SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING PLAN FOR PRINTR

Research question: "What are the effective ways of engaging with

people on social media and

improving online presence of Printr to increase its brand awareness?"

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ABSTRACT

This bachelor thesis was conducted for a startup company Printr with its headquarters in Amsterdam, striving to turn the often complicated process of 3D printing into an easy and enjoyable experience by creating hardware and software that control a 3D printer.

The ultimate objective of this paper was to help the case company design a social media marketing strategy and increase its brand awareness by determining the effective ways of engaging with people on social media and improving its online presence.

The theory applied in this thesis mainly revolved around the basics of social media marketing and described its most effective practices and techniques. By virtue of conducting interviews with the Head of Business Development and Growth Marketing specialist of the case company as well as carrying out competition analysis, the author of this paper identified the main gaps in Printr's current marketing situation. The additional research methods used for this paper were consulting with the company's marketing materials and direct observations of the author of this thesis, who did her internship at the case company.

As a result of this research, three main conclusions have been drawn:

- Printr needs to educate people on its products and 3D printing technology in general
- Printr needs to increase its brand awareness
- Printr needs to add credibility to its business

The recommendations on the ways of overcoming each of those challenges by using social media have been provided in the end of this paper and will, hopefully, be taken into account by Printr when designing its social media marketing strategy.

Keywords   social media, marketing, 3D printing, startup

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1   INTRODUCTION

1.1   Background Information

Social media has been around for barely a decade, and during this time people have switched from using social networking websites as a way of memorializing the highlights of their lives to transmitting their own ideas and beliefs, establishing important business connections, seeking information about certain products and services and communicating with brands in a personal manner. This switch has also brought some new challenges for marketers: while previously sending one-way messages through the traditional advertising channels might have been enough, nowadays it is all about having a two-way conversation with consumers. Moreover, with the advent of social media, consumers have become more cautious while making purchasing decisions, since they are now able to make comparisons between their purchasing options, reviewing and sharing feedback for certain products and services (Belew, 2014). Taking these facts into consideration, in order to be successful, organizations need to take good care of their image and maintain positive relationships with their customers. A well thought out social media marketing strategy is therefore of great help.

From a company's perspective, using social media is both an easy and effective way of learning about consumers' opinions, needs and preferences and adjusting their performance according to this knowledge. This way they will be able to continuously satisfy those needs and keep customers happy. In the words of Brown (2012):

"If you want to connect with your customers and discover what they think about your brand, social media is your earpiece. If you want to change perceptions about your company, or improve your customer service, social media is your microphone."

This thesis focuses on the use of social media as a tool to create a better brand awareness, attract new clients (as well as maintain good relationships with the old ones) and encourage them to use services provided by a Dutch-based start-up organization called Printr, which was chosen as a case company for this paper. The ultimate goal of this thesis is to design a social media marketing plan for the given organization, a brief introduction of which follows below.

1.2   Printr

Printr is a young start-up company which was founded by three enthusiastic students from the University of Twente, which is located in Enschede, Netherlands. Even though the organization has been operating for a relatively short period of time, it has recently expanded to its second office in the capital city of Amsterdam. The main idea behind Printr's business (vision) is to «Revolutionize how consumers interact with 3D printers by creating software that lowers the technical knowledge needed to create a 3D print.» (Printr website). In order to do so, Printr has created three products: The Element, Formide and Katana.

FORMIDE is an eco-system developed by Printr and targeted to both individual consumers and organizations. It ensures the fast and efficient 3D printing experience by virtue of a smart interface that allows users to manage numerous printers and materials as well as print jobs and slice profiles.

The Element is another product created by the start-up, which is a streaming device powered by FORMIDE. It is beautifully designed and can be connected to a 3D printer with a USB to ensure that customers have a productive and easy experience during the process of 3D printing.

Finally, the company has also come up **Katana,** a slicing engine that transforms 3D models into a set of instructions that are understood by a 3D printer. It can be installed on Mac, Windows and Linux and is available for free (Printr.com, 2016).

Even though Printr seems to be a really promising start-up that offers unique products and certainly has a bright future ahead of it, just like any other organization, it faces problems and challenges of all kinds. One of the main issues, according to the CEO of the company, is a lack of *brand awareness*, as the company is still very young. One important cause of this problem could be the fact that there is no social media strategy as such that Printr follows. This is one of the main reasons that this topic was chosen for this thesis.

1.3   Research Question, Objectives and Methods

Nowadays, when technology, computers and the Internet play such a crucial role in our everyday lives, it is essential that a company has a strong online presence, so that it is visible for its customers. Hence, the main objective of this work is to study material concerning social media marketing, apply it to the chosen case company and, as a result, design a social media strategy which will hopefully help Printr create a better awareness among potential customers and, thereby, generate more users for its platforms.

Therefore, as a result of this work, the research question of the thesis: «What are the effective ways of engaging with people on social media and improving online presence of Printr to increase its brand awareness?» is answered and the recommendations for the company are provided.

In order to do so, the following steps are conducted:

First of all, social media marketing related theories are introduced through books, articles and other relevant sources. Next comes the research and analysis part, which is divided into two sub-parts. In the first sub-part the current situation of the case company in terms of its social media marketing activities is evaluated and problem areas and gaps are identified. This is done by virtue of conducting face-to-face interviews with the Head of Business Development and Growth Hacking specialist as well as through direct observation and reading of the company's business materials. The second sub-part is dedicted to Printr's competitors, discussing the solutions they offer and how they differ from the ones of the case company. This sub-part also contains information about marketing activities of Printr's competetitors.

The final step is suggesting solutions on the ways to improve online presence of Printr, based on the findings made in the research section, which might be helpful for the company as it strives to increase its brand awareness and attract more users to its platforms; in other words, answer to the research question of this thesis.

2   THEORY – SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING

The theoretical part, which follows below, serves as a basis for the practical part of this paper and provides insights into the main areas of interest of the case company. It concerns the basics of social media marketing, explaining why it is important for a business to use social media and how to use it in order to attract customers and communicate with them. It also contains information on social media channels and ways of engaging users on each of those channels as well as utilizing blogging as a part of social media marketing strategy. Finally, the theory behind search engine optimization (SEO) and the ways of creating SEO-friendly content are introduced.

2.1 Social Media Marketing: Purposes and Benefits

To start off, it is important to provide the definition of social media marketing and discuss its main benefits and purposes.

The term *social media marketing* refers to approaches that address social networks and applications with the goal of creating and increasing brand awareness or advertising products and services. There are several reasons why businesses should consider actively using social media marketing. Firstly, for customer-focused organizations it is crucial to create an impression of a close connection between the customer and the seller and show that a company is eager to communicate openly with its clients. Furthermore, this type of marketing is claimed to be very effective due to the fact that social media allows targeted messages to be sent to specific audiences, which will provide better results in a company's marketing campaigns (Technopedia.com, 2016).

Social media marketing can be very beneficial for organizations in many different ways. As mentioned previously, it is a great way of increasing brand recognition, meaning that using social media makes it very easy for new customers to access information about products or services offered by a company and makes an organization more familiar for previous customers (Forbes.com, 2016).

Furthermore, social media marketing can increase the level of brand loyalty. As stated in a report published by Texas Tech University, those companies that engage on social media channels tend to have a higher level of customer loyalty, compared to their competitors (Forbes.com, 2016).

Another important benefit of using social media is that it enables higher conversion rates. The main reason behind this is that, by virtue of interaction on social media channels, brands become more humanized, which means that consumers no longer see them as just brands but as real people (Forbes.com, 2016).

In addition, the bigger the number of followers, the higher the level of credibility and trust in a brand. Using social media marketing also improves brand authority. People like to give their opinions on products and services on social media and when they mention a brand, they attract more people to follow its updates. Having people talking about a company and its products creates a higher brand authority (Forbes.com, 2016).

Moreover, social media marketing can decrease marketing costs significantly. Being active on social media does not cost anything but a little effort and time; even paid advertising through channels like Facebook and Twitter

are relatively inexpensive compared to traditional forms of advertising (Forbes.com, 2016).

Being active on social media helps companies improve their search engine rankings. If the company is active online and has a significant online presence, then this becomes a key factor used by Google and other search engines when calculating the order that websites should appear in on their search results pages. When a brand is active on social media, it shows the signs of professionality, integrity and legitimacy, all of which are essential attributes for any company hoping to build a strong brand (Forbes.com, 2016).

Finally, the use of social media can provide better customer insights for a company. It enables the company to monitor client feedback, which helps learning about customers' needs and preferences, whilst it also informs the company of what people really think about a business and its products (Forbes.com, 2016).

2.2 The Framework for Social Media Marketing Strategy

It can be challenging to figure out where to start when thinking about designing a social media marketing strategy for a business. However, even the difficult task of making an effective social media campaign strategy can be presented in a rather simple and logical framework.

One of the best frameworks for social media marketing strategy creation is *the Deming cycle,* which was named after its creator, W. Edwards Deming, who made a huge contribution to Japanese business and manufacturing by coming up with Statistical Process Control and Total Quality Management. (Mftrou.com, 2016)
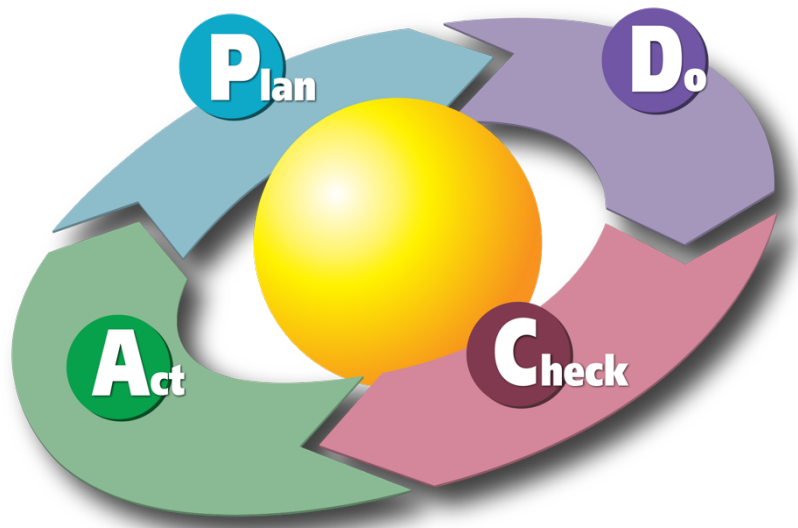
Figure 1: Deming cycle (The PDCA cycle n.d.)

In the model in Figure 1, *P* stands for *planning*, referring to the social media strategy that will be developed; *D* stands for *doing* which describes the execution of the social media strategy in accordance to the plan; *C* stands for *checking* and means comparing the outcomes of the social media strategy implementation (by looking at the key performance indicators) with the objectives stated in the plan; and finally *A* stands for *acting* or *adjusting*, which is described as a process of modifying the plan, based on the outcomes from the step C and repeating the cycle. It is important to note that this process is a never-ending cycle since it is nearly impossible to achieve perfect performance on social media, therefore, the success is only possible when a company constantly plans, implements, checks and improves its social media marketing strategy.

So what are the fundamental elements of a social media marketing strategy?

Every social media marketing strategy begins with defining its *objective.* If a company fails to create specific goals for its strategy, it will be impossible to create distinct key performance indicators that will help to measure the end results (Schaffer, 2013).

Once the objective has been identified, the next step is considering who the target *customer* is. A company needs to have a detailed understanding of what kind of customers it wants to focus on, in order to define the best way to engage with them as well as choose the appropriate social media channels for engagement (Schaffer, 2013).

Another crucial element of every social media strategy is the actual *content* that is shared with social media users. The future content depends on multiple variables, for example, whether a company sells to other businesses (B2B) or directly to consumers (B2C) (Schaffer, 2013).

A company has to identify *who* will be in charge of implementation of its social media strategy. It could either outsource this function (hire a responsible person from a specialized agency) or assign current employees for this task (Schaffer, 2013).

Finally, a company needs to apply its *brand* guidelines while designing the social media strategy. It is important that an organization keeps its branding consistent on social media by keeping in mind its visual branding guidelines, sending consistent social signals and keeping its message content rational (Schaffer, 2013).

