

Saimaa University of Applied Sciences  
Faculty of Business Administration Lappeenranta  
Degree Program in International Business

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## **Sport and Social Media Marketing: how to promote online sport platforms.**

Thesis 2019

## **Abstract**

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Sport and Social Media Marketing: how to promote online sport platforms, 38 pages, 2 appendices

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The purpose of the research was to develop a general guideline for how to promote online sport platforms. In the theoretical part the author explained online business, basics of marketing, social media and sport marketing.

The information was gathered from literature sources, the Internet and by interviewing two successful Russian entrepreneurs. In addition, an online survey was conducted in order to understand people's view on online sport platforms.

As a result of this thesis, the most profitable tool of promotion such online sport platforms was identified and a general guideline was created. The results of the study demonstrate the importance of having a strong promotional plan. This thesis can be used by entrepreneurs who are thinking about establishing an online business, specifically online sport platforms.

Keywords: online business, social media marketing, sport marketing, online sport platforms, promotion

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## Glossary

**Social Media Marketing (SMM)** – a form of Internet marketing that utilizes social networking websites as a marketing tool. The goal of SMM is to produce content that users will share with their social network to help a company increase brand exposure and broaden customer reach.

**User-Generated Content (UGC)** – User Generated Content is defined as any type of content that has been created and put out there by unpaid contributors or, using a better term, fans. It can refer to pictures, videos, testimonials, tweets, blog posts, and everything in between and is the act of *users* promoting a brand rather than the brand itself.

**Consumer-generated media (CGM)** – refers to any written, audio or video content created by end users, using basic or semiprofessional tools. CGM can include one-consumer-to-many applications such as photo sharing, publishing via blogs, podcasting, social network videoblogging and the like, as well as “auteurs” looking to get their content to an audience.

**Search engine optimization (SEO)** – relates to methods to increase the appearance of company’s website on search engines.

**Domain name** - is the address where Internet users can access your website.

# **1 Introduction**

## **1.1 Background of the topic**

Sport is becoming extremely popular among people. It brings happiness and pleasure. More and more people are following a healthy lifestyle. That is why the cult of sport is high nowadays. Sport brings up the character of the person. Also, doing sports strengthens willpower and disciplines people.

Sports bring together millions of people at one time. For marketers, sport is something that gives access to a large customer base at one time. With all the possible newest technologies, sports has become a significant business today. Many types of sports are gaining popularity day by day and mostly with the help of the Internet and online presence. Sports marketers are constantly adopting the ever-changing technology and coming out with innovative ways to tap into the diverse audience base to create compelling experiences for the fans.

Then, smartphones and the Internet have become an essential part of everyday life. Almost everything can be done via the smart devices and online. A change from traditional to e-commerce business is a common trend today. With the popularity of sport through online resources, there is no longer a need to go to the gym and pay for a monthly membership. Instead, one can download an app for a fee or just go to a website or an Instagram page, to communicate with people, or have an access to personal trainings with video, a chat with a nutritionist and many other benefits.

The topic is unique and worth studying because of the growth in popularity and actuality of sport via online resources in this day and age. People tend to think more about being fit and healthy. However, a very small amount of people can find free time and resources to go to the gym to train with a personal coach or to have nutrition counseling about a precise diet or advice on how to eat in order to be healthy. Moreover, this costs a great deal of money. Instead, a mobile app is much cheaper and more convenient to use. It also can be even beneficial. The author of this thesis will look in more detail into this aspect during the whole research.

As for previous studies, the author did not find much information, but some articles and books on the topic. For instance, for an explanation of the phenomenon of sport marketing the author used "Sports Marketing; Creating Long Term Value" by John A. Davis and Jessica Zutz Hilbert (2013) and "Introduction to Sport Marketing" by Aaron C. T. Smith and Bob Stewart (2015) to understand the structure of sport marketing and

essential principles. Then, the author used "Nontraditional Media in Marketing and Advertising" by R. Blakeman (2014) for the social media marketing chapter.

## **1.2 Objective and research question of the study**

The aim of the research is to build a general guideline on how to promote online sport platforms. The process involves identifying the steps for creating an effective marketing plan based on a theoretical framework and cooperation with two Russian entrepreneurs, who asked not to publish their names.

These entrepreneurs are doing similar business online: they have a project, which people can join for a fee. It is an online platform for trainings: either at home or in the gym. There are daily plans for working out with videos and explanations of how to do exercises. People can use it either in the Internet or as an app via smartphones. Besides, there are articles about healthy lifestyle, recommendations for nutrition and many other benefits.

The main research question is "How to do appropriate promotion in order to have a profitable online business in the future and how to build an online sport platform?"

During the research process, the author aims to answer the following sub-questions:

1. How to develop such platforms in order to attract new customers?
2. What are the channels for promoting sport applications?

## **1.3 Delimitations of the study**

There are various online sport applications all over the world. One of the main delimitations of this research is that the thesis work is concentrated only on the Russian market. As regards the empirical research, the author posts a questionnaire for actual users in online Russian sport platforms (groups and forums, for instance). An interview is conducted among Russian entrepreneurs, who have already created a profitable and working online sport platform. In addition, it is also important to mention that the particular research is not intended to cover all of the existing sport platforms.

The target audience for the research are actual users and potential ones in the Russian market. To make the research more reliable, the author concentrates on 18-35 years old people, who are highly interested in doing various sport activities and having a healthy lifestyle. The program of their interest is either weight loss or strength training.

## **1.4 Theoretical framework**

The theoretical part is divided into four chapters: online business, introduction to marketing, social media marketing and sport marketing. The author decided that it is logical to divide the theory like this. The thesis topic relates to online business and marketing, specifically sport marketing and SMM. Social media marketing is one of the most common promotional tools today, so the emphasis is on SMM and sport marketing.

### **Social Media Marketing**

Social media marketing (SMM) is becoming more and more popular. Each business is interested in all the possible opportunities which are offered and provided by SMM. For businesses, large and small, social media is a great way to generate or increase sales, and decrease advertising costs. (Blakeman 2014.)

SMM is a form of Internet marketing that utilizes social networking websites as a marketing tool. The main objective of SMM is to produce content that users will share with their social network. Moreover, it is essential to help a company increase brand exposure and broaden customer reach. (WhatIs 2018.)

Before the era of SMM, businesses were using traditional advertising, where they could control content by sending a one-way message to the client. Instead, the type of advertising which appears today on social media requires advertisers to join the conversation and develop a dialogue with the clients and particularly with their target audience. By taking part in such discussions, advertisers can address any negative comments in a short period of time and consider including positive comments in future content and advertising. In addition, companies can learn how to use such direct feedback as a way to improve the product performance. (Blakeman 2014.)

## Sport Marketing Principles

Smith and Stewart (2015) define sport marketing is the process of planning how a sport brand is positioned and how the delivery of its products or services are to be implemented in order to establish a relationship between a sport brand and its consumers.

Smith and Stewart (2015) state that sport marketing is divided into two groups: one is the marketing of sport products and services, while the other is marketing through sport.

According to Smith and Stewart (2015), the sport marketing philosophy is to satisfy the needs of sport consumers.

Smith and Stewart (2015) identify the process of sport marketing is the series of steps required to find opportunities, devise strategy, plan the tactics, and implement and evaluate a sport marketing plan.

In obedience to Smith and Stewart (2015), the principles of sport marketing provide the rules and guidelines for the implementation of the Sport Marketing Framework process, while the tools of sport marketing are specific activities designed to help execute the principles.

