

# **Improving online marketing communications for small service business: case Meal My Day Oy**

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<p>The subject of the thesis is improving online marketing communications for small service business, company called Meal My Day Oy, that is operating online only. Company is rather new, started in June 2015. The purpose of the study is to help Meal My Day Oy to develop their marketing communications in order to gain more customers and thus increase their revenue. Objective is to discover ways to do this and give ideas for the first steps. The suggestions made are kept simple and when it comes to marketing in the Internet, it is not even advisable to make stiff plans. Online marketing is in constant change and new channels and ways to communicate are constantly arising. Therefore the focus is on basics, foundation where to build on.</p> <p>I have considered social media marketing, search engine marketing (SEM) and content marketing as the main areas to focus on. Social media is part of our everyday lives. Services like Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Instagram and LinkedIn are used for networking, job search and also to find new products and services. Peer recommendations guide our purchase decisions. Therefore companies need to be active in social media; listen, share, participate. Search engine marketing is vital for all online businesses as nowadays service providers are often looked up from the modern phone book, Google. Therefore optimizing the company's home page for search engines and even having paid adverts on search engines result page are important ways for improving findability.</p> <p>To make sure that the marketing actions have been correct ones and to know what to improve, companies need to follow up the results. When marketing online, this is easier than ever. Site owner can check in detail how many visitors their pages have had, which page has been the most interesting one, where the visitors came from, did they come again, how many of the visitors actually made a purchase and so on. All this information and more needs to be followed in order to find the weakest links and to make sure that the next visitors will want to come again.</p> <p>The project took seven months, from September 2015 to March 2016. This procedural thesis has been written utilizing the zipper method. Theories regarding the subject are accompanied with discussion. Questionnaire was sent out to the current customers to collect supporting data and answers were received during December 2015.</p>	
<b>Keywords</b> Online marketing, social media, search engine marketing, marketing communications, service business	

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# 1 Introduction

Within this thesis I will study theories of online marketing and how to improve online marketing communications of Meal My Day Oy, a small business that is operating online, in order to increase the number of customers and keep the customers they already have, additionally increasing the revenue. According to Tilastokeskus (2014), Finns are using Internet more than ever. In 2014 the usage grew in all age groups, when the ones using it most were the 25-34 –year-olds. Of the entire population of 16-89 –year-olds, 64% are using Internet several times a day. Therefore Internet is a remarkable marketplace and vital for online businesses.

When an online business is making plans for marketing, Internet comes in question naturally. Traditional marketing on magazines or TV is not as flexible and well targeted, and those will always come with higher price. Online marketing can be low-cost or no cost and the only limitation is imagination. For small business money is tight and therefore all efforts need to be cost effective. With this thesis I will try to highlight the most important aspects of online marketing communications so that Meal My Day Oy will know where to focus on when planning on their marketing actions.

## 1.1 Objectives and limitations

The purpose of the study is to evaluate the current marketing communications of the small-sized company called Meal My Day and to give ideas on how the marketing could be conducted in the future to make it more efficient and effective. Budget for marketing is very limited as the business is small, therefore all actions taken should be effective and innovative and with small price tag. This study will therefore focus on online marketing as it can be low cost compared to traditional marketing and can be easily targeted.

The problem is that even though the service already exists, the company does not have a clear plan on how to market it to the target audience. Online marketing is already ongoing, but as the amount of information and advertising that is received via internet is huge, Meal My Day needs to find ways to differentiate clearly from the competition and have their service known.

As the result of the study Meal My Day Oy should be able to develop their marketing to desired direction. The objective is to build awareness of the service among the target groups and thus increase the customer base. Meal My Day Oy considers that their average customer is either a approximately 30-year-old-female that is looking for easier

solution for planning a healthy diet that would also save time when shopping for grocery, or B2B clients, e.g. personal trainers, health clubs or gyms who are willing to offer diet planning for their own clients.

As the company in question is operating online already, we do not discuss the importance of company web site and online presence in that way, more so the focus is on search engines and on few selected channels where to market the service. If the company was larger, several marketing channels could be used. Now, alternatives need to be limited and focus needs to be clear, as one person cannot spend all day just marketing, but it needs to be done in shorter time. Presence in several social media sites and having a blog of their own could be a good idea, but I will discuss this later on to explain why that is not relevant for this company.

Internet is used for several purposes nowadays, marketing your product or service but also marketing your company and the brand. Internet and company sites are important also for recruiting purposes, as people are searching for career opportunities online. However, Meal My Day is not at the point of recruiting and therefore this part of digital marketing is also disregarded.

As the company is operating solely online, digital marketing is the obvious choice as customers need to be somewhat familiar with operating online.

## **1.2 Research method**

Thesis is a procedural study that is carried out by studying relevant theories on online marketing and by discussions with the owner and questionnaire sent out to the customers, accompanied with my own observations and experiences. From the answers and results I have made analysis on how the online marketing communications should be improved in order to reach the business targets.

Questionnaire was sent out to the current clients for several reasons: first of all it is considered to be more cost effective to keep the customers that you already have managed to get than to make new ones. Therefore it was decided to give the current customers a chance to give comments on how to improve the service and thus to activate them to use the service also in future. As there are several non-active users, this is also part of the marketing communications to activate them. Another reason was that feedback was needed on the content and key words used, therefore clients who are familiar with the

service can give more valuable information. Questions asked can be found from the attachments. Questionnaire was a quantitative study. I believed that I would have received so many answers that it would have been rather easy to make clear conclusions and recommendations based on those. There were several open questions to avoid leading the respondents, which turned out to be a good decision giving the low number of answers received. As the respondents needed to think more when answering, there is at least some use to the answers received.

Questionnaire was sent out by email to nearly 400 recipients, whose addresses were received from Meal My Day Oy's customer database, but only 23 answers were received. Reasons for this can only be guessed but personal belief is that as the questionnaire was sent by email, it may have ended up to the trash box or it may have been deleted among other irrelevant emails. The numbers of emails received by an average user is high and therefore we are accustomed to only open and read the ones that seem important to us. All that can be considered as trash, adverts or potential viruses are deleted without further thinking.

The answers were collected during December 2015 and the email addresses should have all been valid as those were used when registering to the service. As the company had only been operating for six months at that time, it is reasonable to assume that most of the clients are still using their email accounts from six months past.

