to understand consumer behaviors and habits is a must for better communication. When analyzing demographic data of customers, such as ages, genders, incomes, favorite, and motivates, companies are able to define their ideal clients for long-term plan. It would guide them to create appropriate contents on social media to adapt to demands of audience, as well as spread fame of businesses. As a result, sending valuable marketing messages to potential clients would produce a full-score victory in the success of social media marketing plan. (Kotler & Keller 2010, 144 – 145).

Together with target audience, B2B marketers should devote themselves in the position of influencers. They are professionals who can affect reputation of companies among buyers, business partners and competitors by their perspectives on social media channels. They are also powerful users who often share their reviews of products and services with other customers. In a nutshell, they contribute to customer buying decision. It is essential for B2B startups to integrate and communicate with influencers to gain trust and belief. Actions such as announcing product updates, releasing new versions or giving free testing products are useful to convert professionals into supporters. Consequently, influencers would raise their voice on company products. It is no doubt that having affirmative opinions from them help companies to build strong name in target market. (Kotler & Keller 2010, 188 – 193).

Social media experts are also good partners that B2B startups should concentrate on connecting with because of their priceless social media knowledge. They are specialists who quickly update and experience the latest trends of social media world. It is possible for them to answer questions such as which channels should be used to achieve customers, or what kinds of data audiences are looking for. By following them, it is possible for B2B marketers to evaluate and determine business objectives. Additionally, social media experts are linked to companies and brands like influencers, and they are involved in all communication activities of the businesses. Under their advocacy, startups can raise their presence in the market. Hence, nothing is better for business reputation than positive reviews and feedbacks from professional ones. (Kotler & Keller 2010, 260, 290 – 291).

3.1.3 Using social media as a tool in market research

Doing market research is a necessary step for any companies before entering new market because they could understand the current situation, customer demands and interests, competitors and themselves in both short-term and long-term. It would help to implement product development and marketing strategies for better customers reaching.

In the past, doing market research for B2B startups were irritating because it was a time-intensive and high-cost process. Fortunately, the development of Internet created valuable and affordable networks, namely social media channels to solve the problems. Many entrepreneurs start applying social media channels into their market research as cost-effective and in-depth tool. By using social media channels, businesses are able to track real-time insight of customers, then use those aspects as profitable information for business purposes. Products and services, for example, are immediately updated to adapt consumer needs, instead of planning a month on surveys and study groups with low-updated data. (Kathleen 2015, cited 6.11.2015).

With an unlimited border and a huge customer base, social media channels also help companies to broaden their scope of market research. It is easy for firms to expand their research in various countries and continents from a diversity of ages, genders, religions and incomes. On the other hand, the demographic obstacle is completely removed because of the connection on social networks. Users is able to comment, share and like their preferable information on similar channels. (Kathleen 2015, cited 6.11.2015)

3.1.4 Building strong online community based on social media

With the advanced development of digital world, users are able to communicate and discuss current business issues with others without geographical difficulties. Companies often create extranet communities where they are able to get opinions of customers for improving products and raising company images under eyes of customers. Besides old platforms like blog and forum, social media is recognized as one of useful communities where communication among users, influencers and suppliers are flourished. (Mangold & Faulds 2009, 358-361).

Online community is considered as suitable alternative channel for companies to interact with their customers via marketing activities. A friendly and trustworthy society enables a good foundation for building relationship with customers, a belief from customers to the brands and an integration among customers. Moreover, brand engagement and brand awareness can be increased and strengthened firmly via reliable content of community (Mangold & Faulds, 2009, 357-361). Another advantage of having a strong community is that advertising cost could be reduced significantly because existing and loyalty users introduce brand to their families, friends and colleagues with belief and trust. To sum up, an online community is a strong network of relationships among sellers with brands and image, products and services, buyers and their social circles. Additionally, the larger growth of community is, the better benefits enterprise is able to achieve. (McAlexander, Schouten & Koenig 2002, 39)

In recent years, it is believed that users have more demands and expectations from the brands they are shopping. Besides quality of products and services, they expect to have extra after-sale-services with better interaction and communication from sellers (Diego 2010, cited 07.12.2015). It is “a must mission” for any businesses to create their community because it performs many important factors and tasks on behalf of the brand. Crezeo (10 Brand Community Statistics That Every Marketer Should Know 2015, cited 12.10.2015) revealed in its survey of 500 Forbes companies that building a strong brand community helped firms not only in customers collaboration but also in decision-making (Figure 1).



Figure 1: Brand community statistics (Crezeo, cited 10.12.2015)

There are several steps that businesses need to follow if they prefer to create community on social media. First of all, it is about which kinds of channels should be used. There is a plenty of social media channels nowadays; however, each has different features which apply for different types of customers and partners. A wise firm should know their target and messages to make a smart choice for social media channels. A recent survey “The 2015 Social Media Marketing Industry Report” by Social Media Examiner revealed that LinkedIn was the leading channel for B2B with 80% of B2B and 56% of B2C. Facebook, on the other hand, was mostly preferred by 68% surveyed B2C companies while only 53% of B2B businesses selected it into their marketing strategy (Stelzner 2015, cited 20.06.2015). Secondly, it is recommended to have community managers who are responsible for posting reliable information, writing high quality blogs, discussing and sharing their opinions about latest issues, answering customers’ question, interacting with other famous and related communities (Patterson 2014, cited 11.12.2015). The managers are required to be also friendly and caring to listen to audiences and make them feel special and stay informed with brand and products in long term. This strategy also expands brand image among customers, their related and friends. More importantly, the engagement between customers and marketers is strengthened. (Baldus, Voorhees & Calantone 2015, 981). Last but not least, posted contents should be updated, trustworthy and relevant to community to attract curiosity of target audiences. They are successful keys in attributing community that bring customers closer to brand and products. Furthermore, well-designed contents would engage customer relationship for success of brand through facilitating desires of audiences. In fact, the power of online community via blogs, comments and feedback as well as rating of customers sharply increase the influence of brand community. Additionally, it is important to choose right day, right types of content and right context to maximize efficient of content marketing on community. As a consequence, nothing is more essential than a brand community which has strong attention from its loyalty and new customers. (Chauhan & Pillai 2013, 41 – 43).

3.2 Evaluating social media channels

There are many social media channels that B2B startups could use to optimize their social media marketing plan. However, this thesis limits its scope to evaluate three following social networks: Twitter, LinkedIn and YouTube according to requirements from the commissioner.

3.2.1 Twitter

Twitter, with more than 320 million active users, is the largest and most popular microblogging globally which provides users short form of communication to broadcast and share their activities, opinions. Audiences can easily post tweet on their profile by including a link to any concerned web contents (blog post, document as well as video and photograph). More importantly, posts, which are favorited or retweeted by a user, not only go one-to-one but expand to larger audience group internally and externally. Twitter with short but powerful text grows rapidly and becomes one of the most important and effective social media channels for any businesses from different sizes. (About Twitter, cited 8.6.2015).

According to Statista (Distribution of Twitter users worldwide from 2012 to 2018, by region. 2015, cited 11.08.2015), the numbers of Twitter audiences are distributed differently around the world. Asia Pacific is in the first rank with 35% of users, following by North America and Western Europe with 22% and 15.9% respectively. Meanwhile Central & Eastern Europe only has 7.3% of users (Figure 2). Hence, top 3 could be potential areas that many companies should develop their business first before expanding to other regions.

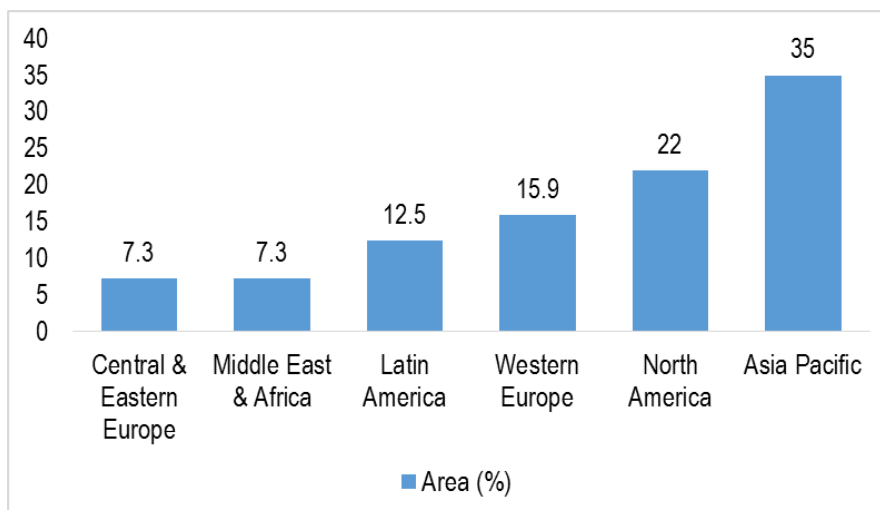


Figure 2: Distribution of Twitter users worldwide 2015, by region (Twitter: regional user distribution 2012-2018, cited 8.11.2015)

Possessing a large amount of customer data, Twitter launched Twitter Analytics in 2011 to support businesses to analyze their audiences. Based on data of following and followers, this tool provides concerned statistics to companies' Twitter account: the numbers of visitors, impressions, and followers during a period of time. Demographic information such as location, gender, interests, etc.

are also included in the monthly report, so that firms can compare their development and evaluate their strengths and weaknesses for greater consequences. Depending on the purpose of each business on Twitter, the internal criteria like goals, objective, marketing strategies and external criteria like customer demand, geographical location, and competitors are benchmarked properly to return the highest result. (Twitter, cited 08.05.2015).

As a real-time blogging, in which latest news are reported instantaneously, Twitter assists businesses to update market trends and willing of customers punctually. User of Twitter are from diversified backgrounds which attract organizations and corporations who expect to discover their consumers appropriately. Hence, product management of companies could be implemented suitably; meanwhile, marketing plan could be addressed to fit industry needs. Businesses could build firmly customer relationship by short but useful tweets. Twitter is believed to be an additional channel to integrate social media marketing into general marketing strategies. It is possible to apply Twitter for both B2B and B2C companies; however, it is better choice for B2Bs because corporate name branding and use of functional appeals of B2B is higher than B2C (Lacy 2011, 340). Because of its advantages and benefits, over 83% of B2B enterprises has their presence on the network in 2015. Moreover, many brand-new and lesser-known B2B startups considered Twitter as the primary channel to build reputation from their audiences. They firmly believe in long-term success of Twitter that explains the reason why a significant 65.8% of marketers increased their budget for advertising on this channel. (Stelzner 2015, cited 20.06.2015).

