

Digital Marketing Communication guidelines for a Scuba Diving Company

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| <p>This thesis was written for a Finnish scuba diving school, Koh Tao Divers, located in Thailand. Koh Tao Divers has a strong and loyal customer base in Finland, and they want to maintain a fruitful and long-lasting relationship with them.</p> <p>The commissioning company wants to have clear and concrete marketing communications practices to support their customer relationship management. Therefore, the objective of this thesis is to define the best digital marketing communication guidelines for the commissioning company. The subject is limited to digital ways of marketing communication, and the target audience is the company's current customers.</p> <p>This bachelor's thesis is written during autumn 2018, and is a practice-based one that includes a theoretical framework and qualitative research. The theoretical framework consists of the most relevant research related to the topic. First, topics related to maintaining a customer relationship are discussed, and afterwards marketing communication solutions are suggested. The empirical material is gathered from both my own observations and the qualitative research conducted. The research follows the Zipper method, meaning that theory and practice are presented together throughout the work. The qualitative data was collected through interviews of eight commissioning company's customers. All interviews were conducted between the 25th of September and the 4th of October 2018.</p> <p>Clear and practical guidelines for digital marketing communication are developed, based on the key findings of the study. The theoretical framework, as well as the empirical data, support the fact that digital marketing communication is related to creating, maintaining and strengthening customer relationships. Koh Tao Divers' customers are active on the social media, and this is seen as the most effective way to keep in contact with the commissioning company. Word of mouth and personal recommendations are determined to have a strong effect on customers' buying behavior. The guidelines produced leave room for imagination and for the company's personal preferences. They are also subject to further development and available to companies in other industries.</p> | |
| Keywords Customer engagement, customer loyalty, marketing communication, digital marketing communication, social media | |

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1 Introduction

How to maintain a good relationship with your customers when they are on the other side of the world? This is a crucial question for Koh Tao Divers whose main customer base is located in Finland and the business in Thailand.

At the moment customer-brand relationships are going through vital changes due today's digital technologies such as the Internet and growth in mobile, online and social media. These factors affect notably on how brands and companies interact with their customers. (Armstrong & Kotler 2017, 46.)

Rouhiainen (2016, 7) emphasizes the fact that customers' attention spans are getting shorter all the time because of the increase of mobiles and digitalized behavior. How people are using content on the Internet has changed and companies need to adjust themselves for this phenomenon. Also Kananen (2013, 9) argues that we are living in continuous change. Traditional information society is changing towards more transparent digital society.

This thesis focuses on Koh Tao Divers' loyal customer base by studying maintaining customer relationships and marketing communication solutions. The research defines customers' behavior and gives empirical data to form conclusions and develop best practices.

This chapter will present the background of the thesis, the objectives and limitations as well as the commissioning company. Also key concepts about the main topics will be opened.

1.1 Background information

Last autumn 2017 I completed my five-month long work placement for a Finnish scuba diving company Koh Tao Divers. I worked as an office assistant trainee and got well familiar with company's ways to interact with their customers. In cooperation with the managers of Koh Tao Divers, we came up with a topic for my thesis to develop a marketing project to guide their customer relationship management.

What got me especially interested in this case was the distance between Koh Tao Divers' business and their customers. How can they sustain the strong and loyal relationship that makes their customers visit Koh Tao again holiday after holiday?

Current challenge of the company is that they don't have consistent and clear marketing communication guidelines for their customers. They want to maintain their large customer base but also attract new potential customers by efficient marketing. At the moment the company is focusing their marketing on social media channels and therefore the aim of the thesis is to develop their marketing communication and give tips how to improve and broaden their actions. Especially Koh Tao Divers' newer staff would like to have more concrete and practical guidelines on best marketing communication options and how to implement them.

1.2 Objectives and limitations

The objective of this thesis is to define best digital marketing communication practices for the commissioning company. The topic will be limited to digital marketing communication. Because of the distance between the business and the customers, traditional marketing is not so relevant or efficient option.

Another limitation is the customer base. The guidelines are directed for company's already existing customers, not for potential new ones. Of course they are applicable for more diverse usage.

1.3 Research problem setting

The research questions for this thesis are how does the commissioning company's loyal customers behave and what are the best marketing communication ways as a company to maintain successful relationship with their customers.

This thesis presents theory behind maintaining an effective relationship between company and its customers. It covers customers' behavior in buying process, engagement phase, customer loyalty and long-term relationship. The content also introduces theoretical framework and solutions of marketing communication while keeping in mind the long-term customers.

The research method and structure of this thesis is presented in chapter two. It presents the results and key findings of the interviews, but they are also discussed more in detail in theory chapters using the Zipper method.

1.4 Commissioning company

This dive school is located in the island of Koh Tao, on western shore of the Gulf of Thailand. It was established in 1987 and therefore it is the island's first dive school. In 2001 it was bought by Finnish Mikko Paasi. At the moment Koh Tao Divers employs six permanent staff members, a cleaning lady and a boat driver. The company also exploits freelance dive professionals when needed. The diving professionals are paid according the amount of their work. Company's another dive school is located in Malta. (Auer 5.10.2018, Koh Tao Divers 2018.)

Koh Tao Divers offer diving from beginners' level all the way to professional level. Also technical diving is available under their subsidiary Koh Tao Tech Divers and snorkeling trips can be arranged. All trips and prices, diving or snorkeling, include professional guides, equipment, snacks, training material and certification fees. KTD also rents equipment for other dive shops on the island. Dive school has a dorm on the yard which provides accommodation in decent low prices for their customers. (Koh Tao Divers 2018.)