All answers received are therefore very valuable and have been used as carefully as possible. Answers are not analyzed in detail in this thesis but used more as supportive material and as the questions were selected with Meal My Day Oy, part of the questions are more for their interest than for the study.

### **1.3 Thesis structure**

Thesis starts with introducing the company, the basic business idea and the current status of their marketing activities and online marketing. After this in the second chapter I will introduce theories on online marketing and digital marketing communications, more in detail social media marketing and search engine marketing. In each sub chapter I will also describe how these theories are today in line with the company's marketing activities and what should then be the next actions to polish the marketing. In the third chapter I will make summarize the thesis and discuss on the recommendations more thoroughly. Finally, I will evaluate my own learning during the process.

#### **1.4 Meal My Day Oy**

Meal My Day Oy is a small business, run by the two founders part time. Company was officially started in June 2015 but the planning and development was ongoing since April 2014. Meal My Day offers an on-line proactive receipt and food diary that is planned to support training and healthy lifestyle. It enables the user to build (or choose from ones that are ready) a personal diet that will help in reaching the goal that one has for example in weight loss.

Meal My Day will provide the user with accurate information on nutritional values as well as a shopping list for the week, taking into account most common restrictions on diet. Concept is new in Finland as most of the food diaries are such that one can fill in after consuming. This one is strictly for planning the diet in advance and similar service is not yet offered in Finland or anywhere else based on the thorough investigation the founders made when developing the service. During 2015 two services with somewhat similar idea were started in Sweden, but those were only for consumers with special weight loss diet. Also Tekes, Finnish Funding Agency for Innovation, looked into competition and couldn't find corresponding service.

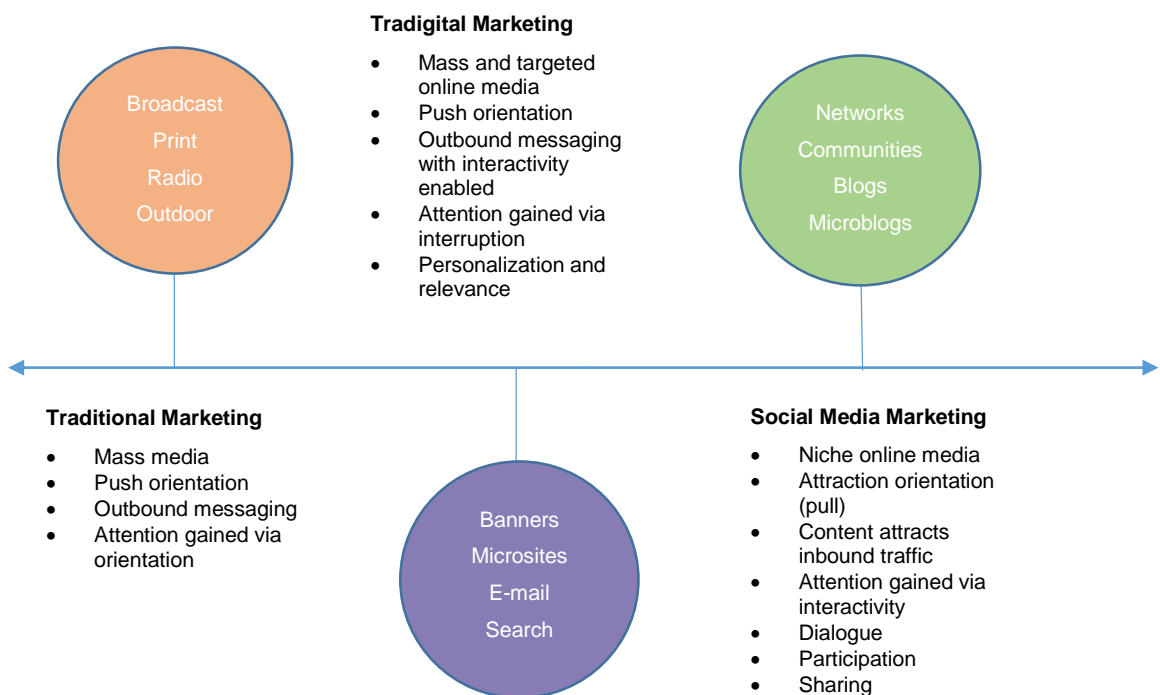
Target group is both businesses (personal trainers, health clubs, gyms) who can resell the service and use it as a tool in their own business, and private consumers (e.g. 30-year-old women who wish to have balanced diet and lose weight).

## 2 Digital marketing communications and online marketing

Marketing environment is changing and more and more marketing actions are taken online instead of on paper or in mass media like TV or radio. Even though those are still important in marketing, customer participation and open dialogue are becoming more important than before.

Armstrong and Kotler (2013, 31) define marketing as managing profitable customer relationships. (Therefore survival of any business depends on marketing, if done poorly no business can survive.)

In their book Tuten and Solomon (2013, 16) describe the evolution of marketing communication, as in picture 1. As social media has evolved rapidly, it has changed the field of marketing in just few years.



Picture 1. The evolution of marketing communication (Tuten, T., Solomon, M., 2013, 16)

Marketers can no longer just feed the products, ideas or services to the potential clients, but they need to tempt to learn more, to discuss, to participate and to eventually purchase and hopefully share the experience within their own networks.



Marketing communications is basically one marketing tool that is designed to communicate the service offering to the potential customers. Marketing communications can yet be divided into different communication methods: advertising, personal selling, sales promotion, and PR. (Karjaluo, 2010, 11)

Digital marketing communication is therefore the same but it is carried out via digital channels and using information technology. (Karjaluo, 2010, 13)

Advertising and personal selling can be of high cost and therefore not really suitable for Meal My Day. Also as Meal My Day is an online business, personal selling would only come to question when selling B2B and the other business being a larger company instead of private entrepreneur. Sales promotion includes coupons, discounts, etc. and are good to use but only offer short term boost and therefore not to be used as sole tool. Meal My Day has used these quite a lot in Facebook marketing, but other means have been more profitable and therefore sales promotion should be considered as secondary tool. PR includes news stories, sponsorship and events and are therefore more real and believable, more easily approachable than ads. PR can be the economical option and should be used. Direct marketing is very personal and targeted, it allows a dialogue and can be very tailored. (Armstrong, G. 2013, 390-392)

