Pinja Kalliosaari

Inbound marketing for a small B2B company

Case: Eevia Health Oy

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SEINÄJOEN AMMATTIKORKEAKOULU
SEINÄJOKI UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES

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Thesis abstract

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The aim of this thesis is to research how a small B2B company can implement inbound marketing. Additionally, the aim is to create recommendations for the commissioner based on the results of the study. The commissioner of the thesis is Eevia Health Oy. This thesis deals with the process of inbound marketing and other things associated with it, such as social media, search engine optimization, and measuring the results.

Two interviews were conducted to support the theoretical part. The first interview was executed on 28 February 2018, and the second one on 26 March 2018. Both interviews were conducted as semi-structured interviews, and they were also used to prepare the recommendations for the commissioner. The aim of the interviews was to bring a new perspective to the topic and to provide practical advice for implementing inbound marketing.

It can be seen from the final results of the thesis that inbound marketing requires a lot of work and resources. Inbound marketing seems to be a good marketing strategy option for the commissioner, if they are ready to commit to it. The recommendations included in the thesis provide a solid base for implementing inbound marketing.

Keywords: inbound marketing, social media, search engine optimization, blog

SEINÄJOEN AMMATTIKORKEAKOULU

Opinnäytetyön tiivistelmä

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Tämän opinnäytetyön tarkoituksena on selvittää, kuinka pieni B2B-yritys voi harjoittaa inbound-markkinointia. Lisäksi tavoitteena on luoda toimeksiantajalle toimintaehdotukset selvityksen tulosten perusteella. Toimeksiantajana opinnäytetyölle toimii Eevia Health Oy. Opinnäytetyö käsittelee inbound-markkinoinnin prosessia sekä muita siihen liittyviä osa-alueita, kuten sosiaalista mediaa, hakukoneoptimointia ja tulosten mittaamista.

Teoriaosan tueksi on toteutettu kaksi haastattelua. Ensimmäinen haastattelu on pidetty 28.2.2018 ja toinen 26.3.2018. Molemmat haastattelut on toteutettu teemahaastatteluina, ja niitä on käytetty avuksi myös toimeksiantajan toimintaehdotusten luomisessa. Haastattelujen tarkoituksena oli saada aiheeseen uusia näkökulmia sekä käytännön vinkkejä inbound-markkinoinnin toteuttamiseen.

Opinnäytetyön lopputulosten perusteella käy ilmi, että inbound-markkinointi vaatii paljon työtä ja resursseja. Inbound-markkinointi vaikuttaisi olevan toimeksiantajalle tutkimuksen perusteella hyvä vaihtoehto markkinointistrategiaksi, mikäli toimeksiantaja on valmis sitoutumaan siihen. Opinnäytetyöhön kuuluvat toimintaehdotukset antavat toimeksiantajalle hyvän pohjan inbound-markkinoinnin toteuttamiseen.

Asiasanat: Inbound-markkinointi, sosiaalinen media, hakukoneoptimointi, blogi

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Terms and Abbreviations

B2B	Business-to-business
SEO	Search engine optimization
B2C	Business-to-consumer
CTA	Call-to-action
CPL	Cost-per-lead
DMU	Decision making unit

Tables, Figures and Pictures

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Inbound marketing for a small B2B company

The digitalizing world of the 21st century creates new challenges for the sales and marketing of enterprises. Because of the fast-growing use of the Internet, it becomes easier for people to access more options and possibly become a client of a competitor. Companies need new ways to make sure they can stand out from all the available options. In business-to-business (B2B) environment it is even more important due to the longer decision times where more options are taken to consideration. To stay with the development of the industry, companies need to also develop their marketing. Instead of pushing the company to people, the marketers should think how they could pull the people towards them.

The goal of the thesis is to conduct research on how to utilize inbound marketing in a small B2B company. Inbound marketing can be implemented inexpensively, which is why it can be an ideal approach for a small business. The second goal of the thesis is to create recommendations for the commissioner of the thesis. The recommendations are constructed based on what is learnt during the research. The thesis consists of two parts. The theoretical part deals with different frameworks of inbound marketing, such as implementing social media and which metrics should be measured. The empirical part of the thesis includes two in-depth interviews of marketing and sales professionals, Ville Orrenmaa and Virpi Varjonen. The thesis is commissioned by a Finnish-Norwegian manufacturer and seller of arctic bioactive ingredients, Eevia Health Oy.

1.2 The research questions

This thesis aims to answer the following questions:

1. How does inbound marketing work?
2. How can the commissioner implement inbound marketing?

1.3 The qualitative research method

The chosen method for data collection of the thesis is a qualitative research. Qualitative research aims to study the topic in as all-encompassing manner as possible (Mason 2002, 3; Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 2009, 164). According to Hirsjärvi et al. (2009, 164), qualitative research prefers people as a tool for gathering data, because they can adapt sufficiently to the varying situations. They emphasize that the starting point for a qualitative research is not testing hypothesis and theory. Instead it is important to examine the gathered data in a multilateral and detailed way. Qualitative research encourages methods that let the studied people to have their own point of view. Even though the interview is about gathering data about the subject, there should be room for discussion. To gain the desired results, it is important that the interviewee knows about the context (Mason 2002, 64). The target group for data gathering is selected purposefully instead of randomization (Hirsjärvi et al. 2009, 164).

The goal of the thesis is to research inbound marketing and its use in B2B surroundings. To accomplish the goal, one-on-one interviews with experts of the subject is used for collecting the data. Because there are numerous ways to implement inbound marketing, two in-depth interviews give more value to the topic than multiple short ones would. The interviews are conducted as semi-structured interviews. The use of semi-structured interviews gives the interviewer an opportunity to ask additional questions based on the given answers (Doyle 2017). Also, in a semi-structured interview the interviewer can ask the questions when they come up in the conversation naturally, instead of following a strict order of the questionnaire. Additionally, semi-structured interview allows the interviewer and the interviewee to have a more fluent conversation, which can help the gathering of data.

To prepare for the interviews, an interview guideline is created for this thesis. It can be seen from Appendix 1. The interview guideline includes questions that the interviewer has prepared ahead, but the interviews are not strictly following the guideline. The guideline works as a tool for the interviewer.

1.4 The commissioner: Eevia Health Oy

The commissioner of the thesis is Eevia Health Oy, a Finnish-Norwegian company located in Southern Ostrobothnia, Finland. They have been operating since spring 2017. The main office of Eevia Health Oy is in Seinäjoki and their factory is in Kauhajoki. They specialize in manufacturing and selling organic bioactive ingredients, such as bilberry and chaga extracts. They sell their ingredients as material for for example the supplement and cosmetic industries. Eevia Health Oy is focusing on international business, and their customers are mostly from abroad. All their products have researched positive effects on health. As an example, their bilberry products have indications on eye health. Eevia Health Oy has 14 employees (Eevia Health Oy, Ref. 1.2.2018).

The current situation of Eevia Health Oy's marketing is that it is almost non-existent and unstructured. They do not have an employee with a designated task of handling their marketing. They are currently not focusing on marketing, but they have an interest to start paying more attention to it. Eevia Health Oy has a solid base for starting inbound marketing, since they already have a functioning website that has been designed well. They have also created users for some social media channels, such as LinkedIn and Facebook but the channels are not updated regularly. Eevia Health Oy has a blog in their company website, but like social media channels it is not regularly updated. Eevia Health Oy does not have a set budget for marketing efforts.

2 INBOUND MARKETING IN B2B SURROUNDINGS

Marketing expert Philip Kotler defines marketing as “The process by which companies create value for customers and build strong customer relationships in order to capture value from customers in return” (2017, 5). Ward (2018) describes marketing similarly, as she believes that it is the process of making the potential customers feel interested in the product or service the company has to offer. She believes that marketing should be planned. With a marketing plan, the company has a structure they can follow to increase their sales.