2.3   Social Media Channels and Engagement

Now that it is clear why using social media for marketing purposes is so important and which essential components social media strategy consists of, this section discusses social media engagement as well as the different channels used for it, also describing the ways companies can engage on each of those channels.

"Engagement is not just a simple interaction with one of the customers, but an open line of communication over a period of time." (York, 2015).

Engagement describes the way a company uses social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube to create a better experience for its customers and ensure that it is visible and easily reachable for them. Experience has shown that being there to help clients when they have specific questions can raise the level of brand loyalty and increase the chances of the future purchase.

For a social media specialist, it is crucial to have a clear understanding of each social media channel and realize that each channel is different and, therefore, will have its own unique impact on a business. For example, while engagement on Facebook involves likes, comments and shares, on Twitter it is a completely different story, where the level of engagement is measured with the amount of mentions, retweets and hashtags. (York, 2015)

In the following section different social media channels are discussed together with recommendations on how to use each of them to generate decent levels of engagement.

2.3.1 Engaging on Facebook

Before discussing different tactics of maximizing engagement on Facebook, it is important to mention such thing as EdgeRank.

EdgeRank is a Facebook method that determines which stories pop up in each user's newsfeed. Every action taken by users of Facebook (whether it is a status update or joining a fan page) has a potential to appear on someone's newsfeed. EdgeRank works as a so-called "filter" that chooses which stories to show based on their rank and on how interesting they would be to each user. The formula of EdgeRank consists of three ingredients: Affinity score, Edge weight and Time decay (EdgeRank.net, 2016).

More specifically, *affinity score* means the level of connection between a particular user to the Edge. The affinity score is calculated by Facebook based on the certain actions (such as liking, commenting, sharing, tagging, etc.) taken by users, where the main factors are the strength of the action, the level of affinity between the individual who performed the action and a particular user and how long ago this action happened (EdgeRank.net, 2016).

The second component of EdgeRank is called *Edge weight*. Every action has different weight, for example, comments have a higher weight than likes, photos and videos are worth more than links.
The last ingredient in the formula for EdgeRank is *Time decay*. As a rule, the newer the post, the higher a Time decay score (EdgeRank.net, 2016).

So why is it important for a social media marketing specialist to be aware of EdgeRank?
Since it is in the interest of a company to attract as many users to its Facebook page as possible, an organization has to make sure that its EdgeRank is high, which could be done by encouraging users to like and comment on its content. When users like, comment and share the posts created on a Facebook page or, in other words, engage, it increases its level of affinity with the fans and raises chances of appearing in their newsfeed (EdgeRank.net, 2016).

There are several techniques that can be utilized by a company in order to maximize its engagement on Facebook. The first way is to *ask questions*

that are relevant to a community. It is both an easy and effective way to encourage users to engage as in this case they would feel the need to answer. Next to that, a company may use a *fill-in-the-blanks technique* by sharing a creative statement and leaving some space for users to fill in. For example, "My favorite thing about Sundays is _____." This method enables users to share their thoughts and generates more comments to a Facebook page (Schaffer, 2013).

Another great way to maximize engagement among Facebook users is by using a method, which is called *Calls to action*. This means making users interact with the content on a Facebook page by writing something like: "Like this post if you are ready for the summer!"
However, it is important to be careful not to overdo it by begging people to like the posts, as this can easily scare users away and turn them off from the content (Schaffer, 2013).

A company can instead utilize a method called *feedback requests.* Not only will this technique make users feel a real connection with the brand but it can also help a company get some valuable feedback and ideas from its customers (Schaffer, 2013).

Finally, it can also be quite effective to make *posts with visuals*, which will make the content seem more appealing to users (Schaffer, 2013).

2.3.2 Engaging on Twitter

Twitter is considered as a fundamental tool when it comes to boosting social media presence. In fact, 85% of marketers utilize it as a part of their social media marketing strategy and over one third of them reported that it was, indeed, a crucial tool for their businesses (Schaffer, 2013).

The main advantage which Twitter has over Facebook is in its public nature. Considering the fact that Facebook EdgeRank works as a filter that determines which updates are visible for certain individuals, some content can be left behind and will not be shown or noticed by users. Moreover, this social network is full of public profiles and conversations, that are not available to general public. Unlike Facebook, Twitter is a very much public network, which allows searching for tweets and using them for any purposes. Additionally, its a great PR tool that will help a company spread the word about itself without spending a single cent on PR efforts (Schaffer, 2013).

So what are the most common ways to increase the level of engagement on Twitter?

First of all, it might be a good idea to limit tweets to 80-110 characters. Taking into consideration the fact that Twitter only allows making short posts that contain the maximum of 140 characters, this way people will have a chance to retweet the post and add their additional comment to it. In fact, shorter tweets receive 17% higher engagement for exactly this reason (Socialmediaexaminer.com, 2016).

Another way of maximizing engagement on Twitter is tweeting during daytime hours. Based on its target audience and the time zone differences, a company would need to determine what is the most appropriate time to tweet. As a rule, tweets that are posted between 8am and 7pm tend to reach 30% higher levels of interaction with Twitter users (Socialmediaexaminer.com, 2016).

Furthermore, a company may want to tweet during weekends, as usually people tend to engage more on weekends rather than on weekdays by 17% (Socialmediaexaminer.com, 2016).

Another great idea for a business that is striving to boost its engagement on Twitter is sharing images and videos in its tweets. By doing this, a company can reach 150% more retweets by its Twitter followers. The graphic below (Figure 2) illustrates the statistics gotten from the research conducted by *Buffer* concerning the number of clicks, retweets and likes (favorites) for tweets based on whether they contained or did not contain any images (Socialmediaexaminer.com, 2016).
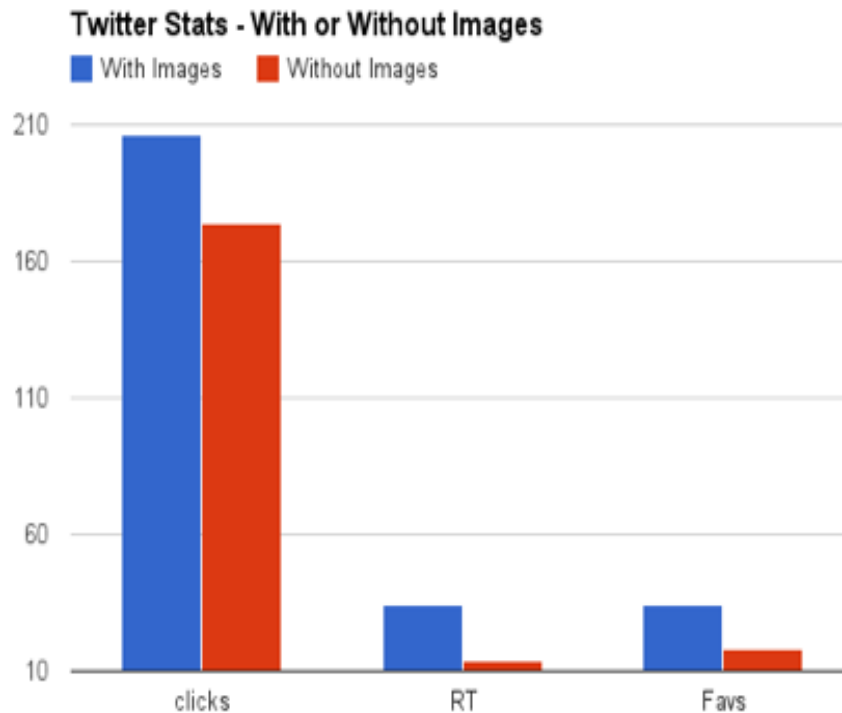
Figure 2: Twitter statistics (Twitter, 2016)

In addition, a company definitely should make use of hashtags. Not only it increases its engagement rate by 50% but also helps to improve its visibility on Twitter. It is important to keep the limit of hashtags (not more than two for tweet) and make sure to use the ones that are relevant for the industry the business operates in (Socialmediaexaminer.com, 2016).

Moreover, it can be beneficial to include links in tweets as, according to data, Twitter posts that contain links tend to earn 86% more retweets rather than the ones without any links (Socialmediaexaminer.com, 2016).

Like on Facebook, using strong calls for action on Twitter can create higher levels of engagement for a company's Twitter account. There is a higher probability that users would be willing to engage and interact with brand if it is asking for action from their side. The examples of the calls to action could be simple phrases like "please retweet" or "please follow" (So-cialmediaexaminer.com, 2016).

Lastly, it is necessary to keep in mind not to tweet too often. While some people may believe that tweeting constantly leads to more engagement among users, it is not completely true as it may create an impression that

the company is being too persistent with its marketing, which can easily scare users away. The ideal number of tweets per day should not exceed four as after four posts engagement drops significantly, which is illustrated on the graph below (Figure 3). However, it is important to respond actively to mentions and direct messages from other Twitter users (Socialmediaexaminer.com, 2016).
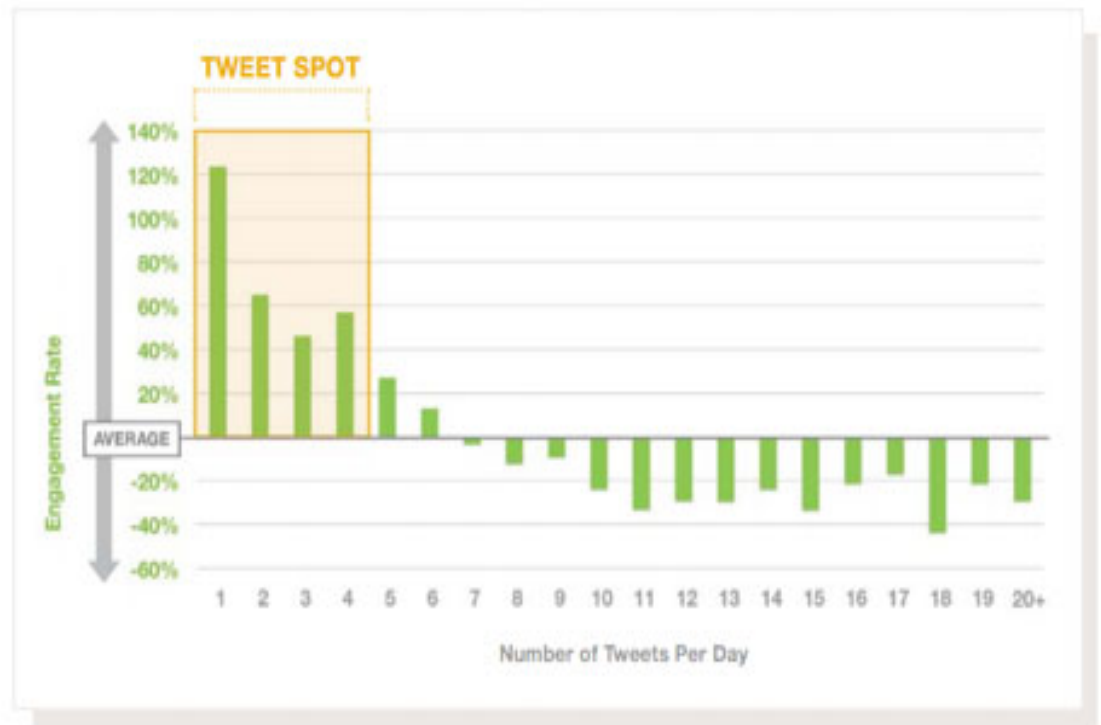

Figure 3: Twitter statistics (Salesforcemarketingcloud.com, 2016)

2.3.3 Engaging on Visual Social Networks

This part will cover the topic of how to use visual social networks, such as YouTube, Pinterest and Instagram in order to boost online presence of a company and engage as much users as possible in its online activities. However, it is important to realize that there are no strict guidances on using each of those channels, on the other hand, those social networks need to be utilized depending on the nature of the business, the target audience that it is striving to reach and many other factors.

Before discussing the ways of using visual social networks, it is necessary to consider the reasons why nowadays it is "a must" to be actively present there.

These days, when technology and social media play such a crucial role in our day-to-day lives, people tend to be distracted by constant text messages, social network chatter and other media, which makes it more challenging for marketers to break through this "wall" and engage audience. At the meantime, not so long ago special social media platforms were created for the purpose of sharing visual content, providing advertisers with a great opportunity to reach potential buyers through Instagram, Tumblr, Pinterest, YouTube and other at that time emerging networks (Schaffer, 2013).