Due to digitalization consumer behavior has changed remarkably. It is getting harder to reach consumers via traditional marketing, either because the use of mass media has decreased or consumers have learned to block advertising better than before. Therefore having consumers themselves sharing information on the company and its product or services has become more important. Marketing communication has to evolve as the media behavior of the consumers is changing. It has become more important than ever before to gain interest, communicate and act up to promises made. (Juslén, 2009, 41-42)

Digital media has two remarkable advantages when compared to traditional medias (TV, radio and printed media); digital media is easier to target, therefore it can be more personal and tailored; also, it is interactive. (Karjaluo, 2010, 127)

According to Karjaluo (2010, 128-129) digital marketing communications is most effective when the target is

- to increase brand awareness (online advertising, content sponsoring, game advertising, viral marketing)
- to alter brand image and attitude (brand pages, online advertising, email- and mobile marketing, online competitions, games)

- to create experience (mobile- and email marketing, online competitions)
- to increase loyalty, customership marketing (marketing by email and mobile, brand related web pages and communities, games and promotions)

Juslén (2009, 145-148) is advising on segmenting clients for marketing strategy. When planning on online marketing, customer segmentation should be done based on the problems and behaviors different customers have. This creates customer types or personas, people whose problems the company's product will solve or who have some special interest for the company. When it has been described how the company can solve these problems and fulfill the needs, there is valid segmentation for the marketing activities.

At Meal My Day some marketing activities have already been made but there is no clear plan or follow up on the actions taken. Marketing is mainly done via social media, e.g. purchased adverts in Facebook and Google, some use of Instagram and Twitter. Internet pages are responsive to mobile phones, and the usability is being developed continuously. Printed material does not exist yet, but flyers will be printed in the future. Women's magazine Kauneus & Terveys has published small article in one issue and service has also been mentioned in blogs.

In the following chapters of the thesis I will discuss possibilities of social media marketing and search engine marketing, focusing on few main channels. Even though there are several marketing channels that companies may choose from, small businesses with limited resources must choose few to focus on. If it seems that chosen channels are not the correct ones and marketing is not successful, then of course strategy has to be changed. However, when marketing online only, the change can be made quickly. That is the beauty of online marketing, that one doesn't need to invest a fortune to be able to market effectively.

## **2.1 Social media marketing**

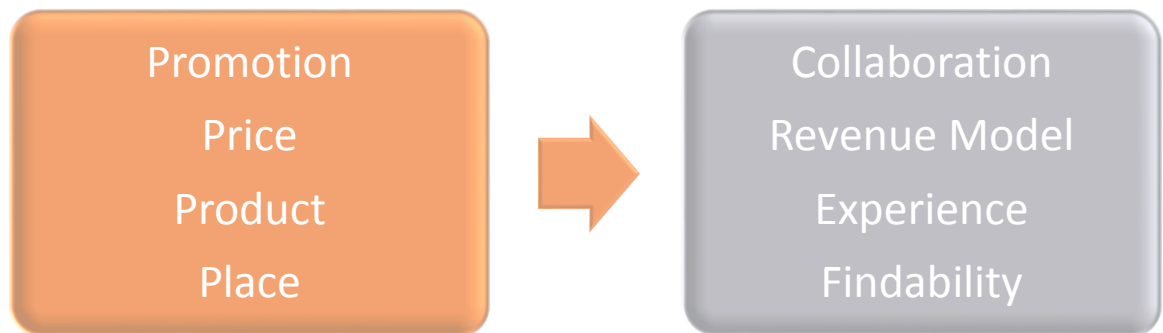
Social media is a rather new market place and therefore not that widely studied. I have gathered here some basic theories and tips on what should be taken into consideration when diving into social media marketing, but as most of us have some experience as users already, I keep this very simple and non-theoretical and add more my own opinions

and observations.

Definition of social media varies depending on the source but according to Charlesworth (2014, 292) social media is 'a collective term for the various social network and community sites including such online applications as blogs, podcasts, reviews and wikis' or 'sites where users can add their own content but do not have control over the site in the same way they would their own website'.

According to Korpi (2010, 7-8) social media is public web site that is easily reachable for reading and participating. Also there needs to be information that is useful for readers and to which they can contribute by participating to conversation, by commenting the content produced by others or by producing own content and allowing that to be commented on.

The word that does come up in every definition however is participation. Participation should therefore be added to the original 4 P's of how marketing is constructed: product, price, place, promotion, *participation*. Or this can be altogether changed to the CREF-model introduced by young marketers Salmenkivi and Nyman (2007, 219). The CREF-model describes the elements that are essential when marketing takes into consideration the social media and networking world. The new version of 4P's is shown in picture 2.



Picture 2. CREF-model. (Salmenkivi, S., Nyman, N. 2007, 220)

In this model collaboration stands for having the customers involved. When the customer has been co-operating with company's marketing or product development, this will generate strong experience, close customer relationship and also stronger brand image. With collaboration the customer can bring added value to themselves as well as to the company. (Salmenkivi, S., Nyman, N. 2007, 220-225)

Revenue model means that companies should look for alternative sources for income instead of just price. Competing with just price is no longer smart as sometimes the best offering the companies have, is offered for free. Also, price no longer determines the purchase decision as much as it has before. Alternative sources for revenue can be advertising and additional services. (Salmenkivi, S., Nyman, N. 2007, 251-263)

Trend has turned from owning to experience. Green values and ethicality are influencing consumers. Creating an experience for the consumer does not necessarily take endless amounts of money but it requires fresh ideas. In some companies when selling b2b, the experience has been made by marketing not product or service but solution. (Salmenkivi, S., Nyman, N. 2007, 264-278)

Findability refers to how easy it is to find any product, brand or person by coincidence or purposely. The product or service needs to be found from the right place at the right time – nowadays this place is Internet. This is where SEM is in crucial role. (Salmenkivi, S., Nyman, N. 2007, 278-286)

Korpi (2010, 12) also gives a great tip when using social media for marketing purposes: one should consider social media as cocktail party. You go there to mix and mingle, you talk to the people you know and get to know new people independently or via people you already know. Be smart and behave as one should behave at a party. Do not push yourself (or your service).