Marketing can be seen everywhere. The advertisements on television and radio, packaging of products and in the received mail. More recently, marketing has started to take over the Internet. Websites, social media, blogs and videos are newer, more interactive places for marketing. This has affected the way of marketing. Now in 2018 marketing has more directness to it, as it is easier to target the right audience. Marketing has also changed into being more of a dialogue between the company and the possible customers, instead of the companies announcing their greatness to larger untargeted audiences (Kotler 2017, 4–5.)

The thesis focuses on inbound marketing in B2B surroundings. Compared to business-to-consumer (B2C) markets, B2B has some significant differences. Typically, in B2B the products are more complex, purchase cycles tend to be longer and there are more decision makers than in the B2C markets (Brennan, Canning & McDowell 2011, 11). Also, the purchasing process in B2B tends to be more time consuming, which is why the significance of customer relationships increases. The increased time on decision making is linked to the higher risks in B2B purchases (Ginty & Vaccarello 2012, 5). The price of the purchased goods is usually higher in B2B than B2C. Larger investments are always risky, and demand more research before the purchase decision. That is why decision making in B2B is usually not carried out by one person. Hague (Ref. 13.3.2018) points out that the decision-making unit (DMU) usually consists of multiple people from various departments. To ensure the purchase, the company should please the whole DMU. All these points should be considered in B2B marketing.

2.1 Inbound marketing

According to Fishkin and Høgenhaven (2013, 3) inbound marketing is everything that can be created and done online that creates traffic to the selected channels. Świeczak (2014, 5) defines inbound marketing in a similar way, as he refers to it as acting in Internet in such way that the possible customers can find the chosen channels on their own.

Inbound marketing is a term for a marketing tactic, where the possible future customers find the company naturally, without any direct push from the seller's side. It requires a lot of work and long-term commitment. It is important to make oneself heard through the right channels. The right channel can be determined by researching where the company's target audience exists. Inbound marketing can also be referred as organic marketing or earned media (Fishkin & Høgenhaven 2013, 3).

The founders of Hubspot, Halligan and Shah (2014, 20–31) say that inbound marketing is equivalent for pulling the customers to the seller. To get noticed by possible customers, a company must provide helpful information on its channels. The people of the 21st century are looking for a solution for their problems. Information is readily available in most locations via the Internet, and that is the primary source of information seeking before purchase decisions. Usually purchase decision starts by conducting a search via Google or other search engines. Therefore, it is often said that a company does not exist without a webpage or other kind of online presence. It is more likely that the company gets found when the provided content is related to the company's industry.

There are numerous different inbound marketing channels. Social media, blogs and online articles can all be used as a part of company's inbound marketing strategy. To gain results, company must make effort on their marketing content. In inbound marketing, consistency is the base for every action. To attract visitors, it is necessary to publish new content regularly. This creates traffic to the desired platforms. (Halligan & Shah 2014, 30). Sornoso (2014) agrees with Halligan and Shah, but he would also add customer service as an inbound marketing channel. A well performed customer service will leave a positive impression for both existing and possible customers. If the customers are pleased with the company, they are more likely to recommend it to others.

2.2 The basic process of inbound marketing

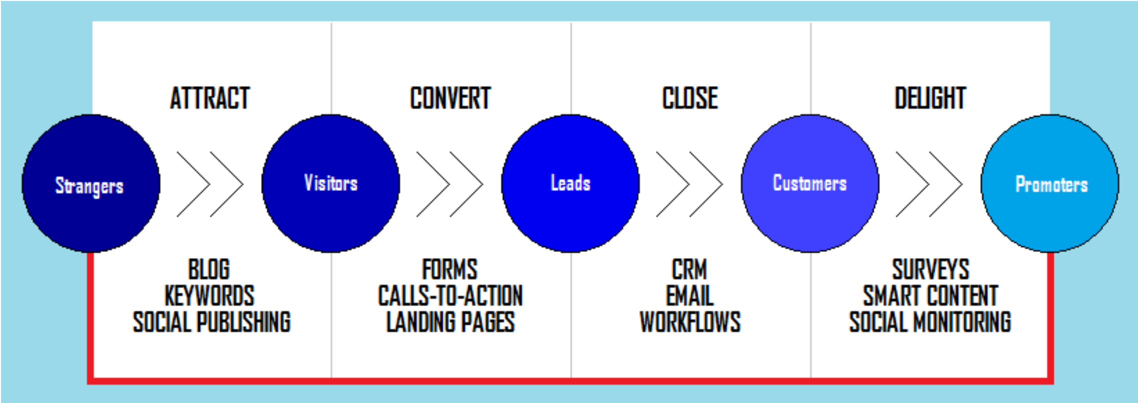

Figure 1 Inbound marketing process (HubSpot 2018)

As stated in Figure 1, the basic process of inbound marketing is divided into four sections: attract, convert, close and delight (HubSpot, Ref. 26.4.2018). During the different phases of the process people are converted from strangers to visitors, leads, customers and eventually promoters. All the phases have their own purpose in moving people through the sales funnel. The term sales funnel is used to describe the journey where people are moving closer to making a purchase (Coudray 2014). There are a lot of people who can find the company website, but only a small part of them will ever become customers. The purpose of the sales funnel is to monitor people on each stage of the funnel and to have them move closer to the purchase.

The first phase is to attract (HubSpot, Ref. 26.4.2018). The aim of the company is to attract those who could potentially become a paying customer. To get those people to visit the company website, it is important to create content that is relevant for them. To attract the right visitors the company can use a blog and social media (Yeakley 2014). Another way to gain more desired visitors is to make sure that the website is using suitable keywords.

After attracting comes the second phase, converting (HubSpot, Ref. 26.4.2018). In this phase the visitor is converted into a lead. To convert a visitor into a lead, a contact of some sort is needed. It can be for example filling an online form to gain access to a key content piece on the website or a more physical contact such as a meeting. When the visitor has already been contacted, it is easier to keep up the conversation and to see if they are interested in what the company has to offer.

In the third phase, close, the lead is turned into a customer (Yeakley 2014). It usually requires multiple points of contact before the lead is ready to move to the end of the sales funnel. This can be done by checking in on the lead regularly, for example with emails. A well working customer relationship management (CRM) system is helpful in managing the leads as it is easier to keep up with what has been discussed previously and when would be a good time to check in on the lead again (HubSpot, Ref. 26.4.2018).

It can be seen from Figure 1, that inbound marketing process does not end to a sale. The final phase is called delight, and there the aim is to turn the customer into a promoter (HubSpot, Ref. 26.4.2018). If the customer is pleased with the company's product and customer service, they are more likely to recommend it to someone else. It is also more probable that the customer makes another purchase if the conversation with the company doesn't end after the first sale. A way to keep the conversation alive and make sure the customer is pleased is to use targeted emailing and surveys.

2.3 The differences between inbound- and outbound marketing

Traditional marketing, often referred as outbound marketing, means pushing the information about the wanted product or service to potential customers. To do this, companies use for example cold calls, bought emailing lists and TV advertisement. Outbound marketing interrupts the potential customers in hopes of getting their attention. Inbound marketing on the other hand aims to lure the potential customers in, without interrupting them. In inbound marketing, the key is to make so interesting content that the potential customers want to see it. Social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter require a subscription to send notifications of new posts. When a person follows a company on social media, they are most likely interested in what the company is publishing (Patrutiu-Baltes 2016). Outbound marketing exists also on the Internet. it is typical for outbound marketing to create content that highlight the product or service the company is selling (Ference 2017). It is often placed in a way that it interrupts the content that the viewer is interested in, for example in a form of a banner ad in the middle of an article. The content of inbound marketing is created for the customer's needs, and it does not interrupt the interesting content, but rather is the content that the viewer is interested in.

