Rasmus Mäenpää

INBOUND MARKETING GTM-PLAN: CASE FICOLO LTD

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Tämä opinnäytetyö toteutettiin toimeksiantona konesaliyritys Ficolo Oy:lle. Työn tarkoituksena oli tuottaa työ, jonka avulla yrityksen sisäinen taito tuottaa markkinointia inbound-markkinoinnin keinoin kehittyisi ja markkinointi itsessään tehostuisi. Tavoitteena työllä oli tuottaa inbound-markkinointisuunnitelma, jota käytettäisiin yrityksen uuden palvelun tuomiseen markkinoille.

Työn teoriaosuus tarkastelee inbound-markkinointia ja siihen liittyviä markkinoinnin keinoja sekä markkinointisuunnitelman luontia ja sen eri osia. Inbound-markkinointi on markkinoinnin tapa, joka perustuu siihen, että potentiaaliset asiakkaat houkutellaan hyödyllisen aineiston avulla markkinoivan yrityksen luo. Markkinoinnissa hyödynnetään sisältöä, joka on asiakkaille hyödyllistä sekä markkinoinnin automaatiota, jonka avulla asiakkaat ohjataan kohti ostopäätöstä.

Tutkimuksen empiirinen osa toteutettiin kvalitatiivisena tutkimuksena, jonka tiedonkeruu suoritettiin kahtena teemahaastatteluna, joissa haastateltiin case-yrityksen johtohenkilöitä. Haastattelua varten suunniteltiin runko, joka varmisti, että haastattelussa käytiin läpi kaikki tutkimukselle oleelliset aiheet. Kerätty aineisto analysoitiin litteroimalla se ensin yleiskielelliseen muotoon, jonka jälkeen aineisto teemoitettiin.

Analysoidun tutkimusaineiston ja teoreettisen viitekehyksen pohjalta kehitettiin markkinointisuunnitelma case-yrityksen uudelle SaaS-palvelulle, jota ollaan tuomassa markkinoille. Suunnitelma hyödyntää pelkkiä inbound-markkinoinnin menetelmiä, eikä siinä otettu huomioon perinteisempiä markkinoinnin keinoja kuten tapahtumia tai maksettuja mainoksia. Suunnitelma on muodoltaan alustava, koska inbound-markkinoinnin keinot mahdollistavat, että markkinointimateriaalia voidaan muokata sen julkaisemisenkin jälkeen. Inbound-markkinointi vaatii jatkuvaa mittaamista ja arviointia, jotta se toimisi mahdollisimman tehokkaasti.

Työn tuloksena luotu markkinointisuunnitelma hyödyntää kaikkia inbound-markkinoinnin keinoja ja sille on annettu selkeät tavoitteet ja mittarit. Hyödyntämällä työn teoriaosuutta yhdessä luodun suunnitelman kanssa, case-yritys saa hyvän lähtökohdan oman inbound-markkinointinsa kehittämiseen.

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Mäenpää, Rasmus
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This thesis was commissioned by colocation and cloud delivery company Ficolo Ltd. Thesis's purpose was to produce a study which would increase the company's internal skills of conducting marketing via inbound marketing methods and would make the marketing efforts more effective. The objective was to create a marketing plan that could be utilized in bringing a new service to the market.

The theoretical chapters of the study focus on inbound marketing and different components that are related to it and marketing plan construction and its parts. Inbound marketing is a method of marketing that is based on the potential customers being enticed to come to the company. The marketing makes use of content that is useful for the customers and marketing automation that guides the customers towards a buying decision.

The empirical part of the thesis was carried out as a qualitative research. Data collection was conducted as two semi-structured interviews, for which case company management were interviewed. A framework was designed for the interviews, ensuring all the relevant topics were discussed. The collected data was analyzed by transcribing it on a standardized language level, and subsequently compressing the data into themes.

The analyzed research data and theoretical framework were used to create an inbound marketing plan for the case company's new SaaS service, which is being brought to market. The plan utilizes only inbound marketing methods and does not include any traditional marketing methods, such as industry events or bought advertisements. The plan works as a basis for marketing, because inbound marketing enables that the marketing content is modified and improved after its initial publication. Inbound marketing requires continuous measuring and reviewing for it to work as efficiently as possible.

The result of the study is a marketing plan that makes use of every inbound marketing component and has clear objectives and measures. Utilizing the study's theoretical part along with the created plan case company receives a good basis for developing its inbound marketing efforts.

CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION

Digitalization is a megatrend that has affected almost everything, not least marketing. Buying processes have changed as buyers have more information available easier than ever before. Search engines, social media and blogs are used to find information about products and problems and getting recommendations and opinions. (Halligan & Shah 2014, 6.) Buyers are informed and in business-to-business (B2B) environment, most buyers don't want to have any contact with sales representatives until they have a clear vision of their options (Laine 2015, 68).

Inbound marketing focuses on knowing what interests target customers and creating content that is helpful and interesting to them. Traditional *outbound* marketing publishes marketing material like advertisements, and hopes some of the people reached are interested. Inbound marketing focuses on making sure that the customer can find the content *when* they need it. Digital marketing channels guide potential customers from strangers to customers who trust the company and believe they are the best fit for them. Successful inbound marketing requires that the company knows its customers well. (Kurvinen & Seppä 2016.)

This thesis is commissioned by the case company to create a plan that improves company's marketing by increasing the knowledge and know-how of inbound marketing in the company by creating a clear plan that helps in measuring the success of inbound marketing. The objective for the plan is to obtain leads for company's sales agents.

The purpose and objectives of the thesis are discussed in chapter two. The thesis's theoretical chapters focus on inbound marketing and marketing planning. The different methods and plan creation process are explained in-depth. The theory uses sources that are reputable marketing books or the newest internet articles from creditable marketing companies, ensuring the information is correct and timely. The fifth chapter focuses on research methods and implementation, and the sixth showcases the finished plan. The seventh chapter is the conclusion and the final chapter evaluates the project.

2 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Purpose and objectives

The case company has an existing marketing plan that is used in its marketing efforts, but not a specific plan for inbound marketing. The purpose of the thesis is to increase the inbound marketing knowledge in the company, making the company's marketing efforts more effective. By improving the inbound marketing efforts, company will have more high-quality leads that are more likely to be converted into customers.

The objective of the thesis is to provide the case company with a well-rounded marketing plan that implements inbound marketing theory into practice. The plan has clear instructions for actions and tracking of its successfulness and the theory gives an in-depth look into the theory and application of inbound marketing. The inbound marketing methods and their implementation are discussed in the thesis and their purposes are explained. The methods are implemented into a marketing funnel that conceptualizes how prospects are converted and closed into customers.

The aim of the thesis is to find answers to following questions:

- What is inbound marketing and how can it be used in customer conversion?
- What are different tools associated with inbound marketing and how are they used?
- How and why is a marketing plan structured and what are its parts?
- How to track and measure the successfulness of a marketing plan?
- What information is needed of potential customers and how can it be gathered?

2.2 Case Company Ficolo Ltd

The case company of the thesis is a data center company Ficolo Ltd. Ficolo is a Finnish colocation and cloud delivery company. Company has offices in Pori and Helsinki, and its data center locates in Ulvila, near the office in Pori. Company's customers are software houses and service providers domestically and internationally. Company's services are divided into four cloud delivery services: colocation, cloud connectivity, managed cloud & platform and cloud assurance & security.

The company is bringing a new service to the market and wants to have a plan that can be used to market it. Inbound marketing plan was suggested by the company's management as suitable method of marketing and the thesis focuses on it. Inbound marketing plan would be used as part of company's marketing efforts, alongside with more traditional marketing and sales operations.

2.3 Conceptual Framework

Conceptual framework is used to set boundaries for research and to give the reader a visual and easy-to-understand representation of the thesis's contents. Figure 1 represents this thesis's main topics. The conceptual framework is used by researcher to set boundaries for the research.

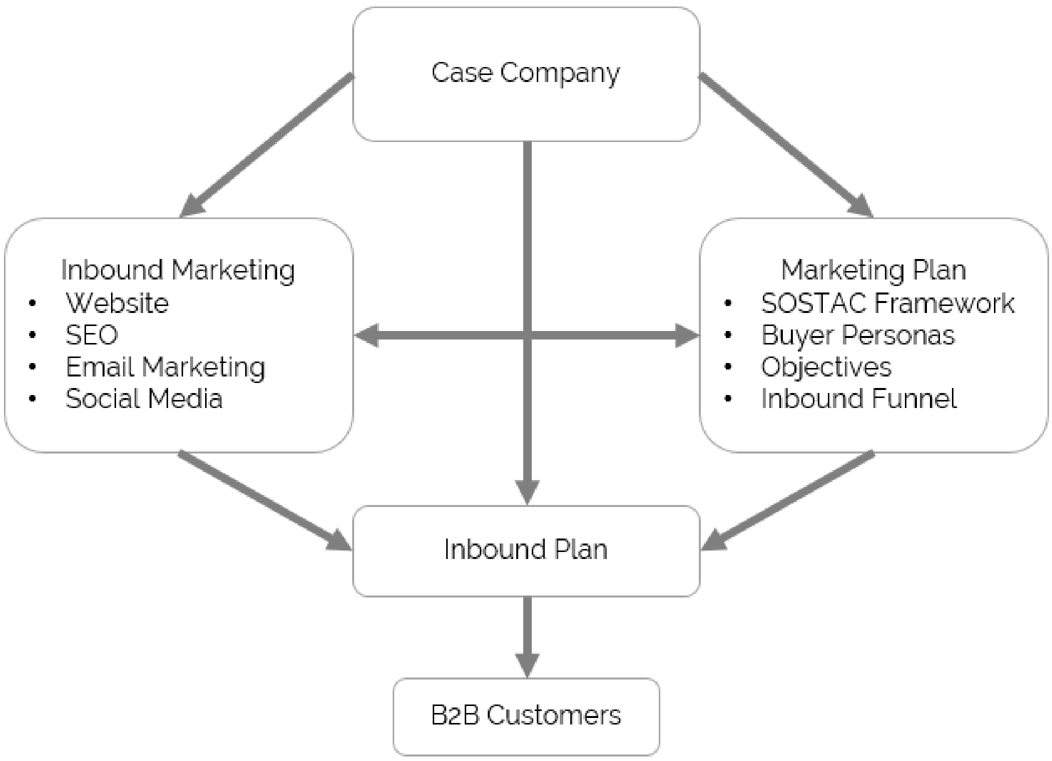

Figure 1. Conceptual framework: Constructing an inbound marketing plan (Thesis author 2018).

