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Email Marketing to Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises

Case study: WorldSome Finland

Thesis

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Thesis Abstract

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The thesis studies the growing importance of email marketing in general and, in particular, from the perspective of small and medium-sized enterprises. To further investigate the research problem, two main issues to be addressed were defined. The first one is the obstacles that SMEs confront while implementing an email marketing strategy, and the second one is how they can cope with those situations.

The theoretical part starts with a brief definition of email marketing and a presentation of some currently commonly used types of emails. The reasons why email marketing has become a trend among strategists is also discussed with reliable statistics. Then, the study goes on dealing with the advantages and disadvantages of email marketing for SMEs.

The WorldSome Finland company was chosen as a case study in the empirical part. Interviews with representatives of WorldSome provided useful information supporting the findings from the theory.

In conclusion, the main issues considering an email marketing strategy include a low delivery rate, a low engagement rate, design issues, and legal issues. To deal with these challenges and make the best of an email marketing campaign, SMEs should go prepare a thorough email marketing plan, making good use of a management system, and strictly follow data security law.

Keywords: Marketing, Email, Email Marketing, Email Marketing Strategy, Small and Medium-Sized Enterprise, WorldSome Finland.

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Terms and Abbreviations

SMEs	Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises
SMS	Short Message Service
B2B	Business to Business
B2C	Business to Customers
ROI	Return on Investment
SEO	Search Engine Optimization
KPIs	Key Performance Indicators
ISPs	Internet Service Providers
ESPs	Email Service Providers

Special Symbols

£ Pound

€ Euro

\$ Dollar

1 INTRODUCTION

The topic of the thesis is “**Email Marketing to Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises**”. Given the commission from WorldSome – a start-up company based in Finland, the case study has been a solid foundation to solve the thesis problems and clarify the thesis topic.

1.1 Necessity of The Thesis

The 21st century has been seen as a new era, shifting away traditional marketing to digital marketing. As a result, businesses are moving forward with fast-paced evolution of social network. Being regarded as the most versatile and cost-efficient way to generate leads and reach out target customers, 97% of marketing strategists are now on social media (Smith, 2018).

Among the most popular social marketing platforms such as Facebook, Youtube, Twitter, etc., Email Marketing has the potential to grow better, yielding outstanding revenue for companies every year. As an example, about £29 million retail sales is generated each year in the United Kingdom, not included offline sales influenced by emails, according to a study by Econsultancy in 2018 (Desai, 2018), which also indicates that Email Marketing is rated by 73% of marketers as the number one digital channel for investment.

Although being critical to marketing strategy, Email Marketing is seemed as uninspiring and unexciting because businesses often underestimate the efficiency of email marketing campaigns (Galkina, 2018). Besides, not every campaign is successful due to shortage of skills and knowledge as 25% of marketers have trouble getting content for their email marketing strategy (DMA report, 2015).

The topic is not new, but crucial, especially for those start-up companies like WorldSome, who are fighting for their ways in a competitive market but still lack sufficient knowledge of how email marketing works.

1.2 Thesis Objective

The purpose of the thesis is to highlight the importance of Email Marketing to Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs). By investigating the case study from WorldSome – a start-up company since 2016 with first-phase difficulties building its marketing strategy, major obstacles that SMEs regularly encounter while using Email Marketing are identified, analysed and solved. As a result, the thesis is to provide a closer insight into how an effective Email Marketing strategy works.

For that reason, there are two main issues arising that need to be dealt with:

First issue: What are the primary problems that SMEs usually confront with while using Email Marketing?

Second issue: How can SMEs cope with those troubles to gain more benefits from Email Marketing?

The field of application of the thesis is internally organizational perspective rather than external scale.

1.3 Thesis Structure

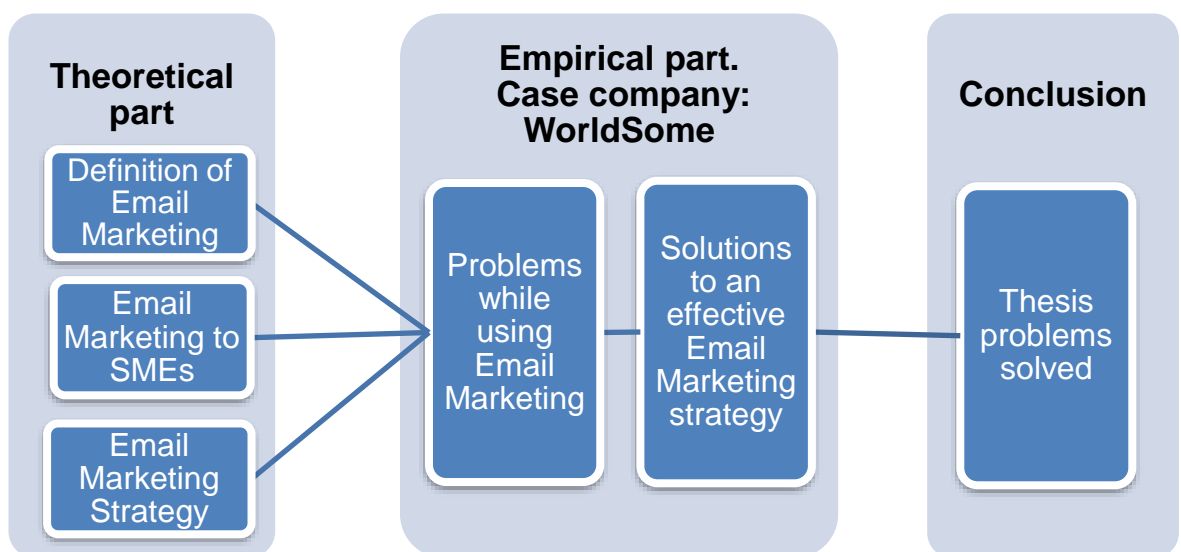


Figure 1. Structure of The Thesis

As illustrated by Figure 1, the thesis is divided into two main parts: theoretical and empirical part. Each part is supported by sub-parts to clarify the thesis problems.

The theoretical part is to give an overview of Email Marketing and some commonly-used types of Marketing Emails. The reasons why Email Marketing has become an crucial part of social media marketing strategy are also proved by real statistical resources. The writier emphasizes the influences and the pros and cons of Email Marketing to SMEs and suggests possible solutions for obstacles encountered when firms are carrying out Email Marketing campaign. Furthermore, a fundamental Email Marketing plan is sketched out in this part.

The aim of the theoretical part is to provide a firm foundation for the practical knowledge, which is the case study of WorldSome. Having studied particular data gathered from the case company, the thesis is to evaluate the company's strategy and identify some challenges that WorldSome, in specific, have to confront while committing their campaign and then, evaluate how effective the company has been dealing with the challenges and propose applicable solutions for this case.

There is a transitional part between the theory and the application called Research Methodology, which specifies the research method used and why this approach is best applicable in this case.

The conclusion is to close the case by giving answers to the thesis problems, evaluating the limit of the study and suggesting further research on the topic.

2 EMAIL MARKETING

2.1 Definition of Email Marketing

The advent of the Internet, which is considered as “the most second important innovation after printing press”, has altered the way companies market their products and communicate with their customers. In response to this e-communicating channel, email makes its way to bring marketers onto the social network. As a result, Email Marketing is born as an online replacement of offline advertising method (Chitenden & Rettie, 2003, pg.203).

Tecnically defined, email marketing is the act of sending commercial electronic mails (emails) to targeted groups of potential customers in a number of ways. Email Marketing can include data mining, efficient testing, customization, precise targeting.

Simply stated by Cambridge Dictionary, Email Marketing is “*the process of using emails to advertise and sell products or services*”.

According to Ward (2018):

“Email marketing is one segment of internet marketing, which encompasses online marketing via websites, social media, blogs, etc. It is essentially the same as direct mail except that instead of sending mail through postal service, messages are sent electronically via email.”

A complete marketing email has 7 key elements, which are: Send Date & Time, Header, Subject Line, Primary Message, Body, Call to Action and Footer (Hanna, Richard C., et al, 2015, pg.30) (Appendix 1).

2.2 Types of Email Marketing

Marketing Emails are divided based on various functions. There are 3 main types of email generally utilized by companies equivalent with their marketing goals, which are: promotional emails, transactional emails and relational emails.

2.2.1 Promotional Emails

- *Informational Emails* provide customers with direct updated products/services, coupons, upcoming promotional campaigns or event invitations. They usually explicit direct sale messages and easy-accessible links to the products
- *Lead Nurturing Emails* is defined by Hubspot in its online publication "The Beginner's Guide to Email Marketing" (2017, pg.20) as below:

"These emails are usually part of a connected series that guides users further down your sales funnel. They're launched automatically whenever a user takes a specific action, such as downloading a content offer on a landing page or requesting a trial"



Figure 2. Sales Function of Lead Nurturing Emails (Hubspot, 2017, pg.20)

2.2.2 Transactional Emails

- *Welcome/Confirmation/Follow-up Emails* are one-to-one interactional emails triggered by customers' specific actions such as signing up for newsletters, making reservation or proceeding transactions. These emails are used as testimonials to fulfill promises to the customers.