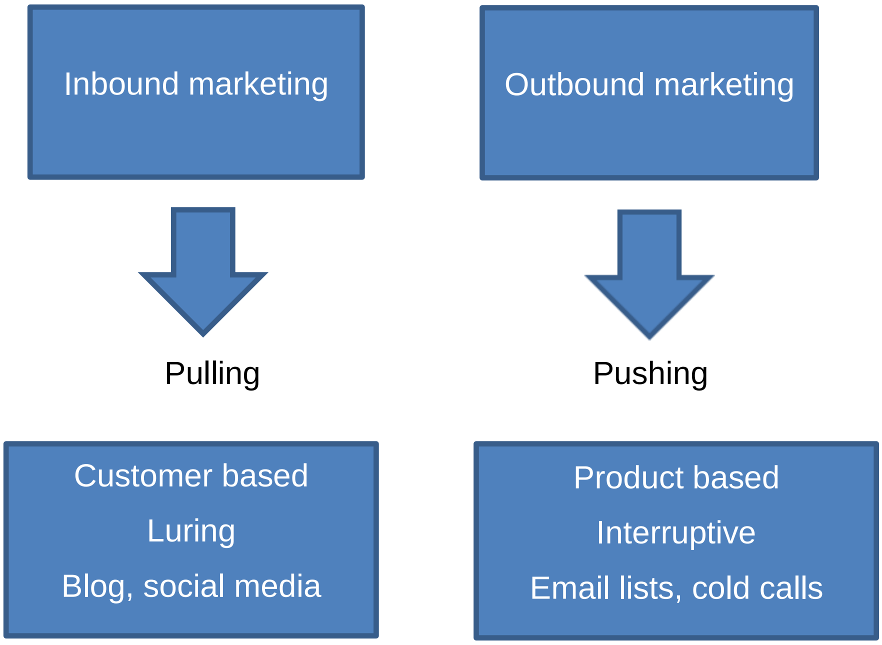

Figure 2 The differences between inbound and outbound marketing

As stated by Opreana and Vineran (2015), inbound- and outbound marketing have different aims. The aim of outbound marketing is to increase sales, whereas inbound marketing aims to have long term relationships with customers. Different aims also result as distinctive target groups. Outbound marketing tends to be less specific with its target group. There is no guarantee the lead is interested in the product or service the seller is offering. In inbound marketing, it gets more likely to find the right leads. Even if the lead does not contact the seller themselves, it is possible to see for example their clicks on the company website and use that information to make them an offer.

As stated in chapter 1.4, the commissioner is currently not focusing on marketing. They are mostly highlighting their products on their company website and blog, which is typical for outbound marketing.

2.4 Advantages and disadvantages of inbound marketing in B2B

Inbound marketing
Advantages: **- Customer relationships** **- Targeted leads** **- Visibility**
Disadvantages: **- Time consuming** **- Requires a lot of target market research** **- Long-term commitment**

Figure 3 The advantages and disadvantages of inbound marketing

Like every marketing method, inbound marketing has its advantages and disadvantages. One of the main advantages is visibility. The Internet can be accessed nearly anytime and anywhere. All the content is constantly available. Buyers are often looking for relevant solutions that can be found quickly (Hanington 2013). Hanington points out, that with successful inbound marketing companies can be found online more easily than without it. She also informs that when there's more content, the website becomes more relevant to the industry in the eyes of search engines. Active presence on social media can increase search engine visibility and attract more viewers to the selected website.

According to Lambert (2014), inbound marketing gains more targeted leads to the company website. Monitoring the web analytics can display which type of content generates the most valuable leads. The analytics can rapidly inform the type of content the company should be creating more, and which type of content should be forgotten. Targeted content attracts the right leads. Inbound marketing is based on Internet data, which gives it a high measurability (Cook 2017). With inbound marketing it is possible to track how successful the marketing campaigns are, and which factors could be improved for the next campaign.

Inbound marketing is also a beneficial tool for relationship building, which is important in B2B markets due to the long decision-making times. Social media is based on conversation (Matchcraft 2017). Sharing content with the leads helps the nurturing process, until they are ready to make a purchase. Lieberman (2015) defines lead nurturing as keeping close contact with leads that have in some way showed their interest in the company.

One of the main disadvantages of inbound marketing is that it is time consuming. Creating relevant content regularly requires effort and dedication (Rengel 2017). Functional inbound marketing obliges for a long-term commitment (Mosier 2014). Seeing the results will also take a longer time than in traditional outbound marketing. Another disadvantage of inbound marketing is that it requires a lot of knowledge of the target audience (Raveendran 2017). To attract the right viewers to the company website it is necessary to know their interests and desires. It might also be difficult to stand out if there is a lot of competition in the industry. The better the target group is known, the easier it is to create content that is catered towards them.

3 COMPANY WEBSITE AND SEARCH ENGINES

3.1 The company website in inbound marketing

Having a company website is vital for marketing, especially for small businesses (Ruzzier, Ruzzier & Hisrich 2013, 51–55). In some cases, website is seen as the core of marketing. A well-designed website introduces the products and the company in an attractive way. Its content is regularly updated to attract visitors, and it has been designed for the company's target group. Westwood (2011, 90) accentuates the usability of the website. If the user experience is not pleasant, there is only a slight chance that the visitor returns to the site. Because of that, Westwood recommends keeping the website simple. He thinks it is crucial to make sure the viewer can easily find what they are looking for. The menu and the titles of the website should be kept straightforward. Also, the content of the website should be relevant to the company. In today's world the website should also be optimized for mobile devices. According to Statista (2017) approximately 53% of the total webpage views were done by a mobile device. This percentage is excluding tablets, which would make the percentage even higher.

In inbound marketing, the company website acts as a base for all the online actions. It is a part of every phase of the inbound marketing process. The company website contains most of the company's web content, and it is the place where the viewer traffic is guided to. The website is also used to convert the visitors into leads (Halligan & Shah 2014, 109). A website designed for inbound marketing includes landing pages, calls-to-action (CTA) and a contact form (Watts 2016). It also has relevant content in it, and possibly the company blog. If the company website is not suitable for inbound marketing, the conversion of leads is not as sufficient as it would be with a functioning website.

A call-to-action (CTA) tells the viewer what the company would like them to do next and how they can benefit from it (Ahola 2016). A CTA is usually in a form of a button. The purpose of a CTA is to guide the viewer through the different actions the company wishes them to do by suggesting them to the viewer. The CTA buttons can for example tell the viewer to subscribe to the newsletter, to read more about the product or to download content from the website.

Landing pages are a part of the process of converting leads (Parma 2016). It is a page that the company uses to attract visitors to turn them into leads. The attraction usually happens with a larger piece of content, that the visitor can download if they fill out their information on a form. That can be for example a webinar or a guide. Another way to define a landing page would be a page that the visitor arrives to after clicking an advertisement on Google (Vähä-Ruka 2015). As stated by Vähä-Ruka, the main difference between a normal page and a landing page is that a landing page has a purpose and a goal. A landing page can be a part of the company website, or a separate page that is designed for a specific marketing campaign (Page et al. 2012, 4).

The commissioner's website has already a suitable layout for inbound marketing. The website has been designed to be user-friendly, and it has been optimized for mobile devices. The website has CTA's, but the path of CTA's is not leading to a landing page.

3.2 Internet search engines

Search engines are the main function of using Internet (Juslén 2011, 22). They help users to find what they are looking for from all the unorganized data that Internet includes. The target of search engines is to offer information corresponding to the search word that is as high in quality as possible. The most popular search engines are Google, Bing and Yahoo! Search (eBizMBA 2017). Google (with 1,8 billion users) has almost double the amount of unique monthly users than the other two combined. Because of that, this thesis will focus more on Google.