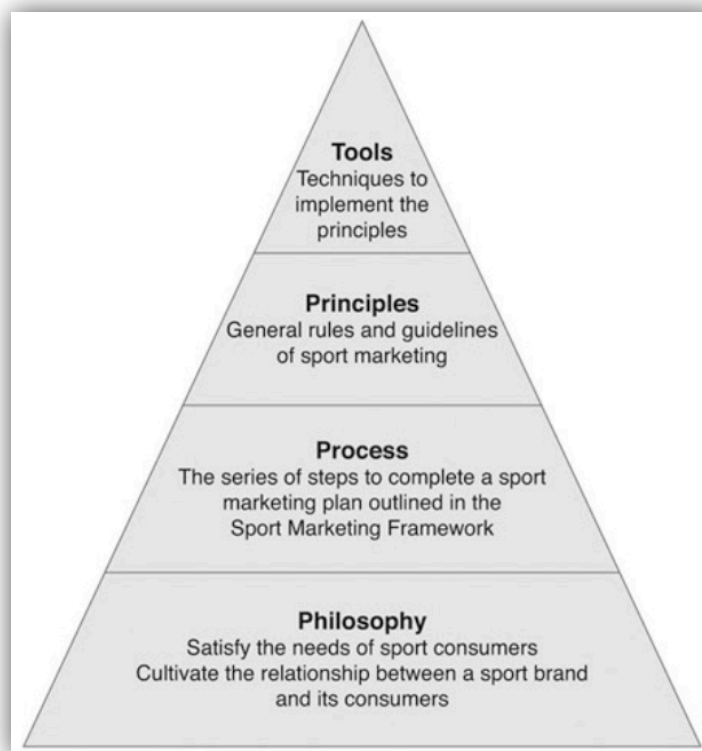


Figure 1. The structure of sport marketing (Smith & Stewart 2015)



## **1.5 Research method**

The author of this thesis uses a mix of qualitative and quantitative research methods. The mixed method involves the collection of both qualitative (open-ended) and quantitative (closed-ended) data in response to the research question. The data of both forms is analyzed separately (Creswell 2014). The main purpose of this form of inquiry is that the combination of these two methods provides a better and complete understanding of a research topic.

The quantitative research method is applied in order to gain a clear vision on the issue and to obtain “inside” information from users. The author aims to collect around 80-100 responses from the actual users of such online trainings applications. The research is conducted through the Internet. The questionnaire is published on various social platforms, sports forums and groups, for example. Qualitative research is conducted in the form of an interview among Russian entrepreneurs.

## **1.6 Structure of the thesis**

This thesis consists of seven chapters. The first chapter is “Introduction”, where the author explains the background of the topic, purpose of the study, delimitations of the study, and research methods. The second chapter is “Online business”. The author explains what online business is and what has to be considered while establishing an online business. The next chapter is “Introduction to marketing”. In this chapter the basics of marketing are presented. Then, the “Social Media Marketing”. This chapter presents the key points and strengths and weaknesses. The next chapter is “Sport marketing”, where the author explains the basics of sport marketing, principles, sport marketing mix and profitable tools in promotion used nowadays.

In this thesis, the empirical part is the main chapter that presents the findings from the interviews and the survey. Moreover, this chapter presents the general framework of how to promote online sport applications. The author has created it based on the theoretical framework and empirical findings. After that comes the chapter “Conclusion” that includes a summary.

## 2 Online business

Online business, also known as e-commerce, refers to implementing business transactions through the Internet. This includes an exchange of information of value in the form of products and services. This chapter presents an overview of online business: the differences between B2C (business to consumer) and B2B (business to business); the SWOT analysis; and the issues to consider while starting an online business.

### 2.1 Introduction to online business

With the great popularity of the Internet, many activities have become easier. More and more businesses appear online on a daily basis. This is the fastest and easiest way to start a business because it is much cheaper than the traditional one. Moreover, marketing strategies cost less and there is no personal touch with consumers. (Business Builders 2019.)

The Internet has an impact on both the way of conducting personal lives as well as businesses. Small businesses might only need an email address to communicate with their clients, customers and suppliers electronically, while other businesses might use their website to conduct their entire business online. An online business has several benefits, such as global access 24/7, improved client service through greater flexibility, cost savings, faster delivery of products, increased professionalism, less paper waste, and great opportunities to manage the business from anywhere in the whole world. (Queensland Government 2019.)

There are two categories of online business:

1. **Business to consumer (B2C):** Customers are the individual consumers. All products and services are designed for their personal use. (Belew & Elad 2017.) Business-to-consumer (B2C) is among the most popular and widely known sales models. B2C traditionally referred to mall shopping, eating out at restaurants, pay-per-view movies, and infomercials. (Investopedia 2019.) Any business that relies on B2C sales must maintain good relations with their target audience and customers to ensure they return.

The author would like to point out the key takeaways of B2C:

- Business-to-consumer refers to the process of selling products and services directly between consumers.
- Online B2C become a threat to traditional retailers, who profited from adding a markup to the price.

2. **Business to business (B2B):** Customers are other businesses (Belew & Elad 2017). B2B companies are supportive enterprises that offer the things other businesses need to operate and grow. This is in contrast to business-to-consumer (B2C) models, which sell directly to individual customers. B2B companies have an entirely different target audience: They offer the raw materials, finished parts, services or consultation that other businesses need to operate, grow and profit. (Business News Daily 2019.)

## 2.2 SWOT analysis

It is essential to apply a SWOT analysis before starting an online business. The entrepreneur has to be prepared for challenges and problems that could occur. SWOT analysis is the best option in this case to define the pros and cons of the business idea. SWOT is the abbreviation of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

Strengths and weaknesses are the internal factors that control or contribute to the business concept. Opportunities and threats are external factors that one cannot control. (Belew & Elad 2017.)

Bellow are the possible questions for analyzing the information in order to start to develop a business idea:

### Strengths

- What are the advantages that product or service offers?
- What makes the business unique?

### Weaknesses

- Which areas of business could be improved?
- Which internal factors interfere with the business success?
- What advantages does the company lack?

### Opportunities

- Is the product or service in demand?

- Which external factors can give an edge?

### **Threats**

- Who are your competitors?
- Which trends can negatively affect the business?

To conclude, a completed SWOT analysis gives a full picture of the advantages and disadvantages of the business. After the analyzing, an entrepreneur knows what has to be improved and what challenges it can face.

### **2.3 Issues to consider before starting an online business**

Firstly, a suitable domain name has to be acquired. It has to be short, reliable, easy to remember and represent the business precisely.

Secondary, easy navigation on the website must be ensured. The design of the website should be easy to steer and have good searching functions.

Thirdly, it is important to find the right and appropriate web host to gain visitors.

Fourthly, reliable banking is necessary. An entrepreneur must choose the fastest way to accept credit cards and take orders.

Fifthly, it is essential to analyze a complete database of the visitors in order to understand who are they and what are they looking for.

Then, an entrepreneur must present clear and complete information. Everything has to be explained in the way, that possible customers would not have any questions.

Finally, applying good marketing strategies is important. Find the best marketing strategy to invite customers to the business.

### **3 Introduction to marketing**

The author decided to start the marketing theory part of this thesis with the basics of marketing. This chapter provides an explanation and an overview of marketing along with the five C's and the marketing tools.

#### **3.1 Definitions**

The AMA (American Marketing Association) states that marketing is the process of planning and executing the conception, pricing, promotion and distribution of ideas, goods and services to create exchanges that satisfy individual and organizational objectives. In other words, marketing is a process which satisfies customers' needs by means of a long-term exchange relationship. (Drummond & Ensor 2005.)

#### **3.2 The five C's of marketing**

The five C's of marketing are company, customers, collaborators, competitors and climate. These are the five most important areas of marketing. A strong marketing strategy can be built by analyzing these factors. (Market Business News 2019a.)

- Company

This includes the analysis of the company's vision and mission, product line and image in the market. (Market Business News 2019a.)