- *Remind/Re-order Emails* are to encourage customers to make purchase on product reservations or remind the time to re-order certain goods.

2.2.3 Relational Emails

- *Newletters* are emails sent to a list of subscribers on a regular basis at no cost to them. The goal is to generate direct sale or build relationship between the brands and the buyers (Yudkin & Gutzman, 2002, pg.13)
- *Feedback/Survey Emails* help to collect useful data on customers' experiences in order to improve service quality.
- *Educational Emails* provide customers with know-how series or industrial knowledge to create connections between clients and business. In other words, as defined by Hanna, Richard C., et al., (2015, pg.6).

“Education-oriented emails are about spreading information, directing recipients to other information content, sharing opinions or providing some other types of educational value”

According to DMA report (2015, pg.5), emails were distributed to serve multiple business goals simultaneously (usually more than three), among which driving sales was the number one business objective (26%). Next came engagement and acquisition, which were 22% and 16% respectively. Meanwhile, among different approaches that marketers use to reach their clients, Newsletters, Welcome Emails, Survey Emails and Lead Nurturing Emails top the list in achieving marketing purposes (DMA, 2015)

To sum up, Email Marketing is a form of direct marketing, which sends electrical mails to targeted customers to:

- Introducing new products/services and promoting current marketing campaigns.
- Acquiring new customers by convincing them to purchase the products/services.

- Encouraging customer loyalty by enhancing the relationship of established customers.
- Improving brand awareness, customers' experiences and service quality.

2.3 The Strategic Importance of Email Marketing

At Nielsen Consumer 360 in 2010, Sheryl Sandberg – Facebook's Chief Operating Officer embraced the end of email:

"In consumer technology, if you want to know what people like us will do tomorrow, you look at what teenagers are doing today...So what do teenagers do? They use SMS and increasingly, they use social networking. Email – I can't imagine life without it - is probably going away".

Years later, as opposed to what the senior manager predicted, statistics collected by many market research agencies have proved that Email Marketing has grown as one of the most powerful marketing tools that no marketers can resist using (DMA, 2015), (The Radicati Group, 2018), (Hanna, Richard C., et al., 2015, pg.6)

As stated in the book "Traction: How any start-up can achieve explosive customer growth" (Gabriel & Justin, 2014, p.g 141), Colin NederKoorn – CEO & Founder of Customer i.o emphasized the indispensable role of Email Marketing:

"If you're running a real business, email is still the most effective way to universally reach people who have expressed interest in your product or site. For that, it really can't be beaten."

As proved to be true, email is cross-platform and digitally universal. Rather than a basic marketing tool used by strategists, email is the most ubiquitous mean of communication (Waterford Technologies, 2017). In fact, email users are increasing incredibly in the last few years. In a report carried out by The Radicati Group, global email users in 2017 amounted to 2.7 billion people, making up approximately 35%

of the world population. Meanwhile, out of 220 billion emails sent everyday, 132 billion was business email. The number of email users is expected to significantly increase, up to 4.2 billion in 2020 (Statistica, 2018). Therefore, it is undeniable that despite the rise of social network, Email Marketing possesses the abilities that no other alternatives can do, which is the world-wide reach of targeted customers.

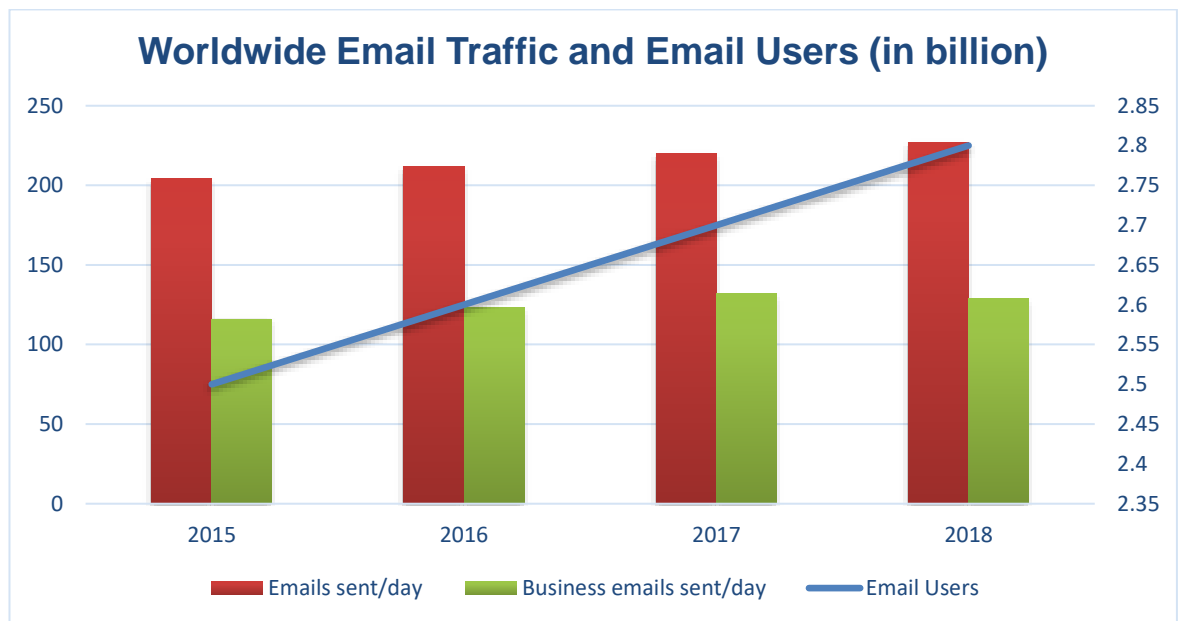


Figure 3. Worldwide Email Traffic and Email Users by Year (in billion) (The Raticati Group, 2018, pg.3-5).

As for strategists, 82% of B2B and B2C companies have taken advantage of email for their marketing campaigns (Mercer, 2017). Data collected in the National Client Email Report by DMA in 2015 showed that more than 80% of marketers rated emails as “important” and “very important” to their business. Not only are there more emails users but business also takes advantage of email more than any other social media networks (Hanna, Richard C., et al., 2015, pg.103). The explanation is that email address acts like a digital passport that allows companies to build their own profile of potential clients. Thus, email is the identifying key to optimize the efficiency of marketing communication.

With an effort to increase brand engagement, marketers have offered customers a variety of practices, among which email is the most preferred way to receive updates and promotions from the brand (MarketingSherpa, 2015). The conclusion was

drawn out by an online survey conducted by MarketingSherpa in 2015 among nationally U.S population, who were asked “*In which of the following ways, if any, would you prefer to receive regular updates and promotions from companies that you are interested in doing business with?*”. Email turned out to be chosen by 60% of consumers, which presented a great opportunity for business to convert more leads and bring out the best of their campaigns. What lagged behind this choice was the fact that email was more convenient, relevant and direct in providing exclusive offers and last-minute deals (Sherman, 2018).

Furthermore, Email Marketing offers other digital marketing tactics with better integrative platform. In other words, marketers can make use of Email Marketing to provide indirect content interaction straight to customers’ mailbox. By sharing marketing videos, embedding landing page links, tracking information or including social media sharing button in email, company can make more traffic back to the site. Thus, Email Marketing works as an effective platform for social networking campaigns (Smith, 2017).



Figure 4. Email Marketing as Interactive Platform (Standberry, 2018)

3 EMAIL MARKETING TO SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED ENTERPRISES (SMEs)

3.1 Definition of SMEs

According to Investopedia, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are businesses whose revenues, assets or number of employees are below a certain standard decided by each nation. For example, The European Commission has defined SMEs based on staffheadcount or either turnover/balance sheet total (Figure 5).

Category	Staffheadcount	Turnover or Balance Sheet Total	
Medium	Smaller than 250	Smaller than € 50 million	Smaller than € 43 million
Small	Smaller than 50	Smaller than € 10 million	Smaller than € 10 million

Figure 5. SMEs Defined in The EU Recommendation 2003/261

In general, SMEs tend to have lower survival rate due to the fact that they have difficulties in attracting diverse source of capital and increasing market shares. Sometimes, SMEs fail to comply with regulatory compliances and taxation reporting system. Being rely more on angel investors (such as personal funds or loans from friends or families) rather traditional funds, these companies usually have more of one owner involvement (Investopia, n.d).

Although having many drawbacks compared to large firms, SMEs make up a major part of the business in many developing countries, vastly contributing to the social well-being in terms of providing job opportunities and generating tax revenues (Ward, 2018). Furthermore, SMEs encourage innovations and competition, which are essential to national economic development. Advantages of SMEs are clarified in Figure 6 as below:

Yet small firms also have advantages, some of which grow more pronounced with the ‘information revolution’:

- Smaller firms may be less bureaucratic, and may have less ‘inertia’ in their operating structures.
- Innovative activities may flourish more in the small or ‘start-up’ environment.
- Smaller firms frequently place innovation (rather than market presence) at the centre of their strategy for advancement.⁸
- Intensified global competition due to transportation, information and communication improvements has led large diversified manufacturers to sell off less competitive holdings and has forced all producers into leaner manufacturing.
- Significant increases in the degree of uncertainty due to high rates of interest, inflation, unemployment, exchange rate volatility and growth slowdown in industrialised countries may have favoured smaller, more versatile firms in the 1970s and 1980s.
- Intensified market fragmentation due to growing consumer demand for differentiated products may have favoured smaller, more versatile firms.

