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DEFINING A BUSINESS-TO- BUSINESS CUSTOMER JOURNEY

– Company X

BACHELOR'S THESIS | ABSTRACT

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DEFINING A BUSINESS-TO-BUSINESS CUSTOMER JOURNEY

Company X

The subject of this thesis was defining a customer journey for a starting digital marketing agency that offers services in the B2B sector. The objective of this thesis was to analyze and define the customer journey, and to give recommendations based on the results. The different operations of customer journey have a significant effect on customer satisfaction and sales. As the company is growing, it was crucial to define their customer journey.

Digital platforms have changed the ways to communicate, collaborate and buy. The theory section aimed to regard the various operations during a customer journey and their effect on business activity, as well as customer satisfaction and profitability. Also, the results of digitalization were viewed as they affect the operations during the customer journey.

This thesis is viewed as a case study, which is one of the qualitative research types. The customer journey was analyzed and defined based on customers' and employees' interviews, and the given material. The result of this study was a customer journey highlighted in the form of a diagram explaining the customer journey on three different levels, as well as a written explication and analysis for the journey. Also, the recommendations for improving the process were given. The study can be used in work orientation and as base material when developing the customer journey and its phases.

KEYWORDS:

Customer journey, business-to-business, digital marketing, customer experience

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ASIAKASPOLUN MÄÄRITTÄMINEN B2B-SEKTORILLA TOIMIVALLE YRITYKSELLE

Yritys X

Tämän opinnäytetyön aiheena oli asiakaspolun määrittäminen aloittelevalle digitaalisen markkinoinnin toimistolle, joka tarjoaa palveluita B2B-sektorilla. Opinnäytetyön tavoitteena oli analysoida ja määrittää asiakaspolku sekä antaa tulosten perusteella suosituksia polun kehittämiseen. Asiakaspolun eri vaiheilla on merkittävä vaikutus asiakastyytyvyyteen ja myyntiin, minkä myötä myös yrityksen liikevaihtoon ja kannattavuuteen. Yrityksen kasvaessa oli erittäin tärkeää määrittää heidän asiakaspolkunsaa.

Digitaaliset alustat ovat mullistaneet kommunikaatiotapoja ja ostokäyttäytymistä. Teoriaosion tavoitteena oli tarkastella asiakaspolun aikana tapahtuvia eri operaatioita ja niiden vaikutusta liiketoimintaan sekä asiakastyytyvyyteen ja kannattavuuteen. Myös digitalisaation tuloksia tarkastellaan, koska ne vaikuttavat asiakaspolun operaatioihin.

Tätä työtä tarkastellaan tapaustutkimuksena, joka on yksi laadullisista tutkimustypeistä. Asiakaspolku määritettiin tehtyjen haastattelujen ja annetun materiaalin perusteella. Tämän tutkimuksen tuloksena oli määritetty asiakaspolku, joka selittää asiakaspolun kolmella eri tasolla. Kaavion tukena on kirjallinen selvitys asiakaspolusta ja suositukset prosessin parantamiseksi. Työn tuloksia voidaan käyttää työshön perehdytyksen tukena ja perusaineistona asiakasmatkan ja sen vaiheiden kehittämisessä.

ASIASANAT:

Asiakaspolku, digitaalinen markkinointi, asiakaskokemus

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

B2B	Business-to-business
To convert	In this study, to convert refers to that the potential customer makes a sign of interest towards the company in digital channels, for example, by downloading a free guide. (NeilPlatel 2019 b.)
Traffic	In this study traffic referes to the traffic on a website.
SEM	Search engine marketing (SEM) is a type of digital marketing that tries to increase a company's website's visibility in search engines through paid advertising. (Market Business News 2019.)
SEO	Search engine optimization is the process of optimizing a company's online content so that it ranks in search engines, such as Google, as a top result for searches of a particular keyword. (NeilPlatel 2019 c.)
CRM	Customer Relationship Management (CRM) is a business approach that seeks to create, develop and enchance company's relationships with customers. (Payne 2005)
Lead	A potential customer which has showed a signed of interest towards a company or its services or products, but has not been in contact with the company yet.
Prospect	A potential customer whom need has already been recognized by the company.

1 INTRODUCTION

Digital platforms have changed the ways to communicate, collaborate and connect. Through that, it has changed the way we do marketing. Internet offers different digital platforms such as websites, search engines and social media, which allow direct interaction between customers and companies. To stand out, a company must offer a customer experience that matches its' time. Furthermore, that customers will get a seamless experience working with the different parties of a company while their journey.

1.1 Background and the objective of the thesis

The objective of this thesis is to define a customer journey for a starting digital marketing agency that offers services in the B2B sector. The different operations of customer journey have a significant effect on customer satisfaction and sales. By defining the customer journey, it is possible to analyze how the journey can be improved. The subject is reviewed so that the customer experience and customer loyalty can be improved, which affects positively on sales as well.

The principal of the thesis is Company X Oy. Company X is a small company that offers digital services in the field of B2B. They have not defined a customer journey at a detailed level. They have identified a client process, which explains the customer journey's top-level actions streamlined. In this thesis, the whole customer journey is reviewed and defined, from the first touchpoint to managing the relationship. The importance of optimizing the operations during the customer journey has become more critical as the company is growing. The objective of the principal is to use the results of this study to improve the customer journey. In the end of this thesis the recommendations to improve the process are given.

The theory section covers the principles of the different areas regarding a customer journey. The theory section aims to regard the various operations during a customer journey and their effect on business activity, as well as customer satisfaction and profitability. Also, the results of digitalization are being viewed as they affect the operations during the customer journey.

The case study is executed through semi-structured interviews, the given material and own perceptions.

1.2 Company presentation

Company X was founded in January 2019. The company has two owners, and they use a network of freelancers to take care of different areas of the business. They have a full-time freelancer working for sales, a part-time freelancer working for digital marketing, and they do co-operation with a copywriter.

Company X's business activity is based on long term relationships, which fulfill the needs of its customers in the field of digital marketing. All their services are adapted to customer's needs and budgets. Their objective is to have the most satisfied customers in the industry. They want to achieve that by ensuring that their services meet the needs of their customers in changing situations. Company X's operations are personalized and based on continuous partnerships so that they can help their customers to achieve the best possible results. As the customers' needs are the center of service development and their business strategy, it is crucial to have a well-thought customer journey that works.

1.3 Research method and implementation

This thesis is viewed as a case study, which is one of the qualitative research types. Qualitative research aims to describe life as truthfully and holistically as possible. The purpose of a case study is to study individual cases and their relationship to the surroundings. Often, the studied subject is a process, and the material is collected through observations, interviews, and documentary research. The case study most commonly seeks to describe a phenomenon. (Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 2009, 134-135, 160-163.)

The starting point of the research is to define what the research aims to find out. Often in the case study, research tasks and sub-research tasks are used to define the purpose of the study. The conclusions are often regarded as the most important part of a study, as it gives answers to the research problems. It is important to bring up possible errors or inaccuracies regarding the circumstances. (Hirsjärvi etc. 2009, 125, 221, 231-232.)