It is essential to prepare a suitable marketing plan on Twitter in order to build reputation and increase ROI. However, a phrase "how to do" is still a question which should be answered smoothly. It requires enterprises use key activities of Twitter (tweet, retweet and favorite) wisely to share valuable contents and conversational topics with related users. However, high quality messages are not guarantee to utmost attract attention of audience unless tweet timing is calculated exactly. An example of this strategy is that, Monday is for Promotions, Tuesday is for Behind-the-Scenes, Wednesday is for Helpful tips, Thursday is for Customer spotlight, Friday is for Feature industry experts or news, Saturday is for Community or industry spotlights and Sunday is for Focus on people (Create your Twitter content strategy n.d, cited 21.06.2015). Benna (2015, cited 30.07.2015) suggested that tweets should be updated at 12 pm, 5pm and 6pm to maximize effectiveness. Based on the real-time factor of Twitter, it is fundamental for firms to analyze activities of their customers, market trends, and social media marketing strategies of competitors. Thus, they could build appropriate contents that trigger curiosity of readers and pursue them to join the conversation. To

analyze competitors with different experiences, meanwhile, teaches companies lessons of customer engagement, social network management as well as business failures. As a results, improved versions are released to support businesses strongly. The phrase “how to do” also mention impacts of customer services before, during and after sales in getting successful. Outstanding contents are not enough if companies forget interacting with audiences by answering their questions and discussing related topics. They must have an approachable communication style to build a friendly and authentic environment for their questioners. Literally, it would make clients satisfied and keep them as loyalty customers in long-term. It not only strengthens brand awareness but also increase web traffic for search engine optimization (SEO) by a higher numbers of customer engagement. (Create Your Twitter Content Strategy, cited 21.06.2015). Survey of Schneider on Social Media Today (2014, cited 21.06.2015) showed that, consumers prefer to spend 20% to 40% more when they receive appropriate answers from providers. Twitter believes that with those tips, their B2B audiences can attract target audience successfully.

3.2.2 LinkedIn

LinkedIn is the largest social media platform for professionals and businesses to connect with each other, establish new relationships and expand business development. The site was founded in 2003 and by 2016, it has more than 400 million users in over 200 countries and territories. As can be seen in Figure 3, most of its users are originated in EMEA (Europe, Middle East and Africa) regions (127+ million), while people who come from Asia and the Pacific are accounted for 78+ million. (About Us | LinkedIn Newsroom n.d, cited 06.11.2015).

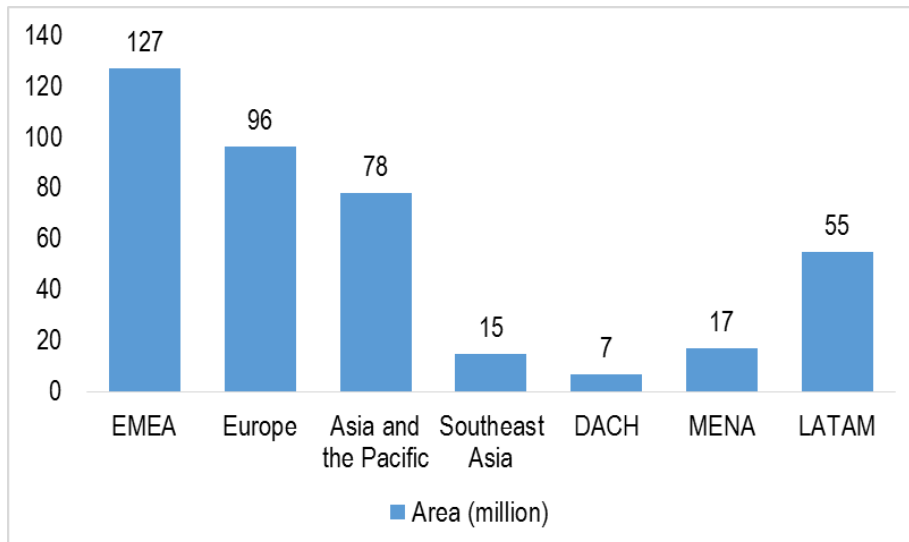


Figure 3: LinkedIn users by regions (About Us | LinkedIn Newsroom n.d, cited 06.11.2015).

More than 2.6 million company (including Fortune 500) has their account on LinkedIn and keep their presence updated. The first reason behind this phenomenon is that, to have a company page on LinkedIn help to increase brand awareness via showcase of products, reviews, and customer recommendation. The network boosts 227% higher generating leads of companies than Facebook and Twitter provided that they create valuable contents. The other reason is, business leaders could share their leadership thought to gain themselves as well as companies higher attention. Those advantages explains why a plenty of entrepreneurs and businesses from different B2B startups to big companies with huge reputation spend their effort on LinkedIn to expand their relationship with experts and influencers. There were 83% business decision makers use LinkedIn as specific tool to make final conclusion. Plus, LinkedIn is used for businesses or both businesses and personal purpose rather than personal use only (Figure 4). It obviously reveals that the personal connection between people to people is gradually transferring to business to business. (Srivastava 2014, cited 6.11.2015).

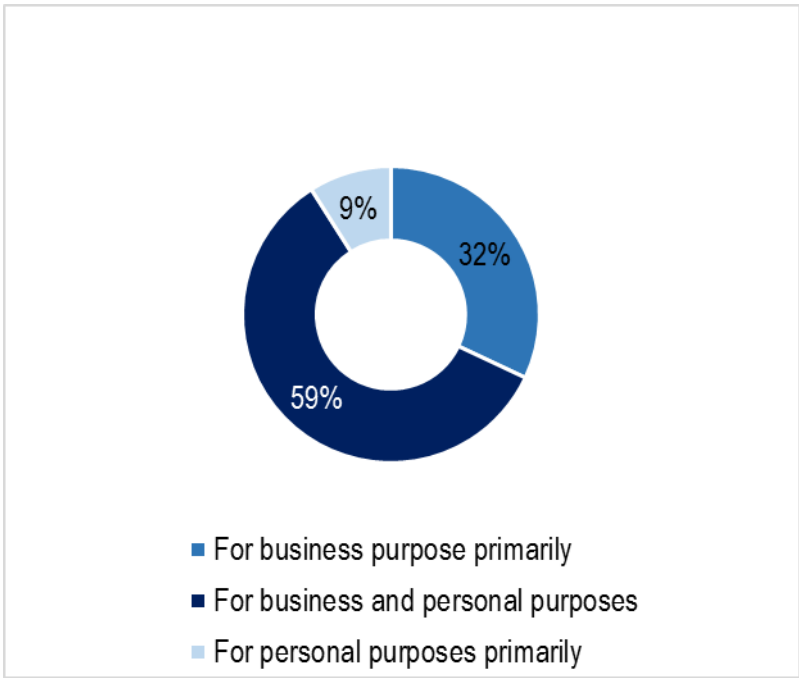


Figure 4: How B2B Decisions-Makers are using LinkedIn (Srivastava 2014, cited 6.11.2015)

In order to utilize LinkedIn successfully, companies should follow those recommendations to become professional in LinkedIn world. Firstly, creating LinkedIn page with a strong company profile i.e. basic information such as short introduction, link of website, industry, types of business, company size and headquarters must be precise and updated. In fact, those data bring really great visibility and credibility of the company and they can build the first and positive impression to customers and partners. Looking at the qualified profiles, visitors can start building trust and companies can start increasing their name. Secondly, business leaders should post creative contents and topics which are followed by LinkedIn users. Moreover, subjects had better relate to products of companies because it would introduce advantages of products as well as give advisable solutions. Good contents carry good conversations which boost traffics of LinkedIn page and website of firms. Growing value leads via search engine and website traffics is one of the first steps that businesses would like to do because it decides how popular companies' images are. There are over 5000 businesses researches have been done by HubSpot to analyze the traffic of LinkedIn; it is announced that LinkedIn has 2.74% of conversion rate and three times higher than Facebook and Twitter. Finally, it is vital to build connection and rapport. Companies cannot survive without cooperation so that being active users on LinkedIn is a compulsory requirement. Besides posting and blogging on own pages, firms can join group or even create a new group to discuss and associate with users. Hence, companies can connect with others within their industry. (Srivastava 2014, cited 6.11.2015).

Building influence in LinkedIn a must-do action and the question is: “Where are the most effective places to expand interaction among enterprises?” Knyszewski (2015, cited 07.11.2015) answered that it was discussion group where controversial cases were argued by the readers from diversified backgrounds. When becoming influencers in discussion groups, businesses quickly build good relationship with their audience and raise their fame on trust and satisfaction. The percentages of integration is much higher and more effective than companies’ pages or personal profiles (Figure 5). It is more important for B2B startups who are totally new in the industry. They could become great influence leaders if performing appropriate actions.

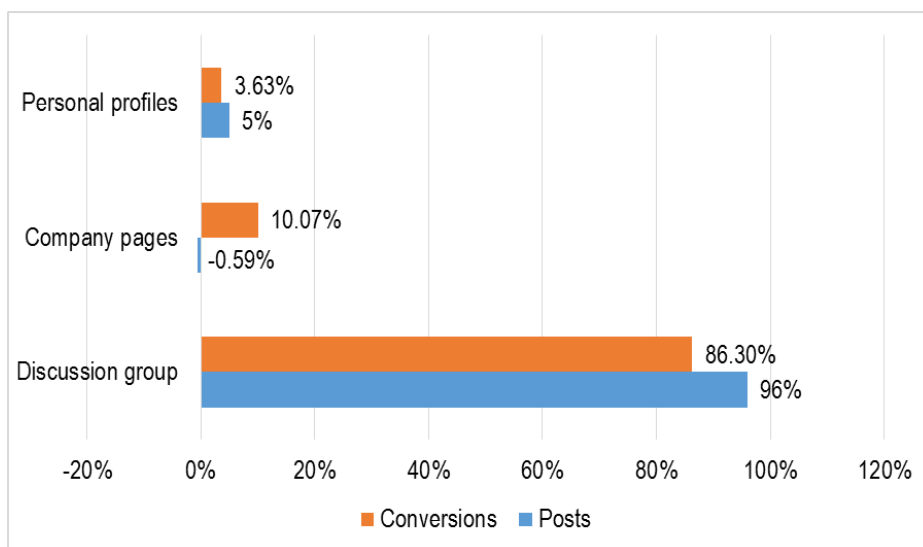


Figure 5: LinkedIn rate of posts and conversions (Knyszewski, cited 7.11.2015)

It is also important for companies to find suitable time for posting their content on LinkedIn. According to Benna (2015, cited 30.07.2015), the best time to post on LinkedIn is from Tuesday to Thursday between 9a.m and 5p.m. The reason is that most of LinkedIn users are business men and women who spend their time on professional and updated contents.

3.2.3 YouTube

YouTube was established in 2005 for sharing and watching videos. After 10 years, it becomes the most popular sharing video site in the whole world. Entering YouTube, users not only discover new videos as well as upload their original videos but also connect with people globally. A thousand of video with better and better versions are uploaded, shared and commented every single day

(Davidson, Liebold, Liu, Nandy & Vleet n.d, 293). Good quality videos absolutely make YouTube become a leading video sharing channels around the world. However, it should be a mistake if this study does not mention another important factor which builds successful for YouTube: audience. Their demands of excellent video contents, quality and quick loading time push YouTube to grow sharply, particularly when YouTube is not an only one channel sharing videos (Ciampa, Moore & Carucci 2015, 281 – 296).

As a result of non-stop effort, YouTube nowadays has more than a billion users which covers one-third of total Internet users universally. YouTube has its own advantages to be one of the bright start to advertise any kinds of businesses. Enterprises are able to integrate YouTube videos (introductions, tutorials, tips) into their social media for demonstrating and increasing brand awareness. Videos are believed to cut through all customer distraction and worry about companies; plus, it delivers directly companies' value to concerned listeners. When working with YouTube, it is not about sizes of businesses or budgets of companies that firms need to concern, it is about how firms can make videos to reach their business goals. In addition, it is also about the audience they are able to achieve; not only new customers but also existing customers or prospective customers who are ready to introduce companies' products and services to their friends and relative. If audience are attracted by companies' video contents, it will be a huge success. (Ciampa *et al.* 2015, 297 – 330).