Figure 6. Advantages of SMEs (Karmel, SM & Bryon, 2003, pg. 33)

3.2 Advantages of Email Marketing to SMEs

Having possessed specific features, SMEs go to great lengths when choosing marketing approach. Compared to other marketing practices such as social media, print ads or telephone marketing, Email Marketing proves to be more beneficial to SMEs. According to a national survey carried out by AT&T, 41% of small businesses are using email marketing to reach their customers (Housh, 2015, pg.22). This is because of those following reasons:

- First, Email Marketing is cost-effective when budget is the greatest concern for small-business owners. While traditional TV commercials or print ads can be expensive, Email Marketing, in contrast, allows small companies to maximize their marketing budget while engaging most customers. This tactic requires less investment to get started, low cost per acquisition and maintenance over time (Standberry, 2018). Over half of the participants in the National Client Email Survey reported that their investment in Email Marketing ranged from 10% to 20% of marketing budget. While 96% expect their

budget to stay the same or increase, indicating great effort to develop Email Marketing as a successful channel. This is because almost 80% of their campaigns were managed in-house with the assist of cost-saving managing software (DMA, 2015, pg.16). (Appendix 2)

- Second, Email Marketing generated higher ROI at lower execution time. Not only Email Marketing requires less investment but it also provides strong Return on Investment (ROI) at less preparation time compared to other alternatives (Zhang, Kumar & Cosguner, 2017, pg. 853). As can be seen from Figure 7, for every \$1 spent, Email Marketing can generate approximately \$40 back in ROI compared to \$22 from SEO and \$10.51 from Mobile Marketing (Smith, 2018). In terms of time preparation, it takes direct mails about 17 days before reaching a targeted of 50,000 customer's mail box while Email Marketing only needs 6 hours to run for a similarly-sized campaign (Zhang, Kumar & Cosguner, 2017, pg. 853).

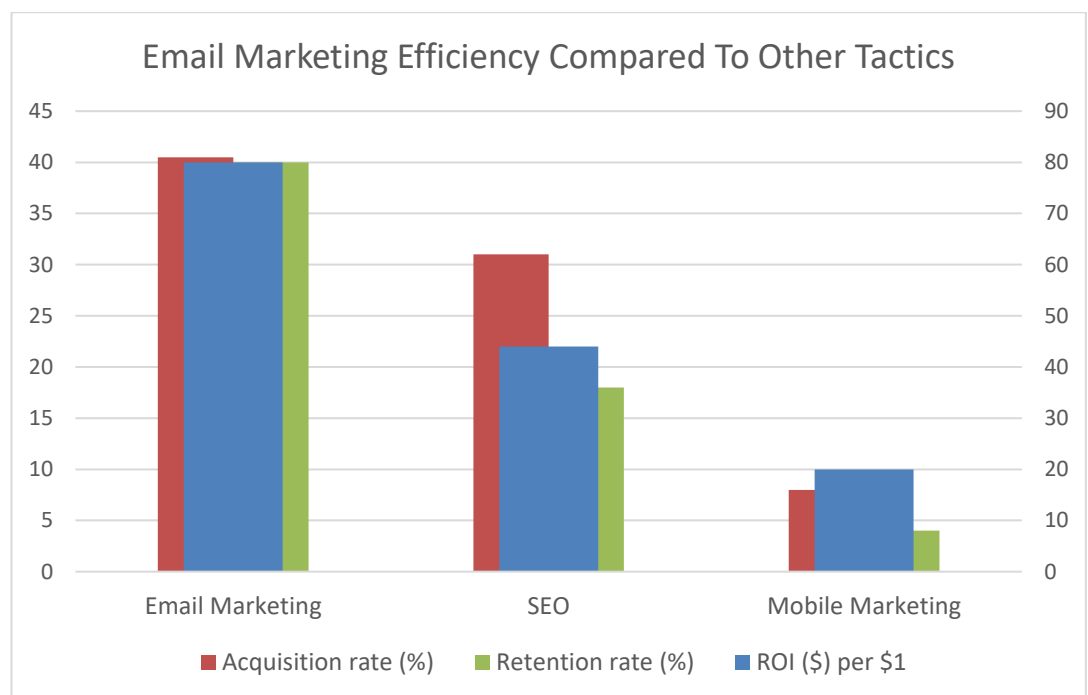


Figure 7. Email Marketing Efficiency Compared to other Tactics (Smith, 2018); (Hans, 2018); (Emarketer, 2016).

- Third, Email Marketing is more effective than social media when it comes to converting browsers into buyers, members, supporters (Hanna, Richard C., et al., 2015, pg.2). As an effective one-to-one communicating form, Email

Marketing makes it easy to customize content for marketing message. This is considered as one of the strengths of Email Marketing. Using segmentation, companies are able to sort out different variants, processing database and moulding message content to fit recipient's need. This would, in return, increase relevancy and move people to act on direct targetted sale messages (DMA, 2015, pg.21) Data provided by Emarketer in 2016 resulted in the fact that 81% and 80% of respondent of over 250 professional retailers in U.S, respectively, rated email as the number one acquisition and retention-driving force compared to SEO and Mobile Marketing, which were rated by far fewer respondents. This has proved how reliable email is regarding generating sales (Figure 7).

- Fourly, Email Marketing is easily measurable. An important part of marketing campaigns is the ability to track the result of audience engagement. Email Marketing provides strategists with different effective metrics to deliver insights in how effectiveness the campaign is. According to Hanna, Richard C., et al., (2015, pg.42)

“Combining more than one metric along with information about user segments tell a more complete story that can cover both campaign performance and the health of an email list”.

From the data gathered, marketers take actions for better result by either adding more interesting subject lines, creatively relevant contents, clearer web links or attractive images. Some examples of email metrics are:

- *Delivery Rate* is the percentage of emails successfully reaching targetted customers' mail box. The higher is the Delivery Rate, the stronger is the email list (MacDonalds, 2018). Depending on different industries, this number may normally ranges from 95% to 98%. (Hanna, Richard C., et al., 2015, pg.42)
- *Open Rate* measures the rate of opened emails over successful emails delivered. This is the foremost criterion for an effective campaign. Average Open Rate is between 10% to 15% while in

some industries, this number can strike upto 20%. MacDonalds (2018) suggested that good subject line and sender's name are what make subscribers click "open" and read emails.

- *Click-Through Rate (CTR)* evaluates the call-to-action effectiveness such as clicking the link or watching attached video. CTR equals total clicks divided by total email delivered. Out of 100 emails sent, about 3 to 10 recipients truly open and act on the message (Hanna, Richard C., et al., 2015, pg.45).
- *Conversion Rate* is the percentage of email receivers who actually complete a desire action (making a product purchase, filling a survey or signing for a trial).
- *Unsubscribe and Complaint Rate* is the number of people clicking through unsubscribe button or marking emails as spam. When running a campaign, unsubscription and spam are inevitable. However, companies can always keep this rate under control (below 0.5%) (Santora, 2018).

Among different KPIs, Open Rate and CTR are the mostly-used measures of success, often used by 72% and 66% of marketers respectively. This focus on deliverability is far more important than ROI for most marketers (Howell, 2009, pg.16-17).

- Last but not least, Email Marketing can be used on the go (Bodnar & Cohen, 2011, pg.148). As customers have been switching from desktops to smartphones, they are naturally shifting their behavior of receiving email campaigns with them. According to Bodnar & Cohen (2011, pg.148), 64% of decision-makers check emails on their phones. As a result, Email Marketing become an optimal tactic for SMEs who want to reach mobile customers. In fact, the popularity of emails on mobile makes it top the list of most popular activities on smartphones (78%) (Standberry, 2018). Statistics also shows that emails opened on mobile have incresead by 30% for the last 5 years, dominating desktops and webmail customers (CampaignMonitor, 2018).

3.3 Disadvantages of Email Marketing to SMEs

“The potential of such media for reaching a target audience and engaging their interest seem to be equalled by the scope for causing irritation and turning away potential customers” (Westell & Wessing, 2003, pg.144).

Although email is the star-turn to marketers which can be used for mass campaign or regular contact (Clapham, 2001, pg.32), there are potential risks that marketing professionals should take into consideration when carrying out Email Marketing campaigns.

3.3.1 Low Deliverability Issue

“Deliverability is still the main issue facing email marketing as it attempts to move away from its image as a form of spam” (Precision Marketing, 2008, pg.25)

Spam is the main cause of low deliverability. The entire concept of Spam generated from the early stage of emails when communication were unregulated and untested. Customer list was chosen randomly rather than being intendedly selected based on reliable database analysis and segmentation. The 21st definition of Spam is more specific, regarding *“a numerous duplicate of the same emails sent to people who are not expecting to receive from the companies”*. The difference is that it is not *“the people who are not expecting to receive the emails”* but *“the people who are not expecting to receive from the companies”* (Lewis, 2002, pg.53-54).