There are numerous benefits that visual social networks can bring to a business which decides to make use of them for its marketing and advertising activities. Visuals such as photos and videos could be used to engage, entertain and deliver complex information in a way that is easy to understand for social media users. The right visual and sharing mechanism can be really powerful in terms of communicating brand attributes and boosting engagement (Schaffer, 2013).

Now that it is clear why it is smart to be actively using visual social networks for marketing purposes, each of the possible channels are discussed below.

YouTube. The main advantage that videos have over text is that they are able to create a personal connection, while text may be lacking this ability. Most of the companies are aware of this fact, which make them start utilizing YouTube as a tool for their marketing and promotion activities. However, there are still some businesses that remain sceptical about the power of this social media channel (Schaffer, 2013).

YouTube remains the second largest search engine after Google with millions and millions of active users. Not only does it enable storing and sharing of videos but also it offers a way of starting conversations with users and creating engagement. In order to make the best use of it, a company must know how to utilize it in an effective way (Schaffer, 2013).

To begin with, it is necessary to come up with a programming schedule frequency and try to stick to it, meaning creating content and posting it in the same day and time on a weekly basis, so that the followers know exactly when to expect updates on the channel (Schaffer, 2013).

What is more, it is not enough to just post videos. There also should be interaction with other YouTube users. It is necessary to be active and like

and leave comments on their videos and subscribe to their channels because this will increase a business's online presence (Schaffer, 2013).

As for the content of videos, there are several different types that a company may use in terms of its social media marketing strategy.

By posting *company overview* videos, an organization will have an opportunity to introduce users to the story behind its business and give itself a face in the eyes of its followers to enable a stronger connection with potential customers. *Video blogs* could also be effective as blogs with video tend to attract more attention and raise view rate (Schaffer, 2013).

Another type of video that a company may want to create and share on its YouTube channel is the *testimonial video.* This kind of videos help people imagine themselves using a product of service offered by an organization and enable them to better relate to it (Schaffer, 2013).

The last type of video that may be utilized as a part of a company's social media marketing strategy are *training videos,* with the purpose of answering people's questions and assisting them in using the company's products (Schaffer, 2013).

To summarize everything mentioned above, in order to see positive results from marketing efforts using YouTube, a company should invest a significant amount of time and energy into creating content which will attract potential customers. Hence, in this case, there is a strong need for strategic planning and a professional approach (Schaffer, 2013).

Pinterest. The idea behind Pinterest is to enable people re-share amazing visuals and information by virtue of repins. Repins make up 80% of the pins found on the website (Creator by WeWork, 2013).

There are a couple of useful tips for businesses that want to create popular pins that will help generating engagement.

Before starting to create any content, it is important that marketers are aware of the most popular Pinterest categories. The University of Minnesota has carried out research that categorizes the most popular pins by gender (with 80% of users being female), the illustration of which follows below on the Fugure 4.

Popular Pinterest Categories by Gender

gender ▮ female ▮ male

Categories
1 food_drink
2 diy_crafts
3 home_decor
4 womens_fashion
5 other
6 weddings
7 design
8 hair_beauty
9 art
10 kids
11 photography
12 humor
13 holidays_event
14 education
15 travel
16 film_music_books

17 health_fitness
18 products
19 animals
20 celebrities
21 architecture
22 gardening
23 illustrations_poster
24 outdoors
25 quotes
26 geek
27 science_nature
28 mens_fashion
29 cars_motorcycles
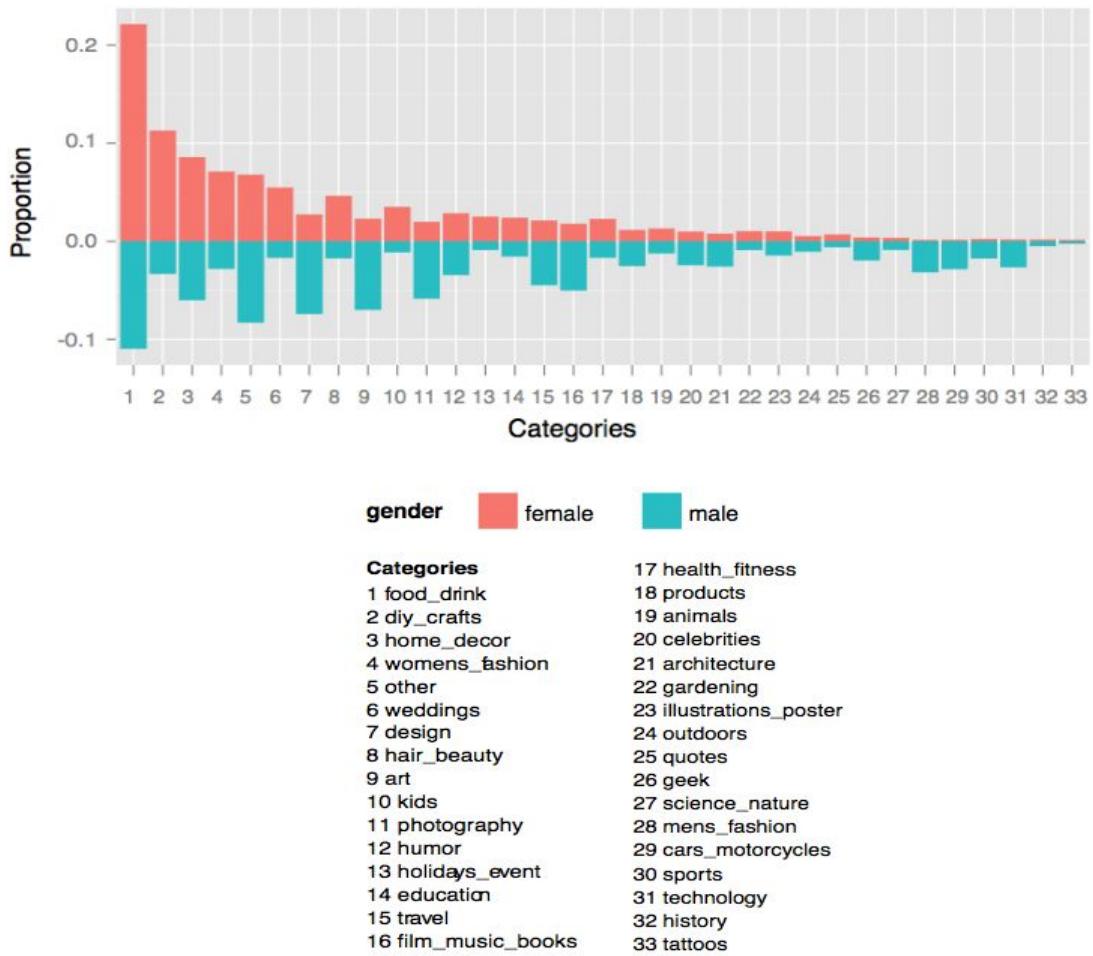30 sports
31 technology
32 history
33 tattoos

Figure 4: Popular Pinterest Categories by Gender (Popular Pinterest Categories by Gender n.d.)

After the most popular categories of pins have been identified, it is time to think about the ways of actually getting them seen and shared.

Companies that wish to utilize Pinterest as a marketing tool need to consider when the best times to pin are. Of course, it will mostly depend on the target audience but, according to data, during the daytime the best time is from 2pm until 4pm, while at night it is from 8pm until 1am (Daley, 2015).

In addition, a business should ensure that it is easy to pin content from its websites by adding a hovering Pin It button to any picture on all of its site pages. Those buttons are used to redirect visitors of company's website to its Pinterest page and to get them to pin the posts from the site to their accounts (Daley, 2015).

Another useful feature of Pinterest is that it enables users to connect with a company's accounts on other social media networks. This way a company

can gain more followers and make sure its content is going to be seen by a greater number of people (Daley, 2015).

Other ways of attracting more attention to pins is by sharing them in a company's newsletter and directing users to check out its Pinterest account (Daley, 2015).

Just as in the case of Facebook and Twitter, a company may want to use a Call to Action technique, or a Call to Pin. According to statistics, using this method generates 80% more engagement from users (Daley, 2015).

As for boosting user engagement on Pinterest, there are several simple recommendations that companies may want to follow. Among them are: posting frequently but trying to pin not more than 30 times per day, answering to comments from followers and commenting on their pins, following popular accounts and actively commenting on the pins they share and creating relationships with influential third parties (Daley, 2015).

Instagram. Instagram is a rather unique platform among the other visual social networks due to the fact that it is based on mobile. It has over one hundred million users and is definitely worth utilizing as a part of social media marketing strategy to generate more brand awareness. However, without a decent number of followers, this objective is hardly possible to achieve. Thus, marketers would need to use some tricks in order to gain engaged followers and get them to interact with the content (Schaffer, 2013).

Apart from recommendations that also apply to using other social media platforms, such as posting regularly and at the right time as well as interacting with other users, there are some tricks that were successfully used by top brands to engage audiences on Instagram which new companies may want to utilize as well.

One of the best things a company could do to better connect with its existing and potential customers is share their consumers' experiences on its Instagram account. Today many businesses are doing this trick to demonstrate how real people are using their products and also reward fans for being loyal and, by this, maintaining positive relationships with existing customers (Sprout Social, 2014).

Another tactic, which can be done in order to boost user engagement on Instagram is encouraging and inspiring followers into action, whether this be checking out the company's website, making an actual purchase, uploading a picture related to a product or sharing information with friends. Ultimately, inspiring consumers into action is the primary objective of any social media marketing campaign. To illustrate this, an example of a successful campaign launched by a famous ice cream brand, Ben & Jerry's, is provided (Sprout Social, 2014).

Instead of placing the focus on its product, the company decided to inspire its fans with the #CaptureEuphoria campaign, the main idea behind which was to encourage them taking photos of whatever "euphoria" meant to them. By doing this, not only did the company show its creative side but it also managed to engage its followers in a very playful and entertaining manner (Sprout Social, 2014).

Another great way for a company to engage and increase the number of followers is by hosting contests on its Instagram account. Normally, it is done by encouraging followers to share a picture on a certain topic and tag the company's account. This is an effective and free promotion tool, which will also make people subscribe to its Instagram updates (BrandonGaille.com, 2016).

Last but not least, in order to generate conversations and maximize engagement, it is a good idea to include questions, mentions and hashtags in a caption, placed under all pictures. In fact, captions that contain mentions tend to raise engagement by over 63%. Concerning hashtags, while including them into a caption, it is necessary to make sure that they are relevant to the content and the brand. Furthermore, marketers need to be careful not to overdo it by posting too many hashtags. Accoring to the study performed by Piqora, during which 150,000 posts by the top 100 brands were examined, the conclusion was made that the optimal number of hashtags per post is only *seven* (BrandonGaille.com, 2016)
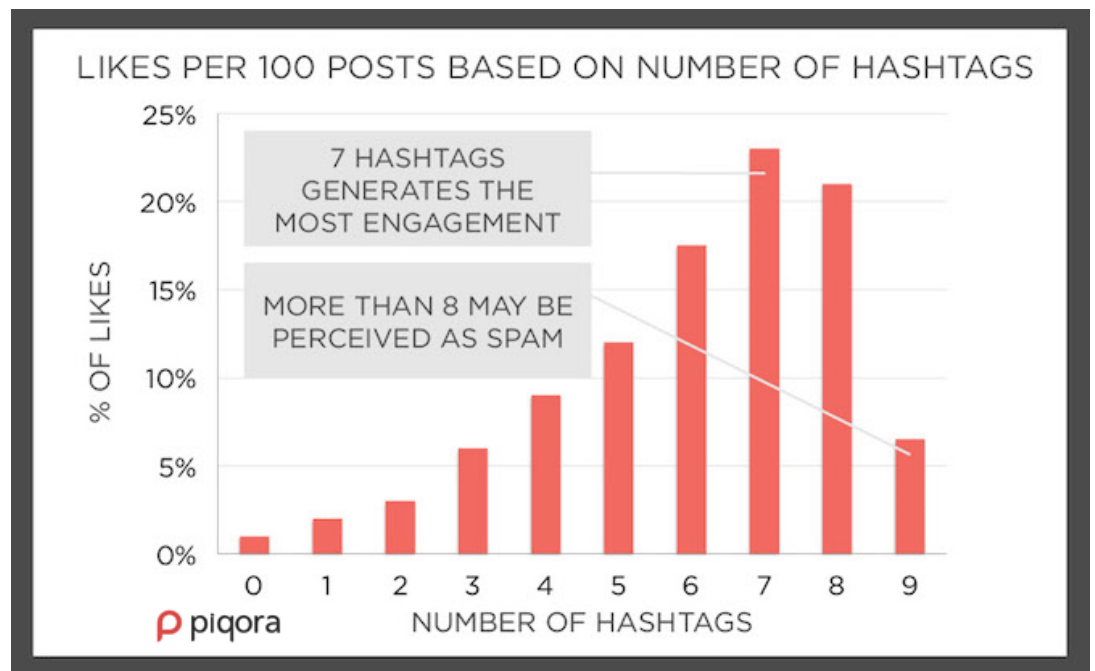

Figure 5: The optimal number of hashtags per Instagram post (Likes per 100 posts based on number of hashtags n.d.)