Koh Tao's island has over 60 dive schools so competition on the island is strong. Koh Tao Divers' advantage is that it is the only Finnish dive school. Company offers as well its services in other languages such as English, Thai, Dutch and Italian. The busiest season for Koh Tao Divers is from December to April. Especially Finnish holiday periods are popular for example around Christmas and winter break in February. Safety and reliability, professionalism and customer centricity are core values of Koh Tao Divers. (Auer 5.10.2018, Koh Tao Divers 2018.)

1.5 Key concepts

Customer relationship: The progress on existing connection between a company and its customer (Business Dictionary, 2018).

Customer relationship management: The process of creating and maintaining beneficial relationship between company and its customers with exceptional customer value and satisfaction (Armstrong & Kotler 2017, 620).

Customer loyalty: An objective of customer relationship management. The customers are dedicated to purchase services from a particular company and have an emotional and positive bond with the company. (Berndt & Brink 2008, 41.)

Digital marketing communication: Marketing communication done in a digital format or media (Karjaluoto 2010, 13).

Digital and social media marketing: Engaging customers via their digital machines whenever and wherever by utilizing digital marketing tools for example social media, email, blogs, mobile apps and websites (Armstrong & Kotler 2017, 461).

2 Practice based thesis

This thesis is a practice based thesis meaning that it does not follow traditional thesis guidelines. It has theoretical framework as well as empirical part and these are presented using a Zipper method. Zipper method means that the theory goes hand in hand with the practice. Theoretical considerations are followed by the empirical findings and finally decisions and conclusions are made for the guidelines.

This thesis' empirical material consists of interviews of company's customers as well as my own observations while I was working in the company. The interviews conducted have helped to understand the big picture and they give perspective from the customers' side.

This thesis does not include a specific final product as some practice-based thesis might have. The guidelines produced are presented in each chapter after the theory and the empirical data.

2.1 Qualitative interview

With the conducted qualitative interviews, the aim is to understand the phenomenon of commissioning company's customers' experiences. Qualitative research helps to comprehend the point of the phenomenon and gives a deeper understanding about it. (Kananen 2010, 36-37.)

Subjects of a qualitative research are people who are affected by the matter or who know a lot about it (Kananen 2010, 37). For this thesis has been interviewed five commissioning company's long-term customers and three customers who have visited the company only once. Jaanu, Järvinen, Immonen, Päckilä and Wikman have been more associated with the commissioning company and so they are considered as long-term customers. Suhonen, Ikonen and Kopra have visited the commissioning company only once. Four interviewees were men and four women. They were between 20 to 38 years old. The participants were chosen from relationships I build during my internship in the company. All participants were Finnish so the interviews were conducted in Finnish and afterwards translated to English for this thesis.

This range of interviewees gave versatile and wide perspective on the research. The amount of eight interviewees qualifies for qualitative research method. Smaller number of answers gives deeper and more detailed understanding on the research problem.

There are two closed-ended questions in the interview regarding the background variables. Otherwise the interview questions are open-ended that can not be answered with one word and need further explaining. (Kananen 2010, 56-57.) Aim of the open-ended questions was to gain more detailed information on interviewees' personal experiences.

2.2 Analysis of the research results and key findings

The interviews were conducted in written Word document form in the end of September and beginning of October 2018. The questions were sent through Facebook to the participants and also received the same way. The answers were analyzed and compared with each other to get a full perspective on the phenomenon. Similar and relevant answers were categorized in same groups which made analyzing more organized.

Overall, all interviewees were really satisfied with the company's operations. Good and friendly customer service, high quality on training, professionalism and expertise were popular answers when describing the services of Koh Tao Divers. Pleasant atmosphere and great team spirit at the school were reasons affecting multiple customers' return to the company.

One important key finding was the importance of word of mouth. Multiple interviewees had chosen the company after hearing positive recommendations from someone they knew. Also all of the interviewees have recommended Koh Tao Divers onwards after their visit.

Relevance of social media came up as a major factor in the interviews. Each interviewee mentioned at least one social media channel when asked how they receive news from Koh Tao Divers or how would they recommend the company.

From eight interviewees only one had improvement idea for Koh Tao Divers. This concerned the possibility to organize breakfast for the early morning dive trip.

2.3 Validity, reliability and usability

The aim of this study is clearly stated in the research questions. This thesis provides valuable information for the commissioning company.

Reliability means that the received research results stay similar if the research is repeated. Reliability evaluation of a qualitative research is more challenging than of a quantitative research. Human being does not always function the same way and rationality does not

often occur and that is why coincidence has an affect in the phenomenon. Human being can change his point of view without an accurate reason. (Kananen 2010, 68-69.)

Validity means researching the right and quality elements. Generalization of the research results is important. The results can be transferred to equivalent situations and they are effective. (Kananen 2010, 69.)

The research was completed in a reliable and valid method. All interviews were conducted ethically with the participants' consent. Participants were able to ask specifying questions from the author if something was not fully understood. The interviews consisted of two close-ended questions and eleven open-ended questions which were all similar. Therefore, organizing and analyzing the answers was efficient. The research was documented appropriately in written Word document form. Since the answers were already in written form, transcription was not relevant.

The theoretical framework was done related to the main themes of the thesis which are maintaining customer relationship and marketing communication solutions. Literature references about consumer behavior, relationship marketing and customer loyalty back up the theoretical framework of maintaining customer relationship. References related to digital marketing communication were chosen from up-to-date publications because the subject is under continuous development.

This thesis is meant to be utilized by Koh Tao Divers' staff. Especially the management and marketing team but also the diving professionals to spread the marketing thinking for everyone in the company.