Figure 6: Average Watchtime of B2B-Related Videos (Snyder & Hilal, cited 07.11.2015)

The power of video is not only for raising brand awareness, it is even stronger when B2B buyers spend their time on watching related videos during their purchasing decision. If only 7% of buyers were willing to do this in 2013, the number is up to 52% more after two years. The research of

Google on U.S YouTube data revealed that average watching time of 48% purchasers were more than 30 minutes (Figure 6). (Snyder & Hilal, cited 07.11.2015).

3.3 Measuring social media marketing performance

After having a major research in various sources, this thesis would suggest several key metrics as well as useful SEO tools to help B2B startups evaluating their return on investment of social media marketing plan. Hence, businesses are able to evaluate the effectiveness of activities on social channels and prepare appropriate plans for general marketing plan.

3.3.1 Key metrics to evaluate return on investment (ROI) of social media

Social media marketing is not able to achieve long-term goals without measuring results of ROI. However, "how to effectively assess social media ROI" is one of the most debated topics in the digital world. Unlike Google AdWords with specific and predictable brought in revenue for each campaign, it is almost impossible to forecast income for weekly tweets or posts. Many companies doubly know how much effectiveness of their investment for social media marketing and how much efforts and money they should go in. Thus, they have their own thought of social media ROI as well as measurement methods. However, when investigating to its core, social media ROI is referred as benefits that companies are able to earn after investing budget, time and effort in a period of time on attracting customers. (Jackson 2015, cited 12.12.2015).

To gauge social media ROI on the right track, marketers firstly need to select their specific goals that they prefer to be measured; without working on this phrase, businesses can be failure. That is the reason why this thesis mentioned defining goals and objectives is a must-have phase in social media marketing plan (see 3.1). When goals are officially clarified, the appropriate measurement metrics are showed up for further business evaluation. There are three key metrics to monitor: Reach, engagement, and conversion rate.

Reach is the first metric that companies, especially startups essentially achieve to get target customers. It is explained as the total numbers of followers/likers who are able to see posts of companies in any given point of time. On the other hand, it shows the impact of business contents to users. (Zeng 2015, cited 12.12.2015). By evaluating "reach", companies enable to understand

how to attract customers via valuable contents, then spread appropriate messages. Depending on social channels, there would be different ways to evaluate this metrics. It is connection on LinkedIn, followers on Twitter, likes on Facebook, views and subscribers on YouTube and visitors on company blog. Together with analytics tool like Google Analytics, companies are able to track above data and statistics by using insight analytics of those channels. Thus, the higher reach companies achieve, the better chance they make influence on their fan so that it is important for them to create high quality contents on social network. As a result, brand awareness is increased positively. (DeStefano n.d, cited 12.12.2015). To calculate “reach”, companies enable to use formula: Reach equals to the number of fans who see a particular post over number of fans online at the time. (Zeng 2015, cited 12.12.2015).

Next step after reaching customers is engaging with them for further planning: stimulating them to stick with brands and frequently purchase products and services. When customers engage with companies, they would prefer to buy more as well as to recommend to their social circles. It would be seen as the most valuable willingness when utilizing social media channels due to its revelation to strong relationship between marketers and clients. The metric tracks the growth of followers and their interactions via comments, shares and likes to analyze how engaged users are. However, measuring customer engagement is not only about calculating the total number of likes, shares or comments; it is about measuring the current health of engagement through various proportions, and their behaviors: stabilizing, increasing or decreasing. Additionally, each measurement would have different evaluation results because they are generated in specific period. (Zeng 2015, cited 12.12.2015). To raise the number of engagements, companies can follow the same strategy as to improve “reach”, which means to create curious and trustworthy contents to stimulate audiences. It is worth to note that in different channels, engagements exists in different forms: the number of clicks on links in posts of social networks; retweets, mentions and direct messages on Twitter; shares and comments on post of Facebook, LinkedIn and blog; and ratings on YouTube. Those statistics are trackable as the same method as reach. (DeStefano 2015, cited 12.12.2015). The calculation of engagement equals to sum of interactions across social media channels over total number of followers across all channels (Zeng, cited 12.12.2015).

Last but not least, it is about conversion rate which has the biggest impact on measuring social media marketing efforts. It is hard to define “conversion” because it eventually covers vast parts of social media goals. However, to explain in short, it is to changing website visitors to loyalty and paying customers. Conversion would show activities of users when accessing website and social

channels such as how they take next step to enter lead generation, how much time they spend on page, which page they are mostly interested. (Zeng 2015, cited 12.12.2015). It also reveals how goals of businesses like email signups, subscriptions, lead generation and sales work for brands. The best action to maximize social media marketing success is linking social media channels to general marketing plan, such as email marketing, content marketing. It not only stimulates existing customers to eagerly engage with brands, but also convert anonymous visitors into potential clients in future for sales lead process. Companies are able to track conversion rate depending on their objectives on social media marketing plan. Here are several samples that conversion rate can be measured: registration for content downloads, registration for webinar, and online lead generation form completions. (DeStefano 2015, cited 12.12.2015). To calculate this metrics, firms need to remember the formula: Conversion rate equals to number of conversions over traffic (Zeng 2015, cited 12.12.2015).

Twitter is mostly used by B2B to maximize social media presence. One of the best functions making Twitter as a leading of B2B social media channels is a virtual public platform of communication. It not only help individual and organizations build their personality brand profile, but also support their search engine optimization process. In reality, more than 90% of Twitter profiles are public so that users enable to search Tweets both from their followers and their non-followers. Hence, search results are used for data analytics and other related purposes. Additionally, Twitter's contents are real-time updated; then, audience can achieve valuable data punctually (Schaffer 2013). "Hashtag" (#) is the second reason that makes Twitter more popular and powerful. When using hashtag, posts of users can be reached by a thousand of other users who are outside their network but have same interesting related to posts. If the hashtag is attractive and trending enough, the numbers of reached audiences can be thousands or millions. Most of influential Twitter users are evaluated and ranked via their on-trend hashtags which are retweeted and favorited by other Twitter users (Holloman 2014). To become Twitter influencers by optimizing Twitter account, companies should follow its metrics about content and partner. It is important to prepare high valuable contents that are controversial and influential target customers which push them retweet and reply. Contents should include link to companies' website in order to increase web traffic and conversion rate. More important metric is connecting with Twitter's business providers who understand perfectly about Twitter to deliver metrics (Holloman, 2014). There are many partners of Twitter that companies can easily find, such as Attensity, Crimson Hexagon, Dataminr, DataSift, ExactTarget, Gnip, HootSuite, Mass Relevance, Radian6, SocialFlow, Sprinklr and Topsy (Lardinois 2012, cited 21.11.2015).

LinkedIn is a professional profile network for any businesses. When updating LinkedIn account, employers and employees are able to increase companies' brand awareness among concerned audience. The number of interaction is even higher when employees share the updates of their company on their own profile. By then, companies can be advocated to expand messages to target customers; even though LinkedIn was established as a personal network. Hence, creating LinkedIn account is not only about setting up companies' profiles itself but it is also about updating employee's accounts. It is because LinkedIn search engine firstly prefers to track down keywords and locations; when companies' name are updated under employee's profiles, it would help better trace. Fundamentally, the percentage of SEO-optimized would be increased perfectly (Schaffer 2013). Besides profiles, enterprises cannot ignore LinkedIn groups which are known as related business communities. There is no successful chance for a single business without joining a community. Being an active member, sharing related news and discussing relevant business topics are brilliant ways to introduce and strengthen brand's image to customers, business partners and LinkedIn influencers. Additionally, the traffic to company website can be raised by sharing on community. LinkedIn itself has analytics which can help companies check their engagement rate and amplification rate so that they can run business on the right track (Holloman 2014, 47 – 52).

YouTube is a strong social channel which easily reach customers via different kinds of video contents. It is possible for businesses to upload videos on YouTube as well as embed YouTube video into the company website. It allow to raise both website traffic and YouTube page traffic, and SEO performance is consequently increased. Customers can easily reach introduction videos of the company, as well as promotion ones. There are some metrics that help companies know where they are in YouTube video competitions. Firstly, it is Analytics Section that provides the full point of view about videos' statistics: demographics, geographic, watching devices, views. Then, companies would know where they good at and where not to improve situation. Secondly, Audience Retention is mentioned as customer attitude to videos; a low rate would show the video has no good attention. There are many reasons about videos time, videos content; however, it is important for firms to know their deficiency and seek for solutions. Finally, it is about View Count. If a view count is low, it means that videos are reached by the wrong target customers and they do not prefer to watch long video (Holloman 2014, 43 – 46).

3.3.2 SEO tools for measuring metrics

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is described as a friendly search method which helps individuals and organizations increase their website's traffics (for example: visitors, comments, questions) by capturing relevant traffic. Therefore, SEO converts visitors to potential consumers for marketers. With SEO tools, businesses are empowered to analyze their business situation, as well as approach their target numbers of customers and sales. (DeMers 2014b, cited 17.05.2015). There are many SEO tools which help companies optimize their market; however, this study selects to review two tools: Google Analytics and True Social Metrics. They have affordable price which is suitable for startup companies with low budget. Literally, the first one provide whole pictures of business from geographic to demographic, meanwhile the second one describes each social channel work.

Google Analytics

Google Analytics is a free SEO service established by Google in 2005 which provides statistics and analytics of websites by describing the whole pictures of businesses, so that individuals or businesses could understand the performance of their website. Because Google Analytics belongs to Google, it is integrated seamlessly with other Google products, such as Google+, Google AdWords, or Google AdSense. Accordingly, there is almost no limit to discover situation of website and social media channels. Companies are able to get advices from Google Analytics when sharing their analysis data to Google. They also receive benchmarking report from Google if they upload their anonymized analytics data to pool of similar industry. (Geary 2012, cited 14.11.2015). Up to 67% of companies in Fortune 500 (2014) selected Google analytics as its first choice of SEO tool.

There are plenty of fundamental metrics on Google analytics that firm can choose to evaluate their business; nevertheless, they should focus more on four following ones: acquisition traffic, bounce rate, conversion rate, and top landing pages.

Acquisition traffic can be called as channel-specific traffic which reports detailed information about audience visiting page during specific time. It also shows where they are from, which browsers they use so that enterprises can target on their potential customers (Ridley 2013, cited 15.11.2015). Additionally, full-scale digital marketing campaign is completely supported by channel-specific

traffic because it indicates which channels are more outperforming than the others (DeMers 2014b, cited 15.11.2015). There are four types of channels that any business should pay attention to:

- Direct traffic: It shows how many visitors visit website directly in specific time (for example: during a day) (DeMers 2014b, cited 15.11.2015).
- Referral traffic: When visitors click on links from other website that go back to businesses' website. It would be great if companies create valuable articles which attract readers so that they would link article to their website. It would help increasing referral traffic. Additionally, posting links on social media channels is a smart choice to connect users to website, and vice versa. (DeMers 2014b, cited 15.11.2015).
- Organic traffic: It includes visitors who enter website by searching on search engine such as Google, Bing, or DuckDuckGo. It is essential for businesses to create an effective keyword strategy which scrolls brands and products beyond the first page of search results (Ridley 2013, cited 15.11.2015)
- Social traffic: it indicates visitors who enter website via businesses' social media channels. One mission of businesses is to strengthen connection between website and social media channels since it provides more support for social media marketing, content marketing as well as SEO (DeMers 2014b, cited 15.11.2015).