When stepping into social media first thing is to find out who are the target audience and look for them, listen and follow what they talk about and with whom. Listening is important as eventually when your service is under discussion, one needs to be ready to react. Whether the feedback is good or bad, it needs to be discussed and hopefully used for advantage. There might be a lesson to be learned. (Korpi 2010, 12-13)

When marketing in social media there is both paid and earned media: paid media is those paid placements of brand messages. Facebook alone earned USD 605 million in advertising revenue in 2010. Paid media are all the adverts in social networks. Earned media is the positive word of mouth, brand message distributed in social networks that is free of charge for the company and beyond control. The benefit of social media is that if company has content that is interesting enough, the public will share it and the message will spread easily. Obviously the same can happen when the information is negative. Therefore it is important to listen to all ongoing discussion and be ready to participate when necessary. Personally I believe that even negative feedback received in social

media is good publicity as that is when company can show the level of customer service, win back the complaining client and even gain more. The more brand related content is shared in social media, the better the ranking also in search engines. (Tuten, T., Solomon, M., 2013, 110)

### **2.1.1 Social networks and online communities**

According to Worldometers (2015) there are more than 3 billion Internet users globally and Facebook has 1,01 billion active users daily (Facebook, 2015). Meaning that 14% of earth population is using Facebook every day.

According to questionnaire that was made for the current clients, only half of them were following Meal My Day on Facebook. However, most likely even more of them are using Facebook and therefore perhaps they did not know it was possible or the content was not interesting enough. Having the possibility to communicate via social media, it should be advertised on the home page as well and the Facebook page should be updated on a regular basis. At the moment the activity is rather low, new updates could be published daily or at least every second day with varying content. In this case more is more. People were hoping to have some additional info that could easily be shared via Facebook or other social media: tips on foods that would be good cure for flu, healthy places to eat, where to buy locally produced food etc. This type of information is also something that could easily spread in social media to even wider audience.

One good way to get more followers in Facebook is competitions, but there should be other content on the pages as well. Having people comment and participate I believe generates more loyalty. Therefore starting discussion on topics like 'what would be a good new recipe to add to the service' or 'what are the followers' tips to fighting flu' could generate more discussion. For summertime perhaps healthy lists for picnic basket or tips for self-made ice cream. When people are asked to help and participate, they feel more appreciated.

Apunen and Parantainen (2011, 119-147) have written on how favors effect on clients. When you do something for your clients, they will feel forced to return the favor. Free consultation for example can result in orders, thank you can result in contact. Also negligence can result in pay back and revenge. Therefore sharing valuable information could result in orders or at least to shares. They also encourage to focus on phrasing, asking questions will always force the client to think.

Advertising in social media is also possible but not at all as well noticed as in search engines, as Facebook users do not log in to see adverts or make purchases. Therefore the click-through rate (CTR) is normally close to 0,05 % for a typical campaign. Click-through rate is a ratio of users who have clicked on a specific link to the total number of users who have seen the advert. It is used to describe the effectiveness of any marketing campaign taking place online. Good thing with Facebook advertising is the fact that the target group can easily be determined in detail. Knowing the target audience in this case pays back, as it can be chosen whether to advertise the service to men or women, married or single, young or old, whatever the criteria. (Juslén, 2011, 257-258)

Juslén (2009, 312-313) is giving five principles for presence in social media:

1. Define target audience and start listening
2. Join the discussion
3. Add value by producing interesting content
4. Study different services and choose the ones to use

There is no need to be present in all venues. You need to find out what are the places where your target audience is and be present there.

5. Measure results

Videos have so far been the best way to create content that spreads rapidly online. Today producing a video does not necessarily even cost much, as those can be made even by phone. Main thing is to keep the video short and clear, and if there is lot to say, make more videos. (Juslén 2009, 288-291)

One benefit of videos also that when made, it can easily be shared in different social media channels. However as making interesting videos can be rather challenging, videos are not to be considered as the focal point for Meal My Day.

Meal My Day is using Twitter and tweeting every now and then is a habit that should be continued. However, according to an article in Talouselämä (2014), only 16% of Finns are using Twitter and as it is not gaining users rapidly, the focus should be kept elsewhere. In case Twitter should become more popular later, it is good to maintain presence.

Whenever there is content to be published via other channels, it should also be tweeted. Tweets are also improving company's positioning in search engines result page, as each tweet is considered as a new web page. Two birds with one stone, as they say. In the

same article it is mentioned that 15% are using Instagram. The advantage of using Instagram is that all posts can be simultaneously posted to Facebook as well so that the presence in two social media environments are taken care of at the same time. As Instagram is based on photo sharing, this is something that could be done often. As the company is small business and the service is on food, taking photos of the meals that are based on the recipes from the service and posting those daily, would show that the food actually is easy to do, part of your daily life and looks good too! Additionally, photos gather more likes than posts with no picture, so spreading the word with nice picture is much more effective.

One aspect in social media marketing is timing: even my sister, age 13, knows that posting in Facebook at the right time means more 'likes' and comments. Therefore companies should pay attention to what is the most popular time for their target group to be online, in order to make their daily status update. On Coschedule (2015) Julie Neidlinger compiled studies regarding the subject and according to those studies best times to post on Twitter or Facebook are from Thursday to Sunday from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. Instagram users however are active all the time so there one could post at any time. Perhaps this should be taken into consideration when posting, as the goal is to get as many likes, clicks and shares as possible.

### **2.1.2 Blogging**

In his book Charlesworth (2014, 310) mentions 'Digital influence report' from 2013 made by Technorati Media, according to which blogs had big role in influencing purchases (31,1%), when Facebook came close behind (30,8%), followed by YouTube (27%). This research encourages to have the service mentioned in related blogs as often as possible.

Blogging is an easy and flexible way of communicating and it is a great forum to talk to your audience and inform of new products or improvements to old ones, upcoming events or any other news that you wish to communicate. Blog can also be used for brand building. As blogs should also have a possibility for commenting, this enables open discussion with clients.

Other advantages are that the more material you have on your site, the easier it is for search engines to locate your site and the ranking on results page improves. When writing a blog one should always keep in mind the keywords that prospects are believed to be using and add those to the text as much as possible to improve the findability.

Blogs are considered useful as part of digital marketing and Juslén (2011, 96-106) has dedicated several pages advising how to make a good blog. I will shortly describe his findings but as writing a blog is very time consuming, this will not be part of Meal My Day's marketing yet but will be considered later when business grows.