- Customers

One of the most essential elements is to know the customers, to understand their needs and wants. (Market Business News 2019a.)

- Collaborators

Collaborators are the partners that help to run the business, for instance distributors and suppliers. (Market Business News 2019a.)

- Competitors

Understanding the competitors is another crucial issue. It is important to know the product range, the pricing policy of the competitors in order to be able to compete against them. (Market Business News 2019a.)

- Climate

This is about external factors that can influence the marketing strategy of the company. It could be political issues, economic environment and culture. (Market Business News 2019a.)

### **3.3 Marketing tools**

This chapter presents the tools that companies use to enhance and promote their products and services. According to Market Business News (2019b), a considerable range of different marketing tools exists and each company uses tools that are suitable for their specific vision and mission of the business. Some types of the tools are listed below:

#### **1. Internet marketing**

Internet marketing refers to online activities such as search engine optimization (SEO) and online advertising. SEO relates to methods to increase the appearance of a company's website on search engines. There are different ways to raise the recognition. First of all, the company must provide a reliable and easy domain name that is relevant to the website and the industry as a whole.

#### **2. Surveys**

Surveys are the tool that helps to identify what to produce or how to improve existing goods. Surveys can be conducted differently: face-to-face, online, by normal post, or by telephone.

#### **3. Customer loyalty programs**

Customers loyalty programs are crucial to maintain a good relationship with customers, to make the customers keep coming back. It costs more to get a new customer than to keep the existing one.

## **4 Social Media Marketing**

This chapter presents the definition of Social Media and Social Media Marketing (SMM). Social Media, also known as user-generated content (UGC) or consumer-generated media (CGM), is the visual/verbal sharing of thoughts and ideas with others having the same or more or less similar interests that have been placed on the Internet by non-media professionals (Blakeman 2014).

Social media marketing (SMM) is a form of Internet marketing that utilizes social networking websites as a marketing tool. The main objective of SMM is to produce content that users will share with their social network. Moreover, it is essential to help a company increase brand exposure and broaden customer reach. (WhatIs 2018.)

SMM is becoming more and more popular today. Each business is interested in all the possible opportunities offered and provided by SMM. For businesses, large and small, social media is a great way to generate or increase sales, and decrease advertising costs. (Blakeman 2014.)

It deserves to make a comparison between the past and present days. Before the era of SMM, businesses were using traditional advertising, where they could control content by sending a one-way message to the client. Instead, the type of advertising which appears today on social media, requires advertisers to join the conversation and develop a dialogue with the clients and particularly with their target audience. By taking part in such discussions, advertisers can address any negative comments in a short period of time and consider including positive comments into future content and advertising. In addition, companies can learn how to use such direct feedback as a way to improve the products performance. (Blakeman 2014.)

### **4.1 Key points about being successful**

Social media is a great way for brands to keep in touch with their target audience. The communication objectives for being successful are quite simple: firstly, to build brand awareness, and secondly, to build brand loyalty.

A successful social media strategy should be adapted and improved from the main entire strategy of the campaign, taking into consideration also traditional media vehicles. If the brand is far away from the basic message, which it tries to give to the customers, then their clients are confused what they really need to know about the

brand's features and benefits as well as the philosophy of the company. (Blakeman 2014.)

According to Blakeman (2014), for being successful, a social media promotional campaign must take the following into consideration:

1. Listen. Any business should clearly understand what their target audience is about. If the business does not understand about their clients, then they cannot respond and understand what the customers are saying.
2. Focus. A business should concentrate all the efforts around the brand. The main aim and message of such efforts, reaching an already loyal target, can be more creative and interesting than an actual plan to persuade a consumer into trying the brand based exclusively on promotional efforts.
3. Be patient. It is important to keep patience in order to be successful, in the other forms of advertising. It always takes customers a while to catch on before they repeatedly visit a site, and develop an interest in the company and various offers.
4. Share. Creative, interesting and updated content helps a brand to build a loyal following.
5. Trendsetter. One of the biggest and successful steps is to collaborate with the influencers. Any business should build relationships with influencers within their target audience.
6. Discuss. Good storytelling keeps the customers interested in the brand and entertained. It is essential to have the promotional information and advertising fresh and bright, so it will catch the attention of the clients.
7. Respond. A business should make sure to keep all of the attention and responding on time on the feedback and messages, both positive and negative, which are coming to the brand on a daily basis.
8. Be available. It is crucial to be online most of the time, in order to monitor what is being said and publish new content, such as third party information.



It is crucial to be one step ahead and think always about something new in order to have a successful online business. Any online business can try to add video blogging to marketing efforts. It helps the clients to see, to hear and to get to know the business better. People like to have a good visual image as it attracts them much more than a simple picture and simple text message. Good visual clues help customers to build familiarity with the brand itself and also help to build loyal relationships. (Blakeman 2014.)

According to Blakeman (2014), other creative options may include giveaways, reader-generated content, opinionated posts, how-to ideas, humorous, motivational or personal stories, Q&A, real-time posts, controversial content, insider posts, contests and sweepstakes.

There are a great number of brands that generate attention through social media by building a database of loyal followers that allows them to notify their target audience about the upcoming promotions, events, special offers and so on. The following are also good to have in use: websites, e-newsletters, search engines, mobile apps and text messaging as well as traditional tools in order to advertise the brand. (Blakeman 2014.)

According to Blakeman (2014), before developing a social network, it is critical to follow some basic rules and principles, such as:

- listen to what the customer has to say
- ask them questions
- know what they like, dislike and their lifestyle
- be open and honest
- be certain that all internal and external messages are aligned
- be certain that all the employees are educated on the advertising message being sent as well as the anticipated or conveyed response.

When advertising on a social networking site, marketers and their agencies are always looking for interactive and creative ways to engage consumers in their brand and to make them share information with their network or friends. Most of the brands are becoming successful since they constantly monitor and check what is said. They are becoming a part of the conversation, by controlling any negative postings, and can help to point out and relay the positive messages. (Blakeman 2014.)

## 4.2 Social media advertising strengths

Before deciding where social media advertising fits in a campaign, it is essential that both the marketers and the advertising teams understand how each vehicle can positively react and enhance or negatively affect a campaign's message. (Blakeman 2014.)

According to Blakeman (2014), the social media advertising strengths include:

1. **Builds relationships with the target.** Social Media is a powerful public relations tool today.
2. **Builds brand loyalty.** The target audience can control and keep up with what the brand is doing as well as document their personal experiences with that particular brand.
3. **Generates traffic to a website.** Promotions, games, special offers, contests can drive current and future potential consumers to a site.
4. **Is an effective branding tool.** It is a great way to explain uses and showcase consumer experiences.
5. **Is credible.** Reading unbiased comments projects advertising credibility.

## 4.3 Social media advertising weaknesses

According to Blakeman (2014), the Social Media Advertising weaknesses are the following:

1. **Information may be bland.** In comparison to third-party sites, a branded site may seem invented.
2. **Negative feedback.** Comments on social media are not always regulated. So basically, anyone can say anything about a product or service whether it is true or not. As a result, the company may appear in a crisis management mode.
3. **Time-consuming.** In general, social media is not expensive to launch at the beginning. However, it is time-consuming to maintain.

## 4.4 How to promote on Instagram

Nowadays many people know that Instagram is one of the most powerful tools among all the social media platforms. That is why more and more people are trying to promote themselves or their brand online, especially through Instagram. There are several tips, from optimizing the posts and profile to rethinking the approach and way to actual

content promotion. (SproutSocial 2019.)

SproutSocial (2019) introduces several ways and tools for Instagram promotion:

1. Grow up and develop the content production.

It is crucial to make experiments with an Instagram account in order to understand what is going to work for the business and what will not. The business needs to post different content more frequently and check how it is going. At the beginning it can be just one post per day. After this, the business can try to post two or three times a day. It is necessary to always keep in mind and follow the rules about the Instagram timing, at what time it is better to create a post.