The subject of the thesis was clarified in a meeting with the principal, and the material for the thesis was collected from the principal. The customer journey was defined and analyzed based on the given information. The collection of information was based on analyzing the given material, personal communication with the principal, semi-structured interviews, as well as own perceptions. These methods made it possible to get a holistic picture of the present situation on the customer journey, which gave the possibility to analyze the process as truthfully as possible. The objective was to give a diagram explaining the customer journey, as well as a written explanation and analysis for the journey. Based on the explanation and analysis recommendations for improvement were given.

2 DIGITALIZATION AND DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

Digitalization refers to enabling, improving, or even transforming processes by using digital technologies and digitized data. (Bouza 2018.) Digitalization creates new markets and challenges existing customer relationship management practices.

Digital transformation indicates examining business areas and their processes and adapting them to new digital technologies. It aims to solve problems with the best possible technical means. (Talin 2019.)

Digitalization is radically and continuously changing people's ways to search for information, buy products and services, share experiences and interact with each other (Ilmarinen & Koskela 2015). As buyers' behaviors are changing, and a company that understands the elements of change in their business gain an overwhelming competitive edge in the market. Marketing is in a vital position, considering the new opportunities created by digitalization and digital transformation. As the goal of marketing is to find out the customer's needs in a changing situation, leveraging marketing provides the tools to understand and manage this change. (Komulainen 2018.)

The changes brought about by digitalization can be divided into three: a shift in customer behavior, a change in technology, and a change in the market. As customer behavior changes, companies need to learn about their customers' habits. Customers increasingly dictate how, where, and when they want to do business. In the digital world, there are many options available to a customer if one company fails to meet expectations. These options may not come from familiar rivals but can come from anywhere in the world. Technological change has enabled the whole process of digitalization. Technology has never been as easy and affordable as it is now: it is ubiquitous and commoditized. The biggest obstacle is the lack of understanding of what technology can be used for. Digitalization shapes the market, the competitive landscape, and the operating environment in many ways. New competitors can quickly emerge from another industry, from another country, and in some cases, from scratch. Many new competitors are following the rules, operating logic, and business models of the digital age, which makes it more difficult to succeed for a traditional company. Digitalization offers a way to grow, reach new customers, and expand into new markets. (Ilmarinen & Koskela 2015).

2.1 Effects of digitalization and digital transformation on the customer journey

The use of digital platforms allows companies to be closer to their customers, to act truly on the customer interface. Communication with customers has become more transparent due to the internet and primarily social media. Social media allows companies to interact with people in a public venue, providing a channel to promote their products or services, as well as discuss with one-on-one messaging. (Digital Marketing Institute 2019b.)

Digital platforms allow marketers to attain overwhelming amounts of knowledge about their customers with data. To succeed, it is crucial to measure the correct metrics, analyze the results, and create content that captures the customers' attention. (Digital Marketing Institute 2019b.) Due to digital transformation and the combination of metrics and interactivity, it is possible to track the consumers' actions and behavior at an individual level. Tracking allows marketers to keep track of customer purchases and to suggest similar products. This customer data makes it possible to send personalized emails or to show personalized landing pages, the pages on a website where a person lands at first when coming to the site. (Talin 2019.)

Digital platforms have changed the ideology of content creation (Digital Marketing Institute 2019b). According to Instagram, in June 2016, users shared, on average more than 95 million photos and videos every day, with posts garnering 4.2 billion likes each day (Reuters 2016). Besides, sharing information with customers through digital channels is most likely to increase in both the consumer and business-to-business market (Komulainen 2018). Social media has allowed regular people to grow the audience on their accounts and become highly influential. Companies do co-operation with these people to endorse their products or services, which helps companies to persuade and engage customers. (Digital Marketing Institute 2019b.)

Digitalization has abled companies to automate processes. Process automation means automating processes through a technology. Automation streamlines processes and increases efficiency by freeing up time for tasks that require human expertise, such as strategic planning or customer interaction. Also, it can reduce the costs of marketing and enhance customer experience. Automated processes can include processes such as customer communications, lead nurturing, content scheduling, social media management, market research, and analytics. (Digital Marketing Institute 2019a.)

3 DIGITAL BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT

Digital marketing is marketing and communication delivered through digital channels (NeilPlatel 2019 b). Digital marketing focuses on managing different forms of the online presence of a company to achieve the objectives of marketing (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick 2019). Businesses use digital channels such as search engines, social media, email, and websites to connect with current and prospective customers (Alexander 2019).

Digitalisation has significantly transformed how and how companies promote and market their products and services, and how they focus their efforts on different channels. Changes in customer behavior, and opportunities in areas such as targeting and measurement, have increased the share of digital channels in marketing. The diversity of digital marketing and advertising is also reflected in statistics. (Ilmarinen & Koskela 2015.) Digital marketing is interesting for companies because, through digital channels, it is possible to reach human masses (NeilPlatel 2019 b). According to Väestörekisterikeskus, in 2018, 89% of Finland's population used the internet, and 82% of the population used it daily (Suomen virallinen tilasto 2018).

3.1 Inbound Marketing

Communication, marketing and sales have changed drastically in the B2B sector after digitalization. Communication between companies and customers used to be visits, letters, or calls. After that came faxing and then email. Today there are more ways for customers to connect directly with a company. The use of Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, and other digital platforms in B2B relationships has become common. (Hyken 2019.) The changes in buying behavior are forcing companies to adapt their business communication and marketing strategies to fit the increasing digitalization of the purchasing process (Bristol Strategy 2019).

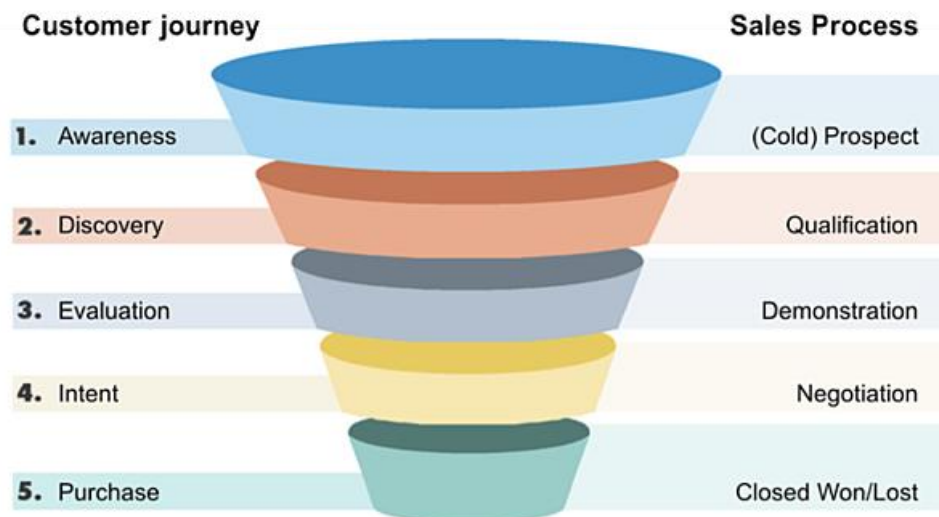
According to Hubspot, inbound consists of three different methods, and each method has its' own strategy, tactics, and tools. The first method is Attracting. The primary tactics of Attracting is content creation and development. The objective is to create content that provides value for potential customers so that they want to convert with a brand. The process of attracting starts with content creation plan. Based on the plan the content is optimized and published. The objective of the content is to create value to the potential

customers. After publishing and optimizing the content, the possible customers find the content through different channels such as Google. From this content, they are led to take the next step. (Hubspot 2019.)

