



Marketing development for “The Solar Company”

Improving the sales process and generating high quality leads in a cost-effective way

Jesse Mikkonen

EXAMENSARBETE	
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<p>Sammandrag:</p> <p>Syftet med detta arbete var att skapa ett dokument med förslag på hur The Solar Company kunde förbättra sin försäljningsprocess och öka sin lead generering på ett kostnadseffektivt sätt. Företaget är verksam inom installation av solenergi och elbils-laddningsstationer. Företaget behövde en analys av deras nuvarande situation och en lista över konkreta idéer om hur de kunde förbättra sina marknadsföringsmetoder för att generera mer högkvalitativa leads och stärka dess position i de mest lönsamma segmenten. Med hjälp av denna avhandling kommer företaget utveckla en plan för att öka synligheten och locka nya kunder till företaget. Skribenten strävar att ta reda på vilka faktorer som påverkar kundernas beslut vid val av installationsföretag för solpaneler och att ta reda på nya metoder för marknadsföring av företaget på ett kostnadseffektivt sätt. Informationen från intervjuerna användes för att hjälpa till att välja lämpliga marknadsföringsverktyg och metoder för olika kundgrupper.</p> <p>En kvalitativ metod tillämpades för att analysera uppgifterna för den nuvarande försäljningsprocessen, marknadsföringskostnaderna för de nuvarande metoderna företaget använder sig av och identifiera specifika kundsegment som är mest lukrativa för företaget i form av vinstmarginaler och snabb försäljningscykel. Studien inkluderar en tillämpning av marknadsföringsteori, marknadsföringsmetoder online och författarens erfarenheter från att arbeta inom branschen.</p>	
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Author:	Jesse Mikkonen
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Supervisor (Arcada):	Robert Henriksson
Commissioned by:	
<p>Abstract:</p> <p>The aim of this bachelor’s thesis was to create a list of suggestions of how The Solar Company could improve its sales process and increase its lead generation in a cost-effective way. The company operates in the field of solar energy installation and EV-charging stations. The company needed a structured analysis of their current situation and a list of concrete ideas of how they could improve their marketing methods to generate more high-quality leads and to strengthen its position in the most profitable segments. The main reason for conducting this thesis was to improve the sales process and achieve a plan to gain more visibility and attract new customers to the company. The objective of the thesis was to find out what factors influence the decision making of customers when choosing the solar installation company and to find out new methods for marketing the company in a cost-effective way. The information gathered from the in-depth interviews was used in order to assist in the selection of appropriate marketing tools and methods for different customer groups.</p> <p>A qualitative method was used to analyze the data of the current sales process, marketing costs of the current methods the company is using, and identify specific customer segments that are most lucrative for the company in form of profit margins and fast sales cycle. The study includes an application of marketing theory, online marketing methods, and the author’s experiences from working in this field.</p>	
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<p>Tiivistelmä:</p> <p>Tämän opinnäytetyön tavoitteena oli luoda luettelo ehdotuksista siitä, kuinka The Solar Company voisi parantaa myyntiprosessiaan ja kasvattaa liidigenerointiaan kustannustehokkaalla tavalla. Yhtiö toimii aurinkoenergian ja sähköautojen-latausasemien alalla. Yhtiö tarvitsi analyysin heidän nykytilanteestaan ja luettelon konkreettisista ideoista, kuinka he voisivat parantaa markkinointimenetelmiään tuottaakseen enemmän laadukkaita liidejä ja vahvistaakseen asemaansa kannattavimmilla segmenteillä. Tärkein syy opinnäytetyön suorittamiseen oli myyntiprosessin ja näkyvyyden parantaminen, sekä uusien asiakkaiden löytäminen kustannustehokkaalla tavalla. Opinnäytetyön tavoitteena oli selvittää mitkä tekijät vaikuttavat asiakkaiden päätöksentekoon valitessaan aurinkopaneelien asennusliikettä ja löytää uusia menetelmiä yrityksen markkinoimiseksi kustannustehokkaalla tavalla. Haastatteluista kerättyä tietoa käytettiin auttamaan sopivien markkinointityökalujen ja menetelmien valinnassa eri asiakasryhmille.</p> <p>Kvalitatiivisella menetelmällä analysoitiin nykyisen myyntiprosessin tiedot, yrityksen käyttämien nykyisten menetelmien markkinointikustannukset ja tunnistettiin yritykselle tuottoisimmat asiakassegmentit voittomarginaalien ja nopean myyntisyklin muodossa. Tutkimus sisältää markkinointiteorian soveltamista, digimarkkinointimenetelmiä sekä kirjoittajan kokemukset alalla työskentelystä.</p>	
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1 INTRODUCTION