2. Focus on people-centric content.

In general, Instagram has become a place to score and improve the sales. However, it is remaining still first and foremost a place to share experiences. People post their selfies, their every day lifestyle, products they use and so on.

Nowadays, a good feature in Instagram is that brands are able to do the advertising in a more human way, without pointing out everywhere.

On a related note, this is exactly why user-generated content such as customer photos are such a goldmine for brands. Most of the time brands use the photos of their customers, who tag them in their accounts with mentioning the brand. It helps brands by leading their own account. This also helps the people who are new to the brand to see that there are real people who use the product and who are satisfied.

But in order to spot user-generated content for a feed, a clear understanding on how to use the hashtags for the account and how this can help in promotion of the Instagram account is needed.

3. Experiment with branded and industry hashtags.

It is quite necessary for a brand to create their own and unique hashtag. This is normally done in order to encourage sharing and promotion on behalf of their followers. Also, any business should try to promote their business by using general hashtags, more specific for the industry. It makes posts appear in general topics, in which people are interested in. Using such a method will help to get more customers and increase the reach.

#### 4. Tag brands, followers and locations.

Tagging is actually a very good and effective way to promote on Instagram. Entrepreneurs can try tagging other brands and accounts and hope they make a shout-out for the brand. If they get a shout-out, it is actually good for the future promotion and growth of the Instagram account, since more people will know about the brand and will see posts. Tagging locations with the places of attendance on a daily basis helps other people to notice your brand only by the location.

#### 5. Publish Instagram content on-site.

Featuring Instagram content on-site is a brilliant way to increase conversations, because when people see purchased products and services in real life settings, on a daily basis, they know that the brand has definitely satisfied their customers in general, their needs and wants. It is not quite definite how it works, but consumers can better visualize the product if they see it “in the wild”.

#### 6. Carve out the creative trademark.

This concerns the theme of the Instagram account, because nowadays creativity counts on this platform. Having some special theme or topic on the Instagram account is a great way to inspire the audience and stand out from the crowd by being unique.

#### 7. Work with influencers to extend the reach.

Influencer marketing is a rising trend nowadays. Generally, influencer marketing is a paid relationship with another account on Instagram, with a sizeable, engaged follower count. An influencer’s audiences should ideally mirror those of the business or allow to tap into a new and maybe different sect of users that the trying to reach for a future growth. Obviously, this can cost some money and it might, at some point, be even expensive, depending on the influencer the business is trying to reach, the audience of this influencer and so on. The most crucial point here is that the business needs to check if the influencer has real followers with an active target audience or not.

#### 8. Rethink how to present the products and promotions.

This tip might seem simple but it is also quite essential in Instagram promotion. This is more part of entertainment and fun on Instagram. Giveaways or sale items, special promotions are good and valuable ways of promotions for the brand when done well.

Thus, when promoting on Instagram in this way, it is essential to present the content as must-see. Instagram thrives on anything and everything “new”. The entrepreneur will benefit in the end from everything if created in the right sense of hype around the brand and especially the product.

#### 9. Run a contest or giveaway.

According to statistics, brands that run contests grow their followings 70% faster than those that do not. Anyone can notice that many brands that are using this practice with contests and giveaways receive a considerable amount of engagement. Social media contests can bring quite a many new followers and fans. A good recommendation is to run a one-time contest promotion on Instagram in order to test and determine whether it is something to practice on a long-term or not.

#### 10. Optimize the profile for promotion.

When working through how to promote on Instagram to new fans and followers, “looking the part” is essential. This may also apply to the brands, which are looking to attract more attention organically. First of all, a good profile name, as well as a profile picture, is a must. It should be short, simple, creative and catchy. Moreover, the business should mention briefly in the bio section who they are and what they do, feature the email and phone number, which is something to consider if running a business account especially. The business should keep the feed always updated, notify the followers about the upcoming events or other interesting activities.

#### 11. Take advantage of Instagram Stories and its latest features.

Instagram Stories is one of the most popular features so far. Brands should definitely take advantage of Stories as often as possible when promoting on Instagram. For many brands this means publishing user-generated photos and behind-the-scenes content so that the target audience and potential customers can see what the brands are actually doing and especially how. The Stories must not be perfect; they should be based on everyday life content as a brand, and they should look alive.

The creativity part counts as well. Stories are always in the center of attention. For an entertainment part in Stories, the brand can use various stickers, gifs, quiz stickers, polls and so on. All these features represent fresh ways for brands to engage with followers for a more unique and interactive type of Instagram promotion.

Keeping up with Instagram means staying active and up to date about its latest features. If the brand is regularly publishing stories and watching what other brands are doing and creating, the brand will always be modern.

12. Consider running a paid campaign.

Nowadays there are several paid promotions which Instagram can offer. Social media at large is becoming increasingly pay-to-play. As part of Facebook's ad platform, one can now use Instagram's advertising options in order to promote one and the brand and win over new customers.

A business should familiarize itself with today's Instagram advertising options and then make sure to have all the necessary tools to see how the paid efforts stack up against the organic presence on Instagram.

## **5 Sport marketing**

Sport marketing is a comparatively new phenomenon. In the 1940s and 1950s, sport was seen just as an activity that people practiced. It was not strongly commercialized. Nowadays, sport can be seen as a tool to promote goods and services. This chapter introduces the sports industry, explains the definition and key concepts of sports marketing and the main sport marketing tools in this day and age.

### **5.1 Understanding sports marketing**

As an industry, sport creates a significant amount of the most modern products and services all over the world. Major sports events can grant significant and unforgettable association advantages among organizations and people connected with the sport. Sport brings up phenomenal fan or customer loyalty, probably more than any other industry. It makes sports marketing an attractive investment for the companies around the world that want to increase their trustworthiness along with obtaining a sizable and committed audience. (Davis & Hilbert 2013.)

Sport marketing is divided into two groups: marketing of sport goods and services and marketing of non-sport products through an association to sport. Likewise any other form of marketing, the main goal of sport marketing is to satisfy the desire of consumers. This is easily achieved by providing sport services and sport-related products to consumers. However, sport marketing, in contrast to the traditional one, is

able to stimulate the consumption of non-sport products and services by the association. To specify, sport marketing means both the normal marketing of sports products and services and the use of sport as an instrument to promote other non-sport goods and services. (Smith & Stewart 2015.)

## **5.2 Sport marketing principles**

Smith and Stewart (2015) describe five sport marketing principles. Firstly, sport marketing is the process of planning how a sport brand is positioned and how the delivery of its products or services are to be implemented in order to establish a relationship between a sport brand and its consumers. Secondly, sport is divided into two groups: one is the marketing of sport products and services, while the other is marketing through sport. Thirdly, the sport marketing philosophy is to satisfy the needs of sport consumers. Fourthly, the process of sport marketing is the series of steps required to find opportunities, devise strategy, plan the tactics, and implement and evaluate a sport marketing plan. Finally, the principles of sport marketing provide the rules and guidelines for the implementation of the Sport Marketing Framework process, while the tools of sport marketing are specific activities designed to help execute the principles.

## **5.3 Sports marketing mix**

The next essential issue is the selling part of sport marketing. An extended strategic analysis has to be done before any transactions can occur in order to understand what sport consumers want, why and how they want it to be delivered.

The marketing mix, known as four Ps (product, price, place, promotion), is still the foundation of most marketing activities, whether it is a sport industry or some other one. However it is modified to a specific field. Therefore, there are five sports marketing mix elements: people, product, price, place, promotion. (Davis & Hilbert 2013.)