The product of the thesis is a go-to-market inbound marketing plan. The plan is constructed from two different parts: Inbound marketing and marketing plan. Both parts are affected by the case company, inbound marketing in the case of the tools that are available, and the marketing plan because the case company affects the target audiences and marketing objectives. At first, the thesis discusses inbound marketing methods, website, search-engine-optimization and social media. Those are the basis of inbound marketing. Then the thesis moves on to marketing plan in inbound marketing: buyer personas, inbound funnel and objectives. The finalized plan is used to reach company's target customers.

3 INBOUND MARKETING

In their book *Inbound Marketing*, the co-founders of marketing software company Hubspot, Brian Halligan and Dharmesh Shah, say that inbound marketing is "about *pulling* people in by sharing relevant information, creating useful content, and generally being *helpful*" (2014, xviii). Inbound marketing differs from the traditional marketing, or *outbound* marketing. Outbound marketing is focused on pushing the message to customers not caring if the message is interrupting the target's activities. The effectivity of inbound marketing comes from the fact that people don't want to be interrupted by marketing and have got quite good at preventing it. (Halligan & Shah 2014, xvii – xviii.)

These days, almost everything is researched on the Internet before making the decision to buy, from consumer goods to business decisions. According to Laine (2015, 68) over 60% of B2B buyers advance to the final stages of their buying processes before contacting sales representatives or suppliers. The availability of information enables the buyers to evaluate and compare their options. With inbound marketing, digital channels are used to engage buyers at the right time and with right marketing content. Internet enables marketers to reach millions of potential customers with lower costs than traditional marketing by utilizing search engines, landing pages and email marketing to engage potential customers directly and provide them with the content that helps them to make more educated buying decisions. (Halligan & Shah 2014, 6; Laudon 2017, 376.)

Google, the overwhelmingly dominant search engine with over 86% market share in 2017, conducts over three and a half billion search queries every day (Website of the Internet Live Stats 2018; Website of Statista 2017). Inbound marketing's purpose is to increase the chances that potential customers find the company when they are looking for information. The main channels used are search engines, social media and email marketing. By creating content that is helpful and designed to customers' needs, the marketing builds credibility and trust between the customers and the company. (Halligan & Shah 2014, 6; Website of Hubspot 2018.)

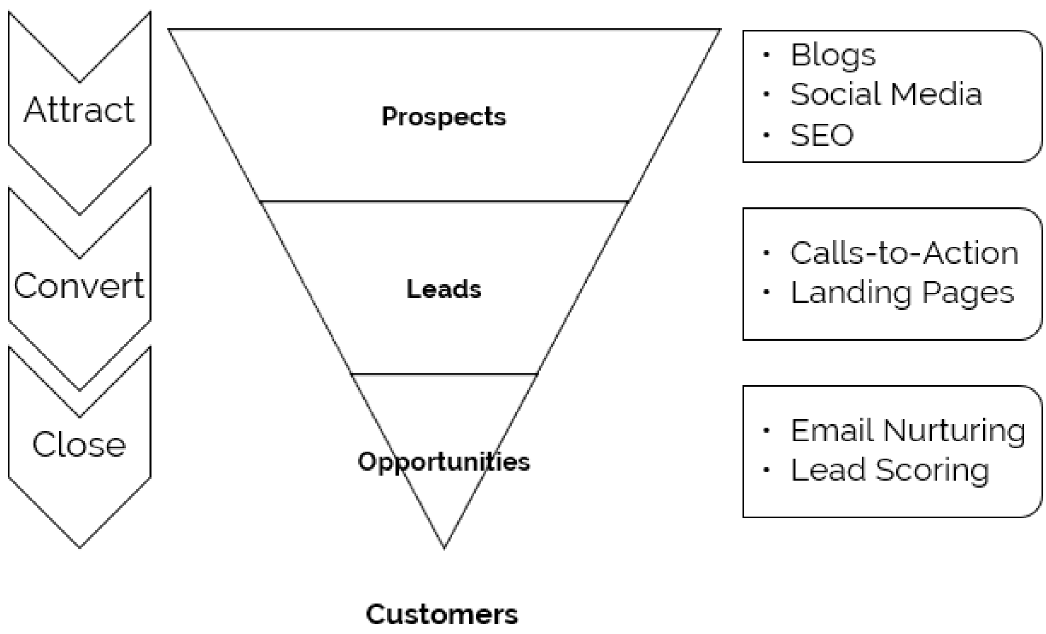

Figure 2. Inbound funnel and sales process (Halligan & Shah 2014, adapted by thesis author 2018).

Inbound marketing has three distinct phases to nurture prospects into customers. Those phases are: Attract, Convert and Close. Each phase uses different contents to engage prospective customers. (Kurvinen & Seppä 2016.)

In *attract* phase, the marketing brings the right type of prospects to the company's website. Prospects are the type of people who are likely to make a purchase from the company. This happens with blog posts, social media posts and optimizing website for search engines. The second phase is *conversion*. Once the prospects have found the company and are on the website, they are converted into leads. The conversion happens by offering the visitors gated content, that requires them to give their contact information by filling out a form. The lead is more qualified the more information they give out. The content can, for example, be an educational white paper, eBook or a participation in a webinar. The third phase in inbound marketing is *closing* phase that means guiding the lead to a buying decision. The closing happens by nurturing the lead with additional content and keeping the company on top of the lead's mind as they move towards the buying decision. Nurturing happens with lead scoring and with targeted email marketing. (Website of Hubspot 2018.)

The process is called a funnel because each stage has less potential customers than the previous one; not all prospects are converted into leads and not all leads are closed into customers. (Website of Hubspot 2018.)

In the next chapters the inbound marketing methods are explained. The first method is the website that is the center of all inbound marketing activities. The site is the place where everything points to and where the prospects are converted into leads. The site also has two inbound marketing components: landing page and call-to-action button. Next is search engine optimization which's purpose is to improve website's ranking in search engine results page. Email marketing is explained next. It is used to nurture leads and guide them to a buying decision. Finally, the chapter ends with social media and how it is utilized in inbound marketing efforts.

3.1 Website

The website is the center of company's inbound marketing efforts. It is where current and potential customers go to be informed and educated. There prospects are converted into qualified leads. (Halligan & Shah 2014, 109.) According to Laudon (2017, 389), the website functions as a brand message anchor and the customers go there to find out the "true story" of the company. The site is the cornerstone of brand identity and it sets the customers' expectations of the company. It should be considered as the *marketing hub* of the company, the place where all the inbound marketing efforts point to. But the most important about the website isn't the design or visual outlook, but that the site visitors find the information they are looking for. (Halligan & Shah 2014, 35 – 36.)

Website has two important components in conversion process: landing pages and call-to-actions. The landing pages are pages of the site that are specifically dedicated to a product or a service that a visitor is interested in. Landing pages are completely dedicated to one topic, so the visitor does not get distracted or confused by additional information. Call-to-actions (*CTAs*) are prompts that encourage visitors to engage with the company. (Halligan & Shah 2014, 109 – 110.)

Call-to-actions

Call-to-action is a statement that is designed to get an immediate reaction from the person reading it. Call to action's purpose is to guide the visitor and show them what to do next. Example of this is "click here" or "download now". The used language has to be simple and easily understood and prompt the visitor to act on it. It needs to be clearly visible on the site and offer something valuable in return. Figure 3 illustrates the qualities that an effective CTA has. (Halligan & Shah 2014, 111 – 112.)

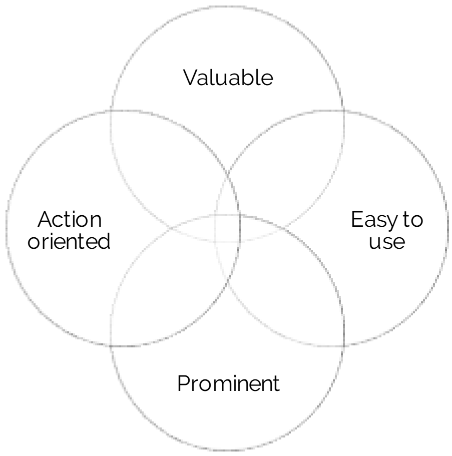

Figure 3. The Qualities of a good Call-To-Action (Halligan & Shah 2014, 111. Adapted by thesis author 2018).

The CTAs are used to convert site visitors into qualified leads. CTA leads the visitor to a dedicated *landing page* where they can fill out a form with their contact information and receive content that they are interested in, for example an eBook or a free demo. CTAs aren't used only to guide to a landing page but each time the visitor is guided further in the process. The landing page itself contains a CTA as it is the link that the visitor has to click to send their information to the company. Thus, it is important that the CTAs are always unambiguous and leave no doubt on visitors' mind on where the link is taking them. (Website of Hubspot Academy 2018.)

When designing the CTA, it must be taken in the account that the CTA has to stand out from the page and that a site should only have a limited number of CTAs. The design of the CTA should utilize contrasting colors that catch the visitors' eyes and make the button stand out from the page. Placing the CTA in a prominent place on the site and making it more noticeable increases its conversion rate. It is better to have only one CTA per page but if more than one CTAs are used on the same page, then they have to be ranked so that the most important one is more visible than others. (Halligan & Shah 2014, 112; Website of Hubspot Academy 2018.)

Landing pages

Landing pages are webpages that are designed to convert targeted audiences from prospects into qualified leads. The content of landing page should be limited to the contact information form. (Halligan & Shah 2014, 115 – 116). Any distraction can cause the visitor to leave the page without sending their contact information. The landing page functions only to capture visitors' information, so the page shouldn't have any additional links or offers. (Halligan & Shah 2014, 116 – 117; Wainwright 2013.)

The form should be simple and the required information should match the visitor's valuation their personal information to the provided content. Content that is intended to buyers in the later stages of their buying process, can require more personal information. (Kurvinen & Seppä 2016.) Converting through landing pages helps understanding the prospects. Analyzing the downloaded content gives valuable data about what content is engaging visitors and what landing pages are working well. (Vaughan 2012.)

After the visitor has filled in and sent the contact form, they should be followed up with a "thank-you page" that provides the lead with the offered content or clear instructions on how to acquire it. This can be a link to download an eBook or step-by-step guide on how to take part in a webinar. The most important part of the follow-up is that the lead isn't left without guidance or wondering if their form was received. (Vaughan 2012.)