Positive reviews are studied to have a great impact on purchase decision. In one study even 90% of the respondents claim that positive reviews influenced their decision, whereas negative reviews influenced 86% of respondents' decision. According to same study over 60% of consumers are more likely to buy from a website if there are any ratings, comments or reviews posted at all. Therefore it is recommendable to ask for feedback and when positive, ask for permission to use it. (Levinson, J. Lautenslager, A., 2014, 86-87)

According to Parantainen and Apunen (2011, 93-95) people are followers and make decision based on examples. Therefore if you wish to have potential buyers to act, tell them what the others have done. If bloggers share stories of using the service and they have considered it useful, most likely the readers will try the service as well. Parantainen and Apunen have given an example from 2010 that when Michelle Obama wore clothes from Calvin Klein and Nina Ricci, their sales increased by 772 million dollars. Group pressure and public opinions are powerful forces. In the same book Parantainen and Apunen (2011, 104-105) tell about a study made by Kimberlee Weaver in which was discovered that people are more likely to believe in whatever has been repeated often enough. For example if one fact has been repeated three times during one meeting, it is as credible as if it had been told by three separate people. Therefore having the message served via several channels repeatedly will increase credibility and credibility will eventually effect sales.

Meal MY Day has already managed to have their service tested by two bloggers in Finland, one who is writing about fitness and other writing a lifestyle blog. These blogs have somewhat different readers, but still most likely fitting to target group of 30-year-old females. When Meal My Day was mentioned in a blog, it immediately generated plenty of visits to the site and several new clients. Therefore it is important to find new bloggers who could be interested in this kind of service and have them write about it.

Having a blog of your own could also be a good idea. That could increase discussion and also add more written content to the web page, which will improve the results in search



engine listings. Juslén (2009, 205-206) lists also several reasons why having a blog of your own is a good idea for marketer

- starting a blog is fast and can be done even for free
- it is easy to communicate with customers when commenting to blog is allowed
- blogging will enable you to start discussion and build relationships
- blog is inbound marketing (based on customers willingness as it builds interest, reputation online and increases natural appeal)
- means of providing useful information to (potential) clients
- way to differentiate from competitors and to establish a professional image

Having a blog of your own is however time consuming and requires commitment. In case in doubt whether it should be done, it might be a good idea to wait. (Juslén 2009, 208) Even though this channel is something Meal My Day will do when the time is right and technology is available, now is not yet the time to do this. As time is very limited, focus is better to keep on the other social media channels and having other bloggers to write about this service. While preparing for it, monthly letter to the customers could be something to think about. That would be a good way to test the writing skills and also a good way to find out what are the topics the customers are actually interested in. Also as the blog would be published on the web site and probably in social media, it could also be sent out by email, so that also the customers who are not following the company otherwise, would get regularly reminded of the company's existence.

## **2.2 Search engine marketing**

When choosing service provider, the common practice is to look up from the Internet for potential companies or choose the one recommended by a friend. Therefore it is essential for companies to make themselves visible online and ensure that customers will find them. In this section I will focus on search engines and how to utilize them in best way possible. This will be divided in two parts, search engine optimization (SEO) and search engine advertising (SEA), more thoroughly explained below.

SEM is used to improve visibility and ease findability. There are four important reasons why a company should be found on the search engine's listing (Karjaluo 2010, 133):

- Visibility on the right moment generates potential buyers
- Using the search engine is for information gathering and is not considered as advertising in its negative meaning

- Pages turning first in the listing will gain majority of visitors. Number of visitors decreases rapidly if the page is listed on any other result page than the first.
- Visibility on the top of the search results is prerequisite for fully utilize internet as marketing channel

In SEM it is essential to make difference between paid and organic search results. Paid results are such where the visibility is based on advertising space purchased from search engine. Organic results are then again based on the search engines data bases and how the information is classified there and that cannot be purchased. (Juslén, J. 2009, 113)

For Meal My Day Oy SEM could be an easy improvement point, as according to questionnaire made, none of the respondents found the service via search engines. Even though the number of respondents was minimal, this needs attention. Visibility in search engines should be immediately improved as it is vital channel for flow of customers.

### **2.2.1 Search engine optimization**

“In essence, SEO is the practice of making a website attractive to a search engine by presenting its code and content in such way that the search engine will assume that it will address a specific enquiry from a (human) searcher.” (Charlesworth 2014, 191)

Search engine optimization is based on keywords that are used on the web page both on the text and the code, and the links that lead to the page. For example in Google there are over 100 factors that contribute to the results, the most important of which are content, accessibility, linking and popularity. (Karjaluoto 2010, 133)

Studying the web analytics is useful, as the company should look into what are the most popular pages on their sites and what are the searched words that have led to their site. With these tips it is easier to increase the number of these popular words on the site to boost the number of visits.

SEO is not about optimizing the search engine but optimizing the web page for the engine. (Charlesworth 2014)

According to Charlesworth (2014,197), for companies operating online only, it is essential to appear high in the SERP (search engine result page) to gain customers. When trying to decide what the keywords should be, it should be considered that the word gets high volume of searches and that the words are actually relevant for the service provided. It is

not enough to only think the words that one would use themselves when searching information, but it is also useful to ask the customers what words they have used and use technology to find out how the web pages have been found in the past. (Charlesworth 2014)

Google's AdWords Keyword Tool should be utilized to check the words that have earlier lead to Meal My Day's site. Google is also offering several other tools free of charge for improving the site and it would definitely be with while to learn how to use those. In the questionnaire made to the current clients, they offered long list of potential words they would use when looking for corresponding service: food diary, nutrition planning, healthy food, losing weight, healthy diet, nutritional values etc. The list should be read through carefully and the site should then be checked. If these words are not yet included in the site, perhaps articles including these words should be linked to Meal My Days site in order to lead potential clients there as well.