Another method is Engaging. The main tactic of Engaging is communication with customers and potential customers. The objective is to communicate with the customers in a way that builds long-term relationships with the brand. Using mutually beneficial agreements is crucial. Usually, the strategies of Engaging include active customer service and solution selling. The key to Engaging is to focus on the customer's problems and needs rather than the company's offering. The tools for this tactic are, for example, marketing automation and lead management. (Hubspot 2019.)

The third method is Delighting. The tactics of Delighting include ensuring that the customers are satisfied and supported after they make the purchase. The objective is to be there for customers and to assist the customers in any situation. The objective is that the customers become brand advocates for the company. The tools of Delighting are, for example, chatbots, surveys, and social media listening. (Hubspot 2019.)

An inbound marketing funnel is based on the same strategy as sales funnel. The most significant difference between the two is that the inbound marketing funnel is mainly digital. (Bristol Strategy 2019.)



Picture 1 The connection between customer journey and sales process. (Bristol Strategy 2019)

The sales funnel starts with a cold prospect who has not discovered the brand yet. After the consumers discover the product, they will evaluate it by guided information provided by the brand. The customer is seeking value and compares offerings between various companies. After the first evaluation, interested prospects continue their journey through a more detailed evaluation and interaction with the brand. The next step is contact with a sales representative, who discusses with the prospect and closes the sale. (Bristol Strategy 2019.) After the purchase, the customer continues its' journey on with the customer. However, closing the sale is the last step of the sales funnel.

The same ideology works with the inbound marketing funnel. Inbound marketing funnel's steps focus on creating value and trust between the potential customers and a brand, which, on end, creates leads for the sales team. The funnel is based mainly on digital platforms. (Hubspot 2019.) At the top of the funnel, potential customers are trying to solve a problem or meet a need. They start looking for information to fulfill the need or to solve the problem. At this point, the value of these prospects is still low because the probability of buying is uncertain. (Booth 2014.)

Throughout the steps of the inbound sales funnel, the brand provides content to the prospect. The main objective is to provide answers to their questions and solutions to their problems. (Booth 2014.) As the prospects reach the middle of the funnel, they have already recognized their need that needs to be fulfilled. They are more committed to buying, so the prospect is more valuable. In this stage, a company has to prove how its solution fulfills the need of the customer.

When prospects reach the bottom of the funnel, they are ready to make the purchase decision. According to The Marketing Blender, the buyers' journey is done 68% digitally (The Marketing Blender 2019). It is essential to help the prospect to make the purchase decision so that they will not end up with the competitor's services or products (Booth 2014).

Inbound is a method of attracting, engaging, and delighting people with content that provides value and builds trust between potential customers and a company. (Hubspot 2019) Furthermore, it is a tool for companies to regain access to prospects early in the sale process through digital channels (Bristol Strategy 2019).The main objective of inbound marketing is to help the customer by offering valuable information so that the customer converts. There are different possibilities for inbound marketing methods,

strategies, tactics, and channels. Furthermore, the channels are selected based on the audience that a company wants to reach. (Sales Communications 2019.)

3.2 The different areas of digital marketing

Digital marketing includes plenty of different tactics and channels. In this thesis, the most common digital marketing tactics are reviewed. These tactics concentrate much on internet marketing. Other digital marketing channels are, for example, radio, television, phone, and enhanced offline marketing (NeilPlatel 2019 b).

Search engine optimization, SEO, is one of the many methods of digital marketing. Search engine optimization is the process of optimizing a company's online content so that it ranks in search engines, such as Google, as a top result for searches of a particular keyword. (NeilPlatel 2019 c.) The channels that benefit from SEO include websites, blogs, and infographics. Search engine optimization consists of three categories: on-page, off-page, and technical SEO. Also, blog posts work as a tool for increasing organic traffic on a website, when good content is combined with SEO and keyword strategy. (Alexander 2019.) On the other hand, there is search engine marketing, SEM. It is a type of digital marketing that tries to increase a company's website's visibility in search engines through paid advertising. With search engine marketing, companies pay for their adverts to appear alongside search queries in search engines such as Google and Bing. (Market Business News 2019.) A company can achieve goals faster with SEM than SEO, but the results are not sustainable in the long term. (Alexander 2019.)

Both SEO and SEM need good content, which is why they are often combined with content marketing. Content marketing is creating and promoting content to generate brand awareness, traffic growth, lead generation, and sales. Channels to promote the content are, for example, optimized blogs, ebooks, and infographics. (Alexander 2019.) When a website has enough traffic, it is recommendable to analyze and optimize the conversion rates.

In internet marketing, conversion optimization is a system for increasing the percentage of visitors on a website that takes a desired action on a webpage. These actions include filling a contact form, downloading a whitepaper, or making a purchase. A company needs to measure the conversion rates to increase their profits. There are different tactics to develop conversion rates. One of the tactics is A/B testing, which means

changing one thing in the campaign to see which works the best. The change could be, for example, a button's color. Another tactic is a customer value proposition, which describes clearly the product's or service's added value to a company's customer. Other tactics are the use of colloquial language or review the customer's concerns and give information that wipes them away. (NeilPlatel 2019 a.)

Another tactic is social media marketing. It is a form of digital marketing that involves creating and sharing content on social media networks in order to achieve marketing objectives. Through social media, a company can strengthen their brand and communicate with customers. Social media marketing includes activities such as planning and posting updates in the form of text, pictures, and video. Also, it includes engaging with the audience. (WorldStream 2019.) Compared to social media, a tactic that has been longer time in use, is email marketing. It is one of the ways for a company to communicate with its customers and potential customers. Email marketing is often used to promote companies' content, discounts, and events. Primarily the objective is to direct the audience to a company's website to convert or to sign up for an event. (Alexander 2019.)

Nowadays, a tactic that is more common is marketing automation. Marketing automation refers to the software that serves to automate some or all of the company's marketing operations. It is used to automate repetitive tasks and to understand data and the lead nurturing workflows better. It mainly includes email newsletters, social media post uploads, lead nurturing, and campaign tracking and reporting. (Alexander 2019.)

4 CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT

Customer Relationship Management (CRM) is a business approach that seeks to create, develop and enhance company's relationships with customers. The objective of CRM is to improve customer value and company's profitability. It aims to increase acquisition and retention of profitable customers, and it is often combined with the use of information technology and implementation of relationship marketing strategies. (Payne 2005, 4-5.) It includes all the activities, strategies, and technologies that companies use to manage their interactions with their customers (Kulpa 2017).