3.2 Search-Engine-Optimization

Search-engine-optimization (SEO) is one of the most prominent components of inbound marketing. The search-engines are highly effective in contacting prospects right when they are looking for information and in the beginning of their buying process. They look for information about their problem, how to solve it and how others have solved the problem. (Kurvinen & Seppä 2016.)

The search results page (SERP) is divided into two sections: *paid* and *organic* search results. Companies can use engines' advertising software, i.e. Google AdWords, to place their page on top of the results page by paying the engine. Those paid results are place on the top of the results with a yellow "ad" label. After them are the organic results that are unpaid. Although paid results are on top of SERP, they only get a small part of the clicks, approximately 18 per cent, as the majority - over 80 per cent - goes to organic results. SEO is used to improve the ranking of those organic results. (Dodson 2016, 10; Landon 2017, 393.)

SEO is used to improve company's visibility in search engines. Visibility drives high quality, interested in buying, traffic to company's website. SEO increases individual webpages' ranking in search engines by making the pages' content more "search-engine friendly". Ranking as one of the first results is very important, as according to Ginty, Leake & Vaccarello (2012, 38) most users don't ever visit the second page of search results. It happens by considering three components: Content SEO, technical SEO, and SEO authority. The results are also affected by the user's search history, and each user has their own, customized results. (Dodson 2016, 12; Kurvinen & Seppä 2016.)

Content SEO

Website content is in the heart of SEO. Large part of SEO is determining keywords and producing content based on them. The content is crucial in SERP rankings. The challenge is finding the keywords that have enough traffic and low enough competition to rank in the high positions of the SERP. (Ginty, Leake & Vaccarello 2012, 41; Kurvinen & Seppä 2016.)

Optimizing the content for SEO means using keywords in the copy and following basic guidelines of good writing. The keyword(s) should be found in the text multiple times, but the use must be natural. Search engines have started to punish the sites that practice “keyword stuffing”, filling the text copy with keywords in an excessive way. Also, text that isn’t easy to read will increase the bounce-rate of the page, dissatisfied visitors leaving the site without visiting other pages. Along with sensible use of keywords, the text should follow conventions of text structure by using paragraphs, correct grammar and spelling in the text copy. When the keyword use is planned, produced content is focused and easy to read. (Ginty, Leake & Vaccarello 2012, 44 – 45.)

Halligan and Shah (2014, 50) write that SEO starts with choosing the *keywords* the page is wanted to rank for. Keywords are used as the search query in the engines. Using the keywords in the page’s technical aspects helps the search-engine to understand what the most important topic of the page is and who can gain value from it. SEO efforts should be focused so that each page has one to three keywords it is wanted to rank for. Having more than three keywords, causes that the page loses its focus and optimization is less effective. When pages try to cover too many topics at once, page visitors can get confused, leading to high bounce-rates. That in turn decreases the page’s value in search engines. (Odden 2012, 133).

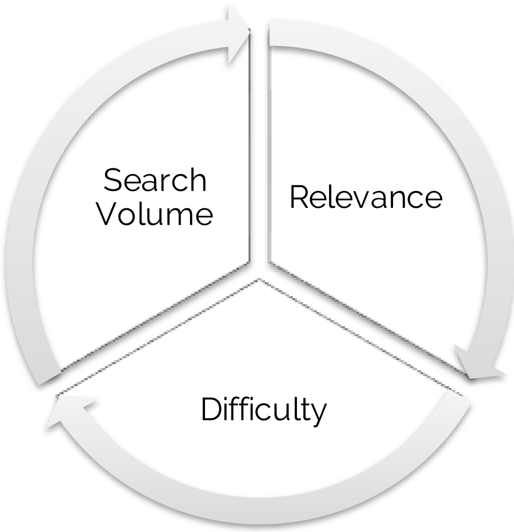

Figure 4. Choosing the right keyword (Halligan & Shah 2014 50 – 51. Adapted by thesis author).

Choosing of keywords is based on three factors: relevance, estimated search volume and difficulty. Right keywords are balanced between those factors. Keyword should be relevant to company's products/services, have high enough search volume and not have too strong competition from similar companies. Users who use specific, *long-tail* keywords, are much closer to buying decision than one to two words, general searches. General searches can potentially drive high amount of traffic but the traffic generated by long-tail keywords is higher in quality. (Dodson 2016, 16 – 17; Halligan & Shah 2014, 50 – 51.)

Technical SEO

Technical SEO's purpose is to remove any technical aspects on the web page that prevent search engines from indexing it. It facilitates the engines' scanning by providing them with an obstacle-free access to the page and helps the engine to understand what pages the company wants to highlight on its site. Pages technical aspects like URL, meta description and titles are made clear and easy to understand. (Kurvinen & Seppä 2016.)

In technical SEO, keywords are used in optimizing page's technical components. The keyword(s) should appear in all of them as the search-engines use frequently used words to determine what is the page's topic. (Ginty, Leake & Vaccarello 2012, 45; Halligan & Shah 2014, 62).

Technical SEO concerns mostly with page's title, meta description and URL. Page's title is the most important aspect of technical SEO as it is the most prominent. Title is shown on the top of the browser and is the most visible text in the SERP. The title should be descriptive of the content and start with a keyword the page is wanted to rank for. Meta description is only show in the SERP and is a summary of page's contents. The description isn't directly used for ranking by the engines, but a compelling description will increase clicks from the users. Also making sure the URL (*Uniform Resource Locator)* is search-engine optimized is important. Using keywords in the URL indicate to engines about the page's topic and clear URL is more user friendly in general. Also having a clear and clean URL is useful if other sites link to it. In most cases, the URL is used as the anchor text for the link, and a keyword rich, simple and clean URL is more likely to gain clicks than a URL that is complicated and hard to read. (Halligan & Shah 2014, 53 – 55.)

SEO Authority

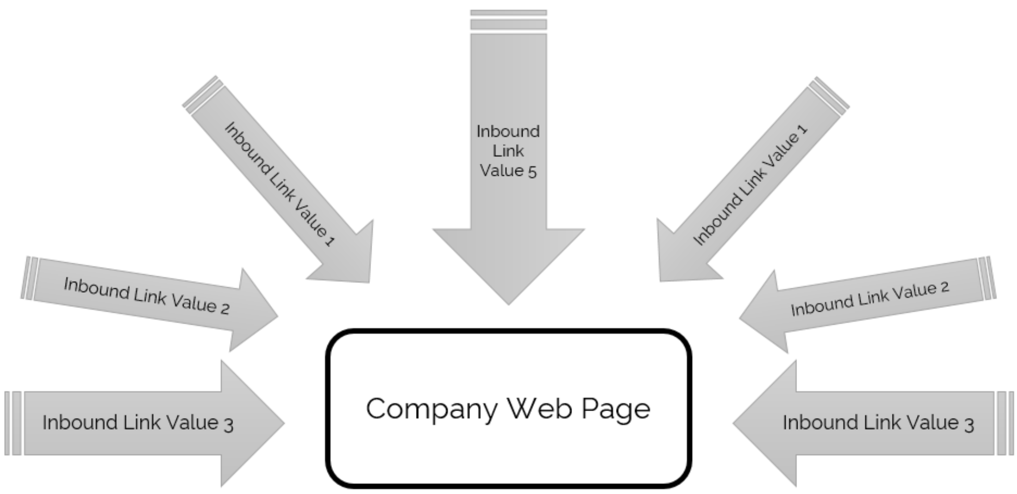

Figure 5. Inbound links: How inbound links add increase the authority of a web page (Thesis author 2018).

SEO authority focuses on other sites linking to company's webpages. The inbound links tell search engines that the page's content is high quality. An inbound link is a "vote of confidence" by another site. Each link increases the pages authority and thus the chances of higher ranking in SERP. How much value each link has in turn depends on how many links the linking site has itself. This means that links from high quality sites with a lot of inbound links provide the site they linking to with more value than a site that does not have as many links. The algorithm that determines the value of each link is called PageRank. (Fishkin & Høgenhaven 2013, 70; Kurvinen & Seppä 2016.) Figure 5 illustrates how inbound links affect web pages authority score.

3.3 Email Marketing

After the prospect's contact information has been acquired, the lead can be nurtured. Nurturing is a process where communication between the company and the lead is active, so that when the lead enters the buying phase, the company is on the top of their mind. (Halligan & Shah 2014 152.)

Email is one of the oldest online marketing methods and it is still one of the most effective ones. Vast audiences can be reached with relatively low costs, as sending a hundred emails costs basically the same as sending a thousand. Their effectiveness can be measured by tracking click-through-rates (CTRs) and they can be personalized to contain customized messages and tailored offers. (Laudon 2017, 404 – 405).

Unsolicited emails, or *spam mail,* has decreased email's effectiveness, as inboxes are cluttered with unwanted offers and messages. The amount of emails means that email marketing has to be done in such way that is useful and interesting for the receiver and isn't intrusive or annoying. (Kotler, Armstrong, Harris & Piercy 2016, 508 – 509.)

To be able to nurture a lead effectively, the leads are given a score. The score indicates at which part of the buying process the lead is. The score is given either manually or by using a customer relationship management software (CRM) that supports that function. The scoring can be based on different factors: referral channel, website visits, CTAs and form responses. Basically, all the ways that the lead can interact with the company should be given a value, and as the lead interacts with them, the lead's score gets higher in the CRM. (Halligan & Shah 2014, 149 – 152.)

Lead nurturing is used to keep in contact with the companies and customers that aren't ready to buy, so when they are ready the marketer's company is on top of their mind. Mostly this happen by e-mails but phone calls can be mixed in if appropriate for the business. Length of the sales cycle determines the number of messages over time. If company has a complex sales cycle that lasts many months, it is ideal to limit messages to one or two per month. The sales cycle has to be kept in mind in the nurturing content as well. If the lead isn't in the phase to buy, it isn't useful to them to receive e-mails filled with special offers. The content should always be useful and create value for the lead, causing them to look forward to receiving the e-mails. (Halligan & Shah 2014, 152 – 153.)

3.4 Social Media marketing

Social media is a powerful tool for inbound marketing. The most important feature is its sharing capabilities that allow the content to reach vast audience in a short period of time and with minimal costs. Social media makes it possible for great, high quality content that engages people to reach prospects that the company couldn't otherwise reach. Data gathered by platforms' analytics tools provide information that can be used to customize content to platforms. Analytics show what kind of content is best suited to platforms and what is the best time to be posted. (Kurvinen & Seppä 2016; Vaynerchuk 2013, 12.)