The technology has changed as well as the techniques, due to the fast growth and development of digital media and marketing. Nowadays such techniques offer a wide range of tools and materials, to help the marketers to attract and retain customers and raise their brand value. (Davis & Hilbert 2013.)

In the following, each element of the sports marketing mix is explained as suggested by Davis and Hilbert (2013).

### 1. People

There is no doubt that people are an essential part of the marketing strategy, because all products and services are eventually designed for a particular customer or group of people. In the sport industry, major effort is put into top athletes, who are participating in sports events and are well known. Companies are developing solutions to be able to communicate with the target audience through them. These top athletes advertise products and services of a particular brand in social media, in public events and competitions.

### 2. Product

Nowadays, product is more broadly described as offerings that cover both goods and services. In the context of sports marketing, a “product” can be either athletic shoes or sports agency services.

### 3. Price

Price remains the fundamental factor of the financial value for products. Price also explains the uniqueness and the quality of the product and offerings.

### 4. Place

Place describes how it is possible for customers to purchase products they are seeking for and where these products are distributed. Place consists of two initial channels: consumer and business. Consumer channel is the traditional distribution of the customers’ products to the retail stores. Business products are usually distributed through field sales forces or professional agents.

### 5. Promotion

Promotion explains how sports marketers enhance perception about their products and the services they are offering and how to obtain profit and customers using marketing communications.



## 5.4 Celebrity marketing in sports

Sport guarantees one of the main components of a successful campaign - an emotional connection with the audience. The moments of victories of the sports hero are reflected on fans. Therefore, if a brand partner that is associated with this star is nearby, he is also in the win situation. (Tribuna Digital 2018.)

Inviting popular and well-known athletes is one of the most profitable marketing tools in this day and age. People tend to follow their idols in everything: starting from the cloths and ending up with the lifestyle. They are following them in social media and watching their sports achievements in the competitions. However, not only athletes, but also trainers and top sports journalists, mostly those who have become prominent in the related media field, can be used as great promoters. (Tribuna Digital 2018.)

The most important aspects to take into consideration in order to correctly select celebrities from the world of sports for an advertising campaign are:

1. Understanding the region and audience.

First of all, it is crucial to correlate whether the audience is familiar with the athlete of an advertising campaign. For instance, one of the best tennis players in the world, Novak Djokovic (Serbian), will be not an appropriate choice in promoting a local Russian brand in the regions. All in all, it is essential to analyze the target audience that a business wants to reach before starting an advertising campaign with a particular famous athlete. (Tribuna Digital 2018.)

2. The popularity ratings and the number of titles of athletes are not crucial.

Titles are not always a guarantee of the necessary status of an athlete. For example, hockey player Vyacheslav Voinov is a two-time winner of the Stanley Cup. On the contrary, Alexander Ovechkin never won this title, but for an advertising campaign he is a better choice because his one of the most recognizable athletes in the world. (Tribuna Digital 2018.)

3. Work on the future perspectives and sign the contracts with athletes in advance.

For instance, Puma signed a contract with a French football player Antoine Griezmann after the 2016 European home championship to promote a deodorant. They successfully interpreted a gesture of Griezmann into an advertising move. In the

European home championship games in 2016, Griezmann became the top player (six goals) and celebrated his every goal with hand movements. In the commercial, they were given new meanings - from cutting hair to flying an airplane. Griezmann helped men in situations related to women (using these hand movements as the basis): one knitted a warm scarf, the other drew a heart in the sky – some essential basic for advertising a man’s personal care product. The video was released four months after the European Championship in autumn 2016, when the player was still at the top of his popularity. Puma managed to play on a trend gesture, which remained his recognizable sign for a long period ahead. (Tribuna Digital 2018.)

## **5.5 Sport branding**

Branding is another popular tool in daily promotion of a company. It is not about the creation of a brand but also the development of different activities and events in order to build a positive attitude to the product and services and to form a strong loyalty among consumers. Appropriate branding can lead to significant sales not only of a single product but also of other products associated with the brand. (Koloro brand design 2014.)

Modern branding has to be done in accordance with the plan of brand promotion or the brand maintenance. These include branding of products – the creation of an attractive image of products. It is important to understand that products with club symbols are not only the commercial resource. Therefore, if the company is interested in popularization and in sales goods and services the quality has to be high, the product has to be modern and affordable. (Koloro brand design 2014.)

## **6 Empirical research**

In this chapter, the author presents the findings from an interview with two successful entrepreneurs on the Russian market nowadays and from a survey. Based on all the data that the author has gained from the empirical research and leaning on the theoretical part, a guideline for how to promote online sport platforms is created. This is the main chapter of the thesis.

### **6.1 Findings from the interviews**

The author conducted two interviews with well-known entrepreneurs on the Russian market. One interview was carried out face-to-face and the other one online. The

names of the entrepreneurs are not disclosed because they did not want to be mentioned in the report. The actual questions the reader can find in the Appendices part.

The first interview was conducted online because the entrepreneur was not in Russia and, as a consequence, was not available to meet. The author carried out the interview via Instagram. The list of questions was sent directly to the person, and after a while the author received answers. All questions were fully answered. The other interview was conducted face-to-face. Obviously, this method was a better one. The interview was in the form of an unofficial meeting. The author asked all the planned questions and received the answers.

These entrepreneurs are doing similar business online: they have a project, which, for a fee, people can join. It is an online platform for trainings: either at home or in the gym. There are daily plans for working out with videos and explanations of how to do the exercises. People can use the service either in the Internet or as an app via smartphones. Besides, there are articles about a healthy lifestyle, recommendations for nutrition and many other benefits.

The purpose of these interviews was to get to know about the “insides” of such online sport platforms: how they have found consumers; how they compete; and which marketing strategies are they using, for instance.

The answers were more or less the same. The main point of how the sport platforms started was that they, first of all, had promoted themselves through social media (specifically Instagram). When these two entrepreneurs obtained a considerable amount of followers and, as a consequence, gained a great recognition of their names, the names started to work for them. The visualization also works well. When potential customers see pictures of a perfect sporty body, they also want to bring sport and a healthy lifestyle to their lives.

Another key point is to love what one does. Success starts with total involvement in the business. This passion can be felt even through the screen. Moreover, this is one of the main points that attract customers. To sum up, a good awareness of the main person of the project as well as a visual picture are the core elements of choosing the right online sport platform.

Another issue is the program content. Both two interviewed entrepreneurs have several programs to choose within their platform: from weight loss to strength trainings. Besides, there is a choice of daily menus: a customer can have either a normal, vegetarian or vegan menu, and also have access to chatting with nutrition, psychology and trainings specialists. All the exercises are filmed with a clear explanation of the techniques. Moreover, there are articles to study, so such online sport platforms are full educational portals.

One of the interviewed persons mentioned that in her program there is also a competition with great prizes. All one needs to do as a customer is to send a “before” photo and an “after” photo. “Before” means a photo taken by the day of starting and “after” means when he or she has just finished one month’s membership. Then an independent jury makes a decision about the progress of the participants. The prizes are expensive and valuable, in order to create additional motivation.

To conclude the interview part, the most essential aspects that the two entrepreneurs mentioned are:

1. the promotion of the personal page on social media
2. the visual image
3. the content of the program.

For a beginner entrepreneur, it is important to generate an interest among people to be able to succeed. Besides, the visualization component is a key. People will more likely choose a sporty and good-looking person compared to a different. In addition, the content has to be interesting and informative. This is another important issue. Also, as it was mentioned earlier, competitions are a motivation. It can be good additional promotion too.

## **6.2 Survey analysis**

A survey was conducted in order to understand the people’s view on such online sport platforms. Overall, as the author had expected, the results were positive. Such online sport applications are gaining more and more popularity nowadays.