According to Charlesworth (2014, 203) the keywords should be used several times and soon in the beginning of the text. Search engines check the frequency and are also developed to notice if the page does not have actual information but just spam. Therefore listing keywords would not do the same trick. In addition, the key words are not enough to be written to the body text but it should also added to the source code of the page. The first thing to see when choosing any page is the heading. Therefore having a clear heading that informs the page content immediately, most likely leads to a visit on the page. Headings should include key words and should not be longer than 64 characters, in order it to be fully readable in e.g. search results listing and on web browser. And most importantly, same words need to be in the body text as well. (Juslén 2009, 185-187)

When producing body text, the good maximum is 500 words per page. Each chapter should start with key words whenever possible. (Juslén 2009, 188)

As the search engine will lead the searcher to a certain page, not to a site, every page on a site needs to be optimized. It could be a good idea to actually have one page for each important subject, add plenty of text there and also a descriptive heading.

One important aspect is linking. The more links there are leading to the company's site from other sites, the higher it will appear on the result page. External links are the most valuable ones, but also internal linking is beneficial. (Juslén 2009, 189)

There is mixed information whether links shared in social media are considered by search

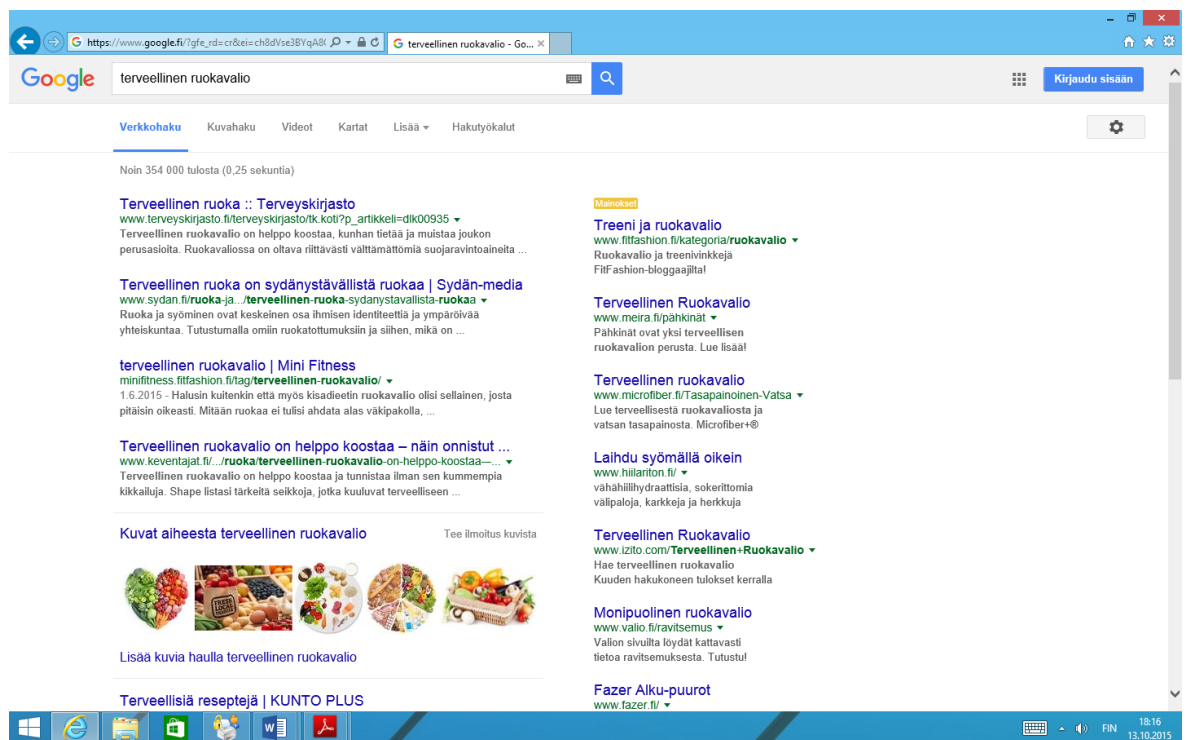
bots. According to Tuten (2013) the links from social media are the most valuable ones, and according to Juslén (2011, 164-165) search bots are advised to ignore links in social media. But even if SEO would not benefit, the more people are sharing links to your site in social media, the more visits there will be. Therefore it is safe to say that inking from wherever is still valuable.

If all has been done in own power, one option is to hire a professional to re-write all text on the pages; e.g. a reporter. Technical aid will never be as efficient from marketing perspective. (Juslén 2009, 184)

There are several other more technical aspects for optimizing the site, but having these basics in order, will benefit long way.

## 2.2.2 Search engine advertising

Search engine advertising means the text- and picture advert services offered by search engines. The advert is presented with the search result of the search made, based on the relevance and the advertiser's budget. The big-budget ad comes first. Example from Google, search engine adverts are on the top of the listing and on the right hand side under the heading 'Mainos' (picture 3). (Karjaluoto, 2010, 135)



Picture 3. Search engine result page (extract from Google)

This form of advertising is more discreet than for example direct adverts or banners, as the potential customer has actually looked for the service and comes across the web page due to the search made. Therefore the approach is more positive. Also, as the competition is hard and optimization does not always bring the wanted results and the page does not end up high in the listing, this may be the only way to get noticed. One advantage is also the ability to actually measure the effects as it can be easily checked how many clicks have been made due to the ad and how many of these have actually lead to purchase or contact. (Karjaluo, 2010, 137-138)

According to Charlesworth (2014, 244-245), compared to SEO, one advantage is also that advertiser can decide the text that searchers sees when ad appears on the screen. Obviously the length of the message is limited as it is only a link, but as it can be premeditated it can have huge effect. Charlesworth gives the example, that saying 'we have sold grass seeds for 50 years' does not mean anything but 'we guarantee a greener lawn' does. In this concept one option would be something like 'feel and look better with tailored diet'. When planning on the advert, the different needs the searcher may have needs to be taken into consideration; in this case one may be looking for way to lose weight, other may be looking for healthy recipes. Therefore it might be useful to have several adverts simultaneously.

Benefits of SEA are according to Juslén (2009, 244-245) that

- it is fast paced as you can start campaigns immediately
- feedback is received immediately on new products before launching larger campaigns
- two different messages and effects can be tested simultaneously and based on the results the more effective campaign can be chosen
- costs can be adjusted along the way as campaign can be started with small budget and volume can be increased as results get on the wanted level

Juslén (2009, 244) has arguments however on behalf of SEO compared to SEA, as according to researches the organic results are more likely clicked than the paid ones and even 65% of users never click on the paid adverts or links. Also, people often visit the sites more than once before making the final decision (on purchase, ordering newsletter, uploading article etc.) and therefore the site should be easily found on the organic listing. Therefore SEA should only be used in addition to SEO, not instead of it.