Social media makes it possible for companies to have a two-way communication with their target customers which is beneficial for both parties. The company learns more about the customers and can focus its resources better and the customers get their voices heard and get the kind of service they want. The analytic capabilities of social media platforms offer improved tracking and anticipation of customer needs. (Ahto, Kahri, Kahri & Mäkinen 2016, 27; Ryan 2014, 151.)

There are many kinds of social media platforms and most popular ones have over billion monthly users. Social networking sites like Facebook and LinkedIn are what most people connect with social media, but there are also forums, media sharing platforms, link sharing sites, review and rating sites, blogs and microblogs, wikis and podcasts. (Ryan 2014, 156-167).

Each platform has its own language and culture, their own aesthetics, designs and tones that are native to platform. The content posted on social media should match that language while keeping the brand identity of the company intact. (Vaynerchuk 2013, 11-13.)

Kurvinen & Seppä (2016.) write that the most important social media platforms for B2B marketing are LinkedIn, Twitter, and Facebook. Each platform has their own use purposes and culture. LinkedIn is world's most popular networking site for professionals and is the best place for B2B content that deals with industry news and updates. Twitter is a microblogging site that enables a quick exchange of opinions and leverages a heavy use of hashtags (#). Facebook, the world's most popular social networking site, has over billion users and has a huge reach potential. Its use is mainly focused on personal lives but the professional use is increasing. Facebook offers marketers a great platform to raise awareness of their company and drive traffic to company's website. (Kurvinen & Seppä 2016.)

4 INBOUND MARKETING PLAN

4.1 Marketing planning and SOSTAC framework

Marketing plan is based on company's business idea and on the objectives specified in company's strategy. Planning of marketing is both strategic, long term planning and annually done tactic and operative planning. For marketing efforts, the plan is usually done in yearly basis. The plan is done in a written form, including relevant analyses, target audiences, actions and monitoring metrics (Bergström & Leppänen 2015.)

Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2016, 188) recommend using SOSTAC planning framework for developing a marketing plan with digital marketing channels. The SOSTAC framework stands for: Situation analysis, Objectives, Strategy, Tactics, Actions and

Control. (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick 2016, 188.) Figure 6 illustrates the SOSTAC planning framework.

Figure 6. SOSTAC marketing model (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick 2016, 189, adapted by thesis author 2018).

Situation analysis aims to answers where the company currently is; how the internal and external factors affect company's marketing activities. This is done conducting a SWOT analysis: analyzing company's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. The analysis produces a TOWS presentation of strategies that combine the four categories to produce strategies that combine strengths and opportunities and combine them with weaknesses and threats to counter them. (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick 2016, 196.)

Objectives answer to question: "where do we want to be?" (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick 2016, 188). The objectives are used to assess the successfulness of marketing efforts. They should be tied to company's other objectives and should fit the S.M.A.R.T. (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and timely) criteria. (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick 2016, 196, 203.) Setting objectives for inbound marketing are discussed further in Chapter 4.2.

Strategy summarizes how the set objectives are achieved. The targeted audience is specified and the channels and tools that are used to reach them. The target audience can be segmented and targeted, while the company can decide it's differentiation and positioning for each channel; different channels have different user cultures and need different tone to be natural (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick 2016, 208; Vaynerchuk 2013, 12.) It is important that the chosen strategy aligns with the objectives.

Marketing plan's *Tactics* specify what are the practical tasks that are done (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick 2016, 188). What content is produced and how, and what channels are used to promote it. In inbound marketing, this means the marketing funnel that is discussed in chapter 4.3.

Actions refers to how the plan is executed. Who are the persons responsible and what are their duties? The plan is also set a time timetable in which the objectives should be achieved. (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick 2016, 188.)

Control assess how the successfulness is measured and what improvements can be made. The measuring should be done be determining key performance indicators. (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick 2016, 188.) Key performance indicators (KPIs) are factors that are used to measure progress. Inbound marketing KPIs are, for example: Monthly website visitors, monthly converted leads and amount of traffic from social media, blog posts and email. (Mawhinney 2017.) Choosing the right KPIs is crucial to monitoring marketing's performance effectively, and making right decisions for continuous improvement (Ryan 2014, 84-85).

4.2 Setting objectives

Objectives tie the marketing to company's overall strategy and give clear indication how the marketing is affecting company's business. (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick 2017, 196 – 197.) Using SMART objectives ensures that marketing target is clear and makes progress tracking easier (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick 2017, 203). The website of Hubspot Academy (2018) determines the SMART objective qualities as:

- Specific: the objectives are unambiguous and communicate with clarity what is expected, why it is important, what is involved and where it is going to take place.
- Measurable: the objectives have concrete criteria for measuring progress and reaching the target.
- Attainable: the objectives are realistic and possible to be reached.
- Relevant: the objectives are relevant to the business and addresses core initiatives.
- Timely: the objectives have an expected date when they will be reached.

4.3 Buyer Personas

Buyer personas are the foundation of marketing plan as they outline the target audience. Understanding who the marketing is for, what are their interests and what channels they use helps in creating the right kind of marketing content that resonates with the target audience. The buyer personas are a representation of the ideal customers that are given specific attributes. Usually more than one buyer personas are constructed as most products and services are purchased by people in different roles and many people take part in the buying decision. Defining and understanding the buyers facilitates the creating content that attracts customers. (Kurvinen & Seppä 2016; Mawhinney 2017.)

The buyer personas are created by researching, surveying and interviewing the target audience. That can include current customers, prospects and contacts who align with the target audience. Understanding how current customers interact with the company and how they consume the content the company produces, gives important information how to attain the best possible reach for the content. (Vaughan 2017.)

Good lead capturing forms contribute to the buyer personas, as they gather information i.e. company size and the lead's position in their company. The sales representatives' feedback should be considered as they interact with the customers the most. They have insights into how the customers behave. (Vaughan 2017.)

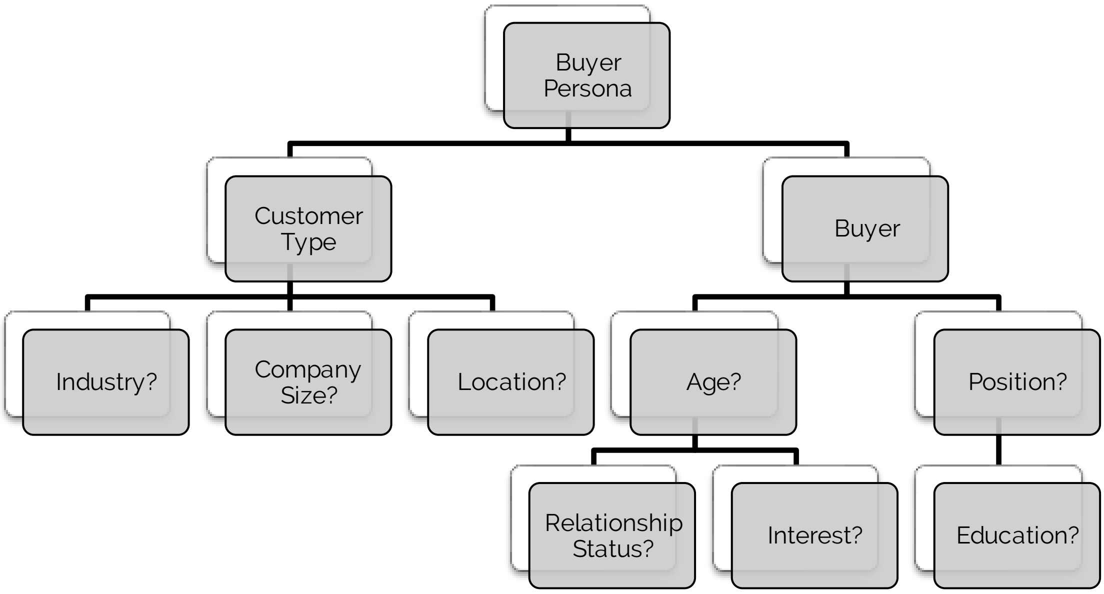

Figure 7. Buyer Persona Template (Thesis Author 2018).

The construction of the personas starts with the basic information of the customer: what kind of buyer are they? As the customer type is specified can more specific information about the buyer be constructed. Where do they live? How old are they? Are they a male or a female? What are they interested in? This type of information is used as a guide and gives a good base for understanding the buyer. (Website of Digimoguli 2018.)

4.4 Inbound Marketing Funnel

Inbound Marketing funnel breaks down potential customers' journey from prospects to customers. The stages are attracting, converting and closing. Each stage has content that answer to needs of customers in that stage. (Mawhinney 2017.)

In attract stage customers have identified a need or a problem and look for more information about it. Then they enter the conversion stage, as they want to know how to solve that problem. When they understand the problem, and know how to solve it, they move to the closing stage where they decide who to buy from. Assigning potential customers into specific stages makes targeting more effective and accurate, providing potential customers with useful and relevant content. (Halligan & Shah 2014, 138; Mawhinney 2017.)

Attracting Prospects

According to Ginty, Leave & Vallance (2012, 149) the B2B sales cycle is typically slow and involves many persons and roles, facing the marketer with a complex conversion process. The customer's interest has to be piqued and kept through the complete buying process. Inbound marketing does this by producing content that helps them to understand their problem. This content is top of the funnel, or TOFU content. The content is about the topics that interest target audiences and helps them understand the problem they are trying to solve. (Kurvinen & Seppä 2016.)

The stage's purpose is to generate traffic to the company's website and reaching as many potential customers as possible with inbound methods. These are website and blogs, social media and search engine optimization. They are used to promote the content that is created based on buyer personas. With correct buyer personas, company reaches right audience that matches with buyer personas and have a high conversion rate. High amount of traffic does not matter if the visitors aren't going to be converted into leads and customers. (Chaffey & Smith 2013, 349 – 350; Mawhinney 2017.)

Converting Leads

Once prospects visit the company's website, the fundamental part of inbound marketing starts: gaining the marketing permission. Gaining the marketing permission is also known as *conversion*. It happens with middle of the funnel, or MOFU, content. The content is gated behind a contact form that the prospect has to fill to gain access to. The conversion can be thought as an exchange where the prospect gains valuable content and the company receives contact information of a potential customer. (Kurvinen & Seppä 2016.)