3 Maintaining customer relationship

“Customer relationship management is perhaps the most important concept of modern marketing.” Customer relationship management is an on ongoing process that builds and sustains a profitable and lasting relationship between company and customer. Creating superior customer value and satisfaction are the most important factors what comes to establishing a lasting customer relationship. (Armstrong & Kotler 2017, 41.)

Life-cycle of a customer relationship means the length of the relationship and its value for both parties. This life-cycle can be shared to four phases that are acquisition, engagement, development and retention. These phases require communication with the customer and while the relationship develops the communication should also transform and deepen over time. (Korkeamäki, Lindström, Ryhänen, Saukkonen & Selinheimo 2002, 138-139.)

A study conducted by Rosenberg and Czepiel (1984) argued that a typical company pays six times more engaging a new customer than retaining an already existing customer. Many companies focus on increasing customer satisfaction as it is thought to affect on maintaining customers (East, Vanhuele & Wright 2017, 33).

When asked to describe the commissioning company’s services, both Jaanu (26.9.2018) and Järvinen (26.9.2018) define them as customer orientated. Järvinen mentions that everything is done according customers’ wishes and she likes the fact that the company has diving options to offer for all levels and everyone has chances to develop their personal skills. Clear majority of the interviewees point out factors such as high quality, professionalism and expertise when they are asked to describe the services of the commissioning company.

During my internship I noticed that Koh Tao Divers’ holds in to their core value customer centricity. Every customer is important for the company and this can be seen in the staff’s customer service and flexibility. Operating according customers’ wishes is priority, meanwhile of course holding on to the agreed schedule and rules.

3.1 Consumer buying behavior and motives

Consumer buying behavior describes the behavior behind individuals who purchase services and goods for personal consumption. Cultural, personal, social and psychological factors affect on the purchase decisions. Marketers can not impact on these factors but they should acknowledge them. (Armstrong & Kotler 2017, 162-163.)

Cultural factors affecting the buying behavior are typical for commissioning company's Finnish customers. I observed that when Finnish travelers meet another they are more likely to socialize with them than with foreigners. Also feeling of safety in diving and getting training in native language was a major factor affecting many first-timers' buying decision. When asked why customer has chosen the commissioning company, Järvinen justifies that her purchase decision was strongly affected by the fact that the dive school is Finnish owned. She believes that presumption of Finnish know-how, work moral and commitment raised the feeling of professionalism which led to the purchase decision of this particular company's services.

Also Jaanu, Suhonen (2.10.2018), Ikonen (30.9.2018) and Kopra (25.9.2018) mention that Finnish language was one reason why they chose the commissioning company's diving services. Ikonen says that she felt secure and safe choosing a Finnish speaking diving company since her English skills are not so high level. Kopra agrees with the fact that learning new felt more natural in his native language.

Social networks, family and friends are social factors that can have a powerful influence on consumer's buying behavior. Personal words, feedback and recommendations from social networks and other customers are called word of mouth influence. (Armstrong & Kotler 2017, 166.)

What comes to social factors, Jaanu, Immonen (3.10.2018), Päckilä (3.10.2018), Wikman (4.10.2018), Suhonen and Ikonen told that their purchase decision was affected by their friends' experiences, recommendations and feedback. Personally I got also familiar with Koh Tao Divers for the first time through my friend's experience and recommendations. Reaching out for the company felt more natural after knowing a bit about them. Since I was looking for a company to do my internship in, the cultural fact that it was operating also in Finnish got me more interested. The fact that actually staff and customers at the school spoke primarily English to acknowledge also other than Finnish people impressed me.

Consumer's buying motive explains why consumer purchases goods or services. Person's needs, personality, income and company's marketing actions affect on the motives and therefore the motives have an impact on the consumer's buying decisions. Motives can be either rational or emotional. (Bergström & Leppänen 2016, 99-100.)

3.2 Customer engagement

Nowadays customer engagement is all about social interactivity, conversations and networking, especially through mobile, online and social media platforms. Companies are maintaining continuous, deep and straight customer involvement by creating brand conversations and communities. (Armstrong & Kotler 2017, 46-47.) Relationship between company and customer can be maintained by creating an online community in popular online social platform such as Facebook (Sernovitz 2009, 142).

What is observed during my internship was the strong company culture Koh Tao Divers has. Feeling of community and socializing are big part of the operations. Staff wanted to get to know the customers and was truly interested in them. People spent time with each other also outside the school and diving trips. This was not only Finnish people but customers and staff from different countries and cultures.

Jaanu, Järvinen, Päckilä, Ikonen and Kopra mentioned the commissioning company's relaxed and pleasant atmosphere when answering to the question what would be the reasons behind their revisit. Järvinen says that time flies, because the team spirit is always so uplifting and everybody has fun at the school, on the boat and while diving.

Greenberg (Greenberg 2011) argues that customer engagement means the relationship between a company and customer which is determined by continuous involvement of the customer because of specific reasons. Company does not have to know the reasons but it should have insight about the customer to know how to maintain or develop the customer's relationship with them.

Four interviewees point out that they have developed closer relationships with the staff and other customers and become part of the Koh Tao Divers community. When asked how would the customers communicate with the company, Järvinen, Päckilä and Wikman would said they would contact directly the employees if they had something in mind, because they feel that they have such close bond with them.

Aim of customer engagement marketing is to make the brand impact meaningfully customers' discussions and lives. By delivering relevant brand messages and utilizing social media skillfully a company can get customers interested and talking about the brand. (Armstrong & Kotler 2017, 46.)