Customers nowadays are bombarded with a huge number of emails that they cannot manage. Sometimes, commercial targetted emails are mixed up with spams, which accounts for 89% of all emails sent per day. The unexpected result is that those marketing emails are then navigated to spam folders and would never be opened again (Bodnar & Cohen, 2011, pg. 145).

Moreover, in order to counteract spammers from violating data security issues, some internet servers may use spam filters, firewalls, email blacklists to prevent unwanted emails getting through their customers' addresses. Statistics have showed that approximately 20% of commercial emails is blocked or filtered by Internet Service Providers (ISPs), causing millions of revenue lost annually (Duffy, 2007, pg.156-157). Moreover, excessively sending emails to untargeted recipients can cause certain irritation. If email campaign gets classified as spam, Response Rate, Delivery Rate and CTR will be lower than standard level. In worse situation, this can cause violation to privacy and data protection rules (Williamson, 2017)

3.3.2 Low Subscriber Engagement Issue

Industry research has proved that it takes roughly five seconds to impress readers when they open an email. This means in most case, customers are just skimming through the content but not actually reading what is inside the letter (Williamson, 2017). Some emails are regarded as ineffective because they do not contain words and phrases or more important – a subject line that can stimulate excited response at first glance (Lewis, 2002, pg.167-183)

In some cases, companies have spotted customers who are active in opening the companies' emails but rarely take any actions. Although these receivers could raise the Delivery Rate and CTR, from profit perspective, there are fewer chances that firms can convert those recipients into repeat buyers (Zhang, Kumar & Cosguner, 2017, pg.851).

In other cases, companies find it difficult to keep in touch with their subscribers. To deal with the issue, some professionals may try to regulate email frequency, which can sometimes backfire. Too frequent, customers are overwhelmed with messages and considered marketing emails as too many. Too rarely, customers may forgot that they have subscribed and left emails in the spam folders (Lewis, 2002, pg. 211).

“If you are unable to produce emails that consistently generate an emotional response, you’re emailing too frequently. If you find yourself

backed up with unsent offers because you have too many available discounts, prizes, recognitions, or advanced new items, you may be emailing too infrequently” (Lewis, 2002, pg. 210).

In a nutshell, sending the optimal number of email is critical to a firm’s success. If being utilized in a wrong way, email frequency and content can drive away potential customers (Zhang, Kumar & Cosguner, 2017, pg. 852).

3.3.3 Design Issue

To guarantee a successful Email Marketing campaign, design is especially important (Ellison, 2006, pg.40). However, companies may encounter a trade-off between design, content and functionality as email service filters can block logos, graphics, image pixel and flash animations from coming through in order to counteract spammers getting through customers’ mailbox from those elements (Duffy, 2007, 157). The result as that pixel cannot be loaded and what buyers may receive is only text-plain emails.

“The biggest concern for email marketing design is how the formatting and graphics will render (i.e., appear) in different email clients and environments” (Hanna, Richard C., et al, 2015, pg.33)

Also according to Hanna, Richard C., et al (2015, pg.33), there are three email client environments, which are desktop email clients, webmail clients and mobile email apps. Cross and within those environments, emails appear entirely differently due to multiple settings and platforms. As a result, one email cannot be displayed as designed across channels. Fonts and text size may not be consistent in format. Contents can move from one line to another, which would decrease the impact of the message (Forneris, n.d).

Thus, email strategists should not only pay more attention to the message they want to convey but also the environment that consumers receive it (Hanna, Richard C., et al, 2015, pg.25)

3.3.4 Legal Issue

What facing marketing professionals today is that they must not only effectively convey marketing message through emails to global-scale customers but also comply with lawful manners regarding information security and customers' privacy (Westell & Wessing, 2003, pg.144).

Directives and regulations concerning data processing can be challenging to SMEs, partly contributing to the success of Email Marketing campaign. These rules specify contents included in the marketing message as well as legal responsibilities a marketer should carry. Law is enacted to prevent spammers from acquiring customers' email address without their permission. However, even experienced marketers can sometimes accidentally break the law. It is advisable that marketers refer to current laws beforehand (CampaignMonitor, n.d).

Some current legislations and regulations coming into force are:

- *Data Protection Act 1998* was enacted under a 1995 European Directive, covering the processing of personal data and regulating direct marketing through email and SMS. Its main provision has been into effect since 25 May 2018 (Westell & Wessing, 2003, pg.144), (ICO, n.d).
- *CAN-SPAM Act 2003* is the first national standard law governing the method how marketers can send commercial emails in the U.S. These rules do not specify that firms need permissions to send email but rather clarify the main requirements for business emails to be legally sent regarding clear header, subject line, message, location, opt-out requests (Hanna, Richard C., et al, 2015, pg.23)
- *EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)* is applied all over EU member states, which harmonize data privacy laws across every sector. New regulation was reinforced in 25 May 2018, implementing heavy fines on violation. "GDPR reshapes the way in which sectors manage data, as well as redefines the roles for key leaders in businesses" (EU GDPR, n.d)

3.4 Solution for Email Marketing

One of the key concern for email marketers is to get emails pass through the spam filters (Duffy, 2007, pg.156). If emails sent to a certain domain are bounced back to the senders, got rejected outright or get blocked, spam filters are doing their ways. Unclear content could be a reason. But the more likely culprit here is the reputation of the firm such as unknown message source or IP address that do not seem to exist (Tsai, 2009, pg.35), (Lewis, 2002, pg.61). In this case, strategists can either find other methods to get to the customers or have their emails sent by a safe sender, who have certain relationship with ISPs (Google, Hotmail or Yahoo). Brand owners have a wide range of expert email service agencies to choose from such as Silverpop, E-dialogue, DoubleClick, etc,. This ensures emails make their ways through ISPs filters and not being reported as spam (Precision Marketing, 2008, pg.25), (Hanna, Richard C., et al, 2015, pg.43)

Improving brand engagement is another issue that marketer should pay attention to. If customers stop responding, chances are that they are either no longer growing any interest in the content or getting any emails from the companies (Ellison, 2006, pg.39). A research made by Mogos (2015, pg.28) has emphasized the importance of the subject line on an email regarding emotional response. Subject line is a phrase that encompasses call-to-actions such as opening, reading or even deleting the email. In fact, the subject of an email is among the top 5 incentives for engagement (Chittenden & Rettie, 2003, pg.207). What make an effective subject line are: (1) it should be related to the content of the email; (2) it should grab recipients' attention and arise curiosity to open and excitement to find out what the email is about; (3) it is should be concise enough; (4) it should be displayed properly on mobile devices (Mogos, 2015, pg.28). Beside subject line, other emails's element such as personalized greetings, clear message content, call-to-action button, colorful images or attractive design can also increase response for the companies.

Moreover, finding the right number of email to be sent is important but also challenging to many entrepreneur as customer's intrinsic behavior differs significantly overtime. Email optimization should depend on customer's engagement level. Let

take MarketingProf as an example: “*in early 2011, MarketingProfs, the marketing content, education and events company, changed their weekly e-mail to a daily e-mail. According to Ann Handley, chief content officer, based on site traffic and other engagement metrics, “The audience is more engaged with MarketingProfs, not less”*” (Bodnar & Cohen, 2011, page 148). Thus, it is up to the situation of each Email Marketing campaign that marketers will decide to increase or decrease the frequency (Zhang, Kumar & Cosguner, 2017, pg. 852).

As for technical issues, email professionals should be able to display their emails properly across channels. Cross-platform testing is critical. Thus, it is advisable that e-mail design should be tested on different platforms before being sent to customers to avoid misconstruing and unexpected appearance. Firms may refer to technical specialists from marketing agency to help them with creating code processing system. Experts in the field will devise the most lucrative email design and ensure compatibility in all devices (Williamson, 2017).

Executing legal compliance is part of Email Marketing campaign. In order to minimize breach of law, marketer can refer to legal consultants or carry out these following steps to make sure their emails stay on the right side with anti-spam regulation.

- *Ensuring customer’s location.* The challenge is that emails that is legal in one country can be illegal in another. There are national laws and international laws that implement different requirements. Firms are advised to find out where their subscribers are based and study laws beforehand (Cvijovic, n.d).
- *Ensuring permission before sending.* Westell & Wessing (2003, pg.147) suggested that “*it is a good idea to ensure that all recipients opt in to receiving marketing materials*”. Firms should not only get recipient’s permission but also store valid proof of it by registration via subscription form, in-store newsletter (Cvijovic, n.d).
- *Ensuring explicit information.* The point here is not to mislead the recipients. Company should be straightforward about who they are, what they do, what kind of proposal they are offering to the customers. Moreover, marketers

should make sure that their information they are providing is honest, truthful and transparent (Westell & Wessing, 2003, pg.148).

- *Ensuring data privacy.* It is the firm's responsibility to keep secure of customer's information. Unauthorized disclosure of personal data can cause troubles to both companies and customers.