4.1 Managing the customer relationship

CRM is about managing a company's the relationships with customers. The relationships are dynamic and they evolve over time. (Routledge 2003.) Also, the dynamics of these relationships are changing as a result of changes in the environment. Branding emerged to give competitive edge to mass production, which led to the point where consumers base their opinions to the brand's reputation rather than their own experience. The dynamics are continuously evolving as the era of interaction has emerged to challenge the brands. Companies are strategizing how to gain sustainable competitive advantage by thriving customer information and interaction. As social media and other digital platforms have created a transparent environment, companies have realized how important it is what customers say about them. The focus must be more on the customers rather than on the company. (Peppers & Rogers 2016, 4-5.)

According to Buttle, the five phases that a customer relationship can evolve are awareness, exploration, expansion, commitment and dissolution. Awareness is when a customer becomes aware of the company. Exploration is a phase when the customer is engaging and evaluating the brand. During this phase the customer develops expectations of the company through given information and communication. Expansion is when the trust begins to develop. Usually this phase includes more communication and transactions between the parties, which often include purchases that require background work and meetings. At this stage the customer is not fully committed yet. After expansion phase becomes commitment. All the relationships do not reach this phase, as it requires focused trust and increased adaptation. The development of trust

can be described as investment in relationship, which supports long-term objectives. After the trust is reached, the both parties are motivated to make investments in the relationship. However, reaching the commitment phase is essential when building successful long-term relationships. Confirmation of commitment can be found in the investments that the parties make for each other. (Buttle 2003, 13-16.) According to Payne, the levels of the relationship can be divided in six: prospect, buyer, client, supporter, advocate and partner. The transition of customers to the next level requires effort from the company. Depending on the strategy, the objective is to make customers brand advocates or partners. (Payne 2005, 112.)

In order to build valuable customer relationships, it is necessary for a company to identify customer personas, differentiate them and interact with them. Furthermore, it is significant to offer a personalized experience. (Peppers etc. 2016, 73.) The value creation process consists of three elements: the value the customer receives, the value the company receives and maximizing the life-time value. The customer evaluates the benefits and the added value, which build up the product. Customers do not regard only the product or service, they regard the total offer that the company provides. To understand the benefits in the customer point of view, the company is obliged to understand why the customers are buying their products or services. (Payne 2005, 103-104.)

Managing the customer relationship and building trust leads to customer retention. The two main benefits of customer retention are reduce in marketing costs and understanding the customer needs and the company's possibilities to fulfill the needs. Marketing costs are reduced as there is no need to spend money on marketing and sales to replace the lost customers. As the tenure grows, the understanding of both parties increases. Deeper understanding and commitment to the relationship most likely produce more secure revenue streams. (Buttle 2003, 17-18.)

Customer relationship management must be adopted through process, organization, technology and culture management. It should focus on long-term value rather than short term, as the relationship gets more valuable during time. It is even possible that a customer relationship brings losses to a company in short term but will pay off in the long run. A company should pay attention to customer equity when measuring the value of a customer. The term customer equity describes the effectiveness of customer strategies and implementation. It is the result of customer relationship management, which explains the lifetime value of all the customers. The customer life time value measures the life

time net value of a customer. It regards all the touchpoints and transactions during the customer journey. To put it in a straight forward format, it is measured by the revenue that a customer brings to the company minus the costs of customer acquisition and customer service. (Peppers etc 2016, 147-150, 355, 358-359, 360, 364.)

4.2 Customer Relationship Management software

The term Customer Relationship Management (CRM) was founded in the early 1990s. Before that, other systems provided parts of CRM software, such as Personal Information Manager (IMP) (UKEssays 2018). Customer relationship management (CRM) is a software that a company uses to manage and analyze customer interactions and data throughout the customer lifecycle. The objective is to improve customer relationships. It assists in customer retention and helps driving sales growth ad the customer data is well-structured and available. (Rouse, Ehrens & Kiwak 2019.)

CRM software stores customer information (Salesforce 2019). It gathers the customer data in one central location in the CRM database. The contents of the database include the data from the first contact to maintaining the customer relationship. A modern CRM software adjusts to a company's needs as the fields are customizable, which allows the customer history data content to be defined based on the needs of a company, and so the data will stay comprehensive. The contact is first registered to the CRM as they have their first contact with the brand. The contact must be recognized at a detailed level, for example, email, name, company. So, CRM stores the personal details of a customer, as well as the source of the contact. Also, a CRM software can automatically maintain the upcoming sources and interactions, as the contact interacts with the company in different channels. Furthermore, other customer information that comes up in meetings and purchase history is stored in the CRM. (Act! 2019) CRM software makes it easier to access and measure the data; often, the productivity increases (Salesforce 2019).

With the help of the customer information and the features of a CRM software, a company can identify sales opportunities, record service issues and manage marketing campaigns, in one central location as the information in the CRM is available to everyone at the company. (Salesforce 2019.) As the buying behaviors are changing, a company must make a personalized experience for the customer. With a CRM system, a company can document all the details of the customer journey and use the information efficiently to make the customer experience personalized. (UKEssays 2018.) The detailed

information that is stored helps a company to build long-lasting customer relationships (Rouse etc. 2019). However, to be able to use the advantages of CRM software, a company must select the right CRM for its use, and the implementation has to be well planned and executed.

When selecting the right CRM software for a company, it is good to find similar companies that have implemented CRM into use successfully. This way, a company will gain useful advice, and it helps to avoid pitfalls. When a company has found the right CRM, they have to name someone to be in charge of the project. After they have to make a schedule for the implementation and a plan for the budget. Also, the areas of responsibility have to be defined. A detailed and well-thought plan will help with the execution of the project. (Five Paths 2019.)

5 CUSTOMER JOURNEY

The customer journey is the experience a customer goes through with a brand. It is a roadmap detailing how a customer becomes aware of the brand and interacts with it. Customer Journey is the sum of experiences and actions that customers go through when they are interacting with a company and its brand. (Sorman 2019.) Mapping out a customer journey is essential when developing and improving a company's customer journey (Richardson 2010).

5.1 Customer journey map

A customer journey map is a diagram that illustrates the steps that a customer goes through in engaging with a brand (Richardson 2010). It lays out every stage of the customer experience. These stages include customer touchpoints, which define the moments when a customer is in contact with a brand. (Sorman 2019.) The more customer touchpoints a customer journey has, the more complicated the mapping becomes. Besides, as there are more customer touchpoints, the mapping becomes more necessary in order to understand and to optimize the customer journey. (Richardson 2010.)

The process of mapping a customer journey starts with gathering exciting research. The research is divided into two types of research: analytical and anecdotal. Analytical research may consist of website analytics, social media analytics, and customer data such as customer survey results. Anecdotal research consists of user experiences. It might include customer interviews or interviews or workshops with employees who work close to the customers. The main idea is to get crucial information about a customer's experience with a brand. (Boag 2019.)

The second step of mapping a customer journey is defining a timeline of stages (Richardson 2010). The stages vary depending on the nature of a company's product or service. The stages may be such as discovery, research, purchase, delivery, and after-sales. After defining the stages, critical information for a customer in each stage is defined. (Boag 2019.) This framework consists of four areas: actions, motivations, questions, and barriers. Actions define what the customer is doing at each stage. Furthermore, what are the actions taken in order to move to the next stage. Motivations

define customer's motivation to continue to the next stage and what are the emotional motivators that make them care to continue the customer journey. Questions define the possible uncertainties or other issues preventing the customer from moving to the next stage. Lastly, Barriers define the structural, cost, implementation, or other barriers that are on the way of moving on to the next stage. (Richardson 2010.) After covering these areas, customer touchpoints are defined. The customer touchpoints tell how does the customer interact with the brand at each point. (Boag 2019.)