3.3 Customer commitment and loyalty

Customer loyalty is when customers are dedicated to buying services and product from a particular company and will avoid the competitor's actions to reach their attention. A positive feeling is the cause of these customers' relationships with the company. This emotional connection with the company is one feature of a loyal customer. (Berndt & Brink 2008, 41.) Järvinen told that they passed by dozens of diving school on their way to the commissioning company for the first time. She says they didn't even consider for a second to go to some other school since the decision about the commissioning company had already been made.

According to Grönroos (2009, 177), Armstrong and Kotler (2017, 49) customers that are satisfied are more likely to repurchase the brand and become loyal customers. Just a small decrease in customer's satisfaction can have a huge impact on loyalty. In loyalty there are big differences between less satisfied, somewhat satisfied and completely satisfied customers.

When asked how interviewees' customer loyalty toward the company has been noticed, remembering name and person as well as welcoming heartily back were factors mentioned in three of the interviews. Järvinen mentions that her loyalty towards the commissioning company has been well noticed and the company gives the impression that every customer is important, especially the ones who revisit them. Päckilä and Wikman are satisfied with discounts on the diving prices.

Customers can demonstrate three different kind of loyalty behavior; share, retention and recommendation. First, they can make a higher contribution to one of the various brands they purchase. Second type is retention, when customers keep on purchasing a brand for a long period of time. Finally, they can engage new customers by giving positive feedback about a certain brand. These three kind of loyalty behavior assure a steady revenue stream for the company and also decrease the necessity to market the brand. Therefore, companies wish for customers with these kind of loyalty habits. (East, Singh, Vanhuele & Wright 2017, 27.)

Loyal customer feels goodwill towards the company and so they more easily encourage their family and friends to purchase from it by telling their positive experiences. Also disappointments are shared, sometimes to bigger audience than the positive would have been. (Arantola 2003, 24; Berndt & Brink 2008, 41.)

Interviews revealed that all interviewees have recommended the commissioning company onwards after their visit. The commissioning company has a habit on sending Trip Advisor review site links by email to the customers after they have left the company. This way they can get more recommendations and reviews on Trip Advisor and hopefully new potential customers.

3.4 Long-term customers

Arantola (2003, 22) states that long customer relationships can be more inexpensive for the company, because the customer has learned how to function with the company and therefore he does not burden the service process. Also Armstrong and Kotler (2017, 49) argue that it is financially wise to maintain customers loyal.

Long term customers' behavior changes as they use more and more certain company's services. They search and observe less for other options, notice less marketing messages from other brands, spend more and are less sensitive with the prices. Long term customer relationships correlate strongly with the company's market share. (Arantola 2003, 24.)

The interviews point out that all interviewees would revisit the commissioning company. Ikonen, Suhonen and Kopra would revisit if their holidays would end up again to Koh Tao. Järvinen feels that one reason for commissioning company to obtain long-term customers is company's way of responding quickly to enquiries and welcoming happily and genuinely back for a revisit. She mentions that during the five years she has visited the company everything has happened really easily and smoothly. She doesn't see a reason to change the company since everything is functioning so well currently.

Good service, team spirit and atmosphere at the shop are reasons behind Järvinen's returns to the company year after year. She says that the atmosphere is something she misses almost as much as diving. Jaanu, Ikonen and Päckilä agree with the atmosphere as one reason to revisit. Also the quality of training and the island as travel location are meaningful reasons for Jaanu to visit again.

4 Marketing communication guidelines

If a company wants to control successfully their customer relationships, all business activities should include a bit of marketing thinking. All operations, not only traditional marketing ones, should consider the impact they have on customer. The whole organization needs to have a marketing mindset. (Grönroos 2009, 70-71.)

Isohookana (2007, 63) states that modern marketing thinking highlights the importance of long-term customer relationships. She defines marketing communication as communication that is related to creating customer relationships, maintaining and strengthening them and the aim is to have a direct or indirect influence on purchase of a product or a service.

Also Karjaluto (2010, 128-129) agrees that marketing communications is most efficient when it's goal is to increase loyalty and focus on customer marketing. Essential channel here is email marketing, mobile marketing and brand related website and communities.

4.1 Digital marketing communication channels

Digital marketing is a form of marketing communications which is capable of reaching efficiently and more cost-effectively the target groups. It works especially well with already existing customer relationships. (Karjaluto 2010, 14.)

Digital marketing communication actions can be seen and measured in real time. Nowadays marketing actions can be targeted very precisely for specified audience and at the same time measure their responsiveness. (Kananen 2018, 13.)

4.1.1 Social media

Armstrong and Kotler (2017, 467) define social media as independent and commercial online social networks to which society gathers to socialize and receive and distribute opinions, photos, videos and messages. Social media offers excellent opportunities for a company to expand their customer engagement and start brand conversations. Social media provides platforms for real-time marketing in which companies can engage customers regarding trends at the moment. (Armstrong & Kotler 2017, 52-53.)

Beside being cost-effective, social media's biggest benefit is possibly its engagement and social sharing ability. It is very suitable for building customer engagement and community and getting customers interact with the company and each other. (Armstrong & Kotler 2017, 470.)

For four of the interviewees social media channels would be relevant for interacting with the commissioning company. Kopra mentions private message on social media as a relevant option to contact the commissioning company.

Social media is based on trust. Without trust relationship it is hard to get new members, they won't become loyal or spread the word about the brand. Transparency and consistency are key factors here. Company's external communication should be similar and coherent regardless the media used. (Kananen 2013, 115-117.)