4 EMAIL MARKETING STRATEGY

The goal of Email Marketing strategy is to assist and expediate customers' movement from awareness to conversion to promotion. As customers move along this plan, their value journey accumulatively increases, adding to the profitability of the business. A successful Email Marketing strategy requires thorough preparation, good execution and process improvement. The plan can be broken down into following key steps:

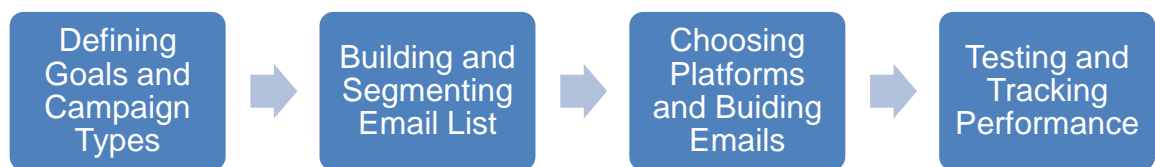


Figure 8. Email Marketing Strategy

4.1 Defining Email Marketing Goals and Types

“Choosing Email Marketing goals is the first step to making your strategy result-oriented” (Raychale, 2018)

By setting up clear goals, firms can easily vision what they should accomplish in the coming years. Email Marketing, just like other marketing tactics, should have their goals alligned with overall marketing KPIs of the company. That could be increasing email signups, getting better Open Rate, generating new leads for sale team, attracting more attendees to the events or getting more traffic to the websites (CampaignMonitor, n.d). Once marketing goals have been defined, enterprises then choose best types of email campaign to support their plan, as according to Henneberry (2018):

- *Indoctrination Campaign* is sent to new subscribers to introduce them to the brand and arise their excitement for the products. This is the typical type of compaign that many SMEs are using when they are new to the market, expecting some recognition from the recipients' inbox

- *Engagement Campaign* is an interest-based, triggered campaign sent after the subscribers take specific actions to relevant offers (such as visiting a page). This campaign could lead customers to make a purchase.
- *Ascension Campaign* will turn new buyers into frequent buyers by leading them to the sales funnels.
- *Segmentation Campaign* is manual promotion campaign sent to the entire database to segment subscribers by interest. Data from this campaign helps marketers decide to whom they should send more marketing emails and whom they should not.
- *Re-engagement Campaign* is to re-engage subscribers who are not opening or clicking any emails for the last one to two months.

Each campaign type will be carried out with prevalent marketing email types for best result.

4.2 Building and Segmenting Email Lists

When first carrying out Email Marketing strategy, professionals may not have an email list yet. Thus, they should start capture email addresses and build the list from scratch. According to Wainwright (n.d), there are 2 ways marketers often use to acquire their email list:

- *Buy an email list.* List providers are expert in this field. They own millions of email addresses available based on demographic and industrial information. Firms may purchase these lists without any difficulties searching for potential customers. Buying available email list can be effortless and time-saving. However, this is not considered as a sustainable method to grow a business. There are problems strategists may encounter when purchasing a list: (1) Violating the rules of consent, (2) Getting into trouble with unreliable email marketing services, (3) Acquiring ineffective email addresses, (4) Being flagged as spam emails.

- *Grow an organic list.* The important thing is that firms should grow their own list. This is the result of earning interest and trust from the customers. Rober Harrison – a British Economist and a Porfolio Manager at BlackRock, has emphized the importance of growing an organic email list:

“Some companies forget the benefits that customer profiling can bring... Organisations should aim to acquire customers that will be interested in what the organisation has to offer and have the highest life-time value” (New Media Age, 2006, pg. S12).

In order to grow their own lists, there are materials called Lead Magnet that marketers can use such as webinars, e-books, reports or templates to provide premium content so that customers find these tools valuable enough to give out their email address. Another simple way to obtain organic list is to make use of subsription form from websites. By this way, subscribers have expressed explicit consent that allows companies to use their email addresses.

“Your website should be the first place to start when building a contact list. Customers visiting your website and blog already have an interest in what you offer, so enticing them to sign up might be easier here than anywhere else. You can then integrate your social platforms and face-to-face contacts to tell followers and customers about the benefits of joining your mailing list” (Chieri, 2018)

After acquiring a quality list, marketers then use segmentation tool to break down the list into sub categories based on different charateristics. Email segmentation is an entry-level strategy but many marketers overlook the tactic in their own campaigns (Hesilridge, n.d). Understanding ideal audience not only helps to improve marketing results such as sales, engagement level, reducing cost and time but also minimize the potential risks of becoming spammers.

“The more you segment your list, the more trust you build with your leads and the easier it’ll be to convert them later. Not to mention, segmented emails generate 58% of all revenue” (Perricone, n.d)

Yonatan (2018) has suggested several criteria when segmenting an email list, ranging from gender, age, income, employment status, geographic location, interests, relationship status and a huge number of other variables (Figure 9).

- **Geography** — The physical location of your recipients by country, region, state, or city. This can help you tailor content specific to certain places or accommodate time zone differences.
- **Demographics** — Demographic criteria includes age, gender, language, background, job title, or any other data points specific to an individual.
- **Firmographics** — Firmographic criteria refers to characteristics regarding a company, such as headquarters, industry, revenue, and number of employees. This is particularly useful for B2B account-based marketing or sales.
- **Past purchases** — This is useful for ecommerce retailers in particular. This can inform an email’s dynamic content or the nature of promotions personalized to recipients’ interests.
- **Amount spent** — This is useful for encouraging customers to hit a threshold at which they gain benefits, or rewarding loyal customers with a discount.
- **Position in sales funnel** — The abandoned shopping cart is the most well-known example. However, you can send emails customized to any stage of the buyer’s journey to push them farther down the funnel.
- **Time since last purchase** — Win back past customers before they go cold. Offer them incentives to return, announce new merchandise, or preview upcoming sales.
- **Expressed interests** — Send relevant content to the parties most interested based on interests they confirmed when subscribing to your emailing list.
- **Email engagement** — Customers who opt to receive emails no more than, say, twice a month can have abbreviated bi-weekly newsletters sent to their inboxes with the top topics of that period.

Figure 9. Criteria When Segmenting Email Lists (Yonatan, 2018)

4.3 Choosing Email Platforms and Building an Email

Mass distribution of emails from certain domain address can trigger spam filters and be rejected outright. Thus, rather than distributing emails by themselves, it is advisable that enterprises can contract with reputable email service providers who have good relationships with ISPs and are whitelisted (Goldstein, 2004, pg.2). There are

several email experts to choose from regarding marketing goals, budget and level such as MailChimp, Hubspot, Campaign Monitor, Get Response or Infusion Soft.

“The first thing to do is avoid buying a generic third-party list. Secondly, refrain from spamblasting people. And thirdly, pick a good email marketing software with a good reputation that can get your emails delivered to actual inboxes” (Hudson, 2015, pg.A4-A6)

A successfully-created email comprises two main factors: design and content. Professional-looking design is the visual part that can attract customers at first glance while good content is the direct reflection of the message firms want to convey.

Design can be challenging, even for graphic designers. That is why email marketing services provide marketers with attractive templates. These templates are designed with easy customizing tools to change colors, drag and drop pictures, add sections or videos. Along with design, content is what strategists should focus on to increase deliverability rate. One method professionals can utilize to optimize the campaign is personalization. According to Gunelius (2018, pg.59), personalization is not only about including personal contact name in the subject line or greeting part but also about changing content depending on who is receiving the messages. This method allows offers to be sent to the right person at the right time.

4.4 Testing and Tracking Performance

Testing is an essential part of Email Marketing. *“Test, test, test wherever you can, test. Subject line, call to action, time of day, frequency, incentive--whatever you think might make a difference. However, make sure the test is statistically valid and include only one element per test cell”* (Truman, 2006, pg.19)

Most often, A/B testing is used to divide audiences into segments, which are then shown with different testing elements. By testing multiple variables at the same time, marketers can spot out which elements are more effective in improving marketing

performance. Email design can also be tested online before sending live offers. Marketers can create different layouts and submit these to A/B testing to receive feedback from others outside their target audience. Moreover, strategists can also test email marketing campaign on multiple platforms to ensure compatibility on all devices. Thus, experimenting and testing is ongoing processes that should be doing all the time (Gunelius, 2018, pg.60).

Once testing is done, Email Marketing campaign is ready to set off. The final step in email marketing strategy is analyzing and optimizing performance. It is regularly reviewed to help marketers keep track of desired results. Google Analytics or other tracking tools are used to evaluate results of the campaign based on KPIs such as Open rate, ClickThrough Rate, Deliverability Rate, etc,. Using data collected, enterprises can optimize their campaign for better results.

5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research is the search for knowledge. This is considered as a voyage from the unknown to the known by academic activities such as defining problems, formulating hypothesis, collecting information, comparing and correlating data sets, making deductions and reaching conclusions. With the help of observation, study, comparison and experiment, researchers find the solutions for the problems.

According to Sachdeva (2008, pg.13), research is not just about information gathering from books and fact transportating from one source to another because these activities do not generate any contribution to new knowledge. Instead, research is a *“systematic process of collecting and analyzing information (data) to increase our understanding of the phenomenon about which we are concerned”*.