A good website is the one which has more than 50% good rating for search traffic (Ridley 2013, cited 15.11.2015)

Bounce rate describes the percentage of visitors who leave website after visiting a page rather than reviewing other pages within the same site. During an interview about Web-analytics, analytics expert Kaushik (2011, cited 19.11.2015) cited that bounce rate was extremely important because it quickly found errors in website marketing process. Hence, companies enable to fix mistake and return business back on the right track (Lee 2010, cited 17.11.2015). Right keywords with a potential landing page make business become a star because of low bounce rate. It means there are a lot of visitors spending their time on website and discovering contents from customers which can lead to a higher conversion rate. However, there is not many websites that have right strategies for keywords and landing pages. It obviously leads to a high bounce rate. Inspire of having high bounce rate is not a good case, it could be considered as good in some situation such as clear contents and answers, no longer available information so that customers prefer to leave page earlier (DeMers 2014b, cited 15.11.2015). To reduce bounce rate, it is essential for businesses to

review behaviors of customers: how they enter site, which parts they spend most of time, etc. Thus, enterprise should look together referral traffic for social media, return visitors, search engine traffic and link from other websites to analyze bound rate. It would help them set suitable goal for bounce rate on Google Analytics. (Sen 2015, cited 17.11.2015).

Conversion rate, cited by Ratcliff (2015, cited 17.11.2015), is *“a key metric in ecommerce as it reveals the percentage of your site’s total traffic completing a specific goal. The higher the conversion rate the better”*. Up to 98% of company respondents showed their positive attitudes in success and influence of conversion rate in their digital marketing. It reflects marketing and/or sales goal such as signing in an account for annual report, entering an email for downloading free e-book. It is believed as one of the most essential metrics for evaluating profits and benefits of marketing strategies (DeMers 2014b, cited 15.11.2015). Setting up a goal in Google analytics full report reviewing is able to help companies to track their businesses’ process with. It figures out which activities bring the best conversion results in order to direct firms to a winning formula. Thus, the higher conversion rate is, the better result comes. Based on the result, making decision for time effort and budget is easier than ever (Sen 2015, cited 17.11.2015). In case, companies’ website have low conversion rates, it is necessary to recheck design, user offerings as well as disinterested audiences because they are the main reasons (DeMers 2014b, cited 15.11.2015).

Top landing pages are about pages that visitors firstly enter when they are accessing the website. By reviewing report of top ten landing pages, businesses can understand customers’ activities and demand. They can also know which pages to focus and which kinds of contents are attractive that rapidly improve site traffic. Google Analytics gives detail report of top landing page which could help companies understand customer demands. Literally, they enable to create attractive contents on websites and social media channels to get more attention of users. (Ridley 2013, cited 15.11.2015).

True Social Metrics

Analyzing social media channels plays important part in contributing victory of businesses. That is the reason why businesses must evaluate fundamental metrics if they prefer to measure social media success. If Google Analytics provides marketers the whole picture of business from different point of views, True Social Metrics presents deeper opinions for social media channels. Thus, companies could understand specific situation of each social media channel so that action plans

are prepared appropriately. There are four following metrics that decide success of social media that companies should focus when using True Social Metrics: conversation rate, amplification rate, applause rate, and economic value (Figure 7). (Kaushik, cited 19.11.2015).

TrueSocialMetrics		Metric	Diagnostic		
		Twitter	Facebook Page	Google +	Blog
1. Conversation rate	6.70	1.50	4.20	72.33	
Comments per post					
2. Amplification rate	17.15	0.00	12.35	2374.33	
Re-Tweets per post					
3. Applause rate	8.25	22.00	22.05	180.67	
Favorites per post					
4. Economic Value	1.02	0.80	2.00	0.00	
Value per visitor					

Figure 7: True Social Metrics is a good tool for evaluating social media success (Kaushik, cited 19.11.2015).

Conversation rate is about conversation between marketers and audiences as well as audience and audience. It is “comment” on Facebook, Google+, LinkedIn and “reply” on Twitter (per post). To get a high conversation rate, it is essential for marketers to understand deeply customers’ behavior, brand’s purpose, brand’s advantages and disadvantages, and value for customers. Aiming for higher conversation rate means contributing high valuable and meaningful conversations with audience. (Kaushik 2011, cited 19.11.2015).

Amplification rate describes the number of shares and tweets that are re-shared and retweeted per post by users. Raising level of amplification rate is not very difficult if marketers post valuable and incredible articles on social channels. It absolutely would attract audience share and retweet content on their wall. Amplification is even powerful than conversation rate because it not only reach customers inside but also outside networks. (Kaushik 2011, cited 19.11.2015).

Applause rate is like, favorite or pulses per post. Businesses should remember the important of applause rate because it would affect result of SEO search. Hence, the more endorsement a post can get, the higher content can be searched in search result. (Kaushik 2011, cited 19.11.2015).

Although aforementioned rates can describe whole picture of social media and its gap; they cannot lead to perfect success without evaluating economic value. Economic value generally describes financial situation for a social media campaign in short term, long term, and cost savings. If forgetting this metric, obviously, none of businesses would be successful. (Kaushik 2011, cited 19.11.2015).

4 SUCCESSFUL SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING OF CASE COMPANIES

In this part, the thesis would like to benchmark three companies, namely Trello, Egg Agency and S3 to learn from their social media marketing activities as well as their experience in measuring social media channels. The reason to select Trello is that it is one of the most successful collaboration software for B2B clients which the commissioner prefers to develop. Following activities of rival would be a good opportunity for the commissioner to learn and prepare for official launch and development. Egg Agency and S3, meanwhile, are B2B startups with valuable experiences in digital marketing, particularly social media marketing which get stable success in their industry. It is believed that their advices and perspectives could be great instructions for growth of Odd Expert.

4.1 Trello

4.1.1 Growth process of company

Trello is an online project collaboration application which was officially established by Fog Creek Software in 2011. It helps individual and especially organizations by providing Kanban paradigm, which has three working phrase: To do, Doing, and Done, for managing workloads. The numbers of users dramatically increase every years; from 500,000 users in July 2012 to 10 million users in October 2015, 20 times larger (Figure 8). (Ye, Gallagher, Cervino, Garber & Pyor, cited 22.11.2015). It is because Trello supports to variety of works and personal uses that combines from professional work of companies to individual school work (About Trello n.d, cited 22.11.2015).

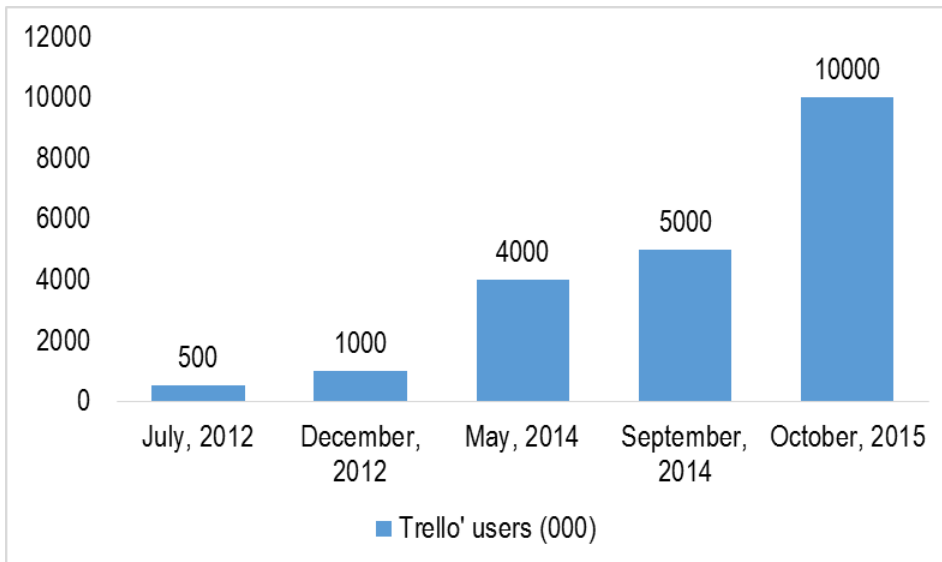


Figure 8: Trello's users between 2012 and 2015 (Ye, Gallagher, Cervino, Garber, & Pyor, cited 22.11.2015)

Trello is now available in various devices: PC, laptop, and mobile as well as different mobile platforms. Thus, there is no access limited for Trello's users during their communication and cooperation with their colleagues. Trello has many competitors, here are five strong ones: Wrike, Asana, Basecamp, Microsoft Project, and Nutcache. (About Trello n.d, cited 22.11.2015).

4.1.2 Success on Social media channels

After 5 years of hardworking, Trello finally enters global market with offices in different countries such as Brazil, Germany and Spain. Until now, Trello is one of the best project management software that is trusted and used by many individual and businesses all around the world. (About Trello n.d, cited 22.11.2015). In spite of the fact that it is impossible to have deeper look at data of Trello on social media to watch its generating leads, it is possible to learn from its daily posts where the engagement and interaction would be showed. It is where the commissioner could find suitable social media lessons from.

Twitter

Trello has a large amount of followers and likes on Twitter; 98.6K and 11.3K respectively (Figure 9) which reflects a strong engagement rate between company and its potential audience. It seems like readers prefer to update latest information of Trello via daily tweet. Understanding customer



Figure 11: Kickstarting Creativity: How Trello Powers Communication at Kickstarter (Trello (@trello) | Twitter, cited 5.12.2015)

However, due to the fact that telling stories of others was not enough to attract high user integration, Trello also updated its current situation and activities. One of its action was about to increase power at Kickstarter which engaged followers and users (figure 11).



Figure 12: 5 Reasons Why Modern Day Santa Would Be A Power Trello User (Trello (@trello) | Twitter, cited 5.12.2015)

In a nutshell, it must be said that Trello follows the right direction of creating a successful social media marketing strategy. Together with short text explanation, each post of Trello has an engaging

picture related to post, on-trend hashtags and website's link. This brilliant combination not only updates latest information of Trello to users, but also raises website traffic for better SEO. The number of retweets and favorites per posts are quite good; and by including the link on post, those amounts are even higher. For example, up to 1336 shares on total social media channels of Trello for article: *"The Mark Bittman Trello Board: How to Cook Everything, And Organize Anything Together"*. It leads to an interesting fact that this successful story get more attention of audience than other contents (Cervino 2015, cited 5.12.2015). It seems audiences prefer to hear from precedence's succeed; not only for getting higher inspiration but also for gaining trust of product and brand. The high number of shares was proved it right. Additionally, it is wise that Trello added recent holiday and activities to content of posts. It is right call-to-actions to attract customers' attention so that they reach articles via supporting of hottest hashtags.



Figure 13: 5 From Maker To Manager: Tips To Lead More Effectively (Twitter (@trello) | Twitter, cited 5.12.2015)

Together with contents directly link to products, Trello also shares relevant topics to Trello such as management skills, tips for startup, calendar for career year (figure 13) which attract attention of readers. The numbers of retweet and favorite are quite good within first day of publishing.

LinkedIn

Company has short but clear description on LinkedIn page in order to introduce brand and service sharply and effectively. Although Trello share its articles on LinkedIn, it is small numbers (1-2 posts per day) and do not have many interaction with customers there. Furthermore, Trello community (one of the most important part in developing LinkedIn) is not found. It seems like Trello would not invest their time and effort on LinkedIn marketing as much as Twitter.

YouTube

Trello, actually, has not many activities on YouTube; only nice videos since account created and small subscribe on YouTube (649 subscribers) (Trello - YouTube, cited 5.12.2015). It leads to questions of Trello's reputation: "How can Trello get more popular?" It would say although Trello does not have any marketing strategies on YouTube, it is very easy for users to search introduction, review as well as tutorials about Trello here. There are many organizations and personals uploading their videos to give guideline and advice to others. To be clear, if searching on Google with keyword "Trello YouTube", there are 94,700 results are found in only 0.27 second (Google Search with keyword "Trello YouTube". n.d, cited 5.12.2015).