To conclude this section dedicated to the usage of visual social networks, clearly there has been a shift to visual social media and, since nowadays more and more people are using it in their everyday lives, it has become much easier for companies to reach their audiences by actively utilizing channels like Instagram, YouTube, Pinterest and others as a major part of their social media marketing strategies.

Considering that social media trends tend to change every other day and that each company is unique, there are no universal rules that every organization should stick to in terms of usage of visual social media channels. The best thing that a brand can do is to determine what is the most effective way of utilizing those networks for marketing purposes according to their skills and the behaviour of their customers, through constant experimenting and by exploring the features of each of these social media tools.

2.4   The Importance of Blogging

Now that it has been discussed how different social media channels can be utilized by businesses to generate higher levels of engagement among users, it is important to throw some light on *blogging*, as an additional component of a social media marketing strategy, which adds value to it. Unlike being actively present on such social media channels as Facebook and Twitter, having a blog is not compulsory, however, it can be very beneficial for a company which decides to make use of it, in many different ways.

While there is a common misconception that blogs are mainly used for personal communication, nowadays, more and more companies start using them as a part of their marketing efforts. *So in which ways can blogging can add value to a social media marketing strategy?*

Firstly, when it comes to drawing attention to the company's website where potential buyers can actually make a purchase, social media channels have some limitations. For example, Twitter does not allow the sharing of content which exceeds a certain amount of characters, hence, this way it would be challenging to communicate what a company does. In this situation, having a blog would be of great help as it can be utilized as a home base where a company can convey its vision and point of view and then share that content on all kinds of social media channels it uses (Schaffer, 2013).

Furthermore, blogging is an excellent way of interacting with people in a very informal manner, on the contrary with more formal content communicated in a strict business voice on a company's website. It is a more personal way of communication with fans, which encourages them to have longer,

more in-depth conversations with a business. By utilizing blogging for marketing and communication purposes, a company enhances its overall voice on social media and learns to create a powerful content to share with its fans (Schaffer, 2013).

While being online, people spend most of their time looking for information, communicating with others via e-mail and chat applications and using social media. Blogging not only helps to enhance a company's online presence but also improves its SEO (which is discussed more explicitly further in this theoretical part). Creating blog posts with a frequency of once per week can have a tremendous impact for a company, which is striving to improve its social media presence and be easily found by search engines like Google. Statistics show that companies that have blogs get 55% more visitors on their websites comparing to those that do not utilize blogging as a part of their social media marketing strategy. Clearly, this number supports the statement that blogging does have an impact on the organization's SEO, however, the number of visitors that are attracted to its website will depend on how much effort was put into the process of blog content creation (Schaffer, 2013).

Content is one of the fundamental components in a social media strategy, so a company needs to focus on creating content which has the potential to attract people and keep them interested. Whilst coming up with appropriate content to post on a blog, Shaffer (2013) suggests a "content buckets" approach, which means dividing a potential content into four different topics. Doing this enables a company to manage its blogging activities easily as well as develop them in accordance with the PDCA framework, which was discussed earlier in the beginning of this theoretical part, in order to determine what kind of content would work best for different audiences.

Also, while considering the potential content for the blog, it is necessary to keep in mind that instead of writing about what a company wants its clients to know, it should place a focus on what customers want to know themselves. That is why it is crucial for a business to have an extensive knowledge of its audiences as well as about their interests and preferences (Schaffer, 2013).

Finally, it is important to mention that a business needs to make sure its strategy for various social media channels is closely correlated with its blog strategy. By simply updating its blog once per week, an organization will always have something to discuss on social media, giving people a reason to check out its website and, by that, gaining new clients as well as maintaining relationships with the old ones (Schaffer, 2013).

2.5   Search Engine Optimization (SEO) and Content Creation

This section discusses the nature of Search Engine Optimization, revealing its best practises and the ways of developing an effective SEO strategy as well as how to create SEO-friendly content to boost organization's online presence and, eventually, attract audiences to its website.

Search engine optimization refers to the process of using different techniques and strategies with the ultimate goal of increasing the number of visitors to a website by attaining a high-ranking position in the search results page of search engines, like Google, Yahoo, etc. The main purpose of SEO is to raise the chances of the website being found by the search engine (Fishkin, 2016).

Search engine optimization is a complex process, which involves multiple activities such as keyword research, keyword optimization, content organization and, finally, content promotion. If integrated correctly, these activities normally bring positive results and ensure a website is visible for search engines and, therefore, the likelihood of the site receiving extra visitors is increased significantly (WordStream and Gabbert, 2016).

Keyword research is one of the most important and valuable activities in this whole process, determining whether a website is likely to succeed or fail at being recognised by search engine. Besides, when researching the most effective keywords to use for a particular market, a marketer can not only learn which words and phrases to target with search engine optimization, but also gets a deeper insight into customers (Fishkin, 2016).

The next activity involved in SEO process is *keyword optimization* and it is about determining where and how to use a website's content in order to ensure its high visibility. Content organization is another activity that is done with the goal of organizing a website's content in a logical manner, which is not only beneficial for search engine optimization but also enables a website's visitors to find other related content easily and ensures they stay there for a longer time (WordStream and Gabbert, 2016).

The final activity involved in SEO practise is *content promotion*, which descirbes the process of raising the visibility of new content on a website, done by virtue of sharing it on social platforms and building links to the site page (WordStream and Gabbert, 2016).

When creating SEO-friendly content, a marketer has endless possibilities when deciding which types of content to utilize to make a website visible to search engines and attract more traffic to it. When making this decision, it is necessary to consider many factors related to the nature of a particular business such as what kind of industry a company operates in, who its customers are and what kind of content they are interested in reading. Some of

the options are discussed in the next paragraph (WordStream and Gabbert, 2016).

Product pages are essential for any e-commerce website and are created to tell a product's story and let potential customers know about its features as well as about the benefits they would receive if they decided to purchase that particular product. *Blog posts* are considered more effective than product pages as they are more engaging and tend to attract links better, which makes this type of SEO content both an easy and efficient way of building the authority of a web page (WordStream and Gabbert, 2016).

Another way of boosting a website's SEO is through publishing *articles*. Articles can be framed as a list, for example, "10 ways to save water". The research has shown that this type of articles generates more clicks when found in search results or social media channels. Placing interactive content on a site is another good way of improving its SEO. A great example of this kind of content are *videos*. Creating and sharing videos is an effective way of attracting and reaching the audience. A company might want to consider publishing video tutorials, explaining how to use its products or illustrating a process that is related to its business. Creating *infographics*, large-format images containing a lot of data, which usually come in the form of graphs and charts can drive traffic to a website and are both informative and interactive way of communicating large pieces of information (WordStream and Gabbert, 2016).

In order to achieve positive results when optimizing a website, a company should not produce content in unstructured manner but instead try to define a concrete SEO content strategy for its web page.

The first step when defining SEO content strategy is formulating the goals for a website or business as the nature of the future content will depend on these goals. If the main target of the business is boosting product sales, the focus should be placed on creating both appealing and informative product pages optimized for searches and conversions. In this case it would also be reasonable to design helpful blog content to educate the audience on the ways of using the product, providing the links to product pages when applicable. On the other hand, if the company determined that its primary goal is attracting new readers through search, it should produce rich content that is both informative and entertaining and would encourage the site's visitors stay there longer and come back to that web page again (WordStream and Gabbert, 2016).

Another important aspect to consider when determining SEO content strategy for a web page is thinking what its typical customer is like and what kind of content he or she would like to see on a website. By using surveys and different analytics software, a marketer can get a deeper insight into typical clients and their preferences (WordStream and Gabbert, 2016).

When the marketing goals have been identified and the picture of a typical customer is clear, the next step is creating an editorial calendar, which schedules the content to be posted. Designing the editorial calendar with future content in mind prevents marketers from the hassle of coming up with a topic for new post at the last minute and serves as a framework for the entire site's content (WordStream and Gabbert, 2016).

The final element of a successful SEO strategy is the constant analysis of the website's content in order to identify what works and what does not. Marketing analysts should pay attention to the number of page views, links, comments, social shares and conversion rates, as these factors indicates whether SEO content posted on a web page is bringing positive results. They also should be able to analyze and identify what kind of content works best for a certain audience, to be able to adjust the editorial calendar accordingly and to keep posting content that resonates with the most important audience (WordStream and Gabbert, 2016).

3 OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

In order to be able to provide the answer to the research question of this paper: "What are the effective ways of engaging with people on social media and improving online presence of Printr to increase its brand awareness?", certain research has been conducted. The research is divided into two parts.

The first part includes a discussion and analysis of the interviews conducted with the Head of Business Development and Growth Hacker of the case company Printr, on the current state of affairs at the business and other important aspects of the business relevant to the topic of this thesis. These include the company's nature, its target audience, main competitors, current social media marketing activities. The interviews themselves can be found in the appendix. The first part ends of this chapter ends with discussion of the main findings that follow from the interviews.

The second part of this research section is focused on the competitors of Printr, describing the solutions they offer as well as their situation in terms of marketing. Afterwards, the comparison between the case company and its competitors is presented. The research methods used in this paper are interviewing, direct observation, consulting the marketing materials of the case company and comparing them as well as their social media channels and other information with the equivalent marketing approaches used by their competitors.

After getting insights into Printr's current situation as well as its competition, the author of this paper describes three main challenges that the case company needs to respond to in order to improve its current state of affairs in terms of marketing.

3.1 Current Situation Analysis

This subsection is focused on the discussion and analysis of the interviews, which were carried out with the goal of gaining an understanding of several important aspects of the business and its main issues in terms of company's marketing in general and the way its social media is managed.

The first interview was conducted with Printr's Head of Business Development, Ahmad El-Mohtadi. He is one of those several people who joined the company at the very beginning of its journey and knows about the ins and outs of the business like no one else.

According to Ahmad, the idea behind the business started off as a simple project for University, which its founders then decided to develop after hearing positive feedback from potential business partners who they had met at a 3D printing conference. With the goal in mind of making 3D printing as accessible as possible, they started hiring talented employees from all over the world to help them take their idea to the next level. They realized there was a need for software that would transform the often complicated experience of using 3D printers into a very easy and enjoyable one. That is how the Element, a wireless controller for a 3D printer was created, enabling its users to print 3D models without having to face many of the technical difficulties often involved in the 3D printing process.

Printr works closely with manufacturers of 3D printers and tries to make the Element compatible with as many printer brands as possible. The main challenge that Printr is focusing on at the moment is to put a spotlight on what they do and to spread the word about the company. The fact that there are several other 3D printing cloud solutions available emphasizes that Printr need to make sure it is perceived not just as another startup trying to make its way to success but as one of the companies offering cloud solutions of a superior quality. In order to achieve that, huge efforts need to be made to maximize the awareness of Printr and make sure it has a positive reputation in order to be competitive on the market.

According to what Ahmad has shared in the interview, the main competitors of Printr are 3DPrinterOS, offering a single interface to manage different printing settings and Astroprint, an open source software for wirelessly

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managing 3D printers. 3DPrinterOS and Astroprint offer the same kind of products as Printr does and also position themselves as companies that offer solutions for making the process of 3D printing easy-to-manage.