In his book Juslén (2009, 247-252) explains how Google AdWords works and how it should be used in order to have most benefit from it. Advertiser makes the ad by adding heading, ad and the URL-address. Number of characters used is very limited, total of 95 to get your message through. In addition advertiser can choose the specific landing page, where the potential client ends up after making the click. After the ad has been formed, next step is to choose correct key words. Chosen key words should be descriptive to the content of the site in question. Last step is to decide on the budget. As cost is calculated per click in AdWords, advertiser needs to determine how much is the daily budget and what is the maximum cost for each key word. Cost for word effects on the advertising space the ad gets and this effects on the volume of clicks. It is recommendable to start with the lowest possible daily budget and cost-per-word, and increase gradually to see the best level. To finalize the campaign advertiser needs to adjust the key words, depending on how the advertiser wants the ad to be shown on specific searches.

Getting familiar with AdWords and other Google's services is very important to be able to efficiently use those for advertising. Google also offers tips, like how to use negative key words: some customers may find the site by using key words that are actually not essential to the service. In this case potential customer may search for calorie counter and end up to Meal My Day's site and service is actually nothing like that. Adding calorie counter as negative, excluding term, Meal My Day will not appear when looking for such service. Also Google gives tips on new key words etc. Obviously one should consider whether the suggestions are useful but these should be studied regularly.

### **2.3 Content marketing**

According to Juslén (2009, 275-282) content marketing is about creating such content to the site that it will solve the clients' problems and bring added value. For example in this case, as the service is the diary, added value comes from the variety of receipts and news articles that are related to food and different diets. Content marketing starts with recognizing your target group and their problems. One of the problems is how to make simple, good and nutritious food. For now the receipts are available for free, only the diary costs (and it includes shopping lists, sample diets etc.).

Focus on content marketing should always be on the client and not on the product or service.

Joe Pulizzi defines content marketing as a strategic marketing approach of creating and distributing valuable, relevant and consistent content to attract and acquire a clearly

defined audience – with the objective of driving profitable customer action.

In short, instead of pitching the products or services, company is delivering information that makes the buyer more intelligent. The essence of this content strategy is the belief that if businesses deliver consistent, ongoing valuable information to buyers, that will ultimately be rewarded with their business and loyalty. Consumers have simply shut off the traditional world of marketing. They own a DVR to skip television advertising, often ignore magazine advertising, and now have become so adept at online “surfing” that they can take in online information without a care for banners or buttons (making them irrelevant). Smart marketers understand that traditional marketing is becoming less and less effective by the minute, and that there has to be a better way. Thought leaders and marketing experts from around the world have concluded that content marketing isn’t just the future, it’s the present.

Social media marketing is action taken in social media, where content marketing is content created on the web site (blog, recipe etc.) and then shared in e.g. social media. Content marketing and social media marketing therefore are somewhat overlapping but yet separate things.

Content marketing is being used by some of the greatest marketing organizations in the world, but it’s also developed and executed by small businesses and one-person shops around the globe. (Content marketing institute, 2016)

## **2.4 Metrics to success**

To find out if the marketing actions have actually been successful, results need to be checked. For small business the impact could be noticed without scientific measuring, as explained earlier with what happened when service was mentioned in a blog. But to make sure the results are not based on gut feeling, some metrics should be followed. Jayson DeMers has listed ten most crucial ones for Forbes (2015):

1. Total visits

Number of total visits on the site or on certain page will give ‘big picture’ on how the campaign is going. If there is no traffic, it is obvious something is not working.

2. New sessions

It should be followed what are the numbers of new visits compared to recurring visits. Even though new visits are important, as said before it is cheaper to keep the ones already paying than to get new ones. Therefore it needs to be kept on eye that the number of recurring visits does not drop. That would be a sign that service has not filled the promises.

### 3. Channel-specific traffic

With for example Google Analytics the company can track information on where the clients are coming from, for example has the click resulted from search performed, has client found you from social media, have they typed your address to the browser or has there been an external link they have followed.

### 4. Bounce rate

Meaning the number of clients that leave the page immediately after landing on it without any exploring.

This may not always be a bad thing, but as the business in this case is depending on clients that stay on the page and therefore click further, bounce rate should be rather low.

### 5. Total conversions

### 6. Lead to close ratio

Not a sign of marketing success but merely gives information whether the site has been well built and the service has been interesting enough for the client to actually order the service and be ready to pay for it. Calculated by dividing number of sales with the number of leads. Low rate is a sign that the sales strategy needs to be re-thought.

### 7. Customer retention rate

In case the customers will not make new order or cancel the membership after a while, it can be a sign that the product does not have the expected value. When considering the service of Meal My Day, the retention rate could get lower after customers have made few sample weeks, printed these out and then they could just check the receipts free of charge without having the customership. This



obviously is the case only with private individuals, as if the customer was a company or entrepreneur personal trainer, they need to make new diets for their clients on a regular basis.

#### 8. Customer value

Estimated number of transactions per client per year.

#### 9. Cost per lead

Calculated by cost spent on a campaign divided with the number of conversions. Also invisible costs need to be included, not only the direct costs of marketing action.

#### 10. Projected return on investment

Calculated by cost per lead compared to lead to close ratio. If the result is more than customer value, the return on investment (ROI) is positive and campaign has been worthwhile.

If the listed metrics are followed on a regular basis, site owner gets valuable information on the traffic on site.

When company has taken a lot of effort to market the product, search results have improved, Facebook page has numerous likes and there are continuously visits on site, marketing has worked. But the real results are measured next: are there new clients?

Juslén (2011, 320-321) has listed similar metrics to follow and mentions also Google Analytics as a good tool to use. For example, as Meal My Day needs the client to make an order, with Google Analytics it is possible to find out that in which part of making the order client decided not to go through with it after all. It can also be checked what are the most popular links on your own site. This is valuable information when deciding for example what the landing page for different campaigns is. Juslén also notifies that when looking into the reports it is important to exclude the visits from company's own network as these will distort the numbers, especially when the total number of visitors is low.

### **3 Discussion**

This thesis gives a light understanding to what should be done when marketing online, via social media and search engines. As this is a world that is in constant change, it requires a lot from the marketer.