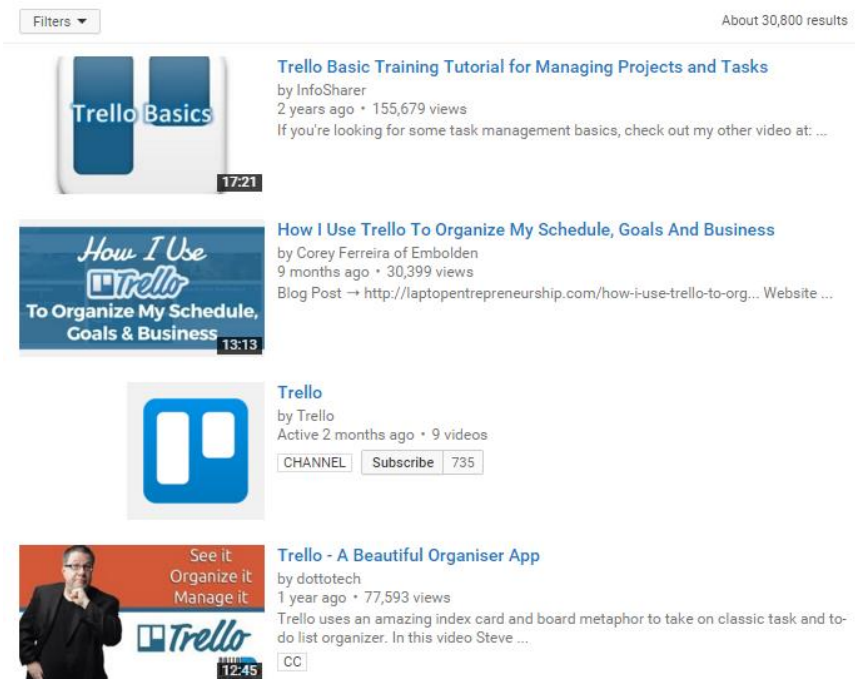


Figure 14: YouTube Search Result for keyword "Trello" (YouTube Search with keyword "Trello". n.d, cited 12.12.2015)

YouTube itself also show 30,800 results of Trello related videos (YouTube Search with keyword “Trello”. n.d, cited 7.12.2015) (Figure 14). Furthermore, each video has a plenty of views, likes, comments and subscribers. It is obvious that the first impression on videos of Trello as well as its product stimulate users continuously to review on YouTube. In long-term development, it is no need for Trello to have a marketing strategy on YouTube.

4.1.3 Trello active community

Facebook and LinkedIn are two social media channels supporting Group/Community for companies to communicate with their customers. Unfortunately, community does not a target that Trello applies itself to. After searching on those channels, there are no existing community of Trello.

Trello itself has a community of translations which interact with audience from different countries to help it develop languages themes. (About Trello n.d, cited 22.11.2015)

4.2 Simple Solutions Joint Stock Company – S3

4.2.1 General background

In recent five years, Vietnam has started growing dramatically both economically and technically, there are many retailers set up their own businesses; however, they have many serious troubles in managing and establishing. For example, the large numbers of inbound and outbound products are extremely difficult to control thoroughly, which make many retailers out of control and go to bankruptcy. Despite the fact that several online services are made to solve problems, they are too complicated to most of retailers who have not have much experiences with online solution, or too expensive for small businesses who have limited budget, or too professional for startups who only need basic business functions. Understanding this situation and preferring to give a support hand to Vietnamese growth, Simple Solutions Joint Stock Company was set up with the ambition to a build simple, friendly and useful service for Vietnamese market.

Simple Solutions Joint Stock Company - a Vietnamese startup company, which is as known as S3, was officially established in May 2012 after long period of researching market industry and contributing service. It was co-founded by two members Hoang (Eric) Nguyen (CEO) and Duy Huynh (COO) who both have many years of experience in different background. Target customers

of S3 are small and medium retail stores in Vietnamese market, as well as in South East Asian countries where the FMCG market are similar. Service of company is suitable for businesses at different scales, from just-opened stores to large chains. It means that S3's service grows with startup through every phrase of development. Service works smoothly to help retailers manage retail, wholesale, online storage, online customers, and liabilities of stores during period of time. Based on those information monthly report and daily report are sent to sellers to give them a visual of their business. One of the most interesting factors from S3 is that service can work and update information even when there is no internet connection.

The study would interview Mr. Duy Huynh (interviewed 15.01.2016), who has more than ten years in business management and entrepreneurs, is co-founder and Chief Operating Officer (COO) of S3. Working as the COO of S3, he tried to implement service to adapt market need as well as expand business globally to reach more potential customers. In long-term plan, he prefers to build S3 as a multi-channel platform where retailers, wholesalers, plants and brands are able to integrate and communicate freely and effortlessly by using service of S3 namely S3POS Application (Figure 15).

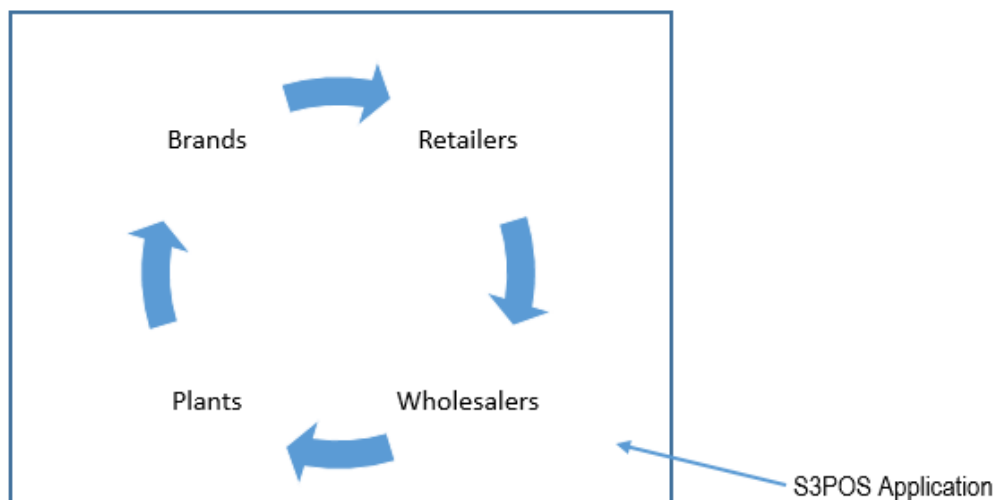


Figure 15: Future plan of S3 for S3POS Application (Interviewed 15.01.2016)

This application would help retailers, wholesalers and plants to conduct order generation, transition tracking, inventory management and POS management meanwhile helps brands to receive related data and messages from retailers.

Eleven questions were sent to Huynh via email to inquiry his perspective and personal experience of maximizing social media marketing for B2B startup. The detail of questions and answers would be found in appendix 1.

4.2.2 Social media marketing under eyes of experts

Talking about digital marketing in recent, Huynh mentioned three hottest trends. Firstly, social media marketing, especially Facebook marketing, was developing rapidly, providing that it could be the number one channel for at least two upcoming years. More and more, enterprises realized the importance and efficiency of social media to the growing process of businesses. As a result, it was not only to build brand awareness but also to raise ROI; it changed from advertising site to a direct sales channels. Secondly, it was mobile marketing. It was undeniable that development of mobile industry was rising rapidly; there were a millions of mobile users in whole world who use mobile to connect online social. Lastly, micro content marketing which could be a new concept for marketing brands. Instead of creating long contents for separate channels, businesses owners prefer to create short contents with specific message that were able to fit different kinds of channels. The best thing about those current trend was that businesses could link them together to set matching social media marketing campaign.

According to Huynh, social media was very essential for development of S3. As a startup company with limited reputation, social channel was its primary choice to build brand awareness and customer engagement via social media. It was strongly believed that trust of clients played an important part in gaining profits of company; the more credits business could get from consumers, the more benefits it could earn. As a consequence, S3 tried to create best contents, which included not only inbound business news, but also social news, on social media to attract the engagement and interaction of users. Huynh revealed that various contents could encourage company's audience diversified point of views as well as stimulate them to discuss for further ideas. Additionally, several articles of products from company's website were also posted on social media channels to update latest situation along with answering question of customers.

Sharing about suitable social media channels for B2B startups, Huynh thought Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter would be ideal ones. All in all, Facebook was the best choice since it got the largest number of user base rather than the rest. Furthermore, there were a thousands of methods by Facebook

support and experts' knowledge that any startup businesses could apply to reach their target audience from the beginning. If Facebook built phenomenal relationship between enterprise and end-users; LinkedIn, meanwhile, was a beneficial tunnel to help enterprise find the best partners and investors. Last but not least, short tweets from Twitter quickly spread information to customers, even though in his opinion, Twitter was not suitable for specific region, such as most of South East Asia countries. Huynh explained that S3 itself also used those three channels for their marketing campaign on social media. Since Facebook was the most popular channel in Vietnam, it spent most of time and effort on setting up a valuable fan page here. S3 used LinkedIn not only for searching potential investors, but also for strengthening its reputation by updating page of company as well as personal page of company staff. It was interesting that although Twitter was not a good choice for S3 at that moment, business leaders would like to gain more followers to prepare for the future when Twitter would be essential in Vietnam. Although YouTube is not used by S3 right now, Huynh said he intent to use it in upcoming year because of its unlimited advances. As a B2B SaaS (Software as a Service) startup company, Huynh believed that making product tutorial on YouTube could introduce it widely to end-users. Furthermore, brand awareness was increased sharply.

After creating right contents which attracted users, it was necessary to determine how productive social media marketing campaign was. S3 used Google Analytics, Kiss Metrics, Bufferapp and Bit.ly to evaluate the success based on three main KPI to evaluate: traffic of both social media and company website, the conversion rate of leads, and engagement.

4.2.3 Advice for B2B startup

Huynh did not give advices for B2B startups; however, he said choosing the right social media channels was important to reach target customers. He also shared that an online community was not a good idea for startup because it requires large amount of resources. S3 used to run an online community; unfortunately it had to stop. Even though the online community brought a huge of benefits and profits for companies: reaching customers easily, understanding customer needs to improve products and services, raising brand image among customers and their relative, it also demanded a large of property that startup with limited assets could not afford. Basically, it was an expensive idea for startup.

4.3 Account manager of Egg Agency - Marketing agency

4.3.1 General background

Egg Group is a brand-new Growth Hacking Agency specializing in Luxury Travel Specialist, Luxury Concierge, Digital Marketing and Startup Accelerator which was found in April 2012 by Mr. Sieng Van Tran. Since then, company presents itself in three countries: London, Singapore and Vietnam. It is seen as a metrics driven and have helped deliver digital strategies that have resulted in growth of over 40% YOY for its partners, even in economic downturn period (Sieng Van Tran | LinkedIn, cited 12.12.2015). The primary goal of Egg is to “bring together technology, data and creativity to find exponential growth in the Asia market.” (Egg Group, cited 12.12.2015)

Egg Group is divided into Egg Agency, which specializes in digital marketing to grow-hack companies in the luxury travel vertical, and Egg Accelerator which focus on providing better opportunities and supports for startups. Both parts are right hand and left hand of Egg Group that not only work independently to gain separate benefits but also integrate to bring best fame. (Egg Group, cited 12.12.2015).