In B2B sales surroundings, search engines play a remarkable role. In many cases, Google search is the first step to a purchase. From marketing point of view, the possible customers use search engines for things that can be roughly divided to three categories (Juslén 2011, 140–141).

The utilization of search engines
1. Defining the problem and retrieving information
2. Comparing the options
3. Finding the place of purchase

Figure 4 The utilization of search engines

The first category is defining the problem and retrieving information. For some potential customers, the solution to their problem is not clear. In this case they start the purchasing process by searching for alternatives that would help them with their problem. Search engines give the advantage to find solutions without deeper knowledge of specific products or companies, compared to other more traditional information sources such as the yellow pages.

The second category is comparing the options and making an information search supporting the choice. When the problem and the options are known, the possible customer compares the options. They search for more detailed information to decide the most suitable solution for their specific needs.

The final category is finding the place of purchase. When the possible customer has decided the best solution, they search for the supplier or manufacturer that can offer that solution for them. In most cases there are several places they can do the purchase from. Depending on the case, they might choose the first one they can find or make further comparisons. This is the reason why the easier the company can be found through search engines, the better.

3.3 Internet search engine optimization and keywords

Search engine optimization (SEO) can be used to make the company website more visible to search engines (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick 2016, 484–485). Its purpose is to make the chosen pages to appear naturally as high as possible in search engine results with the desired keywords. Sheehan (2010, 37) tells that the keywords should be relevant for both the company and its industry. According to him it is beneficial to use many different keywords and phrases, even hundreds of them if there are enough resources to do it. Sheehan points out that the more keywords and phrases are used, the more likely it is that the viewers find the company's website.

Getting a website high in search engine results requires long-term commitment (Juslén 2011, 147–153). To make the website relevant in the eyes of Google, it must have content. It is important to create new content regularly to improve and maintain the websites position. The easiest way to gain more visibility is to write text content that includes many of the desired keywords. The more content with the same carefully selected keywords, the better. On the other hand, the content should be easy to read. Repeating the same keywords too many times in one text can be annoying to the reader. Unnecessary amounts of repetition should be avoided. Another point that is included to SEO is linking to other websites and social media (Laukkanen 2016). Google tends to rank higher the pages that have been referred by other pages. By linking the company website to other websites and social media, it is also likely that new visitors can find the company website from those sources.

4 SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media is a term for a public web page, that is open for viewers to read and take part in (Korpi 2010, 7). Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2016, 479) refer to social media marketing as the online version of the word-of-mouth. In social media, anyone can share and comment content which again makes it more visible to that person's friends and followers.

As Korpi (2010, 10–15) emphasizes, content is the base of every social media channel. Without it, social media would not exist. The users create content on subjects that are relevant to the channel. Depending on the users, conversation might add knowledge and value or act as entertainment. Korpi also states that different social media channels have different purposes. Some are naturally used for business whereas others are more oriented for private persons. For example, LinkedIn is mostly a channel for professional networking. Facebook on the other hand has both private and professional side included. According to Vähä-Ruka (2016), it is not enough to only create a social media user for the company. She accentuates the significance of being active and utilizing the channels that are suitable for the company's target market.

4.1 The benefits and challenges of social media in B2B

According to Coles (2014, 5) one of the main benefits of social media is the price. Social media platforms are mostly free to use, which makes them available to even the smallest companies. They also have a large and growing audience. For example, the amount of Facebook users in the end of 2017 was 2 129 million (Statista 2018). The number of users has increased steadily since 2008, when Facebook had 100 million users.

Like the name tells, social media is a place for socializing. The threshold to contact the seller through it is relatively low, and this makes the viewers more approachable. The viewers can give instant feedback, which can be helpful to a company. Social media also gives companies more visibility on the Internet. This creates traffic to the company website and in the end, those viewers can convert into new leads and possible customers (Coles 2014, 5).

Bodnar and Cohen (2011, 4–5) go to the extent of saying that social media marketing is even more beneficial for companies in the B2B markets than it is for those who operate in the B2C markets. In B2B marketing, relationships with the customer have a vital role. With the bigger investments and longer decision-making times of the industry, social media is a good tool for relationship building. If there is more content available for the leads to review, it usually shortens the length of the decision-making process. In social media, it is possible to get to know better the general leads of the company. It is easier to offer them what they need in the way that pleases them if the target is already known. Another advantage for the B2B companies is that social media is also a place for extending knowledge. B2B companies are usually innovators or otherwise highly expertised in their fields, which enables them to create new and exciting content (Bodnar & Cohen 2011, 4–5).

Social media has also it’s challenges. Using social media for B2B marketing is time consuming. According to King (2015), 43% of small companies spend more than 6 hours per week on tasks regarding social media. This amount includes content creation, monitoring and measuring the results.

Another disadvantage is that gaining attention through social media is not always a positive thing. Talović (2017) reminds companies, that also the negative comments and reviews are visible to other users. He recommends answering to those negative comments in a friendly matter as soon as possible. It is important to address the situation before it gets a lot of visibility.

4.2 Types of social media channels

According to Leino (2011, 120) there’s a social media page for every need and situation. A broad use of different types of social medias can make the company easier to find for more viewers. Different social medias can be roughly divided into six categories (Scott 2014).

Networks such as Facebook and LinkedIn, where the user can connect with others. Common feature to these social media sites is that the user has an own profile which they can use to network and interact with other users.

News where users can share links to other websites and vote for the most popular ones. This gives more visibility for the shared links. Examples for this category are Reddit and Digg.

Microblogging where the users share short updates to their followers. Currently the most used social media in this category is Twitter. Typically microblogs have a specific word or character count to make sure the updates stay short.

Media sharing websites include the social medias with a main purpose of sharing the users own content, such as Instagram and Youtube. These social medias also have the possibility to interact with other users for example through comment sections or direct messages.

Bookmarking websites such as StumbleUpon and Delicious. These act as virtual bookmarks, where the users can save links for later use. The links can also be shared through these social medias.

Forums and blog comments. As an example, social medias such as Blogger are places where the users can post their own thoughts about different subjects and then interact with other users in the comment sections. Typically, the discussion in the comment section is contextual with the topic of the original post.

Scott (2014) reminds that the categories are not always clear, and some social medias can belong to multiple categories due to their multiple functions.

4.3 Selecting the right social media channels

Selecting the right social media channels for the company requires time. To find the most suitable social media channels, Aalto and Uusisaari (2010, 86–91) suggest companies to test different channels. They remind that the popularity of social media channels is changing, and there is a possibility that the users move to another channel. For that reason, it is not possible to name the most suitable social media channels for the company without trying them. To start selecting the right channels for the company, McClean (2013) recommends finding out which channels the company's target market uses. There are various free demographics of social media channels that are available, where it is possible to see what types of people are using the channel. As an example, McClean mentions that Pinterest is mostly used by under 50-year-old women. Clark (Ref. 20.5.2018) agrees with McClean about starting from investigating the presence of target market. Both are also recommending that the company should find out where their competitors are present. For B2B companies, LinkedIn is one of the most popular social media channels (Welschenbach 2017). The reason for it is that the demographics of LinkedIn are suitable for most of the B2B companies. LinkedIn is a networking channel for business professionals. Although LinkedIn is one of the clearest choices for B2B social media channels, it is not the only channel where B2B companies should be present. By researching and trying out different channels, the company can find the ones that are the most suitable for their needs.

5 KEEPING AN ORGANIZATION BLOG

Blogging (originally known as weblogging) has become common for companies. In 2018, people are blogging about everything. There are millions of blogs readily available for the readers, no matter what their interests are. According to Bodnar and Cohen (2011, 78–79) B2B blogging began already in the 1990s by technology companies like Microsoft and Google. The thought of blogging was to have a new way of communication with the customers. After all, even when the customers are also companies, the decision makers are human-beings. To gain new customers, companies must have a trustworthy impact to whoever sees their company page. By blogging about company's thoughts and values, the viewers see a more in-depth version of the company.