The conversion happens through CTAs and landing pages with contact forms. The forms should ask only for the necessary information. If the form asks extensive amounts of personal information, i.e. phone number, the prospect might feel that the exchange isn't fair, deciding not to fill the form. (Kurvinen & Seppä 2016.)

It is important that the customers are offered multiple ways to engage with the company as the visitors are in different phases of their buying processes. The conversion should be offered on different levels with different levels of engagement. Subscribing to a monthly newsletter is much lower engagement than a demo request. (Halligan & Shah 2014, 134.)

Closing Customers

The third phase of the funnel is the closing phase. The company uses the gathered contact information to track the actions the leads take to determine who are the most potential customers and when they are ready to make the purchasing decision. The marketing permission enables the company to offer the lead content that is relevant to their problem and guides them towards the buying decision. (Kurvinen & Seppä 2016.)

The information gathered with forms helps to target leads with the right kind of, relevant content. For example, company CEOs want different content than company IT-manager. Marketing automation tools can be used to create *workflows* that are automatized based on leads' actions. The automation can track what topics the leads are interested in, what content have they read or downloaded, what forms have they filled and what channels they are using. By implementing lead scoring and giving each engagement a value, leads can be kept track of and the ones that have the most potential, can be recognized. (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick 2016, 629; Kurvinen & Seppä 2016.)

Once the lead is determined to be ready for closing, the lead is given to sales department. The interaction history should be transferred with the lead, so that sales representatives can use that information to customize their approach to fit the lead's previous interaction with the company. (Kurvinen & Seppä 2016.)

5 RESEARCH METHODS AND IMPLEMENTATION

5.1 Research Design

Research is purposeful, systematically executed collection and interpretation of data to increase one's knowledge about a certain research object (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2007, 5). Research is guided by its design as it affects the strategic choices made in the research. It is the general plan of how the research questions are answered. The design can be divided into three different categories: exploratory, descriptive and explanatory. (Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 2009, 137; Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2007, 133.)

Explorative research studies what is happening and tries to find new angles or phenomena. It is used for clarification; what is the real nature of the problem. It is usually conducted by executing extensive literature review, interviewing experts or group focus interviews. Explorative research requires that the researcher is ready to change direction mid-research as new data is uncovered. (Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 2009, 138; Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2007, 133 – 134.)

Descriptive research tries to describe the researched person, event or situation as accurately as possible. This type of research design requires that the researcher has a good overall understanding of the research phenomenon before the data collection. The understanding is needed to be able to notice behaviors, events, beliefs and processes that occur during the data collection. (Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 2009, 139; Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2007, 134.)

Explanatory research studies situations and problems to explain relationships between identified variables and if the relationships are causal. Researcher aims to identify the events, beliefs, attitudes and actions that have affected the phenomenon and how those factors affect each other. (Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 2009, 138; Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2007, 134.)

This thesis employs both descriptive and explorative research designs. The research aims to describe the current situation of the case company's marketing efforts and also find new ways of employing inbound marketing in company's marketing.

5.2 Research Methods

Research object is a real-world phenomenon that the research can examine from multiple angles. The angle can be economic, organizational, juridical, etc., depending on what kind of knowledge the researcher aims to obtain. (Kananen 2011, 18 – 19.) The chosen angle determines what the research problem and research questions are. The research aims to improve the current situation by understanding the problem by answering to the research questions. The questions ask what are the underlying structures behind the problem; how different factors affect each other and the problem. The research approach, how the questions are answered, depends on the availability of previous data about the research phenomenon. The research approaches can be divided into *quantitative research* and *qualitative research*. (Kananen 2011, 19 – 20.)

Quantitative research approach highlights the universal rule of cause and effect (Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 2009, 139). The quantitative research answers to the questions "what" or "how much", and uses numerical quantitative data to test hypotheses that are formed from previously existing literature and research. This method is called deductive process. (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2007, 117.) The data is collected from a selected sample group using a questionnaire. The sample group must be large enough to make generalizations about the research phenomenon and human behavior. Quantitative research requires that the research follows strict rules during the research process. Mistakes in the questionnaire or the sample group render the whole research process invalid and it has to be started from the beginning. (Kananen 2011, 72 – 73; Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2007, 118.)

Qualitative research answers to questions "why" and "how". The research enables the researcher to gather more in-depth understanding of the research subject and the reasons behind the subject's behavior and decisions. (Heikkilä 2014, 15.) Qualitative research employs inductive process in which the empirical research findings serve as the basis for forming a hypothesis, instead of using practical tests to prove the validity of a pre-constructed hypothesis. The qualitative research focuses on subjects that cannot be measured quantitatively. (Hirsjärvi, Remes, Sajavaara 2009, 161; Kananen 2014, 17.)

For data collection, the qualitative research employs several different methods that include: theme interview, focus groups, participant observation, etc. The case studies are limited to a small amount, as it facilitates conducting more accurate analysis of the subject. The subjects are managed individually, so the research interpretation is also based on uniqueness. For this reason, the research plan is made elastic and can be modified if necessary (Heikkilä 2014, 15; Hirsjärvi, Remes, Sajavaara 2009, 164.)

Both research approaches were considered to conduct the research for this thesis. If the sample group could be chosen correctly, quantitative research would yield useful information about the case company's target customers' habits and behavior. This would be useful for constructing buyer personas, and would give good, general targets for the marketing campaign. After a consideration, it was realized that not enough was known about the case company's operations and that quantitative research wouldn't be able to collect such data. Therefore, the chosen research approach for this thesis is qualitative research.

5.3 Data Collection

In qualitative research, the data collection method must fit the researched phenomenon; how authentic and accurate the data has to be. The methods differ in their time consumption and requirements for pre-research information. (Kananen 2011, 48; Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 2009, 191 – 192.)

Observation is divided in two types: direct observation where the presence of the observer is known by the observees, and disguised observation that is used when the observation's possible influence on the situation is minimized, by executing the observation without the knowledge of the observees. Observation is most suitable to situation where little or no information is available on the research phenomenon and produces authentic information that is based on authentic situations. Observation is limited as it must be restricted to observable phenomena, and cannot be used to collect data about i.e. person's thinking. Observation is also time consuming and the objectivity of the observer is crucial for valid data collection. (Kananen 2011, 48 – 49; Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 2009, 212 – 214.)

Interview is suitable data collection method in situations where only a little is known about the research phenomenon or it is completely unknown. As a method, interview can uncover in-depth information about phenomenon and reasons behind it. However, interview requires skills and knowledge from the interviewer. The interviewer must adapt to the interviewee and be able to focus on right topics during the interview. The interviewer has to guide the interview in a way that does not distort the answers of the interviewees. Observing the non-verbal cues of interviewee, like sighs and expressions, the researcher can uncover motives behind the answers and make connections that weren't considered before the interview. Interview methods vary in their formality and in how they are structured, allowing the interviewer to make changes to the direction and contents of the interview based on interviewee's answers. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2008, 34 – 35; Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2007, 311.)

Interviews can be carried out as individual or group interviews. The most common interview methods are: structured interview, semi-structured interview and unstructured interview. Structured interview has a strict order and clearly planned questions and is conducted in a way that makes different interviews as structurally identical as possible. The questions' wording is kept the same and no further questions are asked. The structured interview focuses on asking the right questions and requires that the questions are carefully planned beforehand. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2008, 44 – 45; Kananen 2015, 145.)

Unstructured interview is more informal in its structure than structured interview and is similar to a discussion where the previous answer leads to next question. The questions in unstructured interview are open and the interviewer's main task is to move the interview forward with further questions, receiving deeper information and better understanding of the research phenomenon. As a data collection tool, unstructured interview's workload is high and requires skillful conduction of the interview. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2008, 45 – 46; Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 2009, 208 – 219.)

Semi-structured or thematic interview is the middle ground between structured and unstructured interviews. The interviewer sets certain themes that the interview consists of and constructs specific questions for each theme but the wording and order of the questions are free to be changed during the interview. This makes the method flexible and it is commonly used. Thematic interview enables the interviewer to gain versatile data from various angles by initiating the interview from themes on a general level and then diving deeper into the themes through asking specific questions. Semi-structured, thematic interview is closer to unstructured than structured interview. It has the same flexibility as the unstructured interview but still maintains thematic structure for each conducted interview. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2008, 47; Kananen 2015, 148 – 150.)

The third data collection method is using written material. Material can be texts, visual and audiovisual recordings, etc. Basically, any material that contains data or information. When using documents for data collection, the reliability of the sources has to be considered. Most documents aren't done without some sort of self-censorship. To increase the reliability the researcher must use more than one source and compare the data retrieved from the sources. The text interpretation is done by comprising each source into units that summaries what is said about certain subject. This gives a quick and effortless way of seeing what the source is about and how it compares to others. Written material can be used as research material as such or to support and complement interviews. (Kananen 2011, 61 – 63.)

This thesis employs the semi-structured interview method. The method was chosen because of the ability gain specific information with the ability to ask specifying questions. Existing data about the research phenomenon gives enough existing knowledge to form themes and specifying questions for the interview. The method facilitates discovering new, previously undiscovered data, that is crucial for the success of the thesis. A thematic framework (Appendix 1) was created to support the conducting of the interview.

The interviewees for the thesis were the case company's chief executive officer (CEO) and chief commercial officer (CCO). Interviewees were chosen based on their position in management roles and their involvement in company's marketing operations. Their roles also differ enough for the interviewees to offer different angles to the marketing. CEO has a more general angle that is focused on the company as a whole and CCO a more focused angle on the marketing operations and practical tasks involved in them. Both interviews were conducted on April 25 as separate semi-structured interviews. The interviews were conducted through Skype because a face-to-face interview wasn't deemed necessary for the research objectives to be reached. Both interviews were recorded for subsequent analysis.

Both interviews were successful and followed the pre-planned structure. The semi-structured interview made both interviews free-flowing but the thematic structure was followed in both. The interviewees were able to offer insights to company's marketing and enabled deeper understanding of company operations.

5.4 Data Analysis

With the recorded data collected from the interview, analyzation of the data starts by transcribing the interview. *Transcription* is process of converting the recording of the interview into a document that contains the important contents of the interview. The transcription is done in one of the three levels: *word-for-word, standard language* or *propositional*. Word-for-word transcription is the most accurate level of transcription. By using it, each expression, verbal cue and gesture is written down to comply the most accurate representation of the interview. Standard language transcription writes down the whole interview in standard language, translating dialects or slang into standardized language. In propositional transcription, only the key moments or observations are written down and large parts of the interview can be disregarded as insignificant. (Kananen 2011, 57.)