Egg Agency is a small but growth-hacking agency of around 10 staff. Even though it is a startup company with limited experience and relationship, it gains and serve 4 clients that three of them are luxury companies and one is an international school. Enterprise is willing to work with international companies worldwide in order to expand business. The mission of the agency is to deliver digital marketing services to support business, especially startups. Furthermore, it strives to put itself in clients' shoes to get better understanding of business process and to develop the most appropriate action plan. By then, digital marketing is not the only solution of the agency supporting its consumers; web development, market research, business development consulting, and partnership development are also encompassed organizationally (Interview with Ms. Phan, 20.01.2016).

Ms. Phan is an account manager for Egg Agency. Phan has a solid background in digital marketing via self-learning and experiences gained from previous career. Her position requires to oversee the overall running of the agency from team management and client management to campaign execution and reporting. All in all, the connection between the agency members and the customers,

customers' need and teams' working result are basically managed by her. Facebook is mainly and importantly social media channel that she uses to link the agency to the clients.

The thesis is about optimizing social media channels to B2B startups so that I decide to find answers by interviewing her professional experience and expert opinion. Thirteen questions were orderly designed based on thesis topic to achieve the best solution which would be find in appendix 2.

4.3.2 Social media marketing under eyes of experts

As an expert in digital marketing, Phan assured that content marketing was definitely essential trend that any B2B businesses should discover and apply to their own. As a result of highly valuable and shareable content were created in multi channels, firms' target audience would be interested in and appreciate thoroughly. In her opinion, the more worthwhile content were given to clients, the larger outcome companies themselves enabled to receive in return. If they were startup, it would be a scoring points in the mind of their promising customers, registering cornerstone credit of businesses, and becoming authoritative solution provider. As a consequence, audience would like contents and prefer to share them with their social circle which helped to promote brand and gain much more influence. Likewise, social media was also one of the most leading channels for B2B entrepreneurs to consider and develop if it was not the most important one so far. Literally, almost everyone had their own social media accounts in order that firms could easily reach potential clients and adapt their need via analyzing their daily activities. Further, there were diversities of marketing activities with low cost that businesses enabled to optimize in those digital marketing channel. It was revealed by Phan that using budget wisely was the first objective of startup with limited cost so there was no chance to miss opportunity to deploy social media marketing campaign with zero spending. She also emphasized about the supporting link between content marketing and social media marketing. It was obviously to tell that contents was what brands could bring themselves from zero to hero by satisfy clients and social media was where they were able to apply contents costly and valuably.

Additionally, Phan cleared that all along with social media marketing, she would focus on "social factor" as the fundamental key that led to appropriate achievement of brand and products. It would be not about how many like companies could gain, but it was about how many customer absorption

could be counted. The reason was that companies enabled to fake the number of likes, but did not set up comments and shares of posts. Indeed, when post was published, audience preferably liked, commented and shared post in case they felt attracted to it. Companies could do nothing more instead of supporting them by answering their questions and discussing topic. The actual comments and shares were actual results that immediately reflected the engagement of customers to content and further to brand.

To prove herself statement, Phan shared her experiences with content by joining various startup projects as well as self-learning from other agencies which mostly brought her the greatest value. Correspondently, she would like to reach and share content marketing into various ways; social media content (Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn), multimedia content (YouTube), and companies' own content (Blog, Newsletter) before applying to her agency and other clients. To bring it clearer, she talked about her current work in which she administered content marketing and social media marketing to promote companies to their B2B clients. It was because of the fact that one of her customers was a luxury travel agent catering to other travel agents and it preferred to provide other agents priceless and useful travel guides. Facebook, YouTube, newsletter and blogs were particularly target channels that she encouraged her client transplant its contents. By then, it not only helped its partners planning trips for their customers but also made itself as the real expert in the travel industry.

Together with previous experiences by trained and self-learned, she also applied business criteria 7Ps including Product, Prices, Promotion, Place, Packaging, Positioning, People to get more accurate value. It is worth to say that the big picture of business plan was demonstrated clearly after answering related questions: *“What is the product? Who are the target audiences? Which channels the product will be distributed by? What is the budget? How much will the product cost? What should the brand feel like?”* They all supported great deal of planning a social media marketing campaign for B2B startup. Egg Agency was a good example of this term. It was a 3-year-old B2B startup with limited budget and few clients. Social media campaign was the first choice because of low expense and high effectiveness. As a result, several social media campaign were ran to find more customers for its business. At that moment, Phan said she started looking globally which kinds of channels that agency's target companies and their managers would spend time on. It was interesting that Facebook, Twitter and YouTube got the highest places in which their potential clients would like to be on rather than other channels. Because of the fact that budget was still the matter of agency and even human resources so that Phan and her colleagues had to select the

best matching channel where not only had a large amount of target audience but also enabled to expand completely marketing contents. After judging, Facebook was chosen to be the main channel not only because it adapts above requirements, but also because it had longer content, better ease of following and discussing.

Getting through two study case of both Egg Agency and its clients, it was significant that they were willing to broaden their digital present by sharing valuable content on social media channels. It meant that their content should be targeted affirmatively and developed appropriately to cater the need of their partners and partners' audience. The case already proved the great integration between social media and content in building social media marketing campaign for B2B businesses.

When starting a business, brand awareness, customer engagement and return on revenue are three important elements building success of companies that entrepreneurs cannot ignore. They would assume on objective and goal of the whole campaign to choose the most suitable element. Phan guaranteed that it was possible to study those elements on social media channels no matter what channels themselves. The important step was in firms' strategies and how they plan campaign to match market need and even their need. To classify profits each element brings in, business leaders enables to use different metrics such as conversion rate, amplification rate. Each metric would serve different target so it depends on mission of campaign to measure out. According to Phan, there was not specific example she could give, however, she suggested to use conversion rate as a useful metric to evaluate those three elements. She divided conversion rate into 5 phrases for better evaluation:

Phrase 1: When customers have no idea of brand and products/services

Phrase 2: When customers start getting knowledge of brand

Phrase 3: When customers considers to buy product from brand

Phrase 4: When customers contact brand for further products' information

Phrase 5: When customers officially become clients

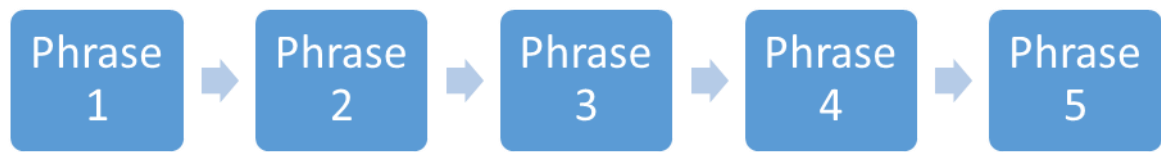


Figure 16: Conversion rate process (interviewed 20.01.2016)

It was a process which interacted each other (Figure 16). Companies could easily gain valuable results based on each phase; from phrase 1 to phrase 2, companies could get brand awareness, from phrase 3 to phrase 4, it was about customer engagement and phrase 5 was ROI. Brand awareness was concentrated on when business was totally new in the industry. It would be better if companies measured the number of times their brand was broached on social media before, during and after their social media campaign. Phan suggested to run sponsored ads on Facebook, for example, to get like on fan page as well as integrate with other famous startup partners to promote image of company. When brand got stable of fan basing on the high number of likes, it was essential to prepare for the next step of raising customer engagement. The assessment should drive on the comments, likes and shares of a single post. Customer sentiment should be also appraised carefully to get deeper perceptive such as customers were satisfied with services/products, customers felt interested in new article in blog. And if they had bad experience with brand, what was the mistake and how to fix. When running marketing campaign on Facebook, Phan focused on a content-led strategy. She not only posted related and valuable news but also encourage the discussion of her agency's fans and followers. She listened demand of clients and adapt appropriately by quickly answering and trustworthy promising of products/services. Equally, the interaction were increased highly. Lastly, when those phrases were ready, startups should look at ROI; how much they could achieve so far. On the other hand, this step would be included all above phrase. As a result, there were no more five phrases, there was only one phrase evaluating based on specific conversion rate which answering specific questions/goals such as how many people register for their email, how many people ask their services. If evaluating this way, owners of firms had better remarketing campaign target audience to get the most effective interaction.

4.3.3 Advice for B2B startup

According to Phan (interviewed 20.1.2016), there was no other social media channel that got huge popular than Facebook at the moment. With a large user base and support for social media

marketing, Facebook was not only suitable for B2C but also for B2B. As working experience of Phan with Facebook and advantages that Facebook bring, she preferred Facebook as the main channel for B2B startup. It was very important to maximize Facebook's features for helping businesses. She gave some must-learn lesson for B2B startup in general. Firstly, if companies would like to gain better knowledge of Facebook, she suggested to learn from Facebook guide for Business, Hubspot, and Jon Loomer blog because of the updated and trustworthy of information and data. Meanwhile Facebook's own Ads Manager would help them monitor and analyze the performance of Facebook ads; a combination of Facebook API script and Google Sheets also help to create data as well as highlight the most important metrics. Facebook itself had Insights part where business leaders could monitors page. If startups prefer to gain knowledge of competitors, other tools to monitor the competitors, such as SocialBaker and SocialOne could not be passed. In case of the fact that they manage many social media channels, Phan suggested to use HootSuite.

YouTube was the second choices she suggested for startup because its multimedia content was far more expressive and suitable for tutorial and guides. However, she also alerted that making video was not simple so startup should think clearly before making final decision.

Although she gave a plenty of good suggest to social media channels, she did not think startup should create their online community in here. Startup always had limited budget which could not afford the high expense of online community which required countless resources. Basically, building, developing, and maintaining the online community would demand endless time and effort. It was far more difficulty to have a sustainable community where all valuable and actual data were contributed. Phan shared that many communities failed, not because of their management or content quality but because of uncontrollable fake comments, hazardous content, online fights. Starhub.vn was an example of failure online community which was established by one of the most influential people in the Vietnamese startup community. Unfortunately, because of lack of care, the community was not able to attract its followers and the owner had to sell it.

5 CONCLUSION

With immense advances in linking customers and contributing brands, it is unsurprising that social media channels are utilized by various B2B and B2C companies as a useful marketing tool. They share valuable messages social channels to connect with customers, raise attention of customers and increase conversion leads. Although B2C, which straightly communicate with end-users, have more advantages and experiences in using those channels, B2B have their own strategies to spread the influences of brands and products. Literally, besides integrating social media with other types of marketing like content marketing, paid social media advertising, real-time social media marketing, classified purposes of brand awareness, customer relationship and ROI are set specifically to achieve their social media marketing plan. Because of the fact that social media marketing brings a plenty of benefits while requires small amount of expenses, startup companies with limited resources are extremely interested in optimizing it. Additionally, they should select appropriate channels to develop strongly rather than expanding their appearance on all ones since their small amount of money.

Together with updating latest trends of digital world to cooperate with social networks, it is important for companies to establish their critical success factors to be successful in social media marketing. Hence, they have to prepare a suitable plan for. In reality, they should undertake many sections; however, there are four factors which should be considered further: setting goals and objectives, understanding customers, using social media as market research and build strong online community. It must say that those factors generally help businesses run in the right track. However, after interviewing with both interviewers, they suggested that online community was only suitable for medium and large enterprises instead of B2B startups because of a huge requirement of resources and budgets. Ms. Phan also gave example of a B2B startup in Vietnam which fall as the mistaken choice on maintaining online community. Additionally, even Trello has good reputation and success in market, they would not prefer to invest on community since its large expense. On the other hand, B2B should focus on three left factors to reach market need and produce the most appropriate product. It means they must set their targets and choose suitable social media channels to start doing market research as well as communicating with audience.