Ahmad also mentioned that there is a different kind of competitor that he likes to consider; the manufacturers that Printr does not work with but who are trying to develop the same sort of cloud solution as the one Printr has devised. There was always a certain risk that some 3D printer manufacturers would develop an easy-to-use 3D printer with internet connectivity that would not necessarily require any additional software to help manage it effectively.

As stated by Ahmad, the one advantage that Printr has over its competitors is the fact that at this moment the company is more focused on a B2B side of the business rather than on a B2C one, meaning that most of the effort is put into initiating and maintaining relationships with manufacturers and not with users. Printr adjusts its products in accordance with the feedback it receives from its partner manufacturers, but not its users. The idea behind this is that the more contracts that are signed with manufacturers, the more people will be using The Element and Formide, since the products will be integrated into 3D printers designed by a manufacturer, with all users of this printer automatically becoming the users of Printr's products. This way Printr focuses on the "users of tomorrow".

As for the target audience of the case company, at this moment Printr is focusing on people that currently own a 3D printer and use it for various purposes, including such categories of users as engineers, designers, makers, etc. However, Ahmad is hoping that as the technology evolves, it will open new horizons for the company, meaning that Printr could start focusing on those who are still new to 3D printing and are just curious about it, assuming that they do not have much technical knowledge about this innovative technology but are willing to explore the opportunities that it has to offer. Ahmad believes there are still too many gaps in people's knowledge of 3D printing and that there is a strong need to educate people about this technology and its possibilities. The fact that at this point in time, all 3D printers require at least a little knowledge to start a 3D print means that Printr cannot yet focus on the masses, unless it develops a strategy to attract these completely new users.

When discussing the main obstacles preventing Printr from success in terms of its marketing, Ahmad mentioned that the nature of the existing marketing problem is related to the issue of attempting to capture too many different target groups. When a company is not focused enough, it has trouble identifying who its clients really are and what they need. Only when an organi-

zation is aware of the nature of its customers and their wishes and preferences can its marketers design appropriate messages to communicate its product to these kinds of people.

Keeping in mind the fact that this paper is focused on social media marketing at Printr and the ways it can improve its online presence by using various social media channels, a question on Printr's digital strategy was asked during the interview with Ahmad. He said that until a couple of months ago the company did not really have any specific strategies for its social media marketing activities, until a full time Growth Hacker, Dianthe, who was also interviewed for this research, joined the team. Besides this, before now Printr did not have much content to share with its social media followers, however, today, with more and more new developments and software updates in Printr's pipeline, there is becoming a strong need for the team to communicate the new information and features of all kinds to Printr's existing and potential customers, if they are to create awareness and encourage 3D printing users to use the company's products.

Ahmad mentioned that when creating content for social media, the main focus should be placed on what kind of content Printr's target audience is interested in reading. As it was stated previously, the current target audience of Printr are technical people who are already in possession of 3D printers, and Ahmad thinks that the content they are looking for is, obviously, technical and 3D printing related. He believes that the content that would generate the most engagement from this target group should reveal the output of the company's products and contain information related to the process of printing 3D models with its software, such as printer settings, the 3D printing related problems that the Element can solve, etc. According to Ahmad, only by sharing this kind of content with the audience, Printr can put a spotlight on the products that it offers and, this way, attract new users to its platform (El-Mohtadi, 2016).

The second interview for this research was conducted with Printr's Growth Hacker, Dianthe van Velzen, who joined the team in Spring 2016 and took control of the company's social media marketing. Considering the nature of her position in the case company, Dianthe was able to provide answers to several social media marketing specific questions, which are discussed in more detail further in this section.

When talking about the competitive advantage of Printr, which Dianthe is trying to keep in mind when communicating information about the company and its products on various social media channels, she emphasizes the fact that Printr offers a standalone USB-dongle, which when purchased will grant people access to Printr's cloud printing solution, all as part of the package.

Prinr has accounts on the key social media channels, however its presence varies from one channel to another. The company tries to be active on the most popular ones and shares content if not every day then every other day. According to Dianthe, however, Printr does not share enough of the "right kind of content", which is content relevant to the industry which additionally fits the interests of the target group. Dianthe emphasized the importance of creating and sharing different tutorials, either in form of blog posts or videos, which would solve the problems of 3D printer users.

Dianthe's goal is to create a knowledge center on Printr's webpage that would contain those tutorials and would become the number one spot where people come to find information relevant to what they are interested in. Apart from doing that, Dianthe is busy writing press releases for various 3D printing forums to spread the word about Printr on the 3D printing community. Furthermore, Printr is currently trying to arrange collaborations with YouTubers who review different gadgets, by getting them to test and review the Element as well. Another activity aimed at creating greater awareness of Printr's products which is planned in the near future is to find and contact people from the DIY community and to get them to talk about how they upgraded their cheap DIY 3D printers with the Element and turned them into good quality easy-to-use printers (van Velzen, 2016).

After conducting the interviews with the Head of Business Development and Growth Hacker of Printr, several weak spots in the case company have been identified and conclusions have been drawn. The key findings of the interviews are discussed and analyzed further in this part.

Finding #1: Printr does not communicate enough relevant content on its social media channels.

In their interviews both Dianthe and Ahmad pointed out the fact that Printr has became more active on its social media channels, compared to how the things used to be couple of months ago, however, the content that is created and shared with the community is not focused around the things that people in the 3D printing industry are interested in reading about.

Lately the content that has been posted on the company's key social media channels has been focused on sharing the stories of the staff of Printr as well as people from the industry, with the goal of shedding a light on the "human side" of the company and the industry itself. Even though sharing this kind of content has created some engagement and drawn traffic to Printr's Facebook page, as those people were also sharing their stories on their own Facebook profiles and the pages of their companies, both Dianthe and Ahmad

have emphasized the importance of also sharing the content that would be relevant to the interests of the target audience of Printr - technical people, who are curious to read about more 3D printing specific things, such as printer settings and see the pictures of different 3D models, printers, etc.

Dianthe has also talked about putting effort into creating tutorials that would educate people on how to use The Element, as well as writing articles about the product's specifications as well as blog posts, which would contain information on how to solve the most common issues that people face during the process of 3D printing. This way, Printr's website could become the place where people who are into 3D printing technology would come to find information, which would also be beneficial for the SEO of the web page of the case company and would, eventually, generate more visitors to it.

Finding #2: There is inconsistency in Printr's positioning.

Even though Printr positions itself as a company offering products that enable printing 3D objects without having any technical background and knowledge of 3D printers, in reality this is not particularly true. In his interview Ahmad admitted that although nowadays more and more people are becoming aware of 3D printing technology, there is still some knowledge required in order to start a print. Hence, the statements that Printr communicates on its website as well as through different social media channels are somewhat misleading. A few examples of such statements are provided below.
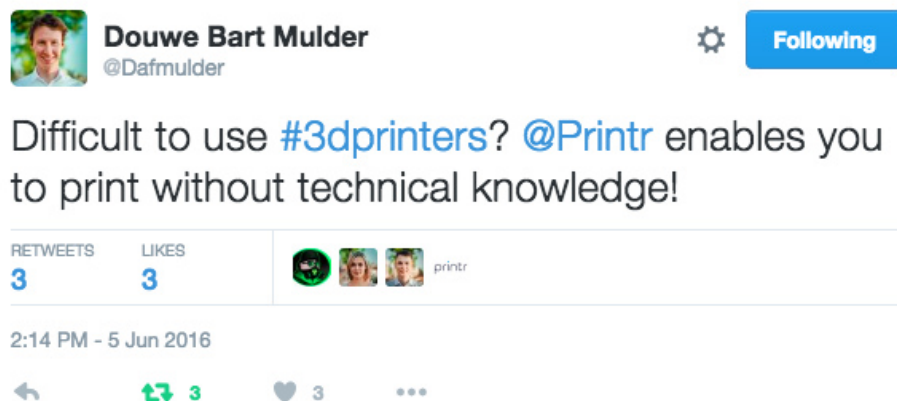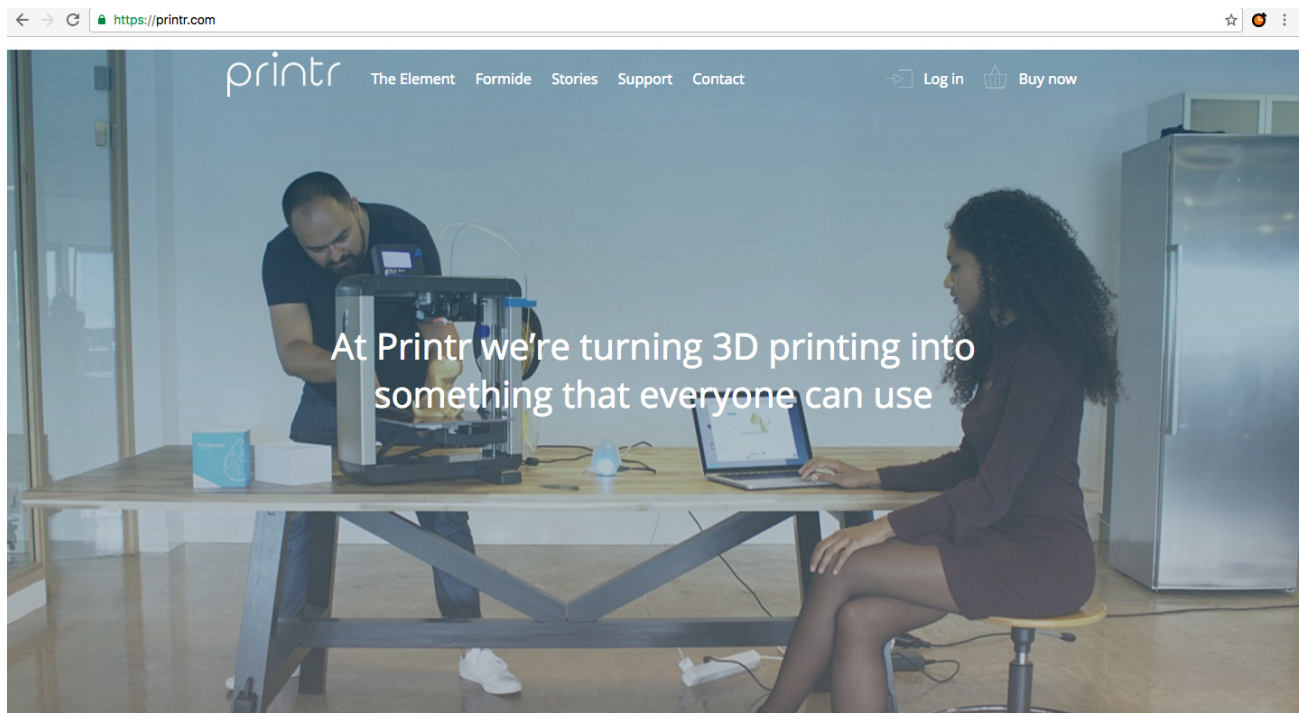

Figure 6: Twitter screenshot (twitter.com/Printr)

Figure 7: Website screenshot (printr.com)

Finding #3: Printr focuses on several target groups, instead of one specific group of customers.

This statement is connected to the previous point about the inconsistency in the way Printr positions itself. In his interview Ahmad mentioned that the biggest downfall of Printr is the fact that it focuses on both of the target groups. He admitted that without at least a little technical knowledge of 3D printing technology, the chances are that people will not be able to use either a 3D printer or The Element. For example, in order to set up the Element and connect it to a 3D printer, one needs to be aware of the meanings of some 3D printing specific terms and printer settings. A person with a zero 3D printing background will simply be unable to start a print without any help.

Therefore, instead of targeting both of the groups - customers with technical background and the ones who are just curious about 3D printing but have never tried this technology before, Printr might want to consider targeting the first group only. When the company has a clear and well-specified targeting strategy, it becomes much easier to design effective marketing messages to reach the chosen target group as well as create social media content based on the interests and preferences of this specific group of people.

Finding #4: There is a strong need to add credibility to the company.

As mentioned by Ahmad in his interview, Printr is striving to get itself out there and compete among the major companies that offer cloud solutions for 3D printing. For this reason, not only does Printr need to put a spotlight on its products but also to cooperate with other companies which are successful and mature on the market in order to add credibility to its business.