5.1 Benefits of blogging

A blog can be a place for company's marketing, communication to outside world and even customer service. Blogging can also be used to give more information to leads and prospects to move further in the sales funnel. All of this can be made with zero to minimal costs, depending on the company's needs and desires (Kortesuo & Kurvinen 2011, 174).

As stated by Kortesuo and Kurvinen (2011, 174–177) a blog can help the customers identify the possible problems they might have. In a best-case scenario, a blog also includes a solution to that problem. The company blog should give the viewer information of the company and the industry. A successful blog reflects the professional know-how of the company, which makes the readers more eager to contact the sales team. One of the main benefits of a blog is the traffic it can bring to the company website. When more viewers are able to find the website, it is likely that at least some of them are also interested in what the company has to offer.

One of the main benefits of blogging is the efficiency in search engine optimization and visibility (Korpi 2010, 22–23). Blog posts can be found through search engines within minutes from publishing. It is relatively easy to include important keywords to them, which makes them more likely to be found on the first page of search engine results. It is recommended to link well written blog posts to other social media channels. This brings more traffic to the company website.

5.2 Generating leads with a company blog

One of the main goals for many organization blogs is to generate leads that eventually become paying customers. There are ways to guide the leads through the sales funnel by using the blog.

Kortesuo and Kurvinen (2011, 183–185) emphasize the significance of knowing the target group. They believe that it is easier to gain new leads when the blog is catered more towards a specific group of people. To identify the buyers position in the sales funnel, Kortesuo and Kurvinen have divided them to three categories: First phase, middle phase and buying phase.

Buyer phases for generating leads with a blog
First phase: **The buyer is not aware of their needs or do not know the solution for it**
Middle phase: **The buyer is looking for additional information before a purchase**
Buying phase: **The buyer is comparing the options for making the purchase**

Figure 5 The buyer phases for lead generation

In the first phase, the buyer might not be aware of their needs. The second option is that they are aware, but are still looking for the right solution. To help this buyer to turn into a lead, the selling company can blog about practical examples of how to use their product or service, tell more about researches concerning them and give more solutions to common needs, where the product or service could be the answer.

The buyer in the middle phase is already aware of their needs, but they still require more detailed information before decision making. The organization blog can give more information about all the needed steps and how those are implemented. It might also be a good idea to inform about common mistakes if there are any. The main thing is to help the buyer receive information and to make sure they get more certainty to their decision making.

The third and final phase is called the buying phase. In this phase, the buyer is usually exploring and comparing the providers of the needed service or product. In this phase, the blog posts about previous user experiences and company's accomplishments come to the picture. This information might be the final difference that makes the company more appealing than the competitors.

The commissioner has a company blog, but they are not publishing content to it systematically. According to the research of Kortesuo and Kurvinen (2011, 183–185) the commissioner should create and publish blog posts that take the target customers to consideration.

5.3 Creating content in inbound marketing

Creating a successful company blog takes time. It is important to keep the blog interesting to the viewers and to post content regularly. It is also necessary to make sure the blog is not a place for company presentations. The blog should consist of current topics and experiences. It should also raise conversation, which cannot happen without a comment section (Kortesuo & Kurvinen 2011, 177–179).

Content is created for also other channels than the company blog. For example, social media channels and the company website need content for inbound marketing to function. Hurmerinta (2014) mentions that to create successful content, the company should know who they are writing the content to, and what are the needs of their target market. The purpose of the content is to give meaningful information for the viewers. The image of the company or the brand should also be taken to consideration while deciding the topics of the content. The aim is to create content that is valuable enough for the target market that they would like to come back and read more. It is more likely, that the viewer contacts the company if they feel like the company can help them to solve their current problem.

Vieri (2018) encourages companies to create content systematically. He believes, that the idea and story of the content are more meaningful than the format the content is published in. Therefore, he recommends companies to first think what is the message they want to send with the content and decide afterwards which form is suitable for the content, and which channel to publish it in. The content does not have to be in a text form. There are also other options, such as webinars, videos and infographics (Buckley 2016). Korpi (2010, 31–32) recommends creating content about how to use the company's product or service. This does not mean listing the technical details. Instead, it means showing the viewers how the product or service works or how beneficial it can be to them.

5.4 E-mail marketing and newsletters

E-mail marketing and newsletters are traditionally considered as outbound marketing, but with some changes they can also be used for advantage in inbound marketing. The biggest difference between inbound- and outbound e-mail marketing is that inbound marketing has always opt-in e-mailing lists. Opt-in means that the person has agreed to receive marketing e-mails from the company. It happens when the person for example subscribes to the company newsletter or wants to be notified when new content is posted (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick 2016, 522–523). Asking viewers to sign up for the e-mailing list is a common call-to-action. (Bodnar & Cohen 2011, 143–144). It can also have a small promise to make it more appealing for the viewers, such as a short telling of what they can expect content wise or the frequency the emails are getting sent. The best option would be a combination of both.

Email marketing is often used as a tool to convert leads to customers especially in the B2B surroundings where the decision making takes a longer time. Sometimes reminding the leads about the company's existence is what is needed for them to take the action towards buying. Newsletters are a handy tool for that, if the content is created so that it gives value to the receiver. Additional information about the product or the industry can make the lead more interested in what that specific company has to offer (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick 2016, 523–524). People receive a lot of spam mail these days. The goal of good email marketing is to get the subscribers to look forward to the next email, not to have a general newsletter that never gets opened (Bodnar & Cohen 2011, 145).

6 MEASURING INBOUND MARKETING

To know if a marketing campaign has been successful, the marketer should set specific goals for what is wanted from that campaign. Inbound marketing has numerous different metrics that can be tracked. It can become confusing to follow all the data, if there are no guidelines to what kind of information is wanted (Leone 2016).

6.1 Setting goals for inbound marketing

Korpi (2010, 73) states that goals are an important part of development. According to him, goals lead the way and give a purpose for company's actions. It is also necessary to follow-up the goals. Korpi emphasizes that goals motivate the employees. If they know what they need to achieve, it is easier to act accordingly. Goals should be checked and updated regularly, to make sure they are lined with the company's development. As the commissioner has not been focusing on their marketing efforts, they have not set goals for it either.

To create relevant goals, the company can use SMART goal framework. The letters in SMART stand for specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and timely (Conner 2017). Some synonyms are used occasionally, such as replacing attainable with achievable, but the main idea is the same.

Setting SMART goals				
S	**M**	**A**	**R**	**T**
Specific	Measurable	Attainable	Relevant	Timely

Figure 6 SMART goals

To create sufficient goals, the company must assess the goals from different perspectives. SMART goal framework can be a helpful tool for that. Specific means that the goals should be clearly defined, and the company knows what they want to accomplish with it (Esposito 2015). Specific goals can be set by asking questions such as what, why and who. Measurable goals are needed, as without any metrics it is impossible to determine whether the goal was accomplished or not. Davies (2018) states, that when the goal is possible to achieve with the company's available resources, it is attainable. He also explains, that relevant goals should be in line with each other and with the matters that the company tries to pursue. Goals are not relevant, if they are not proceeding what the company wants to achieve. The final requirement for a good goal is that it is timely. Every goal should have a clear time frame for its execution (Conner 2017). With a set deadline, it is more likely that the goal gets achieved.

6.2 Measuring inbound marketing data

Collecting and measuring data should be done to gain knowledge of the wanted subjects (Pyyhtiä 2013, 39). Following meaningless data only decreases the time and resources from other things. To know what kind of data should be collected, the goals of the webpage and social media sites should be determined. Even though the goals define what should be measured, there are some basic functions that every company should measure.