Once the transcription is ready, the material is segmented into themes. This process is called *compression*. Compression is an analysis method that aims to find clear thematic topics from the material by "peeling" the unnecessary filler from the material. The analysis seeks to perceive occurrences or phenomena that are repetitive across various interviews. Each segment is compressed to few words to describe what each segment contains. Compression helps the researcher to see the material as units that the collected data consists of. (Kananen 2011, 59.)

The analysis of the data gathered from the interviews started with transcribing the interviews on the propositional level. The level was chosen because the research does not require analyzing any personal subjects or things that the interviewees might be unwilling to discuss about. With propositional transcribing, only the important information that related to the thesis subject was transcribed. After the transcription, the data was compressed into themes and then the two interviews were compared to find overlaps and differences in the data.

5.5 Reliability & Validity

Reliability of the research is concerned with how credible the findings are. If the research would be repeated, would the finding be similar. Would it be the case if the research was conducted by another researcher with another research approach? When considering the reliability of the research, researcher must estimate how the utilized methods might have affected research findings and could another method produce different methods. The researcher must also consider how transparent the data analysis process was during the research. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2008, 136 – 140; Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2007, 149.)

The reliability of this thesis can be considered to be good and it should be possible to re-produce the same research data. The case company and the interviewees were open to discuss about the research subject and wanted to focus on the specific topic. The topic is not affected by emotions of interviewees as it is not a sensitive subject. The theoretical section also has a high reliability as a different researcher would find the same inbound marketing processes and components.

Validity concerns if the research is about what it set to research. Validity means the competence of the chosen research method to measure the chosen research phenomenon and if there is a causal relationship between two researched variables. In qualitative research, validity is handled more than reliability. This is because the researcher's subjective actions, personal opinions and experiences can have significant effect on research results. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2008, 186 – 187; Hirsjärvi, Sajavaara & Remes 2009, 231; Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2007, 150.)

This thesis's validity is good because both interviewees were honest and did not have any particular reason to give untruthful answers. When conducting research by employing interview methods, the interviewers effect on the interview data has to be considered. In this case it can be concluded that the interviewer didn't affect the interview data, as the interviewer was well-versed in the theory of the interview subject and had a good pre-existing relationship with both interviewees.

6 GTM-MARKETING PLAN

6.1 Ficolo Ltd Multi-Cloud Control

Ficolo Multi-Cloud Control is a management tool for managing multiple public and private clouds. It is designed to make the management simple and cost-effective, enabling customers to leverage the public cloud's ease of management and private cloud's cost control on both cloud platforms.

Multi-Cloud Control is a Software-as-a-Service, or SaaS service, and it's based on a third party's software product. The service enables its users to run their resources in the optimal environments, achieving cost savings and operational benefits from optimized use of cloud resources. The complex environment leads to a complexity of management, as each platform has to be controlled as its own unit. Ficolo's service provides a tool that brings the control to a single integrated solution, simplifying the management of the clouds and decreasing the time spend on setting cloud specific backups and user policies.

6.2 Current Situation

Case company has practiced inbound marketing before and produces new blogs posts and newsletters systematically. The social media channels of Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn are all in use to share the blog posts and industry news. The blog posts are published through WordPress. It is a content management system (CMS) through which company’s whole website is managed. It enables the company to practice SEO, and offers different SEO features that measure how effectively the content is optimized. The newsletters are sent from a CRM software called Active Campaign that enables creation of newsletters, setting marketing automation and managing sales pipelines.

The current situation of the company’s inbound marketing was analyzed by conducting a SWOT analysis with the interviewees. The analysis estimates company’s strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats relating to inbound marketing. The analysis is illustrated in figure 8.

Figure 8. Case company inbound marketing SWOT Analysis (Thesis Author 2018).

Strengths

The interviewees explained the strengths that the company has when it comes to inbound marketing. The foremost thing was that the company already has a systematic way of practicing some components of inbound marketing. New blogs are planned and published on regular basis and social media channels are up to date. The in-use social media channels, Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn, all have updated company information and are used regularly to share company blogs and industry news. Company also has a newsletter which it sends to its subscribers on regular basis, once a month. The newsletter includes links to company blogs, news of the events that the company attends to and a link to calculator, with which website visitors can request quotes for the company's services.

This gives the company an edge over similar companies, whose social media channels are not updated and who have out of date information on their social media channels. Regularly updated social media channels sends customers a message that the company is active and keeps the company on their minds.

Weaknesses

Currently the biggest weakness of the company's inbound marketing is the quality of leads produced by the efforts. There is no active tracking of who reads what posts and what blogs gain the most attention. There also is no lead scoring system in use. Although the reach of the marketing is tracked, no actual leads are tracked and the actual effectiveness of the marketing isn't actively measured. Currently, it is difficult to see the marketing's effect on company's sales.

The CRM that the company uses has possibility to automate the lead tracking and scoring but those features haven't been put in use at the moment. Company also has two conversion tools on its website, a quote calculator and newsletter subscription. Neither is producing adequate amount of leads or leads that could be considered to be of quality.

What also came up in the interviews was that the marketing often lacks resources. On many occasions, marketing efforts take backseat as sales cases need more immediate focus. This often leads to that marketing isn't analyzed or planned enough.

Opportunities

Inbound marketing offers some opportunities for the case company. With the methods of producing content that is helpful and interesting to the possible customers, the company can signal opinion leadership in the industry and take an active role in taking the industry forward. By presenting ideas and employing new marketing tactics, company also shows to its possible customers that it isn't afraid of taking new approaches in marketing as well as other parts of business.

By means of inbound marketing, company can automate marketing and get more high-quality leads. Creating different content like infographics, blogs and conversion content like a white paper, a lot of time is saved as automation takes care of tracking the customers and scoring them automatically. Marketing can then pick the right leads from the automation and hand them over to sales representatives.

Threats

In addition to the opportunities, inbound marketing also presents some threats to the case company. A lot of the awareness created by the marketing efforts is relying on open social media platforms. Marketing can also happen in closed platforms, where the company has to be accepted in by a third party which manages the platform. It is a threat that the company's customers move to a closed platform in which the company is not accepted in.

Also, the amount of content created and social media posts create a threat to the company. There is a possibility that some update creates through an accident or misunderstanding a scandal which brings unwanted attention to the company. For example, a social media post might have a tone or message that could be interpreted as offending or as showing bad taste.

6.3 Objectives

Overall objective of the case company's marketing is to increase awareness of the company, especially among Finland's biggest ICT companies. Marketing is geared towards reaching the management of those companies. Inbound marketing's objectives could be set to creating leads who are interested in the service and are potential buyers.
The inbound marketing goals are divided to different parts of inbound marketing efforts: Website, Social media and Email marketing objectives. This is done to gain better understanding of each component's purpose and to guide their execution. Still, all the components have to be considered as a package and the attention has to be on all components and not on each component individually.

When setting the objectives, the SMART criteria, which were introduced in chapter 4.2, should be kept in mind. The objectives must be specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and timely. It also has to be kept in mind, that the objectives should be tied to company's overall strategy and growth plan. The inbound marketing objectives facilitate better monitoring of the progress and effectiveness of marketing efforts.

Website and SEO Objectives

Website is the place where the conversion happens. Conversion can happen either through subscribing to the company newsletter or by downloading gated content. Website must therefore have the ability to create leads that also lead to sales. The website objectives are illustrated in figure 9.

Figure 9. Website objectives.

Website visitors are one of the most important aspects to consider when it comes to inbound marketing. Without visitors, there will be no conversion and no leads. The visitor count should be increasing steadily as content like blogs create a constant stream of new visitors from search engines and social media.

The blogs' content should be considered so that they rank high in search results. The SEO practices introduced in chapter 3.2 should be put in use to ensure this. Ranking in the top three of the results page for the chosen keywords is the goal to be achieved.

A landing page and a content like a white paper has to be created to convert the visitors into leads. The landing page and its form should have a high rate of conversion to achieve good enough lead count. To achieve high enough conversion rate, the form and the design of the page have to be reviewed on regular basis.

Social Media Objectives

The main objectives of social media are creating awareness of the company and increasing traffic to company's website. The platforms differ from each other but all have the same core purpose. Social media channels utilized are: Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn. The objectives for social media are illustrated in figure 10.

Figure 10. Social Media objectives.

All the social media platforms are different and differ in their importance to the case company's marketing. Of the three social media platforms, LinkedIn can be considered to be the most important as it is the most business focused. It is used by professionals and its use is work-related. This makes it the most important for B2B-businesses like the case company. Facebook serves the same purpose as LinkedIn but is less work related and is mostly for personal use. Twitter is more conversational and is less likely to drive traffic to the company's website. Although the platforms don't have the same importance, all the platforms should be given the focus that is needed to get the most out of them.

The objectives for LinkedIn and Facebook are the same. The priority should be on driving traffic to the website and the other important thing should be on increasing the follower count on the platform. As the company does not conduct any business on its social media platforms, it is the foremost purpose of the platforms to drive potential customers to the company's website where the actual conversion happens. The secondary objective for the platforms is to increase the number of users that follow the company on the platforms. The number of followers tells a lot about how the awareness of the company is developing. The objectives for Twitter are the same but the importance is reversed. Twitter's use is different from the other two platforms. It is used to express opinions and increasing the number of company's followers on Twitter tell that industry participants are interested in company's opinion on industry matters and topics.

Email and marketing automation

E-mail is used as a tool to guide leads to a buying decision and tracking their interest in company's service. Gaining new subscribers and keeping previous ones is also one of the email marketing's objectives. The objectives are illustrated in figure 11.

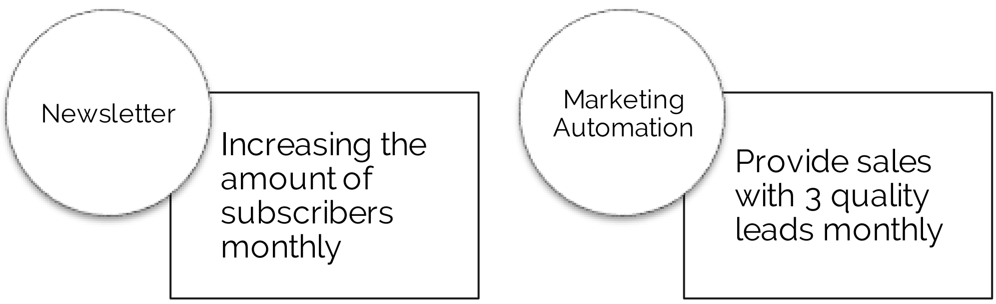

Figure 11. Email and marketing automation objectives.