There are no fixed answers and no single truths, the only option is to stay curious and listen carefully, try to keep up with the change and to embrace every new opportunity. I believe that small businesses do not even necessarily need written plans for marketing, but they do need careful follow up on actions taken.

Possibility to make fast decisions when it is obvious marketing is not working, or to invest more when results are made, are the benefits that small companies have and they easily utilize the possibilities of modern marketing channels. The only prerequisite is not to give up, always to try again.

#### **3.1 Recommendations and conclusion**

Parantainen and Apunen have quoted Thomas Watson saying 'If you wish to succeed, double your failures'. The same advice needs to be taken here. In order to increase the number of clients, all possible marketing actions should be tried. With online marketing failures are of low-cost and therefore should not be feared. Investments are more temporal than financial, and even though time is money in this case it is cheap money and spending it is strongly advised.

The very first thing to do when starting online marketing is to learn very carefully how the different tools are working. Not only how to make adverts but also how to use the very handy analysers. And in a small business this needs to be done by the same people; whoever plans the marketing, should take care of the follow-up and the improvements needed. It is good to have someone who knows a lot about the technological part, but as the free tools that are offered by for example Google are rather easy to use, there should not be any reason why not to take full advantage of those.

Meal My Day Oy is using professionals for the coding of their site, and when it is known what the coders need to do, they will certainly be able to make the necessary changes. Co-operation is very important here as even the best coders cannot know the business in depth, and therefore may not be able to make the best decisions relative to marketing. As findability is crucial in online business, Meal My Day Oy needs to make sure that their

home page has been optimized for search engines. With quick search I was not able to find the service with any of the key words that the respondents mentioned when asking what are the words that they would use when looking for service that Meal My Day is offering: food diary, nutrition planning, healthy food, losing weight, healthy diet, nutritional values etc. (in Finnish). This is clearly a point for improvement.

Even though the company is small and time is very limited, investment made in communication with clients and interest groups is never time wasted. Obviously it is easy for me to say as I am not the one doing it, but if social media is close to the sole mean of marketing, it should be utilized more effectively and more often. Having followed popular bloggers, they are posting for example to Facebook several times a day. Naturally they earn their living by doing this, but so does a starting online business. No one else will keep the noise about you unless you do it yourself. Therefore the recommendation is to post to Facebook at least two to three times a week, share the same via Twitter and Instagram when possible add link to the home page to increase findability. Sharing in social media serves several purposes: it is communicating with interest groups, search engine optimizing and content marketing all at the same time. While blogging would be a good tool as well, these 'micro-blogs' will do before Meal My Day will start their own.

After reviewing the results of the short questionnaire that I sent out, I realized one of the problems that Meal My Day has. Even though the service is excellent giving people tools for planning their diet, Meal My Day is marketing the service as a diary. And diary is something you write afterwards. You write a diary on events of the day or week, or in this case you would fill in the meals you have eaten. And therefore Meal My Day is not really a diary at all. The word diary is misleading and should not be used in marketing at all. Several of the respondents were confused of the offering. Meal My Day is tool for planning, not for following or making notes. This is new perspective to diets. We are too familiar with Weight Watchers and other calorie counters, and therefore it is so hard for new services to get their perspective understood. And actually, this tool should be marketed not only from the point of view of losing weight or eating healthy but for saving time and money and reducing waste as when the meals and shopping lists are pre-planned, you do not have to throw away that much food. Environment says thanks.

### **3.2 Evaluation of learnings**

Personal learnings from the thesis project are that time management is a lifelong learning project, one is rarely as good of a writer one thinks and that finishing long projects feels good.

Even though it was highlighted in the beginning that careful planning is important, I have a bad habit always hoping that a tight schedule will encourage to keep a decent pace. That unfortunately did not happen, and hopefully I will be able to make more reasonable plans in the future.

After several years break from studying, it takes enormous effort to try to write well-constructed text. I have taken it for granted and believed that skills will maintain but it is obvious that the years in working life and writing only short reports and emails has backfired and the ability to write in academic English has been lost.

Besides from these, I have also learned that marketing is a form of art that not all can master. And that it is also hard work and it takes strong shoulders to be able to push through failures that are bound to happen.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1. Meal My Day questionnaire

#### Meal My Day

1. Olen rekisteröitynyt palveluun

- a. ammattilaisena
- b. yksityishenkilönä

2. Miten päädyit kokeilemaan Meal My Day -palvelua?

- a. Etsin palvelua hakukoneella
- b. Sosiaalisen median kautta
- c. Kuulin kaverilta
- d. Jotain muuta kautta, mitä?

3. Miten aktiivisesti käytät palvelua?

- a. Olen rekisteröitynyt palveluun mutta en käytä sitä
- b. Olen rekisteröitynyt ja käytän satunnaisesti reseptejä ja ravinnonsuunnittelutyökalua
- c. Käytän palvelua säännöllisesti apuna ruokailuni suunnittelussa

4. Miksi olet kokenut palvelun itsellesi tarpeettomaksi?

5. Oletko käyttänyt ennen vastaavaa palvelua? Jos olet niin mitä ja mitkä ovat suurimmat eroavaisuudet?

6. Millä hakusanalla etsisit vastaavaa palvelua netistä?

7. Seuraatko Meal My Dayta sosiaalisessa mediassa?

8. Millaista tietoa toivoisit saavasi Meal My Dayn kautta, reseptien ja päiväkirjan lisäksi?

- a. Uutisia ruokatrendeistä
- b. Tietoa ravintoaineista
- c. Tietoa eri ruokavaloista
- d. Jotakin muuta, mitä?

9. Miten parantaisit palvelua?

10. Kuinka aktiivisesti olet rakentanut ruokavaliota asiakkaillesi? (kysymys vain ammattilaisille)

- a. En ollenkaan
- b. 1-5 ruokavaliota
- c. 6-15 ruokavaliota
- d. Yli 15 ruokavaliota

11. Millaista palautetta olet saanut asiakkailtasi palvelusta? (kysymys vain ammattilaisille)

12. Oletko ostanut lisenssin itsellesi? (kysymys vain ammattilaisille)

- a. Kyllä, kuinka pitkän?
- b. En, koska

13. Millaiseksi olet kokenut palvelun käyttäjä?