The survey was conducted online via a Google form. The interviewed people were participants in a sport group: both girls and boys in the age of 16-28 years. The author obtained 100 responses and, based on them, did the analysis. The main advantage of a

Google form is that the results can be seen in a chart, which makes the results easier to analyze. The answers were collected within three weeks. The reader can find the results in the Appendices part.

The main aspects to consider when choosing online sport platforms that the respondents highlighted are:

1. The price

Compared to personal training services, the price for a monthly membership on online sport platforms is much lower. Additionally, there is a daily menu and a chat with a nutritionist and psychologist.

2. Informational content

There is an access to scientific articles that one can study during the membership.

3. Clear and understandable exercises

All exercises are filmed with clear explanations. Besides the video, there is detailed textual support.

4. Possibility to train at home

Few people can find the time to go to the gym. The program consists of functional exercises not requiring any special sport equipment. Therefore, one can train at home or even on vacation.

The survey showed that there is a demand for such online sport platforms. More than half of the respondents were people who already have experienced such platforms or are actual users. Others responded positively on such a way to do sport. However, there were a few people who stated that they prefer to go to the gym and to train with a personal coach.

One of the questions of the survey was for the users: will they continue to buy an online course after the first month of using? The answer "no" outweighed "yes". That means that the program needs to be improved in a way to encourage people to continue to return. The main point is that there has to be more choices in the programs. People want to experience a new training plan every month.

People consider a daily nutrition plan with recipes as a benefit because it is included in the price. A consultation with a nutritionist and forming a diet costs over two times more compared to the price of the whole program. Additionally, besides the daily menu, there is support and an online chat with the nutritionist during the whole program.

Furthermore, the informative content plays a major role for customers. According to the answers to the survey, people are looking for such platforms where there will be curators and specialists, not only filmed training exercises.

The main issue that the author wanted to discover was how people found such online sport platforms. One of the main resources is social media, followed by word of mouth and the Internet. There is no doubt that social media (specifically Instagram) is the most profitable and informative source nowadays. This issue was described in the theoretical part, on page 16. Word of mouth has always been a beneficial resource because it can bring many potential customers. Branding of clothes also refers to this because when people see a title on a T-shirt or hoodie, for instance, they are becoming interested too. The Internet is certainly a common tool among people to search for information and compare the findings.

Taking everything into consideration, such online sport platforms are becoming more popular nowadays. The answers show that people are interested in the new method of training. The main reasons for “why” are: price, informative content, daily nutrition plan, possibility to train at home and, clearly filmed exercises. Based on the survey results, the author is able to create a general guideline for how to promote online sport platforms.

### **6.3 How to promote online sport platforms**

For building a general guideline, the author uses the theoretical background as fundamental knowledge, as well as the findings from the interviews with two entrepreneurs and the survey results since both of them represent the real life outcomes. The main question of the thesis is “How to make appropriate promotion in order to have a profitable online business in the future and how to build an online sport platform?” This issue will be broadly described and fully answered in this chapter.

### **6.3.1 Developing the idea**

Everything starts with an idea. First of all, it is important to evaluate it. At the initial stage, the entrepreneur needs to write the business plan. Business plan is a tool that helps to collect all information in one document. Below there is a list of the topics included in the plan. These have to be analyzed before starting realizing the idea to build an online sport platform.

1. Forming a vision and mission for the business.

An essential point is setting the goals. The entrepreneur needs to understand the vision and mission for the business clearly. This will help to minimize risks and optimize the profit.

2. Applying an analysis

Analysing is the most crucial issue. Before starting an online business, it is essential to do an analysis. The entrepreneur has to be prepared for challenges and problems that could occur. A SWOT analysis, for instance, can show the benefits and disadvantages of the business, because it analyzes both internal and external factors.

3. Budgeting

Especially at the initial stage, the entrepreneur should be careful with financial statements and use of loaned funds. The optimal solution is to make budget expenditures and stick to the financial plan strictly.

4. Good marketing strategies

An appropriate marketing plan is a crucial issue because it refers to how potential customers will get to know the business. A plan has to be created and analyzed. Good marketing strategies are the core issue in promoting the business.

### **6.3.2 Promotional plan**

In the following, the author focuses on the promotional part of online sport platforms. A right marketing plan is an important part of any strategy. Promotion in marketing is any type of marketing communication with the target audience. The aim is to increase awareness and create brand loyalty. Appropriate promotion is essential because it directly refers to obtaining new customers and keeping the old ones.

During the thesis research, the author studied various information about the topic of promotion. Based on the theoretical background and the findings from the real life cases (the interviews and the survey), the general guideline could be formulated. Creating a general promotion guideline is the main point why this thesis was written. The author wanted to take a deep look into this topic from the inside and outside.

Analyzing the gathered information, the author decided on the best promotional instrument for such online sport platforms – Internet marketing, specifically social media marketing. SMM (Social Media Marketing) is one of the most profitable tools because people prefer to do everything via the Internet nowadays, especially the target audience of such online sport platforms – people 18-35 years old. They prefer to do shopping online, to communicate via social media, and now to train without attending fitness clubs. With the new training platforms it is now possible to keep fit while staying at home.

Creating an Instagram account for the online sport platform is the most profitable promotional tool. It can help to gain potential customers and reputation. Instagram is the most popular social media platform in this day and age. All the advertising can be done directly on Instagram.

In order to run a successful social media marketing campaign for an online sport platform, the points listed below should be taken into consideration:

1. Listen

The entrepreneur should clearly understand the target audience. Their feedback is essential in order to understand their desires. Then, based on the feedback, it is possible to make improvements to meet customers' wants.

2. Focus

The entrepreneur should concentrate all efforts around the online sport platform. For instance, such efforts might be offering some benefits for customers, such as discounts on the online courses or encouragement for the best results after a one-month membership.



### 3. Be patient

Marketing always takes time. The entrepreneur should be patient. Some advertising campaigns might take time before they will start to be profitable.

### 4. Share

The content of an online sport platform should be informative, as well as creative and interesting. This will help to build a loyal relationship.

### 5. Trendsetter

It is crucial to collaborate with some influencers. They might be athletes or any other people with a considerable amount of followers. The main point is to reach the target audience.

### 6. Discuss

The entrepreneur has to offer excellent service in order to generate attention around the online sport platform. Word of mouth, in this case, works perfectly.

### 7. Respond

The entrepreneur has to stay in touch with the customers on a daily basis: respond to the feedback, both positive and negative.

The next essential issue for the entrepreneur is the promotion of the personal account on Instagram. No doubt that people want to see the perfect body of the person who runs an online sport platform. Below, the tips for Instagram promotion will be presented. These tips refer to the promotion of the business account as well.

#### 1. The content

The content of the Instagram blog needs to attract people. Information should be unique and presented differently. A major advantage is sharing videos because they represent real life perfectly. Instagram stories are another great tool because they create a personal and direct communication with people.

## 2. Visual picture

Visualization plays another crucial role. Besides the texts, the pictures should be bright and attractive. The theme of sport should be represented in the blog. Sharing videos of training exercises is also a profitable tool. A good idea is to promote the online sport platform in the entrepreneur's personal blog, for instance post pictures of "before" and "after" of the customers. This will help to attract new customers.

## 3. Regularity

Posts should be shared every day or even twice a day. It is important to be always present in the main feed, so people will pay attention to the account and the products.

## 4. Collaboration with other bloggers

There is a special Telegram chat, which can help to find a blogger with the same target group. The prices for such promotion vary. Usually, bloggers with a big audience cost more. The author did an analysis and, based on personal experience, could say that buying advertising services from a blogger with not very many followers is much more profitable and costs less.

### **6.3.3 Evaluating the results**

This chapter describes monitoring the results of success of the business and the personal blog. This is extremely important because it can show what has to be improved and what works well.