When creating an online community for company's customers, in the planning phase goals, target audience and their needs should be considered. The community should have something to give for the customer. It can be either concrete such as video, picture or pdf-file or knowledge and information. Sharing information is an efficient glue for the community. Answering to people's questions is usually a sufficient price. Transparency means that the admin of the community should be genuine to gain trust from the members. (Kananen 2013, 116.)

Using social media should not be seen as marketing tool but as an efficient way of customer service, maintaining loyalty and developing relationships. Company should act on terms of the community meaning that they should always think what is the target audience and their needs. Company should acknowledge their customers by answering to comments and messages so customers wouldn't lose interest and stop communicating.

Using appropriate language and being respectful on social media is key to giving a good picture of the brand. Company should be honest and double check the content to ensure posting accurate information. When publishing content, company should follow their values, not staff's individual opinions. Protecting customers' privacy is important for example when reposting or using their material. Company should always ask first permission from the customer.

Activating the whole staff by liking, commenting and sharing posts gives an active image of the company. Promoting company's social media on different channels, email signatures and website can get more attention and followers. Private messaging on social media channels is an effective way to communicate with customers. Company should advertise this possibility to their customers and encourage them to send questions and enquiries this way.

There are multiple forms of social media. Facebook and Twitter are popular channels, but so are review site TripAdvisor and blogging and podcast platforms. Capturing moments in pictures and short videos has grown its popularity and therefore have channels such as Instagram, Youtube and Flickr. (Dodson 2016,156.)

Despite the form or channel, social media does not sleep. Smartphones have changed how people keep contact with each other; companies can also reach customers 24 hours a day. This can be challenging job, but also really rewarding. (Dodson 2016,156.)

4.1.2 Facebook

Facebook is one of the most efficient online platforms with over 1.4 billion active users. A business page varies from a personal page. A business Facebook page can have limitless connections and likes, is optimized for search engines since it is public and contains a lot of analytics that help track how the site is engaging users. (Dodson 2016, 159.)

Real-time marketing is about connecting customer with the brand, product or service that they lack for now, in the moment. This is done by focusing communicating on present and relevant trends and current reactions from the customers. Facebook is one of the most crucial platforms to carry out this real-time marketing. (Armstrong & Kotler 2017, 54.)

Dodson (2016, 160) sees Like-button as the key to Facebook site's success. EdgeRank algorithm promotes posts that are liked by user's friends. Every like is meaningful and gets company closer to the customers they want to reach.

Facebook owns multiple social media channels such as Facebook Messenger, Instagram and WhatsApp. All these offer special and effective tools to communicate and engage customers. (Rouhiainen 2016, 13.)

When asked how the customers keep up with Koh Tao Divers' activities and news, almost every interviewee feels that Facebook is an efficient way to follow the commissioning company. Immonen mentions that for him the best and efficient way to reach out for the company is through Facebook Messenger.

In Facebook a company wants to be followed and therefore they should be active themselves and follow others such as competitors in the industry, partners and customers. Reacting and being active is important since social media is always available and does not sleep. Company should make sure to answer customers' comments and enquiries as fast

as possible. Especially when the business and its customers are on different time zones. Real-time communicating is crucial as Armstrong and Kotler (2017, 54) mentioned and therefore Facebook Messenger is an excellent choice to be in contact with customers.

Like Sernovitz (2009, 142) mentioned, Facebook is a great online platform for creating a community where customers can share their thoughts and opinions with like-minded people. The company should maintain this kind of page and be active by posting for example detailed information about diving course options and upcoming events that are aimed for long-term customers.

Technology is evolving and that is why the company should keep up with it by focusing on high quality content. Using appropriate equipment for photo shooting and filming is crucial. Engaging customers begins with communicating and starting conversations by asking questions and opinions in the content they post. Finally, company should remember to analyze and follow regularly how many people they reach, what kind of content works the best and gains most likes and comments.

4.1.3 Instagram

Instagram was the first significant social media channel which can be used only on mobile app meaning that content can not be added from a regular desktop computer. It is an extremely popular app with over 400 million active users. This social network is a relevant marketing platform for a small business. Travel industry is one having a lot of success with Instagram. (Rouhiainen 2016, 131.)

Instagram is seen as an efficient way to keep up with the company's news and activities by Järvinen, Immonen, Päckilä, Suhonen, Ikonen and Kopra. Järvinen states that she is happy with the commissioning company's social media updating pace. Three interviewees would use Instagram as a channel to recommend the commissioning company to their friends. Ikonen would suggest especially checking out Koh Tao Diver's Instagram feed when someone feels curious about diving with them.

Company should remember consistency when posting on Instagram. Retaining pace on posting is key to keep up the interest of customers. Posting at least once a day is recommended. Company should utilize a calendar and schedule when posting already prepared content. Hootsuite is a great online tool for keeping up company's social presence. (Hootsuite 2018.)

The company should maintain brand's theme and generate high quality content that is relevant and matches the feed. Being creative, showing brand's personality and using imaginary in the posts is key to popularity. Also authenticity is important, meaning to maintain naturalness and using filters with good taste. Instagram stories are a great way to post behind the scenes material and show everyday action at the dive school. Company should remember to add hashtags that are unique, eye-catching and describing brand's atmosphere.

In Instagram activeness is highly appreciated. Company should follow, comment and like own industry's and customers' posts. Sharing posts to Facebook is efficient way to reach greater audience. Also reposting company's customers' posts about their user experiences gives different perspective for followers.

4.1.4 Content for Facebook and Instagram

Content posted to Facebook and Instagram can be similar. Besides pictures, short videos are powerful. These videos should function and deliver the message effectively also without voice. Storytelling is a trend at the moment so opening story behind a picture is a great idea to reach attention. Behind the scenes material showing for example how company's services are prepared and stories about the staff awake curiosity on followers.