There are some basic types of research as followed (Kothari, 2004, pg.3-4):

- Descriptive vs. Analytical research. Descriptive research uses surveys and fact-finding enquires to measure facts (such as shopping frequency, customers preferences and similar data). Meanwhile, in an analytical research, researchers analyze their findings from data already available.
- Applied vs. Fundamental research. Research can either be applied (or action) research or fundamental (or pure) research. The purpose of applied research is to identify solutions for practical economic, social or political-related problems whereas fundamental research is mainly concerned with laying background for scientific knowledge or formulating a theory.
- Qualitative vs. Quantitative research. Qualitative research is applicable in qualitative issues of all kinds. This type of research is especially important when studying human behavioral sciences such as motives, desires or experiences. On the other hands, quantitative research is concerned with quantitative phenomena, relating the measurement of quantity or amount.
- Conceptual and Empirical research. Conceptual research is often used by philosophers to develop new concept or reinterpret an existing theory while

empirical is data-based research which is verified by observation or experiment.

- *Other types* such as field-setting research, simulation research, clinical research, historical research, conclusion-oriented research. *“All other types of research are variations of one or more of the above stated approaches, based on either the purpose of research, or the time required to accomplish research, on the environment in which research is done, or on the basis of some other similar factor”* (Kothari, 2004, pg.3-4).

In this thesis, the topic is “Email Marketing to Small and Medium-Sized Enterprise” which seeks to find the solutions for Email Marketing campaign. The thesis is a combination of analytical, applied, conceptual and empirical research. Based on research problems, case study is chosen as research strategy, qualitative method is as research approach while interview is used as information collecting technique.

5.1 Case Study

“Philosophically, case study research can be orientated from a realist or positivist perspective where the researcher holds the view that there is one single reality, which is independent of the individual and can be apprehended, studied and measured, through to a relativist or interpretivist perspective” (Harrison, Helena, et al, 2017, pg.18)

Simply defined by PressAcademia (2018), a case study is an empirical enquiry that comprehensively investigates a phenomena within its real-life context based on single individual, group or events to explore the underlying principles. This is a method of in-depth study. Thus, it requires fully interaction between researchers and participants to generate information and provide valid background for the field.

One advantage of case study is that case method can provide profound analysis of phenomena, supporting different perspectives of the problems while allowing multiple data-collection methods to be used such as interviews, observation, desk research (Gagnon, Y.-C, 2010, pg.2). Moreover, case study method possesses high

potential of validity as conclusion does not base solely on one data source. The strength to combine different techniques can counterbalance the weakness of each source, so validity can be enhanced (Newman, I. and Benz, 1998, pg.66).

Nevertheless, case study can be time-consuming for both researchers and participants as it requires bilateral cooperation between the two parties. Besides, there are fewer chances that case method can generalize the theory and apply the findings to bigger population (Gagnon, Y.-C, 2010, pg.4).

In this thesis, WorldSome Oy Finland has been chosen as a case study for the topic. There are reasons that WorldSome can be an ideal case to study the Email Marketing Plan for SMEs: (1) This is start-up company whose size is relatively small (2-5 employees) with shortage of capital and labour force, (2) Email Marketing has become the main marketing tactic for the company so research in this field can be helpful to SMEs like WorldSome, (3) The company is in their first stage building Email Marketing plan and has encountered a lot of real-life challenges so they have experienced comprehensive view on the difficulties when running their campaign and can suggest possible solutions. Thus, case company like WorldSome could provide intensive exploration on the topic with high validity.

5.2 Qualitative Data Collection Approach

Qualitative research method is conducted through variable fields, ranging from education, sociology, psychology, healthcare, business other related areas with an aim to interpret meaning from non-numerical data, which includes: new insights about individual or society, evaluation of effectiveness of program or policies, a solution for a business plan (Saldana, 2011, pg.4).

According to Crossman (2018), *“qualitative research is designed to reveal the meaning that informs the action or outcomes that are typically measured by quantitative research. What this type of research produces is descriptive data that the researcher must then interpret using rigorous and systematic methods of transcribing, coding, and analysis of trends and themes”*.

Traver (2001, pg.2) stated in the book “Qualitative Research Through Case Study” that there are 5 main qualitative methods, which are: (1) Observation, (2) Interviewing, (3) Ethnographic Fieldwork, (4) Discourse Analysis, (5) Textual Analysis.

On the good side, qualitative method provides in-depth understanding of the problems. It goes deeper into studying not only the “what” side but also provide answer to the “why” side. Moreover, the method is known for its flexibility and adaptability and can be conducted with limited budget.

However, in the down side, the findings from qualitative research is limited and not widely generalizable. Researcher may get into personal bias when collecting subjective data from such methods as interviewing or observation.

5.3 Interview

Conducting one-to-one interviewing is one of the most common qualitative methods. The researchers can get in the interview with predetermined questions but they allow natural conversation to flow based on participants’ responses. One advantage of this purely conversational method is that it provides opportunities to get information related to personal experiences, beliefs and motivations. The method can be conducted flexibly through phone, email or face-to-face and does not take long time to be completed (Bhat, n.d). On the minus side, interviewees may have their bias impact their response and overall result of the interview. Thus, to cope of with this issue, it maybe a need to conduct more interviews with several qualified respondents within multiple areas, which again can increase costs and time (DeFranzo, 2014).

In the case study of WorldSome Oy, email interview has been chosen as data collection method for the reasons that:

- Depending on the purpose of the thesis, the analysis is about causes and solutions for the problems which requires real-life experiences. Email interview can provide in-depth information about the issue.

- Since WorldSome is a start-up, there is little information about Email Marketing strategy available on the site, interview can allow more confidential and valuable data to be exclusively disclosed.
- Due to distance differences, email interview is beneficial to both parties as it is time-saving and cost-efficient.

To get the most of the topic, there would be two interviews conducted with WorldSome's representatives: one with the founder, Mr. Tuomo Suonkoski, to get profound insight in the effectiveness of current Email Marketing plan; one is with Customer Relationship intern, Ms. Thu Nguyen, who is directly working with the marketing strategy and can give out more information of problems encountered and how they have tackle with such difficulties. The interviews are conducted at the same time, from 13th of November to 20th of December, 2018.

6 DATA COLLECTIONS AND FINDINGS FROM CASE STUDY

6.1 WorldSome Finland

First founded in 2016, WorldSome is a start-up company based in Finland that is committed to economic and intellectual growth. With the mission to “creat new possibilities”, since establishment, WorldSome has been actively partnering up with many international univerisities, companies, students and candidates all over the globe to create online platforms that support each party to pursue sustainable development. The company aims at improving the cooperation specially between schools, students and companies, and therefore creating an easy global access for students to job/internship/project offers in future.

Currently, WorldSome is running three projects mainly dedicated to educational and commercial purposes. These projects, namely, are:

- *JumptoWork*, launched in 2016-2017, is a web portal specialized at connecting students, schools and companies all around the world. At JumtoWork, students (and other job seekers) are enabled to apply for positions in Job Portal (internships, thesis and other jobs) and search information about universities they would like to study. Companies have possibility to display their job advertisement and schools get a chance to market themselves. *“Our mission is to facilitate the connection and cooperation between students, schools and companies globally. The cornerstone of JumpToWork is assisting students’ study & career paths with a variety of education institutions as well as job offers while increasing companies’ capacities for recruiting new talents and promoting schools universally”* (JumtoWork, 2016).
- *UASBay* is an organizational platform created by WorldSome Evolutions. The main purpose is to establish cooperation between Universities / Universities of Applied Sciences and companies. Through this cooperation, companies can search for right Enterprise Resource Planning talents from the stu-

dents. The platform is completely unique and the first one is currently operating in Finland. The project was launched in 2018 with job portal where schools and companies can post related internship positions (UASBay, 2018)

- *WorldSome Evolutions* is a brand created to provide marketing service to companies in need of boosting their images. Since its establishment in 2018, the focus is to optimize inbound marketing activities by enhancing social media presence and search engine visibility by creating relevant content on all platforms. The service packages are tailor-made to fit customers' requirements and strictly compliant with new GDPR information security rules. The services included are: (1) Web Design, Creation and Hosting for content creation, (2) Social Media Marketing for brand awareness on social networks like Facebook, Instagram or LinkedIn and (3) Social Media Management such as Google Analytics, SEO and KPIs. (WorldSome-Evolutions, 2018)

The connection WorldSome is providing has been beneficial to the society in a number of ways. Students are now given chances for academic learning at prestigious educational institutes while companies can create profiles and post job offers to reach young specialists with various competences and backgrounds globally.

6.2 Interview with Founder of WorldSome

Mr. Tuomo Suonkoski is the founder of WorldSome. Since establishment, he has been in charge of most of the marketing strategy and activities at WorldSome and witnessed the significant development of the company. After being explained about the thesis topic, he has given permission for further research on the case study of WorldSome and is willing to provide some useful information about the company's email marketing strategy. The interview started on 13th November through email and finished on 20th December in 2018.

Based on the research problems, Mr. Tuomo has been asked some questions related to the development and effectiveness of WorldSome's email marketing plan as well as some recommendations for the future. The interview with the founder was

divided into three main parts: (1) Email Marketing Strategy; (2) Current Email Marketing Situation and (3) Development Plan For The Future.