5.2 Customer touchpoints

Customer touchpoints are points of customer contact with a brand, which occur before, during, or after they purchase something from the brand (SurveyMonkey 2019). Understanding and defining customer touchpoints are crucial for a company. It allows a company to measure and to develop their customer experience and to increase their sales. (Interaction Design Foundation 2019.)

Identifying customer touchpoints starts with making a list of all the places and times that a customer is in contact with the brand. According to SurveyMonkey, the customer touchpoints could be the following listed in the table. Before a purchase, the touchpoints are focusing on sources outside the company. These are such as social media, word of mouth, or advertising. During purchase, the customer is in contact with the company. The touchpoints may then be a website, sales team, or a phone system. The contact with the customer continues still after the purchase. These contact points can be billing, marketing emails, or service and support teams. (SurveyMonkey 2019.)

After identifying the contact touchpoints, a company has to make sure that each touchpoint helps to deliver the journey on customers' expectations. That can be measured through studies and surveys about customer experience. (SurveyMonkey 2019.)

5.3 Customer experience

Customer experience is the response that customers have to direct and indirect contact with a company (Meyer & Schwager 2017). It is the impression that a company leaves with its customers, resulting in how the customer thinks of a brand. The stages

throughout the company's customer journey create the experience. Besides, multiple touchpoints, which occur on a cross-functional basis, factor into the customer experience. (Bordeaux 2019.) The customer usually initiates direct contact with a company. It generally occurs in the course of purchase, use, and service. However, indirect contact often involves unplanned encounters with a company or its goods, such as recommendations, reviews, news reports, and advertising (Meyer & Schwager 2017).

Digital customer experience management lies in understanding how people interact with a brand online. (Qualtrics 2019) In modern customer experience, digital and physical touchpoints combine seamlessly. Digital touchpoints support the customer along his purchase path and often also blend into physical encounters. Digital customer experience is not an integral part of the customer experience. It is an increasingly important part of the overall brand image. (Kytösalmi 2019.)

Digitalization has changed the customers' expectations in all the fields, both in B-to-B and B-to-C business. (Kytösalmi 2019.) Companies must find their approach for delivering exceptional experiences to their customers and by leveraging the proper solutions and technologies (Gilliam Haije 2019). Besides, the development cycle has become shorter, and the results need to be responded to more quickly. In a digital environment, piloting new experiences and concepts is mainly faster than in a physical environment. (Kytösalmi 2019.) As an example, according to Forrester's survey, customers are turning more to digital for support. Customers prefer to be in contact through the web or mobile self-service more than speaking with agents over the phone. (Leggett 2016.)

Omnichannel marketing is becoming increasingly important when managing customer experience. Omnichannel is based on using multiple channels and building a unified customer experience where the channels complete each other as seamlessly as possible. Like this, the customer may select the channel which they prefer. Companies need to identify the channels that are most relevant to the customer experience and prioritize development work accordingly. (Kytösalmi 2019.)

6 IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RESEARCH

Seven individual semi-structured interviews executed the research. There were two separate interview frames, one for customers and one for the employees. Five customers were interviewed, and two employees. The objective of the interview was to get more detailed information of Company X's customer journey in both customers' and employees' perspectives.

A semi-structured interview is a theme interview where the questions are defined and executed so that the information from different interviews is comparable. It usually includes both closed-response questions and open-ended probe questions; as a result, to get a combination of quantitative and qualitative data. (Guthrie 2010, 120.) However, it focuses mainly on qualitative data. Usually, the interviews are conducted as personal one-on-one interviews or group interviews. Pointing out the cross-check viewpoints from different interviewees is an essential part of a semi-structured interview. (Guthrie 2010, 121.) In this study, the interviews were personal one-on-one interviews that were executed face-to-face or on the phone.

This thesis was viewed as case study. Case study is one of the qualitative research types. The objective of a case study is to have a deep understanding of the subject or problem from the perspective of the individual. As a result specific information about a subject or problem is gained. Case studies are used for smaller sampling and do not give information in questions such as which option to take, which require a larger sample. They seek to find patterns from data rather than testing of theories and research hypothesis. As the subject is regarded in depth case-by-case, it leaves more place for new ideas than quantitative research methods, which are based on a systematic research of a subject or problem. (Guthrie 2010, 66-67,70-71)

The interview frame was constructed based on the given material to get information to fill the blank and to gain a more in-depth understanding of the journey. Data-analysis was executed through content analysis to obtain a theoretical unit of the qualitative data. The data was analyzed using inductive logic, which means that general information was created through individual cases. The qualitative data was classified in specific types, which means collecting the information based on illustrative types. Also, the data was analyzed by classification, and it was studied how the different classes occurred in the data. The analysis looks at features emerging from the dataset that are common to

several interviewees, as well as cross-check viewpoints. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2002, 95-97.) The conclusions are often regarded as the most important part of a study, as it gives answers to the research subject or problem. It is important to bring up possible errors or inaccuracies regarding the circumstances. (Hirsjärvi etc. 231-232.)

Other information used in the thesis was based on the the given material, personal communication with the principal, and own perceptions. These methods, as well as the interviews, made it possible to get a holistic picture of the present situation on the customer journey.

6.1 Company X's customer journey regarding customers

The customers interviewed were from five different fields and in a responsible position such as a manager or director. The interviews were executed face to face and by phone.

The first touchpoints of the customers vary a lot. One of the five customers interviewed got to know Company X through Facebook Advertisement, one from owner's Instagram, one through a shared customer, one from a family relationship, and one from a previous employer of the owner of Company X. To streamline the results, two of the customers had their first touchpoint in digital channels, and three of the five based on physical circumstances.

Four of the five customers interviewed do continuous co-operation with Company X. They are often in contact though email or phone, and in average more than once a month. The offered services vary between these four customers. Three of the five customers said that the co-operation includes website maintenance and support. For one of those three customers, Company X offers continuous search engine optimization for their website. In addition, Company X offers data analysis and reporting of the results and points of improvement for four out of the five customers interviewed.

When the customers are communicating with Company X, it is based on both digital and physical interactions. All five customers have met someone from Company X face to face. Three of the customers have had their first physical contact with someone from Company X before the purchase, and two of them during or after the purchase. However, most of the communication is digital, which includes phone calls, emails, and virtual meetings. All of the five customers have been in contact with Company X after their first project, and two of them have already purchased additional services. One of them

explained their interest towards purchasing new services in the future: “We will also be happy to buy from Company X in the future. It doesn't make sense for us to have too many players in the loop when we have so few staff and our website is not our core business, so one partner is the most workable solution.”

All five customers are satisfied with their work, and they would recommend Company X's services to other companies. One described: “We're very satisfied with Company X's service and with the representative who's been very helpful, responsive and successful at pointing out area of improvement.”