Company should avoid too obvious advertising and marketing. What comes to consistency and coherence, using similar colors, logo and fonts helps the audience recognize the brand. Diverse usage of emojis can give different impressions and they should be used with consideration to make sure not to give a wrong image. Besides colorful content, happy people with smiles and emotions are recommendable.

4.1.5 Blog

Blog is an optional tool for companies to share their operations and values behind them. Power of personal publishing builds engagement and is capable of affecting and informing communities. (Bax, Meyer & Wilkins 2013, 55.)

In these online forums people and companies post their opinions and content that are closely related to the topics specified and that appeal to limited brand communities. Social media channels can be used to promote the blog. Blogs provide an authentic, personal, different and cost-effective way for companies to take part in customers' online conversations. Still a blog is mainly a channel controlled by customers. (Armstrong & Kotler 2017, 466-467.)

I got familiar with creating content for Koh Tao Divers' blog. Eco-friendliness and protecting the environment are important values for the company. This is why I wrote a blog post about protecting the coral system. Also other staff members were encouraged to create content for the blog and capture moments for social media.

Company should notice blogging as seriously as their other social media channels. Person who writes it should put effort on it and post frequently to ensure customers and seem reliable. Blog content should provide value for the customers. Writing about topics that interest genuinely and that the writer is passionate about creates authenticity. Writer should keep in mind the brand's image and values and produce content that supports these.

Visual language is recommended such as photos, videos and infographics. Personality can and should be shown but with good taste and respectful language. Integrated marketing should be implemented by making sure the post matches brand's theme and style. To generate more traffic company should promote blog posts on other channels, for example as link on Facebook and photo on Instagram. It is important to add further links to the post such as where customer can purchase the service and email address to be able to contact the company for further enquiries.

4.1.6 Website

Creating a website is usually the first thing to do when company starts online marketing. There are multiple kinds of websites. A marketing website is meant for first engaging customer and then motivating them for direct purchase. Branded community website is not about selling anything. It's meaning is to engage customers by introducing brand content and create relationships and customer-brand community. To create deeper relationships and engagement these kind of sites offer large diversity of brand facts, videos, blogs and other activities. An engaging website that gets customers visit and return again should offer valuable content, be easy to use and attract visually. A convenient website contains deep and useful information, changing promotions and links to other similar sites. (Armstrong & Kotler 2017, 462-463.)

Burk Wood (2017, 198) states that today's customers are expecting multifunctional and modern websites that are user friendly that function on any screen type. If website is the first touch point for a customer to a brand, it should cause a good reaction and be inviting to return again.

Jaanu, Wikman, Ikonen and Immonen would share the commissioning company's website when recommending the company to their friends. Jaanu and Päckilä got familiar for the first time with the commissioning company by checking out their website.

When planning company's website, target audience and their expectations are first things to think about. Home page makes the first impression and that is why it should show the brand's personality by quote, pictures, logo and colors. Company's website should be clear and easy to navigate. Especially nowadays website should be mobile friendly, meaning that it fits on all screen sizes. Navigations should be easy to find and access. Website should be kept up to date and not provide old information. This could frustrate a potential customer and give bad picture of the brand. Website should include relevant keywords to get well listed in the search engines.

4.1.7 Search Engine Optimization

Search engine optimization (SEO) means that company's website is successfully arranged and rated by search engines such as Google. Most cost-effective way to gain more website traffic is to have high position in organic search listings, meaning the websites that occur in search results because of their relevance to the search word that user has wrote. (Dodson 2016, 9.)

Also Bax, Meyer & Wilkins (2013, 33-34) agree that best way to get traffic on company's website is a good search engine position. Search engines have improved themselves into practical automated applications that position sites regarding their appropriateness of content related to others. The ultimate situation is to be at the top of listing.

The most important benefits of SEO for the company are that appearing in the search engines is free, users of internet trust more on the retrieval results than paid links and optimizing the website is helpful for all listings since all search engines' algorithms are similar. (Karjaluo 2010, 134.)

Jaanu heard about the commissioning company for the first time from the internet. He found the company by search words Finnish diving school Thailand. After hearing for the first time of the commissioning company, Järvinen had started googling more information about it. Also Päckilä had looked for information about the commissioning company from Google in the beginning when she got familiar with the company.

Keywords are key to good listing on search engines and gaining more traffic to the website. Main keywords should describe well company's operations and it should be relevant to the target audience that is searching for the company. Company's website should use their main keywords in the title, sub-titles, blog posts, descriptions and content. Google provides a free tool called Google Keyword Planner that helps the company define and analyze their keywords (Google 2018).

Website's URL structure should include text, preferably the keywords. The same applies to images downloaded to the website. Cross-linking internal pages is efficient as well as gaining external links from other website owners. All these tips apply also to company's blog. Blog should be linked with the website and also include main keywords.

4.1.8 Email marketing

Armstrong and Kotler (2017, 464) define email marketing as delivering marketing messages that are well personalized, precisely targeted and creating relationships. It is still a developing and important way of digital marketing. Kananen (2013, 102) argues that even though email marketing is seen as outdated way of online marketing, it is still an efficient tool at the point when the customer has already shown interest towards the company's products or services.

Email marketing is a fast and cost-effective way of marketing; it does not cost anything. It is also very personal approach of digital marketing communication. Company can target and personalize the message, assuming they have an efficient CRM-system in use. (Kananen 2013, 111.)