The study showed that LinkedIn, Twitter and YouTube were the best choice for market entry of B2B startups. Those channels generally have large amount of user base; additionally, each one

has specific advantages which provide businesses an opportunity to be popular. LinkedIn has professional connection among business experts where startups could start connecting and being influencers by joining communities as well as writing valuable articles. Twitter has real-time tweets with hashtag which punctually update latest news of business world. Hence, startups could frequently follow to prepare proper real-time social media marketing plan. YouTube, meanwhile, allows to upload high quality videos as well as channel that companies could use to stimulate curiosity of users; plus, making them from visitors to potential clients. Trello, competitor of commissioner, has extremely good status in using those social network. Accordingly, the number of followers on Twitter and LinkedIn as well as customer interaction through comments increase noteworthy. It always publishes impress and controversial topics such as storytelling of customers, tips for managing workload, latest version of product for connecting social network to attract attention of readers. It uploads introduction and tutorial videos on YouTube from the beginning then asking influencers do the similar action to gain trust from customers. It is compelling that this strategy run effectively and interest other users to make Trello tutorial videos. Both Mr. Huynh and Ms. Phan, who had similar experience in B2B social media marketing, agreed that they were the best channels that B2B startups could select if they prefer to build their fame. Additionally, they recommended that Facebook was also excellent one that companies should not dismiss. Although Facebook was mostly used for B2C industry, it did not mean that B2B disabled to utilize Facebook. More and more businesses had their Facebook pages for introducing and advertising brands so that startups should see it as a great chance to be known.

Inspire of the fact that social media marketing brings many advantages and benefit to businesses in general, it is still controversial issue of measuring success of social media marketing that no one could be absolutely assured. Unfortunately, there are three common metrics which are mostly used to evaluate activities of social media channels: Reach, engagement and conversion rate. New businesses always have little reputation so that it is essential for them to prepare a plan such as valuable contents to reach target customers. The amount of likes and followers would reflect the number of reach users. The higher number of likes and followers, the better brand awareness is and that is the best moment to start building customer engagement and gaining trust from them. Unless businesses do have appropriately actions to incorporate with their audience, they would lose chances to be known among users as well as strengthen their reputation. Furthermore, their effort on reaching customers would not be utilized sufficiently. It has to say that above actions are to use for the final purpose: conversion rate. Only when startups have a consistent amount of customers and fame do they apply further profitable plan for their clients such as signing up for

online materials or buying products. As a result, those metrics would help B2B startups to understand their situation and achieve their ROI objectives from the beginning. Thus, they could convert visitors of website and social channels to loyalty customers as well as earn from nothing to a lot of things.

In fact, companies could base on those three to have their own strategies of measurement. Based on her practical working experience, Phan said that she only used five phrases of conversion rate instead of use three metrics for analyzing success of social media marketing: When customers have no idea of brand and products/services, when customers start getting knowledge of brand, when customers considers to buy product from brand, when customers contact brand for further products' information, and when customers officially become clients. Phrase 1 and 2 were for brand awareness, phrase 3 and 4 were for customer engagement and phrase 5 were for conversion sales lead. The reason was that B2B startups were totally new with no reputation so that she had to start from zero position to attract customers. Meanwhile, Huynh preferred to evaluate by using other metrics: traffic of both social media and company website, the conversion rate of leads, and engagement based on key performance indicator (KPI) of company.

After researching and comparing suitable SEO tools for B2B startups to measure success of social media marketing (reach, engagement, conversion rate), the study suggests Google Analytics and True Social Metrics because of affordable prices and useful functionalities. If Google Analytics provides a big picture of business on website and social network, True Social Metrics describes detail statistics of each channel. Literally, companies enable to understand their situation from different point of views so that their achievements are developed further as well as failures are solved. Huynh and Phan also recommended other useful tools such as HootSuite, Kiss Metrics, Bufferapp, Bitly.

There are several suggestions for the commissioner to be successful in optimizing social media channels. Firstly, creating a suitable social media marketing plan with four main actions that companies could not forget. Setting extremely strong goals and objectives from the beginning because the commissioner could create apply appropriate strategies and plans for effective benefits. Additionally, updating current trends of digital marketing as well as linking social media into other type of marketing. Although social media marketing itself brings huge advantages, it disables to maximize positive results without interacting with other marketing types. For example, mobile users increased dramatically all over the world; they spend much time on social media on

mobile. Hence, creating mobile friendly website and social network framework would attract more customers. Moreover, using social media as real-time market research to update market trends as well as customer demands which not only save time and effort but also be updatable. No companies could survive without understanding activities of market. Secondly, choosing appropriate social media channels. Though the commissioner selected LinkedIn, Twitter, and YouTube, it is suggested that Facebook should be also chosen because more and more B2B companies use Facebook as brand building channel. Thirdly, applying three basic metrics: reach, engagement and conversion rate as KPI for analyzing social media channels. Lastly, the commissioner should select right tools to evaluate those metrics.

The study also got conclusion for utilizing social media channels that would be useful for the commissioner (table 1).

Table 1: Opportunities, threats and time to participate in four social networks

Channels	Opportunities	Threats	Time of utilization
Twitter	It is a real-time blogging platform so that businesses can use real-time marketing to spread their messages. (#) Hot trend hashtags are frequently utilized to help business reaching more potential clients.	If companies apply a wrong real-time marketing plan, their reputation and fame could be affected by highly spreading speed.	The whole time of business.
LinkedIn	It is great channel for B2B startups to build relationship among experts, influencers and companies. Business leaders are able to become influencers by sharing their perspectives. Community is a leading channel in LinkedIn to increase brand awareness and fame.	Startups cannot utilize community because it requires huge resources and their limited budget are not affordable.	When businesses have stable reputations.

YouTube	It has a large amount of users who prefer to watch valuable video contents. Users can be helpful supporters when they create tutorial videos of products and services.	It takes times and efforts to make introduction and tutorial videos which is not suitable for startups.	When businesses have some good financial situation.
Facebook	It has the largest user base comparing with other social media channels. Many companies focus on developing their Facebook channels. Companies are able to reach potential customers with low expense when using Facebook advertising	The number of likes can be faked and the contents of Facebook are not reachable by potential customers because of plenty of shared contents of other companies.	From the beginning of businesses

As a result, it is believed that two research question of the thesis: *“What are critical success factors to be considered in building social media marketing plan?”* and *“How can startup companies get successful in social media marketing plan?”* are solved effectively.

6 DISCUSSION

When officially writing this thesis, I realized that it was impossible to finish it as my plan (during three months). Although social media marketing was quite popular and achievement methods were applied practically a plenty of time on B2C business, it was rarely used for B2B development. B2B companies themselves were truly confused of integrating social media into their general marketing plans as well as had no idea how to measure them usefully. It required me to do a lot of researches as well as read books to select the appropriate data.

During research, I preferred to choose the latest information and statistics of social media marketing and B2B in 2015 to give the best perspectives. Various websites published their social media and startup articles which were written under point of views of experts supported properly in comparing and analyzing. On the other hand, I also took data from the previous years like 2011, 2012 to give the big picture of digital media development as well as change of B2B in applying social media for its case. It was actually interesting of watching business growth process when generalizing diversified knowledge. Thing was more attractive since I noticed that advantages of social media was spread widely and effectively in case it interacted with other type of marketing, especially content marketing and email marketing. Mostly, B2B startups used LinkedIn, Twitter, and YouTube as social media channels instead of Facebook; however, Facebook was actually more and more applied for B2B because of its high interaction on brand awareness and customer relationship. Additionally, even though LinkedIn was good for building professional rapports and increasing images, it would not bring high results as Facebook unless LinkedIn community of B2B startups was set. Unfortunately, building and managing community would not be suitable for startups because of limited revenue and human resources according to answers of Mr. Huynh and Ms. Phan. They suggested that community only fit for stable businesses.

I also had some issues during my benchmarking research. I tried to measure social media channels of Trello to evaluate conversion rate, amplification rate; unfortunately, those information was unsearchable so that I disabled to have deep search on essential data. Luckily, Trello was active on social network which gave me a chance to analyze its actions and got appropriate lesson for maximizing effectiveness and influence of brand. If I had had an opportunity to take a closer look, the analyses would be better.

As mentioned above, social media marketing plan for B2B, especially startups was still a huge question mark that many business experts and influencer would like to answer. There was almost no practical or theoretical guidelines to instruct enterprises efficiently. More importantly, even though they were willing to apply social media for their businesses in recent years, they found it difficult to optimize perfectly because of misunderstanding between success of brand and success of social media channels. Hence, I tried to select the most relevant critical success factors from B2C as well as updated situation of B2B social media to create appropriate social media marketing plan. Plus, the interviews with two experts in B2B digital marketing gave me diversity perspectives for further understanding to utilize social channels successfully.

In a nutshell, social media marketing was very interesting topics because of its huge impacts on various types of businesses, especially B2B startups. Although the information was limited and this thesis only mentioned small part of doing successful in social media, I hope it would help the commissioner to approach industry trends and target customers as well as other readers to reach new viewpoint of social network. All in all, inspire of difficulties when doing this thesis, I believe I have learned many new and valuable knowledge.

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APPENDIXES

Appendix 1: Interview with Mr Duy Huynh

Appendix 2: Interview with Ms Rachel Phan Nga

Interview date: 15.1.2016

Background Questions

1. **Can you introduce about S3? (Year of establish, goals and objective, partners, customers, etc.)**

You can find here: <http://s3co.vn/about-us/>

2. **How did you end up with idea of establishing S3?**

My answer can be found at: <https://nguyenhuyhduy.wordpress.com/about/>

3. **Do you have long-term plan for S3? Please describe**

We are going to build S3 as a platform of ordering which can be connect the retailers to the wholesalers, and then from the wholesalers to the plants, and then from the plants to the brand. On that platform, S3POS Application is the key factor which be used by Retailers and Wholesalers as a tool of Order Generation, Transition Tracking, Inventory Management, POS Management. Moreover, S3POS works as a 2-way communication tool which can transfer the all of the messages through the system from the retailers to the brands.

Of course, we want to expand our biz all over SEA where the FMCG markets are similar.

Specific questions

4. **How do you think about current trend of social media marketing?**

Facebook is the #1 channel for social marketing and it's going to be #1 for at least 2 years. Mobile is rising so whatever you want to do on social, you have to make sure its work on mobile in order to deliver the best result. Social is not just for brand awareness and buzz, it becomes a direct sales channel

Micro Content Marketing is going to be a new concept for Social Media. It means people will tend to create a lot of short content which delivers a specific message instead of a long content for multi-purpose.

5. As a company with fast growth, how do you define the important of social media for your company?

To S3, social media is a tool to build customers' belief. It is the way we use to make the customers aware of who we are, what we can do and what we have done. I believe that once someone has put their belief in our honesty and competence, they are ready to buy anything of us when they need.

Nowadays, if not have social media, it is like making a business without a phone in the pocket or working in technical aspect without a computer nearby.

However, I have to say social media is better for B2C than B2B, at least from our point of view. We use social media as a tool for sharing contents, news, not for selling products and increasing brand awareness. Most of our customers contact us via Google AdWords and SEO Google, some of them call us.