6.2.1 Email Marketing Strategy

When WorldSome was first established in 2016, JumptoWork has been the main project of the company. Having realized the shortage of capital and labour force, it is a need to come up with a marketing strategy which is not only effective but also cost-efficient. Since WorldSome's target customers are international universities and global organizations, the marketing tactic should also be wide-reaching. Apart from traditional social platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn, in which WorldSome is currently operating, email marketing has been seen as a modern approach rising in popularity with obvious advantages that meet up with the company's requirements and conditions such as time-saving, cost-reducing, easily and effectively managed. Thus, it is decided that Email Marketing would be the main tool for reaching potential customers and boosting brand awareness.

Currently, WorldSome is working on three main projects, two of which use Email Marketing as the key strategy. They are JumptoWork and WorldSome Evolutions. Since the company is a start-up, the number of email subscribers are low, yet expected to grow potentially in the next few years. In order to increase email followers, marketing team has actively sending out informational emails in order to promote company's service packages and allow customers to receive newsletters through subscription box appeared on the company's official websites. The firm's marketing email strictly follows standard format with header, greetings, messege, call-to-action, footer and illustrations to improve visibility (Figure 10).

In order to effectively manage email marketing activites, many Email Service Providers have been tested. Roundcube and Elastic Email have been the first providers used to send out emails with different purpose and platform. Then the company has switched to more professionally widely-used services like Hubspot and MailChimp, which acquire certain advantages and disadvantages.

INVITATION TO JOIN OUR NETWORK

Dear Mr./Mrs./Ms.,

My name is **Huyen Pham**, and I am a Customer Relationship Coordinator at **WorldSome Oy** based in Finland. Our Company connects higher education institutions, students, and companies from **all over the globe** and unites them on our growing online portal called **JumpToWork**. We wish your university could take part in it!

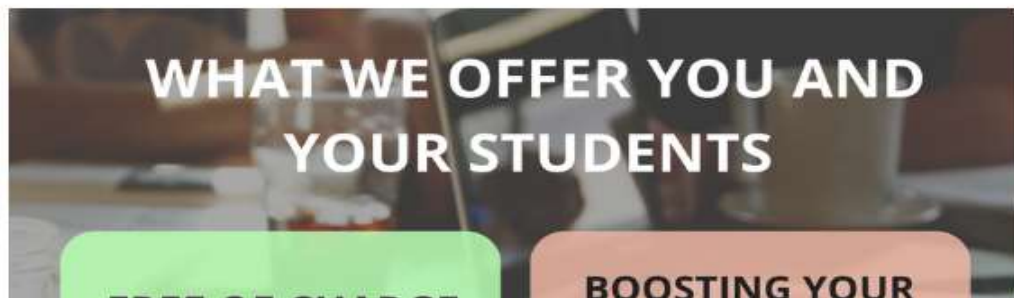


Figure 10. Part of WorldSome's Email Letter

6.2.2 Current Email Marketing Situation

When WorldSome first carried out Email Marketing strategy, the company faced with certain challenges. First was the design of email in order to pass spam filters and meet up with data protection regulations. Second was the establishment of marketing team to carry out the campaign in different countries across the globe. Third was the management of Email Marketing activities to keep track of the result and improvement. In order to deal with those issues in the first stage, it was a fortune that the company has been teamed up with some experts in the field who are able to design a complete marketing email from scratch. Moreover, with the help of interns from universities all over the world, an international marketing team has been set up and in charge of sending emails in different regions. The team has been working passionately and effectively to bring in customers and develop great network for the companies. Taking advantage of Email Service Providers is one way to keep track of their campaigns but WorldSome is still finding different approaches to meet up with its KPIs for better performance.

Since the company is new to the market, it can hardly provide any statistics on how effective Email Marketing plan is performing using certain email metrics such as Delivery Rate, Open Rate or Click-Through Rate. The team is now still working on finding the best tracking service. Thus, in the near future, the information would be available when there are more positive reactions to the company's email marketing campaign.

However, JumptoWork, which is WorldSome's main project since 2016, has obtained certain achievements, showing that the company's Email Marketing plan is moving in the right direction as expected. For the last two years, the number of universities and educational institutes from European and Asian countries featured on the official website has amounted to 30. These universities have agreed to partner up with WorldSome and join the network only through email marketing. UASBay also receives positive attention from Universities of Applied Sciences in Finland. Since June 2018, 7 universities have joined the portal, showing how likely it is to develop Email Marketing plan in the future.

6.2.3 Development Plan For The Future

Since GDPR law has been enacted in June 2018, there is a stagnance in the Email Marketing campaign. It is a need to replan the marketing strategy in order to comply with the regulations. Massive emails could not be sent to personal recipients as they used to be. Instead, general contact is another alternative that the team is testing on. Thus, the company would stick to email as the main tactic to reach international customers since this proves to be the most effective way.

Moreover, along with email marketing, it is recommended that the company can gradually move more into the direction of inbound marketing. In other words, it means bringing in more customers through websites by having call-to-action buttons there. If using outbound methods, it is preferable to call on the phone or make personal appointment in case customers are operating nationally. It depends more on the company and the industry.

6.3 Interview with Customer Relationship Intern of WorldSome

The second interview was carried out with the help of Ms. Nguyen Thu – who is currently working as Customer Relationship Intern at WorldSome. Having been working for the company for almost six months and directly in charge of email marketing plan. Ms. Nguyen Thu has obtained first-hand experience about the strategy. Thus, her information has been useful in investigating the research problems. In this interview, Ms. Nguyen Thu was asked to give her opinion on three main issues: (1) Evaluation of Email Marketing Management Services; (2) Obstacles Encountered With Email Marketing; (3) Solutions For The Problems and (4) Proposals for Improving Email Marketing Strategy.

6.3.1 Evaluation of Email Marketing Management Services

There are four email platforms that WorldSome has been testing. Each provider possesses certain advantageous features but also has its own drawbacks.

- *RoundCube*. On the plus side, as a webmail solution, Roundcube has all basic functionalities such as sending, receiving, forwarding, etc, emails. It supports folders and subfolders and is easy to use for beginners. Roundcube allows users to track which emails were opened to get an idea what kind of topic lines work by marking unread or read emails. Roundcube is also free to use in terms of license and cost, which means it could be an ideal solution for small organizations who want to offer webmail to its members either as a primary or secondary service. However, Roundcube is missing several collaborative features including instant messaging (hangouts), tasks and calendar. The tracking who opens the emails is also not too reliable and users cannot access the whole platform. The “read receipt”, or “not read or deleted receipt” is sometimes in the language of the recipient so it appears in many different languages.
- *Elastic Email* is a mass mailing solution that allows marketers to send various types of emails at a very short span of time with low cost. Moreover, its email

tracking capabilities can result in detailed analytics on every campaign. Elastic Email platform is also simple and straightforward for beginners to use. On the minus side, marketing team sometimes experience technical problems while sending emails although the issue is minor.

- *Hubspot*. This working space is ideal to organise and communicate with customers. When an email is sent to the clients, their information will automatically be uploaded to Hubspot. Therefore, it is easy to track clients and add their contact later on. The interface is highly functional with multiple features and easy to use. The best advantage of Hubspot is that the customers' information updating process is quick and efficient. Nevertheless, Hubspot does not include functions for designing a great marketing email. It is mainly good for managing customers' information. Useful functions requires extra payment.
- *MailChimp* is utilized for creating email marketing contents and campaigns for UASBay. Since this platform is free, the owner do not have to pay cost and license service. Mailchimp includes great features such as marketing email designing, campaign designing, mailing list, etc. The biggest advantage is that the platform is cost-effective and functional with multiple features. There are also instructions on how to utilise different aspects of email marketing. However, just like Hubspot, firm would have to pay for extra features. Moreover, the customer list is provided with only 1000 clients. If the campaign requires more than the limit number, firm is required pay a small fee. Also, working with Mailchimp requires at least a week of familiarizing with the interface.

6.3.2 Obstacles Encountered with Email Marketing

Since WorldSome strives to obtain an organic email list, the first contact is the hardest to make. The problem here is to find the right person to contact: a person from the right office and is important enough, yet not too busy to answer. It can also take very long to get replies, in some case even days or weeks. This is because some

schools have automatic spam filters, so many times the messages do not get through to the recipients. Besides, cultural differences significantly contribute to the response rate. It can be seen from the result that countries from Eastern side of Europe tend to reply more often and are open to the offers than Western European countries and especially Nordic countries. WorldSome hardly receive any reply from Asian countries like Japan, Korea or Vietnam since the cultures prefer direct appointments rather than receiving cold calls/emails from strangers as being considered unreliable.

Moreover, when contacting schools and universities, the reply rate is quite good comparing with contacting companies. The reason is that business customers simply get so many emails dealing with their business, so they often ignore marketing materials or their spam-proof system prevents the emails from reaching the target.

Another issue is how to make sure the design can be read by target customers on multiple different devices. Since the popularity of high-tech devices, WorldSome's marketing team have realized the importance of reaching clients through online email platform. However, the improvement is still on the process and would take more time to launch due to the shortage of human resource.

The new GDPR and Data Protecting Regulation is the final obstacle to WorldSome's email marketing campaign. For example, marketing team have decided to stop contacting Canadian universities because there seems to be strict spam laws in place. With the new EU regulation, it is forbidden to send marketing materials to individuals. Until now, the strategy relies on sending massive amounts of emails to compensate for low response rate but that would be practically impossible to contact leaders or persons of those organizations due to legal issues.