At this moment Printr is cooperating with several manufacturers of 3D printers and trying to sign contracts with more, with the goal of integrating the Element with as many printers as possible. Those collaborations are also beneficial for spreading the word about Printr's products. One of its partners, FELIX printers has published an article on its official website, where they promote their collaboration.
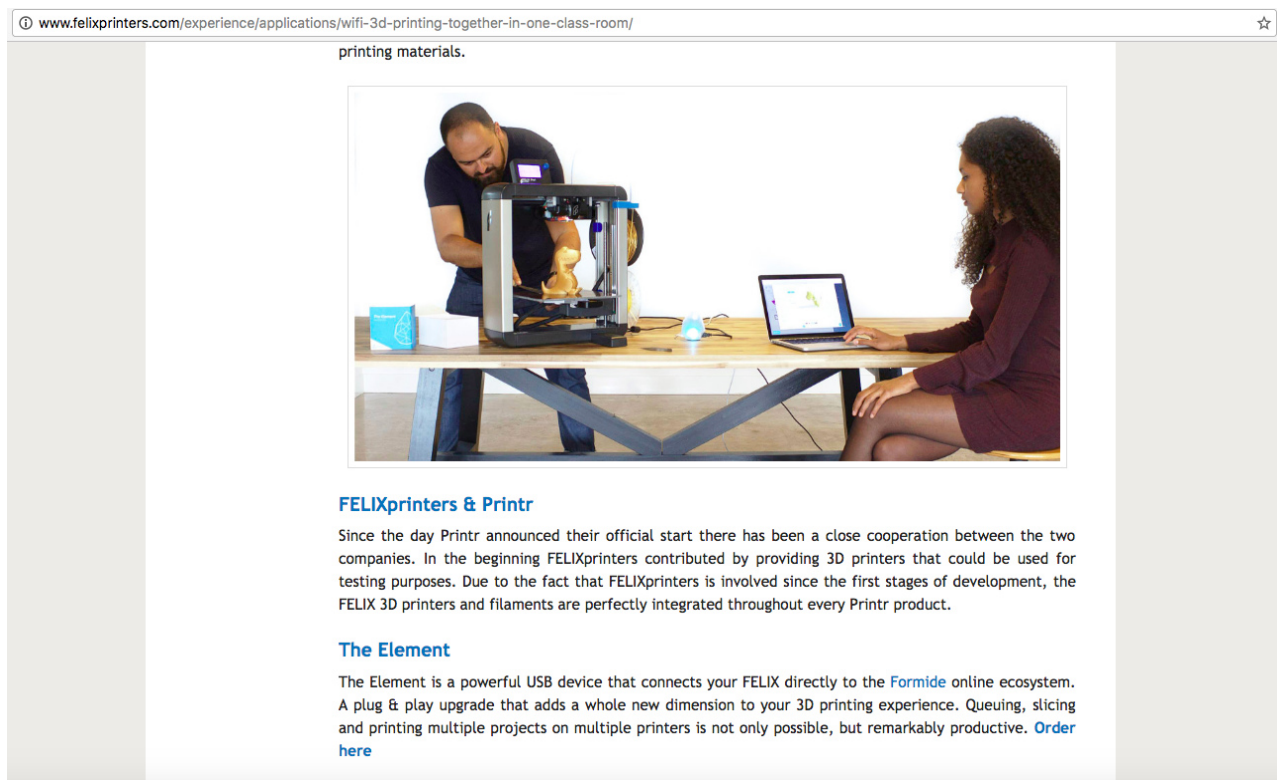

Figure 8: Website FELIXprinters screenshot (felixprinters.com)

Recently Printr started publishing stories of 3D printing enthusiasts, who were interviewed during the biggest Additive Manufacturing conference in Europe, which took place in Amsterdam this summer. The series of stories is called 'Humans of 3D printing', featuring people who work for some well-known organizations involved in 3D printing. Those people shared the stories about them on their own social media accounts as well as on the Facebook pages of their companies, helping promote Printr and its products, and also, by doing so, adding credibility to the company.
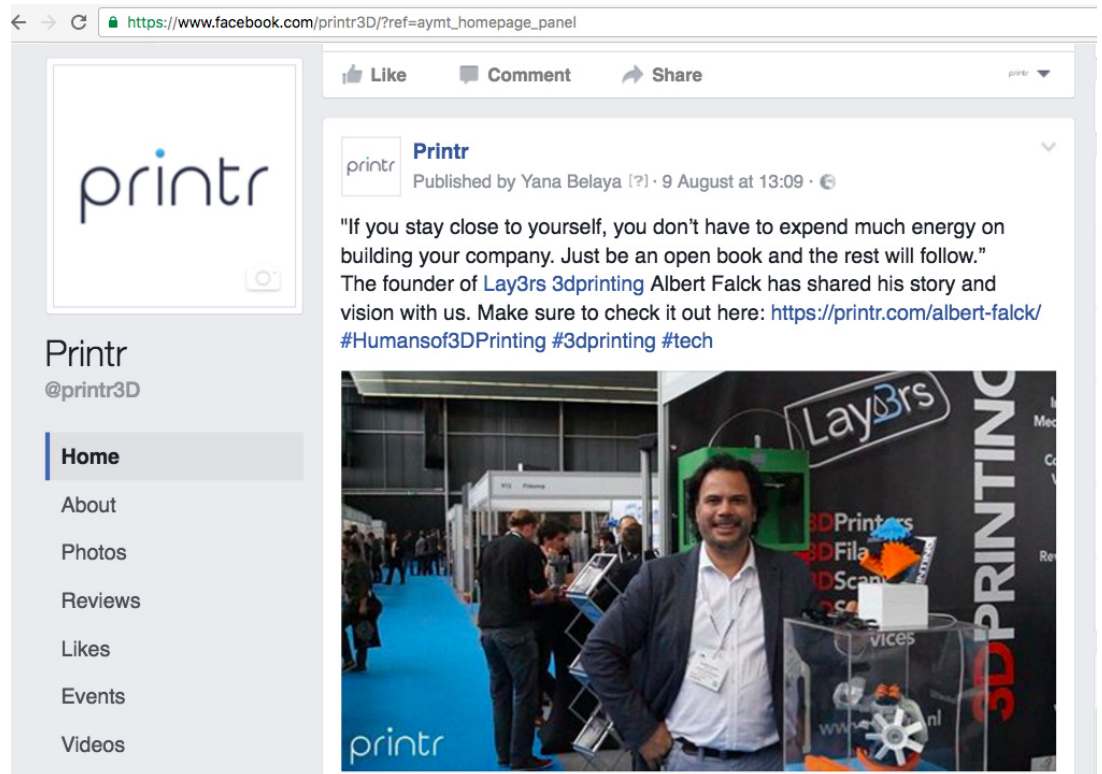
Figure 9: Facebook Printr screenshot (facebook.com/printr3D)

Finding #5: Printr needs to educate the audience on how to use its products and on 3D printing technology in general.

In order to be able to attract more users to its platform, Printr has to prove that its products are handy and easy to use by providing tutorials, explaining how to use The Element and Formide.

Printr has its own YouTube channel, which contains several video tutorials on various topics, related to the usage of the company's products: how to connect The Element to Formide, how to 3D print with Formide, etc.
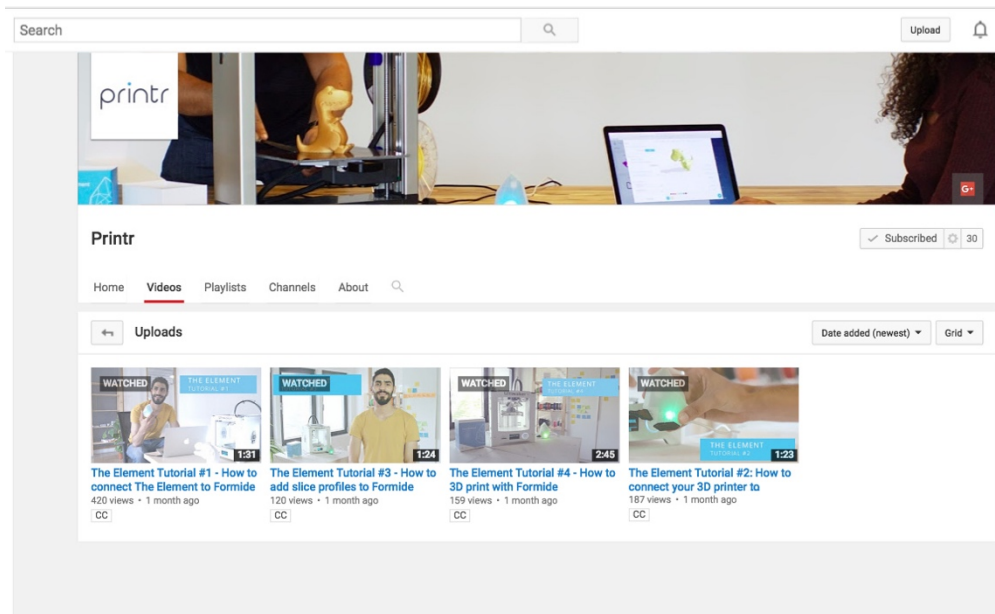
Figure 10: YouTube Printr screenshot (youtube.com)

Printr also has a support center on its website, containing all kinds of articles, answering to the most common questions about different technical aspects of its products. However, more articles need to be added in order to ensure that all topics are covered.

In her interview Dianthe also mentioned the need for creating a knowledge center on Printr's website and creating content for it, which would be focused on different 3D printing related problems and solutions to them. By doing so, Printr is aiming to become the place where 3D printing enthusiasts will come to find information they need and also improve its SEO.

3.2 Competition analysis

In the following sub-part of this section the information on both direct and indirect competitors of the case company is presented, covering the solutions they offer, how they differ from the ones offered by Printr as well as how they manage their marketing activities. The sources of information introduced in this part are materials of the case company of this thesis as well as the ones of the competitors available on the Internet, along with observations on their online presence.

Printr's team has created powerful 3D printing software with the goal of turning the often complicated process of 3D printing into a smooth and productive experience, offering solutions for education, businesses and makers. The Element, a plug & play device that supports 180+ different types of 3D printers and connects them to Formide, an online platform that enables to

control and monitor the process of 3D printing are two main products offered by the case company. By purchasing the Element, customers gain the access to Formide and can enjoy its features, which are: integrated slicing of models, remote monitoring, file repair and managing of files, models and materials for 3D printing (Printr.com, 2016).

As follows from the interview conducted with Printr's Head of Business Development, Ahmad El-Mohtadi, there are two direct competitors of the case company, offering similar solutions, *3DPrinterOS* and *Astroprint*. Both of these companies are young, however they can be considered as strong competitors of Printr (El-Mohtadi, 2016)

Founded in 2013 in San Francisco, *3DprinterOS* has built an operating system for 3D printers, which is now widely used by designers, enterprises, schools and universities in more than 94 countries around the world. The company's cloud-based 3D printing platform enables preparing, fixing, storing and streaming of 3D designs and provides access to analytical tools for tracking and analyzing of data (3dprinteros.com, 2016).

3DprinterOS stands out from its competition, having a working platform with over 16 thousands hours of use and 30 thousands hours spent on developing a software for 3D printing. The organization has developed partnerships with Yale, Duke University, Florida State University and many others and serves such important clients as Ford and Cisco (3dprinteros.com, 2016).

With that in mind, 3DPrinerOS makes an extremely strong competitor for Printr, offering similar solutions for productive 3D printing experience and having built credibility for its brand by virtue of gaining strong partnerships with leading universities and well-known brands.

Another company that has created a similar open cloud-based platform for 3D printing is *Astroprint*, founded in 2013 in San Diego, California. Just like Printr, Astroprint positions itself as the company that offers solutions to make 3D printing process much easier and accessible for a user with a minimum technical knowledge of additive manufacturing technology. The features of Astriprint's 3D printing platform are also similar to the ones of Formide: it enables slicing, downloading, modifying and printing 3D models wirelessly as well as controlling and monitoring 3D printer remotely, in real time (Astroprint.com, 2016).