An email that creates engagement has relevant information for a specific target audience. Key features are also clear calls to action, social sharing buttons and good structure. Headings before new paragraphs, appropriate pictures and bullet points that organize the text makes reading easier. (Dodson 2016, 138-139.)

There are few challenges facing email marketing. It has got a bad reputation because of spam messages and the fact that customer can by himself regulate does he open the message, read it or delete it. (Kananen 2013, 102.)

Jaanu, Järvinen, Päckilä, Ikonen and Kopra would contact the commissioning company by email if they would have a reason to. Jaanu would use email for privacy reasons and Järvinen when the matter would be more formal, for example details about the diving

courses. Immonen mentions that he has not used email as communication channel because he feels his matters have not been important enough.

I paid attention to the matter that Koh Tao Divers email traffic was relatively busy and hectic. Especially when the popular holiday seasons were approaching. Email was most popular channel for receiving enquiries about the diving courses and company's services. Checking out the email inbox multiple times a day creates positive image for potential customers.

The commissioning company should consider regular email campaigns for example discounts on specific time of a year. Company should create mailing lists that define the target audience. This way the email message contains relevant information to the receiver. Referring the customer by his or her name makes the message personal and awakes interest. An email should have something valuable to offer for the receiver for example interesting information about the subject, a link to discount or new diving course's description.

The title should draw attention and make the receiver open the message. Most important information should always be in the beginning of the message. Email can present upcoming events, important changes in the company or reward loyal customers with discounts. Timing of an email campaign should be well considered, especially when planning a holiday to Thailand takes a while and usually is not planned in a short period of time. Including a call to action quote is essential as well as social media channel links.

4.2 Integrated marketing communication

Integration is key to successful digital marketing. Integrating actions across digital channels means using data collected from one channel to boost the effectiveness of another channel. (Dodson 2016, 5.)

Huge growth in engaging customers through digital media is one reason for popularity of integrated marketing communications. With this concept, company combines and controls its multiple communication channels to send a coherent and fascinating message about the brand. To guarantee clear brand message companies should carefully coordinate all customer touch points such as advertising, personal selling, public relations, direct and digital marketing and sales promotions. (Armstrong & Kotler 2017, 395, 399.)

Integrated marketing communication (IMC) needs a lot of effort to bring benefits. It can help customers move through multiple stages of buying process. Same time the company strengthens its image and develops their customer relationships. (Smith & Taylor 2004, 16.)

Company should have well planned internal communication to ensure that everyone understands the importance of a clear and consistent message. The company should also ensure they have common visual guidelines in use for example logo, font and colors. (Smith & Taylor 2004, 19-20.)

Coherence on company level means that company's external communication should be similar and consistent regardless the media used. The core message should be comprehended on all levels of the company. (Kananen 2013, 117.)

Planning and defining brand's visual image is a first step when starting integrated marketing communication. The same logo, fonts and colors should be utilized in all medias used. The company should use all channels to promote the content posted in one channel.

4.3 Word of mouth marketing

Word of mouth (WOM) is usually interactive conversations between people where the one giving the feedback does not have any commercial interest. Person receiving the advice can ask further questions and this makes WOM even more influential way of marketing. WOM feedback can be received by telephone, face-to-face meetings, mail, messages, email, blogs or social network sites. WOM can be positive or negative. Normally positive feedback increases and negative decreases potential customer's intention to purchase the certain brand. (East, Singh, Vanhuele & Wright 2017, 250.)

Sernovitz (2009, 4) states that word of mouth is actually all about great customer service that encourage people spread the word to their friends. Organic word of mouth originates naturally from good qualities of the company. Amplified word of mouth is it's opposite, it is caused by a deliberate campaign to get people talking.

According to Kingston University's studies, customers who have become involved with the brand by recommendations are more likely to recommend it themselves. Also people who purchase often the brand give more WOM. Sometimes they habituate to the brand and talk less about it. (East, Singh, Vanhuele & Wright 2017, 265.)

All of the interviewees have recommended the commissioning company to their friends. When the interviewees were asked how would they recommend the company, most popular answer was by face to face.

Online social networks are great channel for word of mouth marketing. In these online communities, customers can exchange brand-related opinions and information. Companies can create community sites to begin brand conversations. (Armstrong & Kotler 2017, 166-167, 52.)

Online communities are great way to boost word of mouth marketing. Company should start conversations by asking questions and sharing interesting content. Keeping customers satisfied by providing great customer service and making everything happen smoothly will increase chances to get positive recommendations.

5 Discussion

This chapter summarizes the thesis by going through the key points of the theoretical framework and the empirical data presented. Guidelines for efficient digital marketing communication are also presented and discussed. Conclusions are made by taking account all theoretical and empirical data. Self evaluation and personal development on this thesis process can be found from the last sub chapter.

5.1 Summary

As said we live in a continuously changing and developing marketing environment. This challenges keeping up the customer-brand relationships. Especially Koh Tao Divers' communication with their loyal customer base requires a lot of attention and activity. This kind of long distance marketing is best done through different digital channels.

Cultural factors are affecting customers' buying behavior. In this case with Koh Tao Divers, Finnish language is seen as major factor what comes to customers' decisions. The research conducted showed that Finnish people trust Finnish companies. Like Järvinen mentioned the knowledge of Finnish know-how, professionalism and working attitude led clearly her to the purchase decision. Social factors such as friends' feedback and recommendations are also major influencer with Koh Tao Divers.

Customer engagement is about building relationships and creating brand communities. Koh Tao Divers has a strong company culture that pursues feeling of community at the school as well as outside it. Like-minded people can share their background and opinions with each other. A future development idea for Koh Tao Divers would be to expand this community phenomenon to digital channels such as Facebook group.