Communication with the audience and customers is the key. The entrepreneur has to stay always in touch, responding to all of the questions and comments. Moreover, the business has to appear in the main feed every day. That is why a content plan has to be prepared for at least one month ahead. The content plan is the foundation for any blog. Without quality content, one will not be able to create a profitable business or a personal blog.

If an entrepreneur has a business account he or she can check the statistics of the page. This statistics shows how many people checked the account, the gender, the age and the location of the audience. Such a tool helps considerably in the promotion campaigns because an entrepreneur knows exactly the target audience of the business. It is time-consuming because the research is done automatically. Everything is

calculated and controlled directly on Instagram. As a result an entrepreneur saves money.

#### **6.4 Conclusion of the chapter**

Taking everything into consideration, specifically the interview results and the answers from the survey, as well as the theoretical background and the analysis of gathered information, all these helped to build a general guideline for how to promote online sport platforms. The main data were gathered from two interviews and the online survey because these represent the real life outcomes. The main promotional tool nowadays is social media (the Instagram). Through the use of Instagram it is possible to create long-term relationships with customers. Furthermore, by raising awareness of a personal account, it is possible to obtain many new followers or potential customers. Moreover, a business account is a profitable addition because it saves money of the beginner entrepreneur.

### **7 Conclusion**

Summarizing all the work that has been done, this thesis can offer a good guideline for the beginner entrepreneurs. By analyzing the information from the books and articles, the Internet sources, the gathered information from the interviews and the survey, the author has created a general guideline for promoting online sport platforms. The main research question was “How to make appropriate promotion in order to have a profitable online business in the future and how to build an efficient and powerful online sport platform?”. One of the main points is developing the idea. This includes forming the vision and mission for the business, applying an analysis, budgeting and creating an appropriate marketing plan. Then, a promotional plan has to be prepared. Based on the survey results and the interviews, the most profitable promotional tool was identified as Social Media, specifically Instagram.

Social Media is growing with a high speed nowadays and it is by far the most popular service available on the Internet. Whether the business is small or large, online or offline, Social Media provides a great opportunity and advantage for every kind of business. Any business can share information there, spread brand awareness, establish brand loyalty and so on.

Social Media offers a great number of benefits to business owners, as it allows them to reach out their customers, to gain the attention of more people and, in the future, the potential customers.

It is vital to mention about the research process. The author used a mix of qualitative and quantitative research methods. The quantitative research method was applied in the form of an online survey. The author collected 100 responses. Based on the answers, the author has analyzed people's views on and attitudes to such online sport platforms. In addition, the best promotional tool was also identified based on the survey results. The results are presented in Appendix 1. Qualitative research was conducted in the form of interviews with two successful Russian entrepreneurs. The answers were presented in the sixth chapter. The names of the entrepreneurs are disclosed because they did not want to be mentioned in the report. The asked questions can be found in Appendix 2.

To sum up, such online sport platforms are becoming more and more popular nowadays. This thesis provides a reader with analyzed information from books, articles and web sources, from the basics of establishing an online business to a general guideline based on real life outcomes (two interviews and a survey) and the studied theory.

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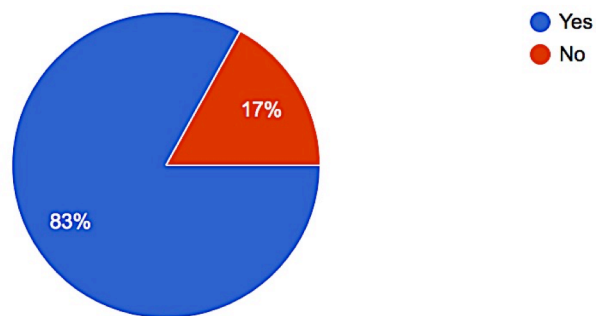
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## Appendices

### Appendix 1. Results from the online survey

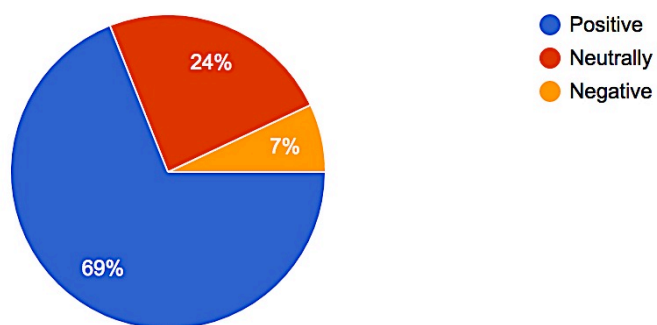
Do you do sport?

100 ОТВЕТОВ



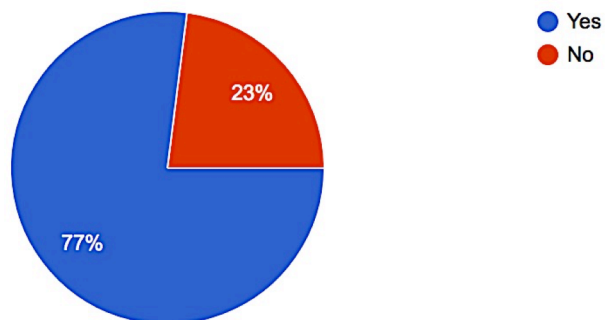
What is your attitude to online sport platforms ?

100 ОТВЕТОВ



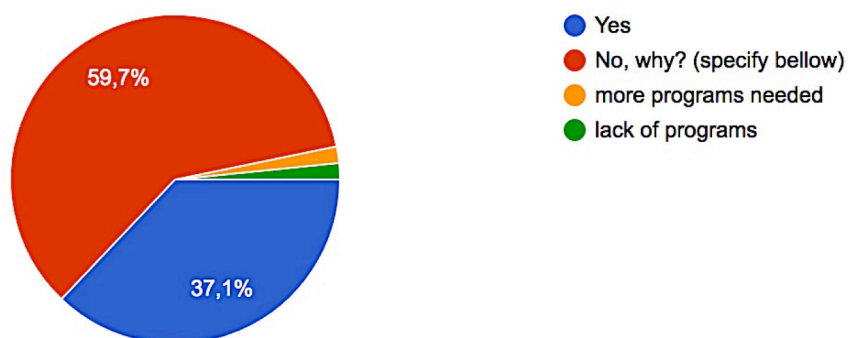
Do you have an experience to train online?

100 ОТВЕТОВ



Question for those, who were already using such online sport platforms: do you continue to buy the online course after the first month of membership?