There have not been any bigger challenges during the co-operation. Three of the five customers have had smaller issues such as modifications and technical issues, which were solved rapidly by Company X. One customer said “I would describe the operation as very flexible, customer friendly. Sometimes you can't reach people even with money, but Company X is quick to respond. We have liked that we are always dealing with the same people, and that people have not changed. Though, I'm not sure if this approach is optimal for Company X itself in terms of time management.”

6.2 Company X's customer journey regarding to employees

From Company X, two people were interviewed. The first interviewee was one of Company X's founders and chief technology officer. His work assignments that require contact with the customers are sales meetings and certain milestones that require customer input, such as project workshops, emails, virtual meetings, and phone calls. Also, after the project, he is in contact with the customers when it comes to maintenance and reporting. The second interviewee was Company X's sales representative. His work assignments that require customer are outreach with email or phone, client meetings before purchase, and back and forth discussion through email. Both of them said that the contact points are both digital and physical, and the ratio between the two is quite even. Physical touchpoints are face-to-face meetings or workshops, and digital touchpoints are virtual meetings, phone, and email. However, they outlined that after the purchase or project, communication is based more on digital channels. They both said that they could imagine that some of the sales and marketing parts could be automated by saying: “Considering our process, some of the sales and marketing parts could probably be automated, at least on some level.” The second interviewee outlined that

with automation, some of the personalization could disappear, which might affect the customer experience.

The first interviewee described that Company X's customer journey starts with a touchpoint such as a blog, advertisement, website, or social media. The next step after the first touchpoint is booking, which means booking a client meeting mainly by phone, and sometimes by email. The following steps are meeting, offer, and contract. After the contract, the work starts, which is a project in most cases. After the project, the customer relationship is taken care of with regular maintenance. The second interviewee described that the customer journey is very customer-centric, and the needs and ways of buying of different customers are taken into consideration. The first interviewee said that the customer journey is clear, and the second one told that it is only partly clear.

The customer touchpoints before purchase were well-described from both interviewees. The customer touchpoints mentioned by both were such as a blog, paid advertisement, social media, newsletter, website, free analysis, and meetings. The second interviewee added an offer and approval of the offer as customer touchpoints. From the answers could be noticed that the customer touchpoints before and when making the purchase are more apparent than after the purchase. Both of the interviewees stated that in order to upsell in the future, data is in a crucial role. Besides, the first interviewee said that they need to be proactive and to gain trust if they want to succeed in upselling: "By gaining trust and being proactive during the customer relationship. Our collection of data supports upsell in the future."

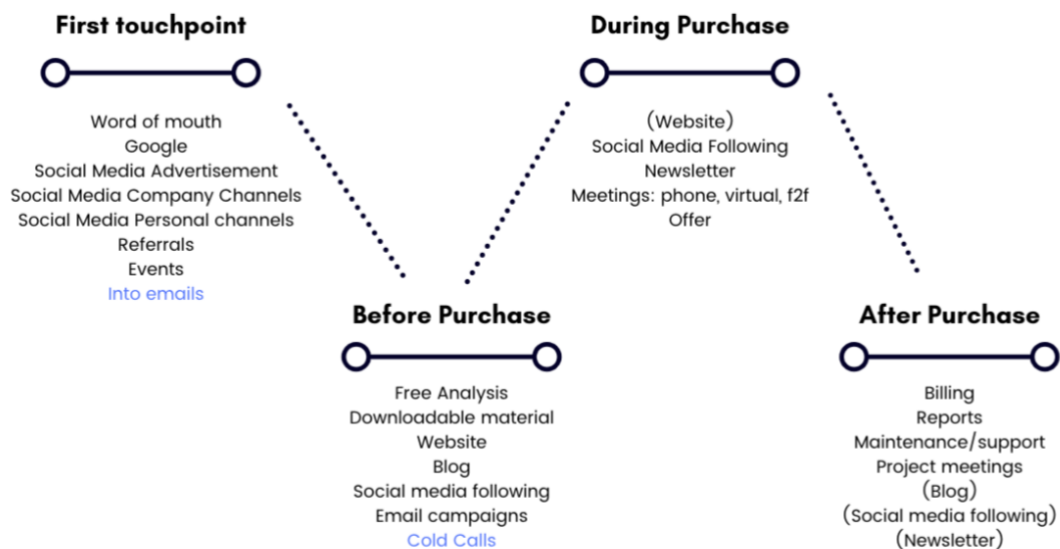
Both the interviewees said that Company X's customers are satisfied. However, they did not agree if customer satisfaction is measured or not. The challenges in the customer journey that came up during the interviews were getting to the meeting table, understanding what is the need of the customer and completing the project on time, which is primarily the outcome of not getting the customer materials on time. The first interviewee said that a good booker would solve the problem of getting to the negotiation tables. The second interviewee told that open project management where the customer could be invited could solve the communication and project management challenges. He said: "We could use any project management tools and invite the customers in there to see what is happening and when + we could assign tasks to the customers. Things like materials for x by the time x."

7 CUSTOMER JOURNEY AT COMPANY X

In this chapter the customer journey is reviewed on three levels: customer touchpoints, operations during the customer journey and the customer journey phases. The customer journey is explained from the first touchpoint with the company to maintaining the customer relationship. The information is provided as a diagram as well as explained in writing.

7.1 Customer touchpoints

The touchpoints during the customer journey are divided into four stages: first touchpoint, before purchase, during purchase and after purchase.



Picture 2 Customer touchpoints during the customer journey

Company X's customer's journey starts when the customer has their first experience with them. There are seven touchpoints, which can act as the first touchpoint for a customer. These touchpoints can be divided into two different categories, physical and digital touchpoints. Company X's physical touchpoints are word of mouth and events. These two touchpoints are valuable, as the customer gets directly a personal experience with someone who is representing the brand. Digital touchpoints are Google, social media