Solar energy is a rapidly growing form of energy production and its share of Finland's total electricity production is only around 0,2% at the moment, but the situation will most likely change in the future. Since 2016, the grid-connected solar capacity in Finland has doubled every year. Right now, the world's leading nations are devoting most of their research resources in the energy sector to technologies based on renewable energy sources. Finland is increasingly doing the same (Breyer 2020)

According to Fonecta, there are around 130 companies in Finland that install solar panels, of which many are smaller companies that do other electrical work as well. According to Salesman A, the competition has grown significantly in the past years because of the increased demand. (Fonecta 2020, Salesman A)

1.1 Problem statement

The Solar Company's marketing has consisted so far of attending fairs and events, and some minor sponsored, seasonal campaigns on Facebook and Google. The Solar Company has been operating in the field of solar energy over 10 years and has been growing fast in the past three years (2017-2020), which has resulted in a need of modernization of the sales process. The main method of finding new customers, has been salesmen searching for suitable roofs on Google Maps and contacting prospects by phone, and attending fair. This thesis will conduct suggestions to the marketing team and management to improve the understanding of which promotion methods are most suitable for the different segments in the market.

1.2 Aim of the study

The aim of this thesis is to develop the marketing strategy for a company that works in the field of solar panel sales and installations in Finland. The company wishes to remain anonymous and will be called "The Solar Company" in this thesis. The aim is to develop the current marketing plan that supports the company's goals and strategy and define and develop the methods that will help the company to focus their marketing on segments with a short sales cycle and high profit rate. The plan will also include a timeline for events that are suitable for promotions in

relation to factors like government issued subsidies and other factors that affects the sales cycle in different segments. The main focus will be on optimizing the generation of high-quality leads in a cost-effective way with a focus on the high margin segments with a short sales cycle.

1.3 Limitations

All research papers are in some way limited and the topics discussed in this thesis are broad enough for it to be impossible to describe or explain all existing theoretical knowledge related to these concepts in one paper.

Therefore, the author aimed to limit the topics and the literature sources in this thesis based on relevancy and comprehensiveness, focusing mainly on choosing literature supporting the purpose of this research.

The empirical part of this research has a focus on exploring how the sales process in The Solar Company could be improved and which new marketing methods could be implemented to improve the results of lead generation both in terms of quality and quantity.

Since the salesforce who provided the author with a great amount of information, are a part of the company this thesis is based on, the information gathered in the interviews cannot be seen as totally objective. The salesforce may have answered questions only based on their own experiences, without necessarily thinking of the sales process from a neutral point of view.

However, the author believes he did his best to investigate the topic, in order to gain a neutral and objective view of The Solar Company's current situation regarding the topic and implement the theoretical aspects in order to improve the sales process.

1.4 Presentation of the company

The Solar Company has been operating in the field of solar energy over 10 years. From 2010 to 2017 the main customer base for the company was summer houses and private homes and

the typical size of an installation was between 10 to 20 panels. The company attended fairs and events where they collected leads, that they contacted and went to visit and left an offer at the customer. The sales cycle was short (1-4 weeks from first contact to installation) and on a typical week the sales would be around 30 000-50 000€ with a profit margin of 25%.