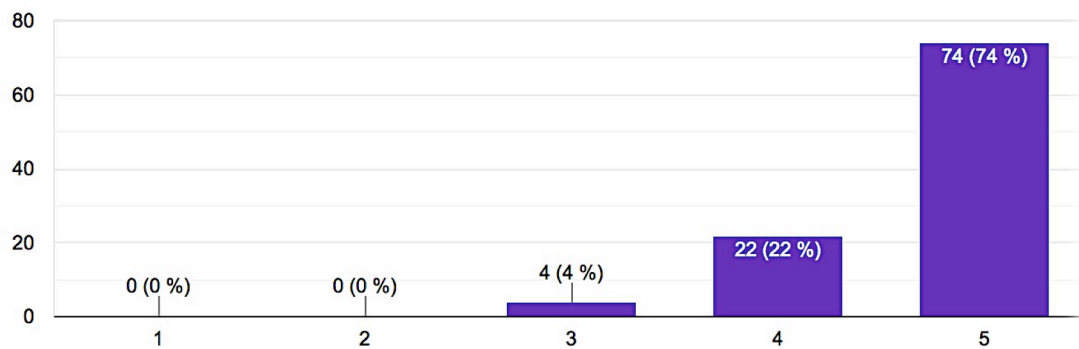
62 ОТВЕТА





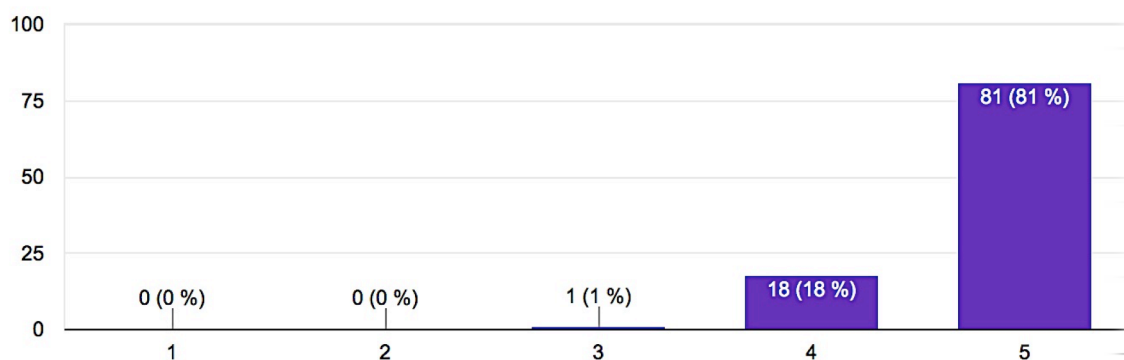
How do you evaluate such aspect as PRICE of such online sport platforms?

100 ответов



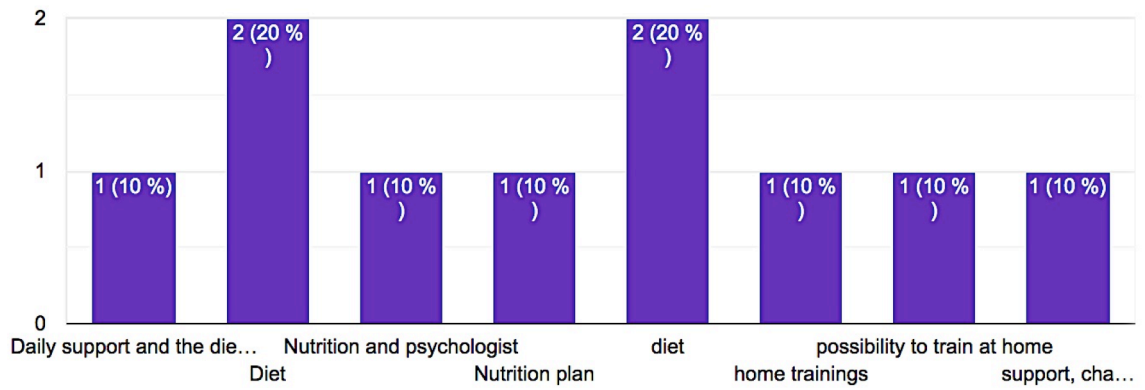
How do you evaluate such aspect as INFORMATIVE CONTENT of such online sport platforms?

100 ответов



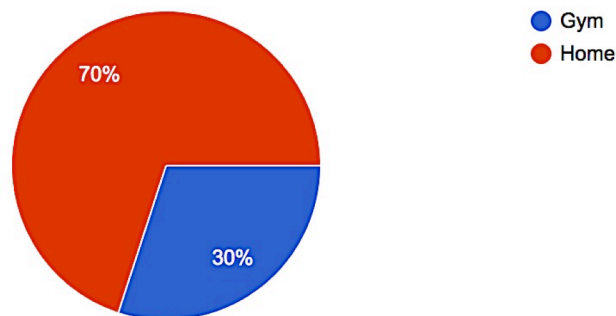
## What else do you consider as a plus of such online sport platforms?

10 ответов



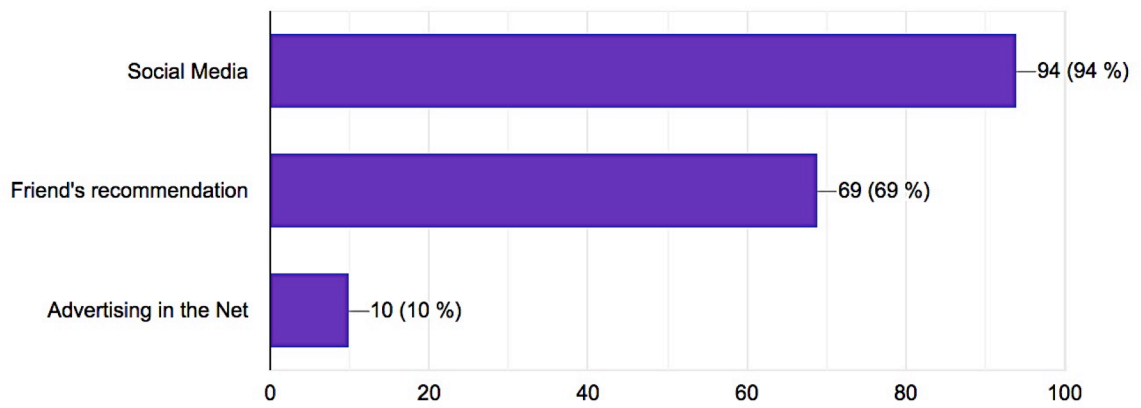
## Do you prefer to train at the gym or at home?

100 ответов



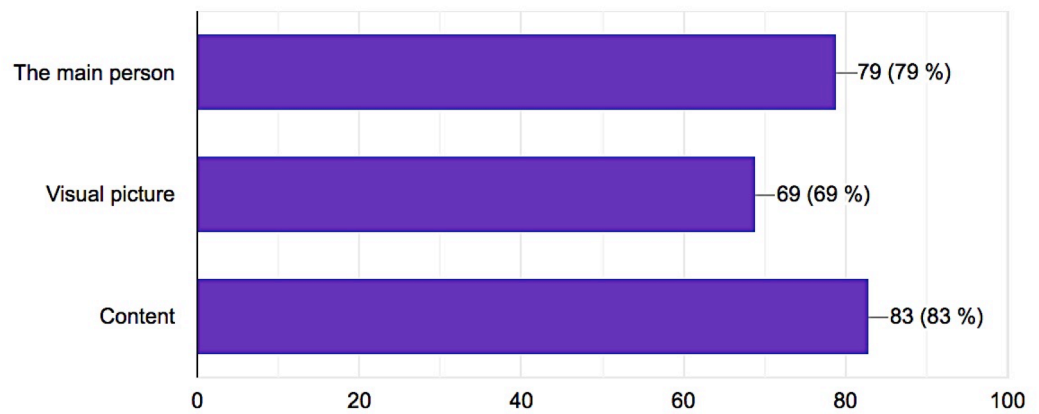
## How do you usually find an online sport platform?

100 ответов



## What is the most important for you in choosing an online sport platform?

100 ответов



## Appendix 2. Questions from the interviews with entrepreneurs

- 1 Explain how does your program work? (Расскажите как работает Ваша программа?)
- 2 What is included in your program? (Что входит в пакет Вашей программы?)
- 3 What are the benefits of purchasing your program? (Какие преимущества Ваша программа имеет среди других?)
- 4 How did you find consumers? (Как Вы нашли покупателей?)
- 5 How do you compete? (Как Вы конкурируете на рынке?)
- 6 Which marketing strategies are you using to promote your online program? (Какие маркетинговые стратегии Вы используете для продвижения Вашего продукта?)
- 7 How did you promote yourself? (Как Вы подняли узнаваемость своей личной страницы?)
- 8 Which channels of social media are you using? (Какие социальные сети Вы используете?)
- 9 How do you keep your customers? (Как Вы подогреваете интерес среди ваших клиентов?)