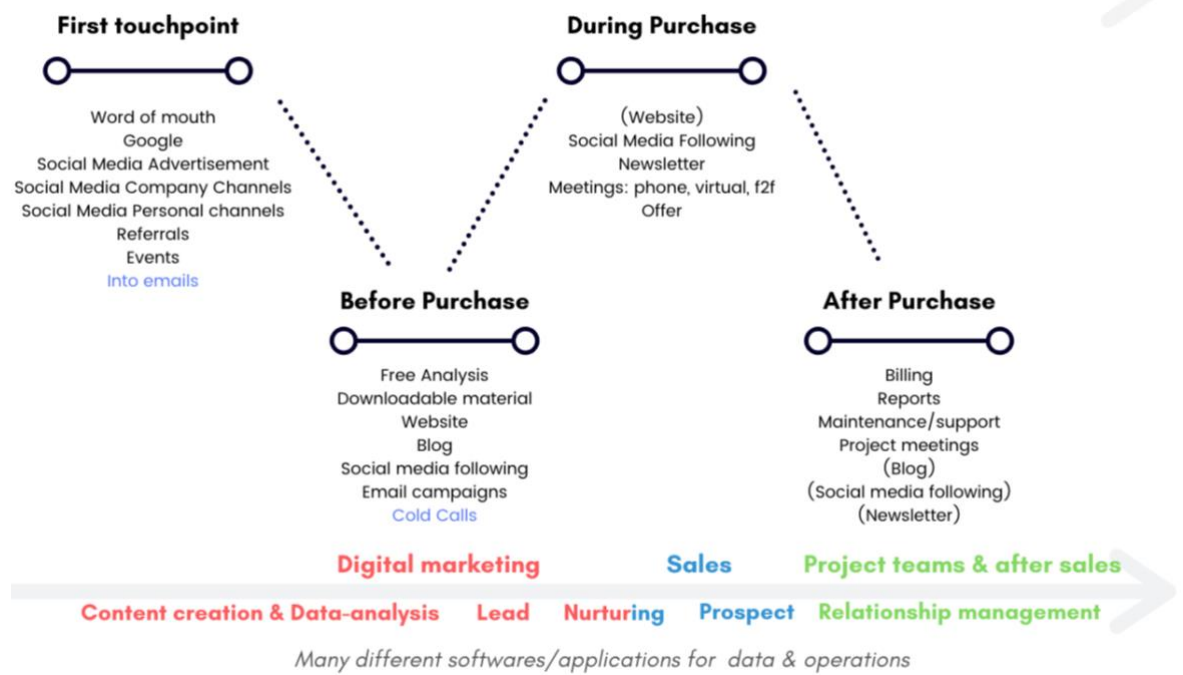
advertisements, social media company channels, social media personal channels, referrals, and email. These digital touchpoints are divided into two categories, inbound, and outbound. Most of the digital channels are categorized as inbound. However, in most cases, email is only used for outbound; for example, before cold calling. The objective is that the customer has an experience with the brand already before the call. In the picture 2 the outbound touchpoints are marked with blue.

When customers have had their first view of the brand, they continue to discover and evaluate. Before the purchase, it is necessary to be able to give the information that adds value to the customer. There are seven touchpoints before the purchase at Company X; free analysis, downloadable material, website, blog, social media following, email campaigns, and phone. Through these interactions, customers will get valuable information to fulfill their needs, and through that, a better understanding of Company X's offering. The customers evaluate the given material and the experience they have had with the brand. Accordingly, the company will get information on the customers' needs and encourage them towards the next step.

As the customer takes the step closer to the purchase, the touchpoints are a website, social media following, newsletter, meetings, and offer. The touchpoints are pointing towards a customer relationship. The customer knows that there is a need that must be fulfilled, but is still evaluating the options. It is crucial to go to the core of the need and to provide valuable information to fulfill that need. As the customer decides to purchase, the touchpoints include billing, reports, maintenance and followup meetings. It might as well include social media following, blog and newsletter depending on customer's wishes.

7.2 Operations during the customer journey

The operations during the customer journey are content creation and data-analysis, lead, nurturing, sales, and relationship management. These phases include different channels, methods and operations.



Picture 3 The connection between the operations and the touchpoints during the customer journey.

Company X is active in different digital channels, mainly on the internet. Their digital marketing strategy is to offer valuable content to their followers, which attracts potential customers to explore more and finally to convert. The different tactics they use are SEO, content marketing, conversion optimization, and develop their digital marketing based on data. During the touchpoints before purchase, the objective of digital marketing is to create content, which captures the interest of potential customers and offers value for them.

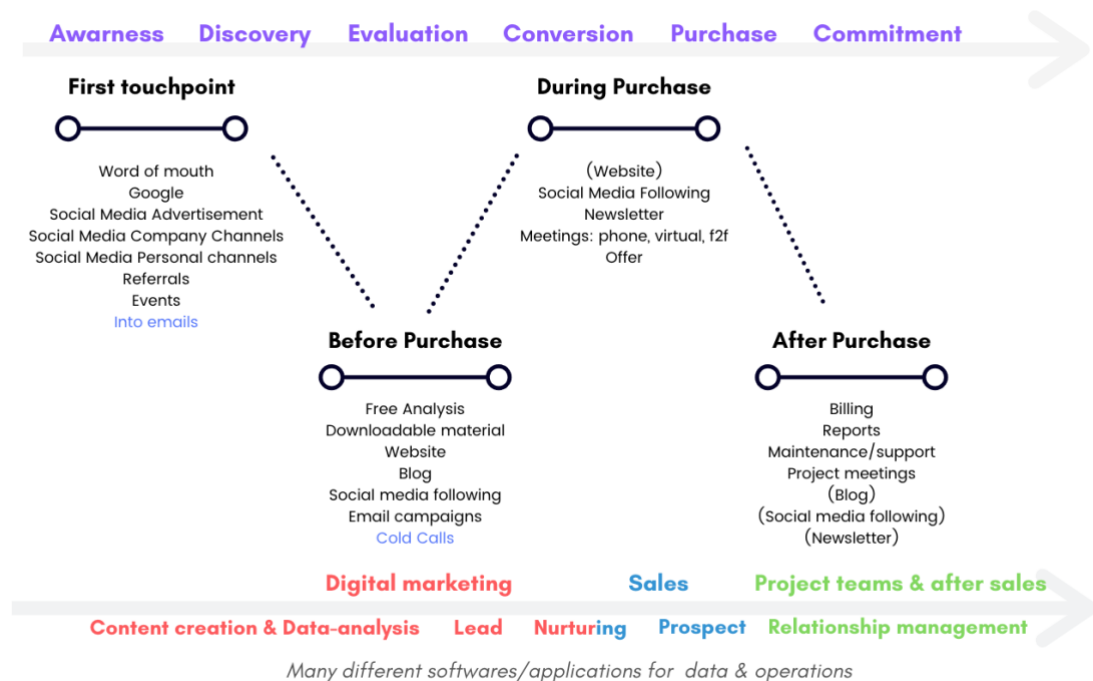
Furthermore, the aim is to generate content, collect data, measure results, and improve the content, so that the customers will convert into leads. To convert means that the potential customer makes a sign of interest towards the company, for example, by downloading a free guide. After the customer has converted into a lead, the lead is nurtured. In this context, to nurture means taking care of the lead, offering valuable information to fulfill the needs of the lead and to collect data of its operations. As the lead gives signs of intentions to buy, it becomes a prospect. When the lead becomes a prospect, marketing gives the customer over to the sales team. After that, the sales team is in contact with the customers and offers a solution to their needs. When a prospect becomes a customer, operations concerning the customer relation management take

action. Also, digital marketing is present through newsletters, blogs, and social media following.

Company X does not have a CRM system to monitor and manage the customer relationship. They use Microsoft's cloud software to share information. In their SharePoint, they have a folder for every client and business function. That is where the sales and project information is documented. To follow the sales process, they have built sales and project paths to Microsoft's software, Teams, which is their primary channel for communication. They do not have one view where all information of a customer, from lead to customer, can be viewed. Their documents are based in the cloud, but a user must use different applications to access the information of the different phases of the customer journey.

7.3 Customer journey phases

The customer journey consists of six phases: awareness, discovery, evaluation, conversion, purchase and relationship management.