Newsletter is sent monthly to those who have subscribed to it on the company's website. Increasing the subscriber count is linked to awareness of the company and is one way of adding leads to the company's automation. The subscription option has to be visible on the website and if it does not gain new subscribers, the way the subscription is presented should be re-considered. Keeping the current subscribers is related to newsletter's content and design. If subscriber count is going down, it means that the content hasn't been good enough and the subscriber has seen the newsletter more as spam than useful content. In these cases, the content, its presentation and newsletter's title should be considered.

Marketing automation tracks what content the users are interested in and what they are reading. Its purpose is to collect data about the users and to determine if the user is ready to make the purchasing decision. At that point the lead is given to sales representatives who then contact the user about the product. Automation has to be set correctly for it to work in a manner that eases the marketing workload and provides value to the customers. For the type of business, the case company operates, providing sales with 3 leads monthly is good starting point, but it has to be reconsidered once the plan is in action.

6.4 Strategy and Buyer Personas

Strategy specifies how the set objectives are fulfilled and what kind of an audience is targeted. The target audience is specified in buyer personas that were based for two typical decision makers of information technology companies: chief executive officer and chief information officer.

The plan aims to reach its target customers by producing content, sharing it on social media and utilizing marketing automation to find the most potential buyers. Utilizing all the aspects of the plan leads to a marketing process that saves time and produces leads.

The content is published on company's website through the content management system WordPress. The content is divided into two categories: content that is accessible for all the visitors and gated content that is downloaded by filling out a contact form. The content that is accessible can be blog posts, infographics and short videos. That content is shared on social media platforms and in the company's newsletter. The gated content is accessed from a specific landing page that is created for that content specifically.

Once the prospects' contact information has been captured, they are entered in marketing automation that tracks and scores them. The scoring happens by tracking their interactions with company's content. The management of the automation happens from the CRM system Active Campaign. The score indicates how close to the buying decision the leads are and when they are ready to be handed over to the sales representatives to contact.

Buyer Personas

Two buyer personas were created for the plan. The two personas are archetypes for the type of decision makers that are part of the buying process of the marketed service. Although more individuals can be part of the process, the two personas represent the decision makers that are going to affect the buying decision the most. The buyer personas are illustrated in figure 12.

Both personas work in ICT company but the personas can also be applied to case company's other typical customers that are big enterprise IT companies and energy companies. The personas were constructed based on the interviews with case company and utilized buyer personas that were created for company's overall business. The previously made buyer personas could be utilized as Multi-Cloud Control's target customers are the same as the typical customers of the case company's other offerings.

The first buyer persona is chief executive officer (CEO) of an ICT company. The company is a middle-sized company with revenue of over two million euros and with 10-25 employees. The CEO is an experienced industry professional with good overall understanding on how to develop their company and increase the overall effectiveness of company's operations. The CEO reports directly to company's board of directors - and often needs content to prove his/her point to the board. CEO searches actively for new information to develop their company and to increase their own knowledge, and utilizes most channels for the information search. Is active in the social media, especially in LinkedIn, goes to industry events and contacts his/her network for advice and news.

Figure 12. Buyer Personas: CEO & CIO.

The second buyer persona is for chief information officer. The CIO is more focused on company's technological operations and reports to CEO. As the CEO's attention is more on the overall efficiency of company's operations, the CIO aims to lower the company's technological costs and to do this as securely and cost-efficiently as possible and try to attain the highest possible usability and assurance for the operations. CIO mostly finds information from internet and social media. CIO also attends industry events and consults his/her network to gain new information.

Keywords

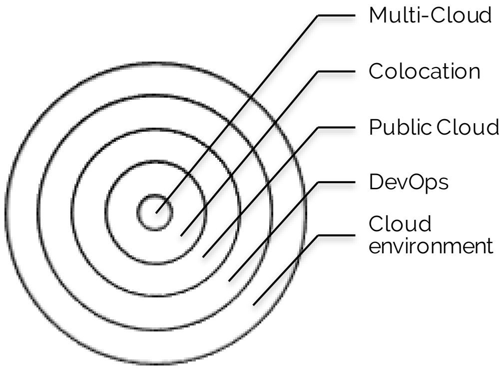

Figure 13. Marketing plan keywords.

The chosen keywords for the plan are based on the conducted interviews. The words vary from each other and give a good basis for creating content based on them. By not focusing on one specific keyword, the content can be more far reaching and still be targeted, enabling the marketing to take advantage of the “long-tail-keywords”.

The foremost keyword for the service is “Multi-Cloud”. It is highly targeted as the user will know what they are searching for and will be knowledgeable about the subject. Then the words move systematically towards less targeted topics. “Colocation” and “Public cloud” are both well-known terms in the industry but more common than “Multi-Cloud”. The last words “DevOps” and “Cloud Environment” are both connected to the service but are more likely to be searched by users who aren’t as knowledgeable about the service as the ones using more specific keywords.

6.5 Marketing Funnel and Tactics

Marketing funnel guides the progress of the potential buyers and is used as the basis for the lead scoring that is done based on the content that the leads consume and interact with. The more interaction happens, the higher the score the lead gets. The three types of content, TOFU, MOFU and BOFU, all have different values for the lead scoring. TOFU content having the lowest value and BOFU content having the highest.

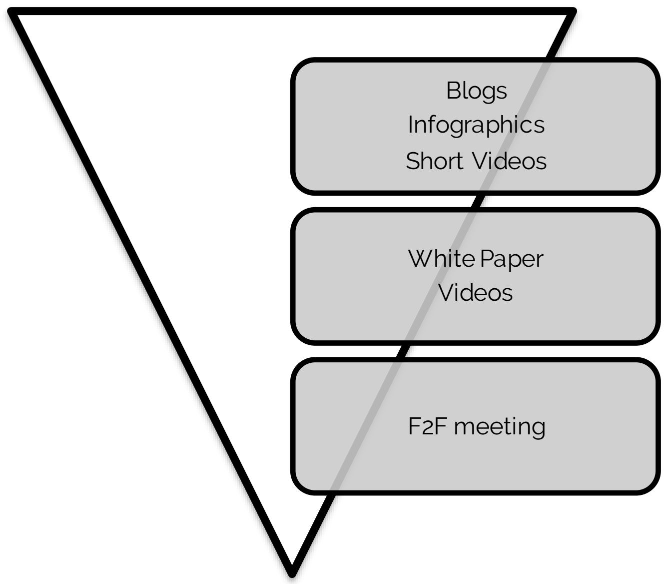

Figure 14. Inbound Marketing Funnel.

Top of the funnel

TOFU content are blogs and other content that is accessible for all the users. The content is published on company's website and shared on social media. The content should be based on the idea that it helps the prospects to understand their problem or issue they are having. The creation should start with considering the buyer personas and the challenges they have. Those challenges should be turned into the keywords that the prospects use in search engines.

Blogs that utilize the keywords can for example be titled:

"Utilize Multi-Cloud for easier use of public cloud and streamlined DevOps"

"How colocation Multi-Cloud environments enhance businesses"

"Why your cloud environment should be a Multi-Cloud environment"

Leveraging multiple keywords in the blog titles and content with other SEO methods increases their ranking in search engines. The blogs should be written so that the keywords are found in them 5-10 times. The number should vary based on the length of the blog posts. Active Campaign features that enable modify the blogs URL, metadata and title should be leveraged to gain the maximum effect from the SEO practices.

Middle of the funnel

MOFU content is gated content that is accessed only by going to a landing page and filling out a contact form. The content for this plan is a white paper that provides its readers with understanding of different cloud environments and how a Multi-Cloud environment works and what are its advantages.

The white paper is created a landing page where it is downloaded from. On the landing page is only a description of the content and a form that has to be filled with contact information. The contact form should ask only information which is necessary for estimating the downloader's potential as a buyer. The enquired information might have to be re-considered once the landing page has been implemented, once it has been seen how the form is converting. The enquired information can be changed to ask only the users' name and email or if conversion is very high, enquiry for phone number can be added. The changes can be considered when it is known how effective the landing page and form are and what kind of leads have been converted.

Bottom of the funnel

For this plan no specific BOFU content is produced. Instead of producing content, when the leads have reached the closing phase of the funnel, the leads are handed over to sales who can then contact them through the contact information gathered from conversion phase.

No BOFU content is needed as the first two phases provide enough information for sales representatives to contact the leads with the right kind of "story" or sales pitch. The leads are known to be interested in a specific service and sales' contact gains valuable information on the leads' needs and how close they are to a buying decision.

Lead scoring

The leads are scored based on their interactions with different contents. The score's purpose is to indicate how close to the buying decision they are in their buying process. Once leads reach high enough score, the leads are given to sales representatives to contact. Each funnel phase content has a specific value. When a lead visits a page to read a blog, reads the newsletter or downloads the white paper, their score is increased automatically.

The scoring is done with the following system:

TOFU content interactions: 5 points

MOFU content interactions: 15 points

Once the leads score is more than 20 points, marketing hands the lead over to sales and they can contact the lead for face-to-face interaction. The scoring has to be re-evaluated once the plan is in action, as the amount of interaction needed by the leads is almost impossible to assume before-hand.

6.6 Actions

Inbound marketing is not campaign based so no strict timetable is set for it. What takes time is writing the content for tunnel's top and middle phases and making sure the content is of high quality and helpful. The plan can be seen to be in action once the conversion content's landing page is published on the website and to be active as long as the landing page is online. Top of the funnel content can be published throughout the plan and already published content can be given a "boost" by publishing them again in social media. They can also be modified to improve their SEO qualities.

Appendix 2 contains a preliminary timetable for the plan, which should be modified according to availability of the resources and how quickly the content is being created.

The execution of the plan starts with creating the conversion content. This is because conversion is what the top of the funnel content guides the website visitors to. The conversion content is also the most time-consuming part of the plan. To ensure that the content is of high quality and of value to the prospects, it has to be planned thoroughly and a reasonable amount of resources should be spent on it. It has to have good visuals and the actual content has to be easy to read and information has to be useful.

Once the content itself is ready, the landing page for the conversion is created by using Active Campaign and WordPress.