6. Which kinds of factors do you evaluate to maximize success of your social media marketing strategy?

The knowledge and experiences of sales management is the key to open the door of success for S3's social media channels. There should be a coordination between the website and the social media channels. Website is the place to store the knowledge and information for the readers (or called customers) to look up or search for the solutions to the problems revolved around the products and services that we are trading. And social media is the place to exchange information and interact with the customers. The website must integrate the features and the contents from the social media and on the contrary, the social media regularly shares both old and new contents on website. Besides, social media needs to have its own specific contents to attract the interaction of the user, the contents should cover all the aspects of life, not keep within the bounds of our business. This makes it easy for us to access to more subjects, and open more opportunities.

7. Which social media channels are suitable for startup to advertise, especially B2B startup? Why?

Facebook. There are 3 main major Social Network Channels which are suitable for B2B startup: Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter. And from my point of views, Facebook is the best choice since it gets more and more popular than the rest. It's very easy to build your own community from the very beginning and you have tons of method to reach people.

LinkedIn is quite expensive for a startup even it's more valuable to reach the professional people in your interest industry. Anyway, it does not mean you will reach the right person. Twitter is not suitable for specific region such as most of South East Asia Country.

8. Which social media channels does your company choose for marketing? How do you think about those channels?

We use Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter.

Since, our target customers are "pop & mom" shop, so Facebook is the most suitable Social media channel for us.

We still need LinkedIn to reach the potential partners and investors. And today, LinkedIn is the quick way to show who you are and what are you doing. People tend to find our profile on the social network than read your "About Us" on your site.

Twitter does not work for us at the moment, but we need to prepare for the future. We start to build twitter content and get more followers 3 years ago. So when Twitter becomes something that our customers care about we will be the best one there.

We also think of YouTube in near future because it is good for startup, especially SaaS (Software as a Service) company like S3. We can make tutorial for users, review of products, etc. We cannot do it well now because of the fact that we lack of human resources. But we think it should be used.

9. How could measure success of your social media marketing performance? Do you apply any metrics to measure? If yes, please describe.

We have to create right content for right people at the right time. We have 3 main KPI to determine the success of Social marketing: Traffic (From social channel to website), the conversion rate of leads, Engagement via social plugin on our website.

10. Do you apply any useful tools for your business to analyze your social media channels?

We use Google Analytics and Kiss Metrics, Bufferapp and Bitly Tool to analyze the performance of Social media marketing. By the way, most of Social Network Advertisement Management

11. Do you build any community (among your company and your customers) for your business? How does it work? How do you think about community? Is it suitable for startup?

We did but stopped. It works, it really help you to reach closed to your customer. You can understand their requirement and improve your products and service. Then you have viral effect,

your current clients will bring more clients to you and they do it because they want to do it. That's a great value for any marketing channels.

When you can build a community, you can get a lot of benefit from that community depending on how "big" or how "deep" it is. That's something should do but not for startup. Building community means requiring a lot of resource (humans and moneys). With the limit of resource, startup cannot do everything, they have to focus on their main objects. Most likely, they are improving products/service and surviving. Community is a very expensive idea to think about.

Interview date: 20.1.2016

General Questions

1. Can you introduce Egg Agency and your position: Account manager?

At Egg Agency, we'd like to be known as a growth hacking agency. This means that we not only deliver digital marketing services to the clients, but we always strive to become involved in each and every step of their business process to study and develop the most appropriate plan of actions to help them grow. The solutions that we give are not limited to digital marketing but can also encompass others such as web development, market research, business development consulting, partnership development, although digital marketing is our main service.

As an Account Manager, my job is to oversee the overall running of the agency, including team management, client management, strategic planning, and campaign execution and reporting. Basically I'm the main contact point linking the clients and the agency members, making sure that we are attending to all the needs of the clients and our team members are delivering results.

2. Please tell more about your clients? (Size of companies, types, etc.)

Because we are a small agency of around 10 people, our client base is quite small as well. Out of 4 clients we serve, 3 are luxury travel companies, and 1 is an international school. The common point among all of them is that they all target the luxury, wealthy consumers. Also, our clients are all international companies based all around the globe.

3. How did you end up with this position in Egg Accelerator?

It's actually thanks to social media that I received this opportunity. To be more exact, it was through Facebook. Long story short, while I was still working in my previous company which was in the mobile & Internet industry, I was involved in a lot of startup and tech communities on Facebook. I don't remember how but Egg's CEO and my current boss friended me on Facebook probably during that time. Then I went to the UK to pursue my Master's degree and on the graduation day I posted a picture on Facebook. He messaged me asking "Congrats on your graduation. Have you had a plan upon coming back to Vietnam?" And that was how I started with Egg.

4. How often do you work with social media marketing on LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube?

I would say on a daily basis, as one important component of our services is Facebook marketing for our clients.

We have never done Twitter and LinkedIn marketing before, but have tried YouTube marketing, not on a regular basis though.

Specific questions

5. As an account manager, which kinds of social media marketing recent trends do you think important for B2B?

I would say the most important trend that any B2B businesses can definitely learn from (and apply) is content marketing. I myself have benefited a lot from the content created by other agencies and always try to do the same for our agency and other clients.

6. Could you give more detail? Describe one of content marketing you have done

I think it's already clear that content marketing is all about creating valuable and highly shareable content that your target audience will appreciate and benefit from. It's the most important in my opinion because when you give valuable content, you receive many things in return: such as scoring points in the mind of your target audience, registering your business as a credible and authoritative solution provider, and when your audience appreciate and like your content, they will be more likely to share it with their social circle, thus promoting your brand and helping you gain more influence.

Content marketing can be implemented in various ways, from content on social media (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn), multimedia content (YouTube), to content on your own channel (blog and newsletter). For our clients, we usually encourage and help them plan branded content on Facebook, YouTube, newsletter, and blogs. One of our clients is a luxury travel agent catering to other travel agents, so their blog usually includes valuable travel guides that help other travel agents plan trips for their customers, while proving that they are the real expert in the field. This is one of the cases when content marketing can be used to promote a company to their B2B clientele.

7. How do you see the importance of social media for startup, especially B2B startup business?

I would definitely say that social media is one of the most important channels that B2B businesses should develop, if not the most important one. The reason is not only because of the fact that almost everyone has a social media account, but also because it's a relatively low cost digital marketing channel with wide variety of marketing activities to choose from no matter what their budget and objectives are.

And as a startup business, budget is definitely a concern, and you can easily deploy a social media marketing campaign even when you have nothing to spend. So why not?

8. When planning a social media marketing campaign for B2B startup, which kinds of factors do you utilize to achieve the best results? Do you have any example for this?

Similar to any other marketing channels, I would look at the 7Ps: Product, Prices, Promotion, Place, Packaging, Positioning, and People. For example: what is the product? Who are the target audiences? Which channels the product will be distributed by? What is the budget? How much will the product cost? What should the brand feel like?

Let's take my company, Egg Agency, as an example. Let's say we want to run a social media campaign to find more clients for our business. We would not have a big budget, as we are essentially still a startup, so social media is actually our first choice of marketing channel as you don't have to spend a lot to run a social media campaign. Next I would look at our target audience, which are luxury companies, preferably in the travel vertical, and the channels that their managers would be on. That leaves us with Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. However, judging from the nature of Facebook with longer content, better ease of following and sharing information, I would go with Facebook.

Social media marketing must be social - no one can force your target audience to like your page, or share your posts, if they don't actually like them. And with social media marketing, anyone can immediately see the results - you can fake the follower number, but you can never fake the actual comments and engagement. As we are a digital agency and our clients are companies who want to broaden their digital presence, our content must be targeted and developed to cater to the needs of this audience. Which means that the content on our Facebook can concentrate on how we are

helping our current clients achieving better growth, any case studies we can give, tips and help with digital marketing.

9. Which social media channels are suitable for B2B startup to...?

- **Increase brand awareness?**
- **Raise customer engagement?**
- **Get high return on investment?**

If apply to your company, how could you tell?

In my opinion, any social media channel is suitable for all of the objectives above. What matters is not the channel itself, but is in the strategy and how the campaign is executed. For example, for my company, using the same channel which is Facebook, depending on each objective there will be different methods to achieve it:

- **Increase brand awareness:** I would run sponsored ads on Facebook to get more likes for our fan page, and partner with highly popular startup communities to promote our company.
- **Raise customer engagement:** I would focus on a content-led strategy, with engaging and thought provoking content being provided on our Facebook page on a weekly basis to encourage the discussion of our fans and followers.
- **Get high return on investment:** I would do all of the above, coupled with a remarketing campaign targeting people who have interacted with our content before to instantly remind and reinforce our brand in their minds.

10. How could measure success of social media marketing performance? Do you apply any metrics: conversion rate, amplification rate, etc.?

Again, this comes down to the objective of the campaign. If it's about brand awareness, I would measure the number of times your brand is being mentioned on social media, before and after the campaign. If it's about customer engagement, the measurements should lie in the comments, likes and shares, as well as the customer sentiment. If it's about conversion, you can monitor the leads and conversions coming through, for example, how many people download your marketing guide, how many people ask about your services.

There are many way to figure out conversion rate depending on campaign's objectives and goals. Here is one of them, dividing conversion rate into 5 phrases: Audience do not know brand ->

Audience know brand -> Audience consider brand -> Audience contact brand -> Audience become Clients. Brand awareness are phrases 1 and 2, engagement are phrase 3 and 4 and ROI is phrase 5.

Any metric serves a different purpose so the metrics will depend on the objective. As there is no specific marketing campaign we're talking about, I'm sorry I cannot give a clearer answer. However, my previous answer has talked about the different metrics that can be used in different cases.

11. Can you suggest some useful tools to help startup business to analyze its social media channels?

For Facebook, the best learning resources I use are Facebook guide for Business, Hubspot, and Jon Loomer blog. To monitor and analyze the performance of Facebook ads, I rely on Facebook's own Ads Manager, and a combination of Facebook API script and Google Sheets to automatically pull the data and create charts highlighting the most important metrics. For monitoring pages, I use Facebook Insights and other tools to monitor the competitors, such as SocialBaker and SocialOne. I also use Google a lot when I run into something I don't know.

Oh, and if you have many social media channels to manage, I would suggest you use HootSuite.

12. In case of B2B startup, do you think Facebook is a good choice? If possible, do you plan to use other channels?

Yes definitely. Facebook is the most popular social media channel nowadays, especially in Vietnam, and I don't think any other social media can rival its huge user base and support for social media marketing. And yes, if possible I would definitely consider other social media channels also. I personally think that YouTube is very good for startups as multimedia content is more expressive and suitable for tutorial and guides. However, making videos is a bit more complicated, so that's a thing to consider.

13. How about LinkedIn and Twitter? They are well-known as leading channels for B2B

I may consider them if we are talking about international markets, but here in Vietnam not many people use Twitter, and not everyone visits LinkedIn on a regular basis.

14. How do you think about building online community for B2B startup?

Maintaining an online community requires a lot of resources which may not be good for a startup. The biggest reason is the lack of resources.

In order to maintain an online community, you would have to dedicate time and effort to have a sustainable community which delivers real values. Many communities fail here, by not monitoring the content and the audiences closely, they can easily meet with many fake comments, hazardous content, online fights etc.

An example of online community that has failed is Starthub.vn. It was developed by one of the most influential persons in the Vietnamese startup community, but he had to sell it because he was unable to keep it up with his schedule.

I wasn't paying attention when it was sold, but I have seen other people mention that due to lack of care, the community failed to deliver great content and it was not beneficial for people to follow it anymore.