6.3.3 Solutions For The Problems

For low response rates, hard work is needed to compensate. Sending emails to multiple offices and multiple people in the same office have proved to be the most effective way. When contacting schools and universities, the first priorities to contact

is international offices and marketing offices. Of course, these emails should be permission-based if they are personal emails. *“Emails are usually sent on Wednesday and Thursday on a monthly basis to improve Open Rate”* – said Ms. Nguyen Thu.

For legal issues, recently WorldSome has been only contacting companies and universities by sending emails only to common-used email addresses rather than personal addresses. Although general contact emails are not as effective as individual emails, they yield some results occasionally. From her own experience, Ms. Thu Nguyen indicated that it usually took her approximately 10 emails for each school and an average 1 out of 10 recipient would reply to the offer. The result is predictable for a start-up like WorldSome.

For content loading problem, the designing should be small and concrete. By using email platforms like Mailchimp with versatile testing system, Ms. Nguyen Thu emphasizes that certain issues can be prevented such as excess image size or typing mistakes. It also helps to pre-check if emails can be fully seen on multiple devices. With the help of Hubspot, WorldSome have effectively managed a great number of mailing lists while easily control the timeline for mailing so that customers could receive the marketing letters in time or if they want to communicate, there are notifications quickly sent to the operators.

6.3.4 Proposals in Improving Email Marketing Strategy

Ms. Nguyen Thu suggests that taking advantage of all the softwares and programs available these days is indispensable to the management of Email Marketing campaign. They are affordable, time-saving and could effectively avoid possible. Companies should build up a concrete system to control each task and have a check monthly to make possible improvements.

Moreover, it is a need to experience new technology, or implement new marketing features in general and email marketing specifically. They can be small investments but will be valuable in longer term. Email Marketing for small companies takes time and effort, thus she emphasizes the importance of hard work and patience. “Do not

forget to comply with the regulations, or your company is going to be punished by huge fines” – added Ms. Nguyen Thu.

7 CONCLUSION

The growing importance of Email Marketing has altered the way strategists reach potential customers. Although firms are investing more in Email Marketing, they still lack of sufficient skills and knowledge to bring out the best of their campaigns. With an aim to provide readers a closer insight into this modern marketing strategy, the thesis concentrates on clarifying main challenges that SMEs are facing nowadays and thus, suggesting possible solutions for the problems. Based on the theory which is profoundly extracted and analysed from reliable sources, the study has investigated the case study of WorldSome – a start-up company based in Finland, who is utilizing Email Marketing as the main tactic. Findings from the case study have provided valid practical foundation for the research. From the conclusion, readers can get a concise brief of the work, both theoretically and practically, evaluation and recommendations for further study.

7.1 Summary of The Theoretical Part

In the first chapter, the writer first brings out a simple definition of email marketing, which is a advertising tactic utilizing online mail to reach potential clients. There are three types of marketing emails commonly used by firms with an aim to: (1) introduce new products/service; (2) improve brand awareness; (3) increase sales and (4) build up relationship with the customers. The importance of Email Marketing is inevitable as the number of email users is significantly growing. Not only email can assist in reaching global customers but it is also regarded as a professional marketing tactic in the business environment.

Although beneficial to firms in general, Email Marketing is best applicable to SMEs due to their natural features. Email Marketing is cost-efficient to low-budget advertising practice, more effective than social network in terms of customers engagement level and easier to keep track of. However, it takes more effort to carry out a productive campaign since strategists are facing certain problems such as (1) Low Delivery Rate; (2) Low Engagement Rate; (3) Design Issues and (4) Legal Issues.

Though challenging as it is, marketers can tackle those obstacles by paying more attention to the process of executing Email Marketing campaign.

Regarding to Email Marketing campaign, in chapter 4, the writer has profoundly gone through the process step by step, mentioning the most important points in each phrase, including: (1) Defining goals of the campaign; (2) Obtaining organic email list; (3) Designing and testing email on serveral platforms and (4) Tracking results and making improvement plans.

In the final chapter of theoretical part, research methodology is brought up to clarify the advantages and disadvantages of different research approaches applicable in the thesis. The using of qualitative method or case study in particular provides a solid practical foundation for the theory. Primary data are obtained from open-ended interview while secondary data are extracted from reliable journal, books and related scientific research.

7.2 Summary of The Empirical Part

By carefully studying case study of WorldSome - a start-up company who is investing in building social/economic and education platforms connecting universites, companies and candidates, researcher has a chance to further investigate the thesis problem. Two interviews with the Founder and Customer Relationship Intern have provided a multi-facted perspective of the thesis topic. In particular, the challenges WorldSome are facing are not different from that of other SMEs studied from the theoretical part. Main problems mentioned are: (1) Low Open Rate; (2) Low Engagement Rate; (3) Design Issue and (4) Legal Issues.

Despite facing such challenges, small firms can still achieve positive result through email marketing by leveraging right methods. In the case of WorldSome, the marketing team has paid more effort in repeatedly sending out letters to general email addresses. By making use of helpful email service providers like Hubpot and Mail-Chimp, WorldSome has effectively managed their campaign, tracking results and implementing possible adjusment.

7.3 Summary of Answers for Research Questions

Two thesis questions mentioned in the Thesis Objective have been explored and solved. In the following tables, readers can have a concise summary of the thesis problem and suggestion for solutions.

Table 1. Obstacles and Proposals for SMEs using Email Marketing

Obstacles & Reasons	Possible Solutions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Low Delivery Rate - Spam Filters - Blocked Images/Graphics ▪ Low Engagement Rate - Cultural Differences - Unopened Emails ▪ Design Issues - Invisibility on different platforms ▪ Legal Issues ▪ Uneffective Management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Using reliable email service providers. ▪ Testing carefully before launching ▪ Sending massive emails ▪ Increasing/decreasing email frequency. ▪ Sending emails at right time ▪ Using general emails address or permission-based personal address ▪ Using Customer Relationship Management softwares.

7.4 Evaluation of the Findings and Recommendations for Further Study

The research concentrates on Email Marketing Strategy for Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises as mentioned in the first part of the study. Having the commission from WorldSome Oy, the study has provided useful information of how the company is dealing with its Email Marketing campaign. By committing two individuals interviews, the writer has gained first-hand experiences and then brought out a comprehensive analysis of the issues and thus drawing a brief conclusion about the challenges as well as suggesting possible solutions. Although having obtained useful practical information, the study cannot help avoid some drawbacks. For example,

bias and personal opinions are inevitable during the interviews. Moreover, researcher can only conduct qualitative method, which is considered as a minus point. If quantitative method such as questionnaire was to be done, this could be a solid base supporting data finding in the interview. Besides, since being a start-up new to the market, WorldSome could not provide sufficient statistics on their Email Marketing campaigns.

For further study, it is suggested that there could be more related topics considering Email Marketing on a larger scale. For example, the research problem could be about how to conduct an effective Email Marketing campaign for a specific project, or how to measure the performance of an Email Marketing campaign or even deeper study the legal aspect of Email Marketing.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1. Elements of An Effective Email

APPENDIX 2. Interview with Founder of WorldSome

APPENDIX 3. Interview with Customer Relationship Intern

APPENDIX 1. Elements of An Effective Email (Hanna, Richard C., et al, 2015, pg.30-31)

1. Send date and time: Every email has a time and date stamp on when it is sent.
2. Header: This section contains the “to” and “from” information for the email. The “from” line contains the email address from which the email was sent.
3. Subject line: This line contains the reason to open the email.
4. Primary message: It should support the message in the subject line.
5. Body: The main part of the email, which typically contains images and information.
6. Call to action: Often the most important part of the email is the call to action. This is what marketers are hoping the reader will act upon, whether it is “click here to sign up,” “learn more,” or “buy now.”
7. The footer: The final element is essentially the “fine print,” which includes information about the company sending the email, their physical location, and an option for the recipient to unsubscribe or opt out of the email list.

APPENDIX 2. Interview with Founder of WorldSome

1. Email Marketing Strategy

Why did you choose email as the main tactic for WorldSome's marketing strategy?

In what projects are you using email marketing?

What types of email/ What kinds of Email Service Providers has WorldSome used?

2. Email Marketing Situation

What were the difficulties when WorldSome first used email marketing? How could you overcome those challenges?

What achievements email marketing has brought about for the last 2 years?

How could you evaluate your email marketing strategy? Is it effective or not? Could you give any statistics?

3. Development Plan for The Future

Do you have any intention to invest more in email marketing in the future?

Do you have any recommendations for your company to improve email marketing plan?

APPENDIX 3. Interview with Customer Relationship Intern

1. Evaluation of Email Marketing Management

What are the advantages of current Email Service Providers WorldSome has been using?

What are the disadvantages of those Providers?

2. Obstacles encountered with Email Marketing

What are the mail obstacles you have encountered when using email to communicate with potential customers?

What are the reasons for that problems? Are they internal or external (reasons regarding cultural differences/ legal issues/ Spam issues/ etc)

3. Solutions for The Problems

How can you deal with these challenges?

Do you any recommendation for other companies facing the same problems?