The interviewees appreciated the fact that Koh Tao Divers remembers them as loyal customers, answer quickly to their enquiries and always welcome heartily back for a revisit. Loyal customers are crucial for companies since they bring profit and spread the word when being satisfied. Digital solutions have increased effect of word of mouth marketing. Positive and negative feedback is shared actively on social media and review sites.

According the research, Koh Tao Divers' customers were overall really satisfied with the company. Especially they appreciated the quality of service and relaxed atmosphere at the school.

In the interviews was found out that long-term customers were more sure about returning for a revisit to Koh Tao Divers. All of the first timers said that they would revisit if their holidays end up again to Koh Tao. Reasons behind returning were good and friendly customer service, the island as a travel destination and quality of training. Also the comfortable and relaxed atmosphere at the school was mentioned in multiple answers.

Marketing communications is about controlling the customer relationships. The whole organization needs to own a marketing mindset. Digital solutions are most efficient and cost-effective what comes to communicating to Koh Tao Divers' already existing customers. Based on the results of the interviews all interviewees use social media channels to follow Koh Tao Divers. Therefore, I would say that the commissioning company is active and on the right track with their digital marketing communication activity.

The society is changing towards more transparent and technology is getting more and more advanced and this leads to the fact that high quality content is often taken for granted. Also media is awake all the time so companies are assumed to communicate and react as quickly as possible. Social media is great option for real-time marketing and communicating. It should be seen as great customer service. Active social media presence can increase engagement and help building brand communities and conversations. Trust is the key to success and it is gained by consistency and transparency. Also company should be authentic and focus on their core company values when posting. Activating whole staff to share, comment and like gives an active image.

Regarding the content guidelines on social media, short videos, behind the scenes material and storytelling are powerful and awake curiosity in customers. Content that presents people behind Koh Tao Divers would be interesting and effective. These apply to blogging as well. Content should share important thoughts and show company's true personality. Visual language should not be forgotten.

Companies must have willingness to evolve and change. They should keep up to date with current trends and phenomenon. Same time they should not forget a bit more traditional channels such as email and website. These are still powerful and widely used. Website usually gives the first impression. Nowadays it is crucial to develop a website that is easy to navigate on any device and screen type. Keywords are crucial and they should be used for example in the URL, image-files and descriptions. This lead to the fact that search engine optimization is vital for company's visibility and website traffic. SEO is all about importance of keywords. Google Keyword Planner is a brilliant tool for figuring out best options.

Based on the results of the research and my observations, email is not outdated and it is still an efficient way of communication. The commissioning company should consider regular email campaigns. Mailing lists are a good option to reach the target audience and personalize the messages. Email should have something valuable to offer, for example discount on special time of the year. Company should consider the timing since trip to Thailand is not planned in a short period of time.

Integration helps to deliver clear and consistent message to the target audience. All channels should support each other by sharing links, posting photos and promoting one another. The company should have common visual guidelines to deliver coherent image.

As noticed word of mouth has huge importance on Koh Tao Divers' activity. WOD originates from good qualities of a company and this is why the company should keep up exceptional customer service. Recommendations are one crucial way to reach new potential customers. Since digitalization, social media and different review sites offer more possibilities for word of mouth.

As a conclusion, the theoretical framework and the empirical data support the fact that digital marketing communication is related to creating, maintaining and strengthening customer relationships. Also word of mouth marketing and personal recommendations were discovered to have strong affect on customers' buying behavior. Koh Tao Divers' customers are active users of social media channels and therefore by focusing on keeping up the customer relationships and following the produced digital marketing communication guidelines the commissioning company can maintain effective presence on different marketing channels. The guidelines leave space for imaginary and companies personal preferences and are also applicable for further development.

5.2 Personal development

This thesis process was very educating. I have not done this kind of researches during my studies so I learned a lot of new. Since I have always studied at least partially in English language, starting this process in English was not intimidating. During the process I realized that I have wider vocabulary on my native language and expressing my thoughts was sometimes difficult. Therefore, I learned a lot about academic writing in English.

Besides academic writing I learned a lot about project and time management. Finding balance between the thesis process, work and free time was challenging. I found out that for me the most optimal situation was to write the thesis on my day offs since after work

days I was not feeling so productive anymore. During writing I had to keep small breaks every now and then to re-energize myself.

In the beginning of the process, planning of the thesis content and structure turned out to be time consuming. After all this phase was probably most rewarding. Following clear table of contents all the way from the beginning helped to put together the theoretical framework. I learned more deepen things during the theory process than I expected I would. From my school courses I had not gained so broad and detailed knowledge so now I feel a lot wiser.

Cooperation with my supervisor from Haaga-Helia and Koh Tao Divers as well as my interviewees went smoothly and without delays. I appreciated prompt answers and active communication. I did not feel like I was alone in the process, besides the supervisor my friends and family were really encouraging and helped me if I had challenges.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 Interview questions

1. Name
2. Age
3. How many time have you visited Koh Tao Divers?
4. How did you hear about the company for the first time?
5. Why did you choose Koh Tao Divers?
6. How would you describe the services the company offers?
7. How could the company improve their operations?
8. Will you use Koh Tao Divers' services also in the future? Why?
9. If you have visited the company multiple times, how your customer relationship has been noticed until today?
10. How do you receive up to date news about the company?
11. How do you keep contact to the company? If you would contact them now, how would you do it?
12. Have you recommended the company to your friends?
13. How or through what channel would you recommend the company to your friends?