Visitor tracking is one of the most important metrics to follow (Leino 2011, 224–229). By tracking visits the company can learn a lot about their visitors and which kind of marketing actions impact the amounts of visits on the website. Some of the common things that can be tracked are visitor amounts, where the visitor came from and what are the most popular sites. Google Analytics is a free basic tool for visitor tracking. It is available for use in www.google.com/analytics.

Conversion means any desired action that the viewer makes to engage with the company (Halonen 2016). It can be for example subscribing to a newsletter, filling a form or contacting the sales team. To know if the CTA is working, the conversion rate of the page should be measured.

$$\frac{Number\ of\ actions}{Total\ traffic\ of\ the\ page} \times 100 = Conversion\ rate$$

Return on investment (ROI) is measuring the amount of money spent for marketing versus what was gained from it (Beattie 2018). ROI can be calculated for the whole marketing, or it can be adjusted to certain products or campaigns. According to Beattie, the simplified version of ROI is calculated as so:

$$\frac{(Sales\ growth - Cost\ of marketing)}{Cost\ of\ marketing} = ROI$$

Cost-per-lead (CPL) is measured to know what are costs for the gained leads for the marketing campaign, or more specifically from one source of leads, such as determined social media channel (Oakley 2016). By calculating CPL the company can learn which are the sources where they can find the cheapest leads, and also if there are some sources that require too much resources compared to what is gained.

$$\frac{Cost\ for\ marketing}{Number\ of\ leads} = Cost - per - lead$$

7 EMPIRICAL

7.1 Interview background

To study the topic more deeply, two separate in-depth interviews were executed. Both interviews included the same 18 questions. The first interview was with Ville Orrenmaa on February 28th 2018 and the second interview with Virpi Varjonen was held on March 26th 2018. The interviewees were aware that the interview was made from a small B2B company point of view.

Virpi Varjonen is a Market Analyst and Strategist currently working in Invenire Market Intelligence Oy. Her focus is on health and nutrition businesses. She also has an engineering background.

Ville Orrenmaa is the Excecutive Vice President of Myynninmaailma Oy. He is working with sales and marketing development, and has noticed an increasing interest in inbound marketing within the Southern Ostrobothnia area through his work.

7.2 Results of the interviews

What are the main objectives of inbound marketing?

Both interviewees mentioned generating sales leads as the main objective of inbound marketing of small B2B companies. According to Varjonen, the main reason to start inbound marketing is to ultimately gain more customers and revenue. Orrenmaa also added lead nurturing as another objective, if the company has enough resources. Mawhinney (2017) defines lead nurturing as giving relevant information to a selected target group in every stage of the buying process. Lead nurturing is done to get the targets further in the sales funnel, and to eventually get them to become new customers.

Would you recommend inbound marketing for small B2B companies? Why/why not?

Orrenmaa would recommend inbound marketing for small B2B companies, because inbound marketing is target oriented. He says it is a good thing to have a target in marketing, so that the marketing campaigns are also giving something to the company instead of only being an expense. According to Orrenmaa, another good thing about inbound marketing is that it is easy to measure. With inbound marketing it can be seen if the held marketing campaigns were successful or not. Varjonen wouldn’t necessarily recommend inbound marketing for every small B2B company. She thinks that it is important that the owner or the leader of the company understands what inbound marketing is about before trying it. She thinks inbound marketing would be easier to put into practice for companies selling quite technical and defined products that have many features. She also thinks inbound marketing is suitable for companies that are selling for example digital platforms or other types of digital tools.

What are the main differences between B2C and B2B inbound marketing?

According to Varjonen there aren’t any big differences between B2C and B2B inbound marketing. The basics are the same in both cases. She reminds that there is also people behind B2B purchases, even though in case of B2B they are not acting as a private person. She thinks the differences are in the decision-making process of the purchase. In B2B people are usually not spending their own money, and they need to justify their purchases to their superiors. This makes the decision making more complex than in the case of B2C. Varjonen says there are also some cases in B2C where people need to see what is the story they are telling others and why they made the purchase, but it doesn’t go to the same extent as in B2B.

Orrenmaa believes that the main difference between B2C and B2B inbound marketing is in the way the companies are handling their leads. In B2C, it is typical that if the lead does not make a purchase, they are only added to an emailing list. In B2B the generated leads are typically forwarded to sales department. The lead might be added to an emailing list, but it is usually not the only thing that happens.

What is physically required from the company to start inbound marketing?

The first thing Orrenmaa mentions is a marketing plan. He says that inbound marketing is quite complex and creating the marketing plan might be difficult for someone who has never done it. The next thing he mentions is the ability to produce content. According to Orrenmaa creating content is not hard, but it might feel difficult and out of comfort zone for some people. The next thing he thinks is required is a system or a software to do the inbound marketing with. Depending on what is wanted it can include for example sending emails, generating leads with forms or identifying companies that visit your website. Varjonen agrees with this, and thinks that it would be ideal if the systems can be integrated to the company's management systems, so that the process can be automatic.

What are the most important things about SEO?

Orrenmaa finds SEO to be important for small companies, because their marketing budgets tend to be low. SEO grows organic visibility, and if the organic visibility is good it is not required to spend as much money on it. As most important things about SEO Orrenmaa mentions two things: a technically built website and its content. With a technically built website he means that the website should have good page loading speed and it should be easy to use with both computer and mobile devices. For the content of the website Orrenmaa says it is important that the titles, text and pictures are named correctly. According to him that might be enough to get high on search results in the local Finnish markets, but globally it is usually more difficult. Especially on global markets, the company should choose only some keywords to focus on. Varjonen agrees with Orrenmaa, and emphasizes that the most important thing about SEO is to know which keywords are relevant for the company, and to aim to be on the top of the searches with those keywords.

Is it mandatory to use paid promotion to be successful?

Both Varjonen and Orrenmaa think that it is not mandatory to use paid promotion in inbound marketing, but it is slow and hard without it. Varjonen brings up the constantly changing algorithms of different social media channels. It seems like the current trend for them is to value posts of private people over company posts, which can be seen in the organic visibility. According to Orrenmaa if the company relies only on organic visibility, there is a risk that the number of leads is so low that the company doesn't learn to handle them correctly. He recommends that small companies should use from some hundreds to a thousand euros for paid promotion. That way if the campaign is done correctly the cost-per-lead would be approximately 10 euros according to his experience. That would create 100 leads. Without paid promotion it might take a whole year to gain as many leads, even if everything is done correctly.

How to recognize which social media channels are the most beneficial for the company?

Recognizing the most beneficial channels for the company can be challenging. Orrenmaa believes it is mostly about trial and error. There are a lot of differences between social media channels, especially when it comes to paid promotion. Orrenmaa would suggest starting by choosing 2 or 3 channels at a time and running marketing campaigns on them. After that the results should be measured. To evaluate which channels are the most beneficial, cost-per-lead is one metric that should be taken in to consideration. Another metric to track is the quality of the gained leads. Depending on the company, the results may vary a lot. By trying various social media channels the company can eventually recognize which ones are the most suitable for them. Varjonen would start by researching the company's current customers. She believes that there's a larger chance of finding the right channel when the company knows where it's customers tend to be the most active.

Would you recommend having a company blog? Why/why not?

Both interviewees agree, that the focus of the blog should be on customers. According to Varjonen and Orrenmaa, a blog is not a place for self-talk. It should be written in a way that the customers want to read it and can also find it useful. Orrenmaa recommends that every company that is implementing inbound marketing should have a blog. Varjonen believes that it depends on the company. For her it is more like a tool among others. She thinks that it might be a good thing for those customers who wish to read more in-depth content compared to what social media can offer.