Apart from having 3DprinterOS and Astriprint as direct competitors, the case company of this thesis Printr also competes with several other organizations. These companies do not offer exactly the same service as Printr does, however, can be considered as its indirect competitors by

targeting the same group of customers with the objective of satisfying the same need.

As mentioned previously in this chapter, Printr's online platform Formide has a built-in cloud slicer *Katana* that enables its users to slice their 3D models from any device. While in case of Formide this feature is already built in the platform, there are several companies that specialize in offering a slicing software solely. Thus, Printr's slicer Katana competes with these slicing softwares.

According to Printr's marketing materials, the main indirect competitors in that sense are *Simplify3D*, *Cura* and *Slic3r* (El-Mohtadi, 2016).

Simplify3D is known to be the fastest slicer on the market, enabling its users to reach the best print quality and slice complex models in a few seconds. This software is supported by many 3D printing experts, adding credibility to the service provider (Simplify3d.com, 2016).

Another slicer Cura is an open source software which is maintained by *Ultimaker*, a well-known 3D printer manufacturer. Cura allows its users to preview, scale a 3D model and adjust its settings according to their preferences (Ultimaker.com, 2016).

The third indirect competitor of the case company Printr in terms of offering a software for slicing of 3D models is Slic3r. Slic3r's service is used by thousands of people, being a non-profit community project and created by members of GitHub, a platform for developers, working together, discussing new features and testing them. (Slic3r.org, 2016).

Although it is often important to consider all kinds of competition, both direct and indirect, the main focus of this paper is set on the direct competitors of the case company Printr, *3DprinterOS* and *Astroprint* and their marketing activities as they offer almost identical service and their softwares have features similar to the ones of Formide. Hereby, further in this chapter their main marketing activities as well as observations on their online presence are briefly discussed and certain conclusions relevant to the research question of this thesis are drawn.

To begin with, according to Printr's Head of Business Development Ahmad El-Mohtadi, the main difference between the case company of this paper and its main competitors is the fact that both 3DprinterOS and Astroprint have been on the market for a while and have already built a certain credibility for their brands, which is exactly what Printr is lacking.

This was achieved by product bundling, meaning offering several products as one combined product. For example, 3DprinterOS has made a bundle

deal with 3D printer manufacturer Rapide 3D, bundling their 3D printing software with their partner's suite of printers and announcing it in their press release that was published on *3dprintingindustry.com*, the website that features the latest 3D printing news (3D Printing Industry, 2015).

Talking about press releases, they appear to be another important component of both 3DprinterOS's and Astroprint's marketing strategy. Whenever they add a new feature to their software, or announce a new partnership, the companies make sure they get a press release published on those websites that feature 3D printing related news, such as *3ders.org, 3dprint.com, techcrunch.com*, etc. By doing this, the companies create a higher brand awareness among 3D printing community and add credibility to their businesses.

In order to increase awareness and add credibility to their businesses, 3DprinterOS and Astroprint have gained several brand ambassadors among influential people of 3D printing industry who promote their software on social media channels, such as Instagram and YouTube and spread the word about their products online.

Having established partnerships with leading universities such as Yale, Duke, Florida State University, Univeristy of Texas and Purdue, *3DPrinterOS* published case studies on their website, promoting their 3D printing solutions for education and emphasizing trustworthiness of the software that was tested and is now being successfully used by well-known educational institutions (3dprinteros.com, 2016).

As for the online presence of the main competitors of Printr, 3DprinterOS has appeared to be not very active on its social media channels, only posting infrequent updates on its Facebook, Instagram and Twitter accounts. The company has a YouTube channel where they post video tutorials on printing with their software and other relevant content.

Unlike 3DprinterOS, Astroprint's social media accounts are frequently updated with relevant news concerning 3D printing industry, software updates and company news.

The key finding that came out from the research done on Printr's competitors and their situation in terms of marketing is the following: *"Since Printr's direct competitors 3DprinterOS and Astroprint have been on the market for a while and have already established both high levels of brand awareness and brand trustworthiness, the need to maintain a strong online presence in their cases is not so strong. Unlike them, Printr's business is still lacking credibility and awareness, thereby, it is necessary*

to fill this gap by ensuring they communicate their products to the industry in the right way through social media channels and other means."

3.3   Problem Areas and Challenges

The following sub-part summarizes the findings from both current situation analysis and competition analysis and discusses the problem areas of the case company Printr in terms of its marketing efforts. It also lays the foundation for the following chapter that contains the recommendations for Printr and provides the answer to the research question of this thesis: *"What are the effective ways of engaging with people on social media and improving online presence of Printr to increase its brand awareness?"*

Challenge #1: There is a need to educate people on 3D printing technology and its possibilities as well as on how to use Printr's products

As mentioned previously, there are still too many gaps in people's knowledge of 3D printing. Therefore, there is a strong need to educate them on this technology and its possibilities. This way Printr can expand its current target audience from focusing solely on people who already own a 3D printer and have at least some technical knowledge of this innovative technology to also targeting those who are still new to 3D printing but are willing to explore what it has to offer. Furthermore, it is also important to educate potential users on Printr's products, their features and technical specifications.

The suggestions on how it could be done can be found further in the final chapter of this thesis.

Challenge #2: There is a need to increase brand awareness of Printr

According to the previous section of this chapter, Printr's software Formide faces strong competition from other providers of solutions for additive manufacturing that are supposed to turn the process of 3D printing into an easy and enjoyable experience for everyone. Printr's main challenge at the moment is to put a spotlight on what they do and spread the word about its software among the community. Therefore, a well-thought-out social media marketing strategy can be of a great help for Printr that is struggling with its image of "just another startup company" and wishing to become *the ultimate   software   solution   for   3D   printing.*

The suggestions on how that could be done by using the most effective

social media marketing techniques are discussed in detail in the next chapter.

Challenge #3: There is a need to add credibility to Printr's business

The previous sub-part of this chapter discusses the importance of building credibility for one's business and demonstrates how Printr's competitors achieved recognition, whether it was by virtue of partnerships with respectable educational institutions and well-known enterprises or by getting 3D printing gurus to review their software. If the case company is to compete with those businesses, it needs to ensure potential clients have trust in its products.

The possible ways of adding credibility to Printr's business are specified in recommendations chapter below.

4 RECOMMENDATIONS

The following chapter of this thesis is dedicated to discussion of possible solutions that the case company Printr could apply in order to fill the existing marketing gaps that were identified and discussed in detail in the previous chapters. The recommendations for Printr suggested in this part are based on both theoretical knowledge of the most effective social media marketing practices and practical knowledge concerning the current marketing situation of the case company and its competitors gained from the research part of this paper.

The main objective of this chapter is providing possible solutions for three main challenges of the case company Printr, introduced in the previous chapter. By giving recommendations on how the organization can overcome these challenges, the author of this paper also answers its research question: *"What are the effective ways of engaging with people on social media and improving online presence of Printr to increase its brand awareness?"*

Challenge #1: Educating people on 3D printing technology and its possibilities as well as on how to use Printr's products

Solution:
There are several possible ways of how Printr can educate people on 3D printing technology and the endless possibilities it offers as well as on its

own products, its technical features and benefits by using social media as a main tool for that.

Printr's ultimate goal should be becoming *the number one spot* where people come to find information on any 3D printing related problems they are facing.

Therefore, the first suggestion for the case company of this thesis is to start building a knowledge center, which would contain answers to the most common 3D printing problems, in the form of either blogs or videos that would be both informative and entertaining. By doing this, not only can Printr improve its SEO and, as a result, increase the number of visitors to its website and social media accounts but also build a strong 3D printing community.

It could also be useful to share the latest 3D printing news revealing the possibilities of 3D printing technology on Printr's social media channels. For example, posting heart-melting stories of happy animals getting their brand new 3D printed prosthetics or articles about talented artists and designers using 3D printing technology to create their pieces of art. This way Printr can attract a completely new audience of people who are still new to 3D printing but are curious about it and are willing to learn more about this innovative technology.

As for the ways of educating people on how to use Printr's products, when trying to put a spotlight on what they do, the case organization should focus on emphasizing the fact that it is the only company that offers a universal solution "all in one package" as well as on the key features of its 3D printing software Formide.

The case company can do that by creating product benefit cards that would educate potential users on Formide's features in a fun and interactive manner and sharing them on its website and social media channels.

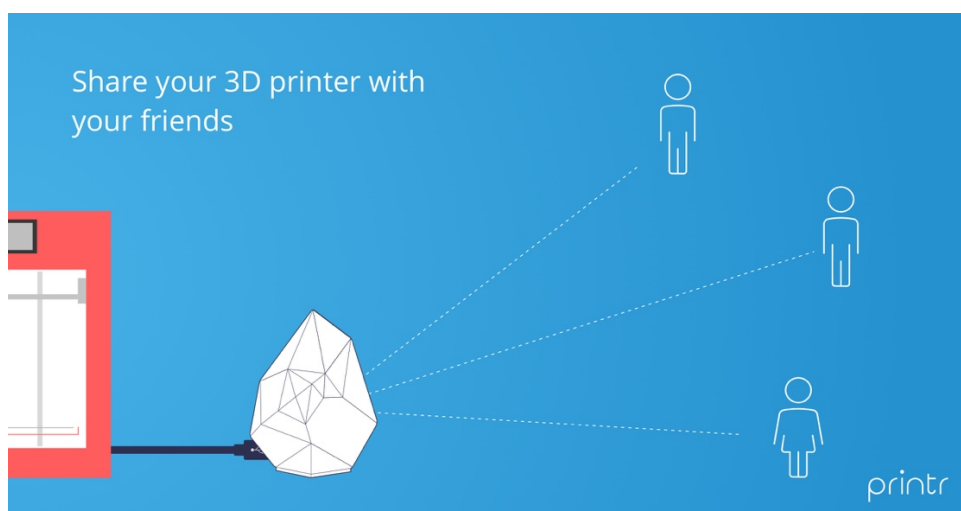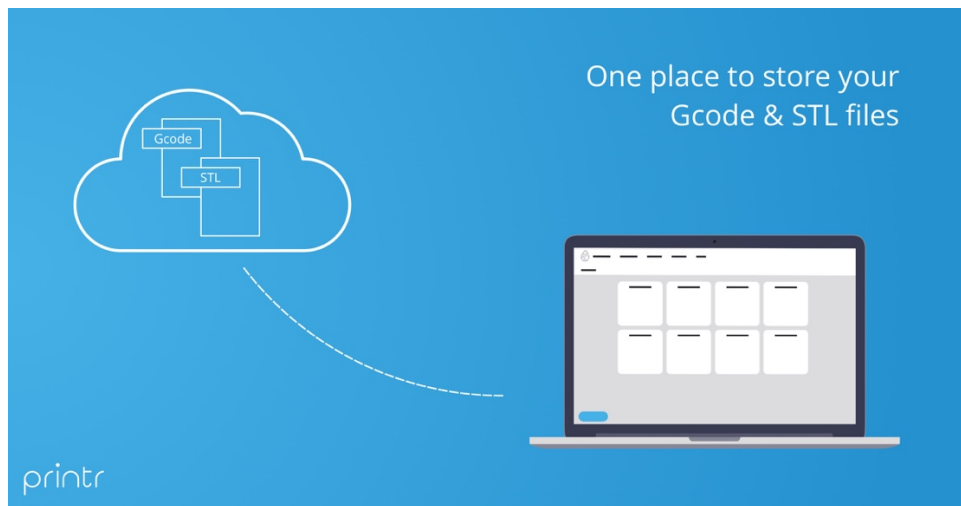The examples of product benefit cards are presented below.

Image credits to Roel Bego, Graphic Designer of Printr

Challenge #2: Increasing brand awareness of Printr

Solution:
The following section of this chapter reveals some possible solutions on how to engage with people on social media and increase Printr's brand awareness by utilizing the best social media marketing practices and techniques.

When thinking of social media marketing strategy for Printr, there are two key questions that should be considered.
The first question is: *"Which of the possible social media channels the company should focus on the most?"*
According to the numbers from one of the social media analytics tools, in case of Printr 80% of engagement comes from Facebook, while the rest 20% is spread among the other social media channels like Twitter, Instagram, etc. For this reason a good idea for Printr would be focusing its efforts on being active on Facebook and trying to engage with the fans of its Facebook

page as much as possible. It is important to mention, however, that it does not imply that Printr should ignore the rest of its social media accounts.