The blogs should be planned ahead of time so that they are finished well before their planned publishing. An adequate amount of time should be spent on making sure they are helpful for the target audience and it has to be kept in mind that the quality of the blogs trumps quantity. The SEO practices should be considered when the blogs are written and the blogs should be revised after a few months to make sure they are search engine optimized.

Everything that is published on the website is also published and shared on social media platforms. When doing this, the platform has to be considered. The text accompanying the link should be different on Facebook from that in LinkedIn, and the text in LinkedIn should be different from the text in Twitter. Facebook can have more casual content whereas LinkedIn is more professional in tone. Twitter benefits from the use of related and trending hashtags.

The marketing automation is set up in Active Campaign. When the contact information of the prospects is captured as they download the white paper, automation enables tracking their interactions with the content on the website.

6.7 Monitoring

The inbound marketing is monitored by setting specific key-performance-indicators (KPI) for each component. The KPIs are measured from the chosen analytical tool that gathers data on the plan component.

Website Monitoring

Website's performance can be tracked through Google Analytics which is a service offered by Google. It enables tracking where the traffic is coming from and on what pages visitors are looking at and how long they stay on each page. The website KPIs are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Website KPIs.

Monitored	KPI	Timeframe	Tool
Website	Traffic	Weekly	Google Analytics
Landing Page	Bounce-Rate	Weekly	Google Analytics
Blog posts	Avg. Time	Monthly	Google Analytics

The most important KPI for the website is the overall traffic that happens on the website. It tells the most on how marketing is functioning and if it is creating enough attention for the company. The second KPI is the bounce-rate of the created landing page of the service. Bounce-rate means the percentage of visitors that leave the page immediately after visiting it. If the bounce-rate is high, it tells that marketing is directed to wrong type of people. Low bounce-rate means that the page visitors are actually interested in the page's content. The third KPI for the website is the average time spent by the visitors reading company's blog posts. The KPI tells what blogs are working and what are not. The blogs content and style has to be changed according to what works.

E-Mail Monitoring

E-Mail marketing can be monitored through the CRM from which the newsletters are sent from and the subscriber list is managed. The email KPIs are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Email marketing KPIs.

Monitored	KPI	Timeframe	Tool
Subscriber List	Number of subscribers	Monthly	Active Campaign
Newsletter	Open-Rate	For each sent newsletter	Active Campaign
Newsletter	Click-Through-Rate	For each sent newsletter	Active Campaign

The most important KPI for email marketing can be considered to be the number of subscribers who are on the company's newsletter list. The subscriber amount should increase and if the amount stagnates or if previous subscribers unsubscribe then the newsletter's content has to be considered and the visibility of the newsletter subscription has to be increased. The second KPI is the open-rate of sent newsletters. If the open-rate is low, then the newsletter's title has to be changed to more attention grabbing. This should be done by A/B-testing where two different newsletters are sent to separate subscribers. The third KPI is the click-through-rate of the newsletter's contents. Often subscribers can open the newsletter but don't click any of the links in the newsletter. If the CTR is very low, the newsletter content has to be considered and modified to be more interesting for the subscribers.

Social Media Monitoring

Social media monitoring happens through the analytics tools that are offered on each platform. The analytics show how big of an audience has been reached by each individual update and also additional statistics depending on the platform. The KPIs are presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Social media KPIs.

Platform	KPI 1.	KPI 2.	KPI 3.	Tool
Facebook	Monthly Reach	Referrals	Follower Gain	Facebook Analytics
LinkedIn	Monthly Reach	Referrals	Follower Gain	LinkedIn Analytics
Twitter	Monthly Reach	Referrals	Follower Gain	Twitter Analytics

The most important KPI for the platforms is the reach they are able to gain and it is monitored monthly. Reach creates awareness and can be considered the most important aspect of social media for the company. The second KPI is how much traffic the platforms create to company's website. The traffic can be tracked from Google Analytics. The third KPI for social media is the follower count and it is also monitored on monthly basis. The follower count isn't as important as the reach created by the platforms but still tells a lot about the quality of the content that is shared on the platform. If follower count isn't increasing or is decreasing, changes to the content have to be considered.

7 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The thesis' theoretical chapters handle inbound marketing and marketing planning. The third chapter focuses more on the components of inbound marketing and how they are used as the fourth chapter delves more into general marketing planning and how an inbound marketing plan is formed.

The theoretical section of the thesis explains what inbound marketing is, why it is used and how it is implemented. After reading the thesis, the reader should have a good understanding of inbound marketing and a good base to start implementing it in his/her own marketing operations. The thesis structure facilitates the learning by first explaining the different components which are part of the inbound marketing process and then tying them together in a marketing plan that implements them into action. The created plan further helps the reader in understanding the practical tasks related to inbound marketing.

Implementing all the different components together will create a marketing process that is automated and utilizes most effective ways of marketing. The thesis is not an all-encompassing guide to marketing, but the reader should have a grasp of how the different components work to fully take advantage of the thesis.

It must be kept in mind while reading the plan, that inbound marketing is a long-term commitment and everything can be modified for improved performance. The goals and KPIs presented in the plan are only suggestions that must be reviewed once the plan is actually put in to action. The biggest upside of inbound marketing compared to traditional marketing is that it is never finished. Blogs can always be altered and contact forms can be changed or completed. They are not like published articles in industry publication which cannot be affected once they are published. Inbound marketing is not a campaign that happens for three months and is then finished. It is a continuous process that can be changed to improve the performance.

8 EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

The thesis process has been as challenging as it has been rewarding, and I feel I have gained a lot of knowledge about professionally useful subject matter and also about scientific research. Inbound marketing is an interesting subject as it is still quite new way of marketing and has many different components that have to be considered. This made the thesis process somewhat challenging though, as each component could have easily been its own thesis subject. This forced the author to really consider what is important for the thesis and what is not. Because of that, a lot of time was spent on planning the contents of the thesis. It still didn’t prevent that a large amount of text was discarded from the thesis during compiling the theoretical chapters.

While the planning could have succeeded better at first, it was the biggest mistake made during the process. The biggest flaw was postponing the actual writing process and focusing on reading as much material as possible. Subsequently it is clear that a lot of the material read didn't offer much value to the thesis and that the thesis's theoretical core is found in three to five books. Better luck of finding the right books immediately at the start of the process would have also helped.

The thesis's purpose was to increase the marketing knowledge in the case company and the main objective was to provide the company with a comprehensive inbound marketing plan. In the author's opinion the thesis achieved those goals well. Once the thesis is read, the reader should be able to answer to all research questions set for the thesis in the beginning of the process. The thesis structure is designed to be easy to follow and it moves from subject to subject in logical order.

The research methods implemented for the empirical part of the thesis were suitable for the subject matter. Qualitative research provides excellent tool for company analysis, as more deeper information is gathered about company operating models and customs. Quantitative research wouldn't have gained results of same reliability as the research subjects are specific for the case company. Therefore, the research's reliability can be considered to be relatively high.

While the reliability of the research is good, some questions about the validity of the research have to be raised. This is always the case with research that is conducted by interview methods. Although the interviews were conducted successfully in a relaxed manner, it is always possible that a more experienced interviewer might have got answers that vary from the answers got for the conducted research. Still the validity can be considered to be good, as the interviewees are well-versed in the company operations and very much open to talk about them with the researcher, who they had known well beforehand the interview.

Alongside the interview of company management, different research methods and subjects were considered. While the conducted interviews were the original planned research method, also interviewing inbound marketing professionals was considered. Few professionals were contacted, but the time strains set for the completion of the thesis required that the research was limited to interviews with the case company. This still didn't decrease the quality of the research, but in fact might have increased the quality of the internal analysis of the company leading to a better understanding of the company's goals and attributes making the produced plan more suitable to the company. Interviewing marketing professionals might have produced insights into inbound marketing that were not considered in the theoretical chapters of the thesis, but the schedule didn't leave time for proper planning and conduction of another semi-structured interview. In retrospect, the thesis could have been scheduled better, leaving more time to conduct the research and decreasing the time for planning and writing the theoretical chapters.

After the completing of the thesis, some aspects of the process can be identified as inefficient and time-costing. The revisions of the text took a long time of the process and text formatting was in some cases waste of time. Better planning and sticking to the set timetable would have led to much quicker results. The original planning of the thesis led to writing about topics that were subsequently deleted completely from the text.

The thesis provides many possibilities for further studies and inbound marketing has many different components that are excellent thesis topics. For myself, the two most interesting ones are social media use and search engine optimization. Social media is a bigger and bigger part of companies' marketing and it would be interesting to conduct a study that would compare the effectiveness of different platforms. I would be really interested in a thesis that researched the effectiveness of Facebook and LinkedIn for B2B lead generation. Search engine optimization is interesting as well, as Google is so big part of everyone's daily life these days. It would be interesting to see a study that would compare different sites and their ranking in Google and see which factors lead to high position in search results page. Also buying personas provide a great topic for a study, as it was touched only superficially in this thesis.

I am satisfied with the work that was created in the last five months. Although the thesis was originally scheduled to be finished about a month earlier, I feel that the finished work was improved by not rushing to finish it on time. During the process I have gained valuable professional competence that is surely going to be useful in my future professional career.

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APPENDIX 1

Theme Interview

Interviewer: ____

Interviewee: ____

Location and Date: ___________________________________

The interview themes relating to company's inbound marketing plan:

- Case company: Ficolo Multi-Cloud Control
- Inbound marketing SWOT
- Marketing objectives
- Buyer Personas
- Keywords

Multi-Cloud Control – Inbound Marketing Plan

Preliminary timetable and tasks for 2018

Month*	**Tasks**
June	- Multi-Cloud Control White Paper - Landing page with contact form - Setting the automation in Active Campaign
July	- Publishing the landing page • Social media posts - Writing the first blog post
August	- Publishing the first blog post • Social Media Posts - Estimating the landing page effectiveness • Click-Through-Rate • Bounce-Rate • Necessary changes to the contact form
Septem-ber	- The second blog post - Analyzing SEO of the first blog post • Ranking in SERP, Visitor count - Reposting the white paper on social media
October	- Posting the second blog on social media - Estimating the landing page effectiveness • Click-Through-Rate • Bounce-Rate
November	- Reposting the first blog post on social media - Reposting the white paper on social media - SEO evaluation of the second blog post
December	- Reposting the second blog post on social media - Evaluation of the plan and correcting actions

**each month includes constant monitoring of the automation and contact with sales.*