How often should new content be posted to a blog/social media?

Orrenmaa instructs to start by considering the company's resources. For small companies, the amount of content is naturally lower than it would be with a bigger company. It is important to have realistic goals. For small companies Orrenmaa recommends creating 2-3 larger content pieces per year. The large content piece could be for example a guide. Furthermore, he believes that it is good to have 6-12 blog posts per year and to update social media channels every week. The amount of social media posts depends on the social media channel. The lifespan of one post varies. As an example, in Twitter a post lives only some hours while in Facebook a post can live for a day. In LinkedIn the posts tend to live for up to a week. Using paid promotion will lengthen the lifespan of the posts. Varjonen believes that it is more important to focus on quality over quantity. The posts should feel natural instead of pushing out content that is not interesting or relevant for the company and its possible customers. According to Varjonen the baseline for social media posts should be 2-3 times per week, but depending on what is happening in the company at that current time it can be more or less than that.

What kind of content would you recommend creating for a blog/social media?

For Varjonen, the type of content is a secondary matter. When the company has a clear idea what story they would like to tell regarding what they are selling, they can decide which type of content fits their needs the best. What matters the most is the inside of the content. She mentions that videos might be a useful form of content to tell the viewer the company's story. Varjonen would also recommend creating a piece of key content where the viewers can be driven to. This could be for example an e-book or otherwise more detailed explanation on how to use the company's products. Orrenmaa emphasizes that the content should be something that the customers would think is important enough that they would "pay" for it with their contact information. The content should answer some questions that the customers might have.

Is it enough to publish almost the same content on all social media channels (f.ex. link to a blog post) or should there be more variety between the channels?

Varjonen thinks there should be some variety between the styles of the content. The channels have different tones. When comparing LinkedIn and Facebook, even in B2B Facebook has a more personal feel to it than LinkedIn which is mainly a channel for business. In many cases the channels are also attracting different users. If the company is sharing the same content on all the channels, it is not working as well in all the social media platforms. Orrenmaa agrees that there should be variety between the channels. In a best-case scenario, all the social media channels should have different content. Due to resources this is usually not possible in a small company. If the resources are low, it is better to post the same thing on all the channels than to post nothing. However, Orrenmaa states that even small changes can be beneficial. For example posting the posts in different times or changing the tone of the post more accordingly to the social media channel can improve the results. Orrenmaa also mentions that even though the same person is following the company on two different social media channels, they might not see the post in both channels due to the algorithms of the platforms.

At what point does the viewer become a lead?

Varjonen recommends that every company should create their own definition for a lead. The definition should include what the viewer needs to do for the company to regard them as a lead. Depending on the definition it might be for example contacting the company, requesting a sample or in case of a marketing qualified lead it can be that the viewer shows interest in the company in some way. According to Orrenmaa the right way to convert viewers to leads with inbound marketing should be that after the contact, if the viewer is seen relevant to the company, they become a marketing qualified lead. Then the company should start nurturing the lead to turn it into sales qualified lead. Orrenmaa explains that this is not the case in many small and medium sized companies. Due to limited resources, small and medium sized companies are usually not nurturing their leads as they should. Instead, in many cases every contact is treated as a sales qualified lead. This is not the optimal way to execute inbound marketing, but Orrenmaa believes that it is better to treat every contact as a lead than to do nothing with them.

When is the right time to forward the leads to the sales team?

Both Varjonen and Orrenmaa agree that in small companies the leads are forwarded early. Orrenmaa says that the sales team might receive the lead right away after the first contact, which is good if the company doesn’t use any nurturing campaigns. If the company does nurture their leads, the company should wait a little before forwarding them. If the lead shows more interest, for example by first subscribing to a newsletter and then later downloads a guide from the company blog, they should be forwarded to the sales team. As an exception Orrenmaa mentions that the lead should not be forwarded if the lead does not seem relevant to the company. These exceptions could include for example students. Varjonen thinks the lead forwarding process should be clearly defined within the company, so that everyone knows when is the right time to forward the leads. She believes that is very important that the sales and marketing teams are cooperating.

Which role does goal setting play in inbound marketing?

Varjonen thinks there should be a purpose for everything the company does, since in the end it is all about sales. To make the system work, the actions should be measured. She says that it is good to have some goals, but if a company is just starting inbound marketing without a lot of prior knowledge or experience, Varjonen would recommend being careful with conclusions. She would rather think about things from the business perspective, as in what the company is investing to sales and marketing versus how much revenue they receive from that investment. She wouldn’t go to too much detail especially at first, and would focus more on broader aspects as in what has been done during a certain time period and how it affected the revenue. Orrenmaa believes that it is important to set goals for inbound marketing, especially if the company uses paid promotion. It is good to see that the investments are worth something. Typically, in small B2B companies there are no goals for marketing, which is not a good thing. According to Orrenmaa it is easy to set goals for inbound marketing. As an example of what types of goals the company should have he suggests having a goal for the number of contacts and sales qualified leads. He also agrees with Varjonen, that it is important to have goals for the revenue.

Which factors of inbound marketing should be measured?

Orrenmaa encourages companies to measure every step of the pipeline. For example, organically gained Facebook views is a small part of inbound marketing, but it can give valuable information for the company. If a post gets a low number of views, there might be something wrong with the formatting or it might be that the topic was not interesting for the viewers. Orrenmaa recommends measuring the traffic of the company website. From this information it can be seen how the paid promotion of for example Facebook and Google is affecting the number of visitors. He also reminds that measuring only the traffic is not enough. The time visitors spent on the website and bounce rate are also a relevant part of understanding how the different channels are affecting the traffic.

Orrenmaa believes that cost-per-lead is one of the main things to measure, as it cannot be argued with like some other metrics. Additionally, the quality of leads should be measured. If there are 100 leads and 50 of them are valuable for the sales team, the company is doing an excellent job. If there are only a few valuable leads within that 100, there is something wrong with the marketing campaign. Orrenmaa says that another good thing to measure is the number of new customers gained from the campaigns. In B2B the purchasing process is long so the final data might not be available until 1-2 years after the campaign, but it is still something that should be measured to find out the end results of the marketing campaign. Like Varjonen mentioned in the previous question, she believes that the ultimate measuring should be done in the business level, but also different stages should be taken to consideration. The main things she would recommend measuring are the amount of leads, and the amount of closed deals.

Which tools would you suggest using for measuring?

In Orrenmaa's workplace Myynninmaailma they are currently using HubSpot (www.hubspot.com) for measuring, which he believes is also the current market leader for small B2B companies. It includes CRM, but according to Orrenmaa it is also expensive tool to start inbound marketing with. He says that small B2B companies usually want to test inbound marketing without large investments before committing to it. Both Orrenmaa and Varjonen would recommend that if the company already has a CRM system, it might be a good idea to look for marketing tools that can be linked to that. When the company is just starting inbound marketing, it is possible to do it with free tools. As an example Orrenmaa mentions using Leadfeeder (www.leadfeeder.fi) for identifying the companies that visit the company website, MailChimp (www.mailchimp.com) for sending marketing emails and a free version of HubSpot as a marketing database. He would recommend starting inbound marketing with the free tools if the company is not certain whether inbound marketing is suitable for them, and to conduct larger investments after testing with free tools. Varjonen does not have any specific recommendations for tools, but she suggests companies to use a tool that can measure the CPL and the cost-per-deal.

What are your recommendations on how to start implementing inbound marketing?