First of all, it is important to make fans think that their opinion matters to the company. For this reason, the author of this thesis advices Printr to make sure they constantly ask for users' feedback and encourage them to share their experiences of using Formide on social media. When clients are satisfied, they are likely to spread positive feedback about the product among their friends and colleagues and help getting new potential customers for Printr.

In addition to that, Printr can consider arranging contests on its social media channels and awarding winners with free Elements. The most suitable channel for that is Instagram, enabling users to post their pictures relevant to the nature of a contest and place a specific hashtag in a caption under their pictures. The company would view all pictures marked with this hashtag and choose a winner of competition. This technique has been used by many well-known companies and resulted in increasing levels of engagement among social media users.

Talking about hashtags, they can be extremely helpful in reaching people depending on their interests, preferences and lifestyles. Therefore, another suggestion for Printr would be finding out which hashtags are used the most by people interested in 3D printing and start using the same hashtags when posting updates on its social media channels. By doing this, not only can Printr engage with 3D printing community but also attract new potential customers.

The second question that should be considered when thinking about social media strategy for Printr is: *"What kind of content people in the industry are interested in reading the most?"*

Taking into consideration the target audience of the case company, Printr should focus on posting the content that would appeal to the interests of the specific group of people they choose to target. Focusing on the existing users of 3D printers and people who are not new to 3D printing, the content that Printr should be sharing has to revolve around technology specific things. The ideal content should contain information related to the process of printing 3D models with Printr's software, such as printer settings, the 3D printing related problems that the Element can solve, etc.

The author of this paper emphasizes the importance of blogging as a part of Printr's social media marketing strategy. Blogging can be extremely helpful not only for communicating important information to the audience but also

for imporiving the company's SEO and making its website and social media accounts visible to a larger amount of people.

The topics for blog posts should be chosen according to the interests of the target audience of the case company.

Challenge #3: Adding credibility to Printr's business

Solution:

The previous chapter of this paper emphasized the importance of adding credibility to Printr's business in order to be able to compete with other companies offering similar solutions for 3D printing. The author of this thesis suggests that the case company does the following to build trust in its products.

In order to get people's trust in Printr's software, the first step for the company would be getting influential people of 3D printing industry to try the Element and review it on their social media accounts on YouTube and Instagram. Printr's main challenge here is to make sure they communicate the right message to 3D printing gurus they decide to approach and discuss the main aspects of their collaboration in detail so that both parties are satisfied in the end.

Furthermore, Printr is advised to continue working on press releases on software updates as well as monthly highlights of the company and making sure to get them published on the websites that feature the latest 3D printing news.

The last and the main recommendation for the case company of this thesis is to start forming strategic partnerships with other companies involved in 3D printing industry. At this moment Printr is too focused on being closed-source and doing everything by themselves. By partnering with other well-known companies Printr can ride on their coattails and gain business credibility.

The company needs to realize that because they do not have partnerships there is not much things to share on social media, and that is exactly the reason why their social media marketing is not booming.

5   CONCLUSION

The final part of this paper concludes the overall findings that are presented in its previous chapters.

This bachelor thesis was carried out for a Dutch startup company Printr with the goal of helping it design an appropriate social media marketing strategy and, as a result, increase its brand awareness and attract a larger amount of users to its platforms.

After having conducted a current situation analysis and competition analysis, certain conclusions have been drawn, laying a foundation for further recommendations for the case company of this thesis.

In order to educate people on 3D printing technology and the ways of using Printr's products, the author of this paper has suggested building a knowledge center that would contain the answers on the most frequently asked 3D printing related questions and sharing the latest technology news on Printr's social media channels. The author also recommended creating product benefit cards, revealing the main features of Formide.

As for the ways of increasing Printr's brand awareness, the author emphasized the importance of asking customers for their feedback about using its products. In addition to that, Printr was adviced arranging contests and product giveaways and paying close attention on the relevant hashtags of the industry. Lastly, the author of this paper suggested using blogging as a part of Printr's social media strategy and creating content that would appeal to the interest and preferences of the target audience.

Finally, Printr was adviced to focus on adding credibility to its business by getting product reviews from the industry influencers, working on press releases and forming strategic partnerships with other 3D printing companies.

The author of this paper strongly hopes her conclusions and recommendations will be helpful in increasing Printr's brand awareness and taking its business to the next level.

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Appendix 1

INTERVIEW #1

Abbreviations further:
Y –Yanina Belaya (the author of this thesis)
A – Ahmad El-Mohtadi (Head of Business Development at Printr, the case organization)

Y: To start off, could you give me a quick overview on Printr? Tell about its reason for exsitence, mission and vision?
A: Around 2013 two co-founders of Printr, Douwe and Chris, were studying creative technology, they were neck deep in coding and developing. For one project they had to create a network of something, so they came up with a network of 3D printers. They submitted their project and decided to continue developing it even after they were done with the University. They attended 3D printing conference just out of curiousity, where they talked to a few companies, some of which were 3D printing manufacturers who said this would be perfect for them. That's when Douwe and Chris decided to turn their idea into a company, that can serve a certain value to customers. Shortly after they applied for a Startupbootcamp, one of the top three largest accelerator programes in Europe. They got accepted, and that's when people all over the world started joining Printr, including myself. The goal behind it was to make 3D printing as accessible as possible but to do that we needed to help the industry and the hardware itselt, so those manufacturers that were developing these printers for everyone were still lagging behind. It was a pretty basic technology and we needed all the software that helps us move forward today. And that's where Douwe, Cecile and Chris were able to validate their idea and they brough over people to see if we can scale it up, and we did. We have been signing manufacturers ever since, and the goal is try to help these manufacturers develop easy to use printers for the platform. That's how it kicked off.
Y: So that's also your vision and mission – to enable people using 3D printers without having much specific knowledge about the technology behind it.
A: Indeed. And for that we need to work closer with these companies that are actually developing these products, while we focus on what we do best, which is software and user experience.
Y: What are the priorities you are trying to focus on at Printr at this moment?
A: I believe the main goal right now is to add credibility to out company. There are different cloud solutions out there and now we need to make sure that we are considered as one of these cloud solutions, and not just a start up that is working towards it. So everything we do right now is an effort to put a spotlight on what we do and to put it next to all the other alternatives out there.
Y: Alright. So clearly there is a bit of a competition out there. Could you name some of Printr's main competitors?

A: I would consider *3DPrinterOS*, *Astroprint* and the third one, I am going to make it a little broad, are manufacturers. There are some of them that we are not working with and that are developing what we are developing, so they are considered competitors as well.

Y: And what is in your opinion Printr's competitive advantage over those guys?

A: One key advantage we have is that we always initiate any kind of relationship or project from the manufacturers point of view instead of the users, which could also be the reason why we are trying to put spotlight on ourselves today, because we spend so much effort and focus on manufacturers, and that automatically differentiates us from everyone else. We optimize our platform after hearing from a manufacturer, not from the user. And that's what separates us from the competitors. We work with the clients of future, trying to integrate the Element with as many 3D printers as possible, assuming that the more contracts with manufacturers with sign, the more people will be using our products.

Y: But how do you see the typical client/user of Printr's service? What is the company's target audience?

A: I see it as a journey: there are different phases. Right now out products are only available to 3D printer owners. Everyone that currently has a 3D printer, which means they are technical, either engineers or designers, or makers. At this moment that is our target audience, however, I do hope that with the launch of our product it becomes easier and easier to use 3D printing, and the more integrated Elements we sell to our manufacturers, the more accessible their printers become. So maybe in the next 6 months to one year the target audience would be new users, meaning the individuals who are still just curious about 3D printing, and we want to present them a solution that lowers the barriers for them to try it out.

Y: Okay. I've noticed that here at Printr you like to position yourself as a startup that offers solutions to people without any technical knowledge, enabling them to 3D print. But at the same time, you focus on people who already know something about this technology, right? I am talking about those people who already own 3D printers, which means they are supposed to have some technical knowledge already… So I can see some inconsistency going on in the way Printr positions itself.

A: Well, it might be true. But I believe that you can't throw a 3D printer at a new person today, there's still some learning curve involved. So that's why maybe today the target audience is not mass consumer. In 6 months, though, when these printers are easier to use, the situation might change. As the industry grows, maybe our target audience can shift as well. But currently it is strictly the users that have basic knowledge required to start.

Y: What do you think are the main obstacles preventing Printr from success at this moment, from the marketing point of view?

A: Well, the answer to this question is related to the previous one. The main downfall is that we are focusing on both of the target groups. Bottom line is

you need some technical knowledge to understand what is going on not just with a 3D printer but with our product as well. I believe that is our downfall – we are not talking to the users that we need to use today, not tomorrow. We keep talking to the users of tomorrow, and they don't exist yet.

Y: I see… That is indeed quite of an issue. But let's talk about Printr's social media marketing. Now there is Dianthe, a growth hacker, and myself that are in charge of managing Printr's social media channels. But did you have any specific social media strategy before we joined the team?

A: Basically, there used to be 5 different people within the company who had an access to our social media, it was all over the place. We also used to have a colleague who was handling blog posts as well as social media posts, but there was no definite strategy. But at that time, I believe, we did not have that much to say or show, while now we have more stuff coming up almost every day.

Y: True. And now Printr has some kind of social media strategy. Not a strategy in particular, but we are now, indeed, trying to put much more effort in maintaining our online presence comparing to what it used to be before. So what do you think is the main gap in Printr's current social media strategy? What kind of content do you think we should try to share more or what kind of stuff we should focus on less?

A: Because of the industry and where it is today, I think an image of a printed product will result in higher engagement than anything else that we are posting right now. You have to think what the target audience is today. You post an image of a 3D printed object, telling about the printer settings that you used to print it and all nerdy kind of information, that's what seems to be getting engagement and that's what the community responds to today. I do believe that if we could shed a little light on printers, different technologies, output of what we do, the problems that our users experience while 3D printing, that would be more relevant to the audience today. At this moment we kind of stopped showing the output of our product, and that's what people are still curious about. We need to show the output and communicate how our products can help people and solve the problems they are facing when 3D printing.

Appendix   2

INTERVIEW #2

Abbreviations further:
Y –Yanina Belaya (the author of this thesis)
D – Dianthe van Velzen (Growth Hacker)

Y: What do you think Printr has to offer in terms of its product that its competitors do not offer?

D: We are in the cloud 3D printing market, which is incredibly small, we don't work with a Raspberry Pi, but, instead, we have our standalone USB-dongle. In that sense, with Printr you get a universal solution, all in one package. That's something that none of the other competitors has to offer.

Y: Sounds like a solid competitive advantage. Which social media channels is Printr on right now? And how do you evaluate its presence on each of those channels?

D: We have our Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn accounts, we also have couple of videos on our YouTube channel. We are also doing press releases, that's not really about social media, but more about being on 3D printing forums. We write text about our product for different forums and this way try to increase brand awareness. At this moment we are very active on social media, trying to post if not every day then at least every other day. The problem is that we are not active with the information that we need to be active with. We show a lot of people at this point but we need more prints that we've printed with our own software and our own hardware. And we need to be relevant to people, because whenever they have any kind of 3D printing related problem we need to be there with all kinds of tutorials, either in the form of videos or blogs, that would give solutions to those problems. This way we would become the number one spot where people come to find information.

Y: I completely agree. Talking about social media channels, which one do you consider the most effective to generate engagement and bring Printr out there so that people know who we are? D: I am very confident that this channel is Facebook. When you look at Google Analytics, in fact about 80% of all the traffic on social media comes in from Facebook. It is the platform that drives the most traffic to the website and the platform where most people really engage with our posts.

Y: Lastly, what are the main social media marketing activities Printr is focusing on at the moment?

D: Apart from daily updates on various social media channels and press releases, we do collaborations with our partners, like Parkeagle. We also post stories of people involved in the 3D printing industry as well as of our staff to kind of shed the light on the "human side" of the company and the industry. Besides, we are trying to get collaborations with YouTubers and let them talk about us and review our products. We are also planning to make some more videos, interviewing people from the DIY community with really simple inexpensive printers and let them talk about how they upgraded from a cheap DIY printer to a pretty good-quality one with The Element (our product).