Picture 4 The connection between Company X's customer journey's phases, touchpoints, and digital marketing operations presented.

The journey starts with an awareness of the brand. Awareness is created through the first touchpoints, which are mainly operated by marketing and sales. The customer continues to discover the brand through available information. As the customers are discovering the brand, they look for answers to their questions and solutions to their problems. Furthermore, they want to find out whether their needs can be fulfilled or not. That is when they start evaluating the given information. At this point, they might provide their contact information to receive more information, but they are not ready to buy. The touchpoints during phases discovery, evaluation, and conversion are the touchpoints before purchase. Based on their assessment, they choose to convert. Converting is a direct sign of intent to buy, which means that the touchpoints are becoming more personal.

In most cases, after converting, the customer has a meeting or two with a representative and receives an offer. After receiving the offer, the customer is still weighing the options and might put the offer out to tender. At this point Company X's representative is in contact with the customer to the offer through together with the customer. Company X's team deals with the customer's concerns and answers to questions. As the customer decides to purchase, the phase of commitment management starts to develop directly. Relationship management includes all the touchpoints after the purchase, which lead to commitment by time.

8 CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND EVALUATION

In this chapter, the results of the study will be analyzed, and recommendations are given. The objective of the study was to define the customer journey, to explain it, and to provide recommendations based on the analysis. The principal did not have a customer journey defined. They had identified a customer process streamlined, which was used as a material in this study along side with other materials. In this study the customer journey was defined in three levels: phases, operations and customer touchpoints. During the definition of the customer journey new parts of the journey were pointed out. Also, the connection between the three levels was identified.

The customers are satisfied with their journey at Company X. They feel like their wishes are taken into consideration, and needs are fulfilled. The customer experience is highly personalized, and the customers appreciate that. The study shows that employees' knowledge of the phases, touchpoints, and operations is not on a commendable level. The employees explain the customer journey differently and do not agree on all the details of the customer journey, which confirmed the need to define the customer journey. As the company is growing, and there will be more people in touch with one customer, it will get more challenging to offer a personalized customer journey which respects the company values and leads to long-term relationships. It is crucial to be able to standardize the operations during the journey, so that the results can be measured, analyzed and developed. It would be recommended to make the presentation of the customer journey as a part of the workplace orientation.

The customer journey was defined on three levels: the phases, the touchpoints, and the operations. The connection between the levels was analyzed and identified. Based on the results was found that physical contact with the customer is most important in the purchase phase. The challenge during the customer journey is to control the entity of different channels and applications and to be able to pinpoint the most relevant information. Primarily the challenges lie in the phases evaluation, conversion, and commitment.

The phases evaluation and conversion happen mainly in digital channels. Due to digitalization and the changing buyer behaviors, a company must be able to give a

personalized and seamless experience without meeting the customer physically. The challenge in the evaluation phase is that principal has no tracking over the possible customers digital moves. Based on the analysis, a marketing automation tool would be recommended. The help of the tool would cover the phases from awareness to conversion by clearing the data and pointing out the most important actions during these phases. In addition, a more personalized experience could be offered as the digital path of a customer could be tracked.

The company's operations are mainly built on manual work and the employees agree that some tasks for lead nurturing could be automated. Marketing automation tool would bring the data from different sources together. With the help of a marketing automation tool, the customers in the evaluation phase could receive personalized reminders through digital channels such as social media, websites and email. A marketing automation tool would automate some parts of the lead nurturing, such as emailing, which would free resources for other tasks. Also, CRM software would be recommended, as it could be integrated with the marketing automation tool. A marketing automation tool would give a clear view of each customer's journey and that information would be transmitted to the CRM software. This intergration means that also the sales and after-sales could use the information to build trust and upsell when meeting with the customer.

The study shows that the relationship management is another phase which might have challenges in the future. As the company was founded so recently, there are not many cases to look at when it comes to customer relationship management. After the purchase, the operations focus on maintaining and improving the service, which directly affects customer satisfaction. However, based on the results of the study can be stated that there are no operations defined for maintaining the relationship and upselling. Follow up reports are often a part of the services, but in most cases, they do not include meetings. It would be recommended to set up standardized follow up procedures to maintain and improve the customer retention, and to upsell. When the operations are regulated, the process becomes more efficient, and the results can be measured, analyzed, and improved. The procedures could include actions to build trust, such as scheduled followup meetings, customer letters or customer satisfaction surveys. Also, a shared portal with customers where they could have all their customer information managed, could support both the trend of digitalization and the evolution of the customer relationship.

CRM software is recommended as all the customer data could be stored in one central location. CRM software allows the company to trace at which phase the customers are on their journey and to allocate resources wisely to advance suitable customers with their journey. Also, the software helps to standardize the process as the information is structured and readily available. CRM software would replace some of the applications used for sales and customer relationship management at the moment.

The results of this study can be used in workplace orientation and as base material when developing the customer journey and its phases. Follow-up studies are recommended in order to gain a wider perspective and keep up the information of the changes in the customer journey.

8.1 Evaluation of the results

This section describes the reliability of this study. The evaluation of the results and conclusions of the study must take into account the possibility of errors in the results. The results of this study are based on individual cases, which do not cover all the circumstances.

In reality, the customer journey is a more complex entity, and depending on factors that were not taken into account in this study. The objective of this study was to define and analyze the customer journey and to give recommendations for improvement. Based on the assigned material, it was possible to identify the customer journey and to provide recommendations. However, the study could go further into the details, and each part of the study could be studied individually. Before moving forward with the recommendations, it is recommended to study the subject further in detail..

The challenge in this study was the reliability of the material used for the theory section. As the subject is continuously developing and evolving, the content becomes rapidly obsolete. As there is not much valid scientific information available, most of the references are websites or articles. The challenge with these references is that they might be written by a person who does not have professionalism in the field or they are not based on valid data.

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Appendix

Appendix 1. Interview frame customers

1.Name

2.Role

3.Where did you find Company X and how did you get to know their services?

4.What type co-operation did you do with Company X? Was it a one-time project or did you agree on continuous co-operation?

5.How were/are you in contact with Company X during the co-operation?

6.How have you been in contact with Company X after the co-operation?

7.Have you purchased new services after the first service you purchased from them?

8.Which of the contact points were/are digital?

9.Would you recommend their services to other companies?

10.Are you satisfied with their work?

Yes/No

11.Has there been any challenges? What?

12.How they were solved?

Appendix 2. **Interview frame employees**

1.Name, company, role:

2.Which of your work assignments require contact with the customer?

3.Are you in contact with the customers mainly f2f or digitally? the ratio between the two?

4.Do you think some of the contact points could be automated? Which?

5.How would you describe a customer's journey at Company X?

6. Is the customer journey at Company X clear for you?

Yes /No /Partly

7.What are the customer touchpoints for Company X's customers?

- Before purchase

- During the co-operation

- After purchase

8.How do you upsell in the future?

9.How do you manage the customer relationship?

10.Do Company X's customers recommend the services to others?

11.Do you measure customer satisfaction?

Yes/No

12.What are the biggest challenges during the customer journey?

13.Do you think these challenges / issues could be solved? How?

Appendix 3. **Company X client process**