Varjonen recommends starting inbound marketing by creating a good story that is relevant for the customer and not only the product features. Before setting up the technical details that are required for inbound marketing, she would test the story with real people. If the story is not working, there is no point to create a lot of content surrounding it. When the company is pleased with the story, they can start supporting it with inbound marketing. Orrenmaa would recommend starting inbound marketing lightly and without large investments. Inbound marketing requires a lot of work, and it is suggested that the company starts it by testing if inbound marketing is working for them. It is good to test if the company can commit to creating the content that inbound marketing requires to function. To start implementing the inbound marketing process Orrenmaa would recommend that the company utilizes their current marketing channels, such as a newsletter, Facebook and LinkedIn. Then the company should create a landing page with a contact form and key content piece to lead the traffic to. After the company has gained some leads, they can start handling them and see what comes from them.

What is the most challenging thing about implementing inbound marketing?

Varjonen believes the most challenging thing is to not get too caught up in details, such as taking a lot of time deciding which post they should publish to Facebook. It is important to remember why the company is doing what it is doing and to think about the bigger picture. It requires quite a lot from the team to move between the practical and strategy level, but it eventually gets easier with practice. According to Orrenmaa, marketing practices in small and medium sized companies are typically straight-forward. As an example he mentions buying an advertisement from a newspaper. Compared to that, inbound marketing is complicated. With inbound marketing there are many things that should be taken into consideration, such as the systems, content and co-operating with the sales department. To avoid the complications, Orrenmaa would recommend creating a clear plan for inbound marketing before starting it.

7.3 Recommendations for Eevia Health Oy

The recommendations for the commissioner of the thesis, Eevia Health Oy, are created based on the theoretical framework and the interviews of Virpi Varjonen and Ville Orrenmaa. The recommendations act as a guideline for implementing inbound marketing.

Recommendations for Eevia Health Oy
1. Create an inbound marketing plan
2. Create content
3. Set up the technical systems
4. Follow-up the leads
5. Measure and adjust

Figure 7 Recommendations for the commissioner

To start implementing inbound marketing, the first things to do is to define the company's goals for inbound marketing and to create a plan that helps to achieve the set goals. Inbound marketing requires many different parts, and it is necessary to plan beforehand so that it can be executed correctly. The plan should include all the practicalities, such as who is responsible for creating the content and what should be measured and when. Making a good plan requires some research. To know which topics would interest the future customers, it is necessary to know the target market of the company. Furthermore, the company should know what their story is and how they want to be identified as. Another thing that the plan should include is the budget. Inbound marketing can be executed inexpensively, but it is a slow process. To gain quicker results, it is recommended to use some money for promotion. The inbound marketing plan should define the inbound marketing process and its phases, for example by describing what the website visitor must do to be considered as a lead. The inbound marketing process is explained in chapter 2.2.

The significance of creating content regularly has been mentioned multiple times on this thesis. Inbound marketing cannot be functional without content, which is why it is one of the central concepts of the process. The first step of the inbound marketing process is to attract visitors, which is done by creating valuable content. To implement inbound marketing, the company should create at least one larger content piece. This piece of content should be interesting enough for the target market, that they would like to give their contact information in order receive the content. In the case of Eevia Health Oy, this content could be for example a guide on how the ingredients affect the health. In addition to the large content piece, the company should also create other content for the company blog, website and the social media channels. The process of creating content starts from ideas. It is recommended, that the company should have a list of ideas for the content. To make the process easier, the company should prepare a schedule for posting the content. The schedule does not need to contain every single post, but it should work as a guide for the employees. A schedule is recommended especially in a case where the company is running a marketing campaign. To gain more organic visibility for the content, SEO and keyword analysis are needed. Their utilization is explained in chapter 3.3.

After the company has an idea on what type of content they will be creating, the company should set up all the necessary tools. This includes a functioning CRM system, a tool to identify the visitors and a form for the company website. The form is the source of lead conversion, which is the second step of the inbound marketing process. Therefore, the form should be on a well-designed landing page. To get the visitors to fill out the form, the form should have a functioning CTA. The use of landing pages and CTA is described in chapter 3.1. After the company has gained leads, it is time to move to the third phase of inbound marketing process, closing. To convert the leads to paying customers, they must be followed-up. Emails are often used for that purpose, as said in chapter 5.4.

The final thing that is recommended for Eevia Health Oy is to set up a system for measuring the gathered data. The responsible employees should have a clear idea on what they are measuring, when and why. There are explanations for some commonly measured metrics in chapter 6.3. In addition to those, the company should set other metrics to follow by defining which of them would give valuable information for them. Orrenmaa mentions for example measuring social media data in his interview in chapter 7.2. The measuring is useful only if the company learns something from it, and the company should also adjust their inbound marketing accordingly to the data they have gathered.

Table 1 explains the current state of the commissioners inbound marketing actions according to the theory of the thesis. It also includes recommendations for improvement.

Inbound marketing	Current state of the commissioner according to the theory	Recommendations
Company website **(Chapter 3)**	- Suitable design for inbound marketing - Optimized for mobile devices	- Create at least one landing page - Create a path of CTA's to drive traffic to the landing page - Conduct a keyword analysis and published content based on the results
Social media **(Chapter 4)**	- Users for Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter	- Publish content regularly - Analyse the target group and optimize the content for their needs

Company blog **(Chapter 5)**	- The company website includes a blog - There is an option to subscribe to a news-letter	- Avoid content that is only highlighting the company - Create content that is optimized for the tar-get market - Publish content more regularly
Goals and measuring **(Chapter 6)**	- The commissioner has not set goals for marketing	- Set goals utilizing the SMART -process - Determine which met-rics should be meas-ured to follow the goals

Table 1 The current state and recommendations according to theory

At this point, the last phase of the inbound marketing process, to delight, is recommended to Eevia Health Oy only if they have enough resources. It is important to not forget the existing customers, but it is enough to follow them up regularly until there are enough resources to start converting them to promoters.

CONCLUSIONS

The goal for the thesis was to research inbound marketing through theoretical framework and to create recommendations for the commissioner Eevia Health Oy based on the results of the research and two in-depth interviews. This goal was met in the end of the thesis. With the content of the thesis, the commissioner will be able to build a working inbound marketing process for their company. To get a full understanding of the thesis, it is not enough to only read the recommendations. The theoretical framework explains the concepts that are utilized for the recommendations, and the interviews of the empirical part are adding value to the research as they were executed with professionals.

The results of the thesis showed that implementing inbound marketing requires a lot of time and effort from the company, but it is easy to maintain after the implementation. To implement inbound marketing, the company has to know the type of their target customer, and create the company’s marketing for them instead of highlighting themselves. It is also necessary to understand the concept and the process of inbound marketing, which are discussed in chapter two.

The rest of the theoretical part is concerning central concepts of inbound marketing, such as social media, the company website and SEO. The definitions and functions for every central concept are addressed, while also explaining why they belong to the process of inbound marketing and how to implement them.

The empirical part of the thesis consists of two interviews that gave the commissioner valuable information from professionals. The interviewees discussed about many things that were already explained in the theoretical part, but they added new angles to the topic and shared their experiences of inbound marketing. The interviews were also a significant part of the recommendations for the commissioner.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Interview guideline

What are the main objectives of inbound marketing?

Would you recommend inbound marketing for small B2B companies? Why/why not?

What are the main differences between B2C and B2B inbound marketing?

What is physically required from the company to start inbound marketing?

What are the most important things about SEO?

Is it mandatory to use paid promotion to be successful?

How to recognize which social media channels are the most beneficial for the company?

Would you recommend having a company blog? Why/why not?

How often should new content be posted to a blog/social media?

What kind of content would you recommend creating for a blog/social media?

Is it enough to publish almost the same content on all social media channels (f.ex. link to a blog post) or should there be more variety between the channels?

At what point does the viewer become a lead?

When is the right time to forward the leads to the sales team?

Which role does goal setting play in inbound marketing?

Which factors of inbound marketing should be measured?

Which tools would you suggest using for measuring?

What are your recommendations on how to start implementing inbound marketing?

What is the most challenging thing about implementing inbound marketing?