(Salesman A)

Since 2017 the B2B and agricultural segments grew significantly, as a result of a major decline in the price of solar panels on the global market, and increased need among companies to show that they are doing their part in the fight against climate change. The challenge with the increasing demand in the B2B sector was that the sales cycle is significantly longer. There is also the factor of government subsidies issued by Business Finland and ELY that includes an added workload to the salesforce. The processing time of an application for different subsidies can take several months and especially for agricultural customers, there is a lot of bureaucracy involved. (Salesman A)

Another issue with the B2B segment is that the contact person rarely makes the decision on their own. They usually have to present the offer among a number of competitive offers to the board before they get their approval. There might also be third party consultants involved that compares the technical nature of the offers, evaluates them and recommends the best option based on their knowledge. The competition on the B2B sector is also significantly higher and the key factor that most customers focus on is price. This creates another issue for The Solar Company, since they have chosen to focus on high quality components, which are not the cheapest on the market. The main challenge is to communicate to the customer the benefits of investing in high quality components and explain why their solutions are the best.

(Salesman A)

2019 was a record year on many levels for The Solar Company. Not only did they reach 3 million in sales for the first time, but the pipeline was valued at 22 million in active offers. According to Salesman B, the customers in the B2B segment are clearly more educated than before and it can be seen in the increasingly more detailed offer request compared to previous years. (Salesman B)

Increased concern for the environment can also be seen in the customers attitudes. According to Salesman C, a large share of customers purchasing solar panels to their houses, are mainly motivated by the fight against global warming. Greta Thunberg have been mentioned by many customers and she clearly have inspired the more environmentally conscious population to do what they can. (Salesman C)

According to Salesman C, solar energy has become the new normal at many farms. Especially poultry and dairy farms consume enormous amounts of energy during the hot summer days, which is an ideal equation for solar energy, considering the 40% subsidy that is granted to farms. The return of invest is high, which is why this specific segment is growing at record speed. Many of The Solar Company's competitors have noticed this too, which leads to an extremely high competition over these customers.

(Salesman C)

Major chains in the supermarket segment have already made huge investments in solar energy and this trend seem to be continuing at the same pace as before. Many companies working in logistics have been showing increased interest in solar energy. Considering the electrification of the logistical fleet, many of these companies will according to Salesman B realise that solar energy is an obvious addition to the charging stations needed for their electrical fleets. Car dealerships and mechanical shops has been according to Salesman B the big surprise segment of 2019. (Salesman B)

Apartment houses and condominiums has according to Salesman B been able to apply for a 20% subsidy, since January 2020. The decision-making process within this segment is known to be long and complicated so it's still unclear how the emphasis will change toward this category, despite the new subsidy opportunity. According to Salesman B, the focus for this segment will still heavily be on the EV-charging stations and solar energy could work as an add-on feature, instead of the other way around as it usually is.

(Salesman B)

1.5 The structure of the study

1.5.1 Theory

The theoretical part of the study includes the following theories:

- *Lead generation* based on Jörg Holenz theories about the marketing process where potential customers interest towards a company is mapped and categorized.
- *Inbound marketing*, based on Patrick Bugeja's theories on how downloadable online content can help companies to profile and gather information about the customers who are genuinely interested in the company's products.
- *Sales funnel*, based on Tapani Määttä's theories of the path a customer walks through during the purchasing process, including the four main parts of this funnel, which are Awareness, Interest, Decision and Action.
- *Pipeline management*, based on Gerardus Blokdyk's theories about how pipeline management can be implemented and used by a company's sales department to produce a strong forecast of the upcoming sales for the company
- *A 4P's marketing mix*, based on Santiago Lopez's analysis of Philip Kotlers theory of the four Ps which are the four essential factors when a product or service is being marketed. The four Ps are the product, price, place, and promotion.
- Other theoretical aspects of marketing channels such as online marketing, fairs, and promotional events and word of mouth marketing. These theories will work as a base for the study in order to develop the understanding of the possibilities there are with different marketing channels.

1.5.2 Method

The author has conducted multiple in-depth interviews with the salesforce, customers, marketing professionals and the former chairman for the Green League Party in Finland. The author have chosen in-depth interviews as the primary method for gather information for this thesis, because the aim was to gather as much detailed information about the company's sales process and marketing methods, political aspects and the customers personal experiences as possible.

Roughly half of the interviews were conducted face to face at The Solar Company's office, and the other half was conducted by videocall because of the ongoing Covid-19 restrictions. The author conducted an interview guide for the salesforce, the customers and the politician and used a laddering technique during the interviews, by asking follow-up questions based on the interviewee's answers.

By analyzing the information gathered from the interviews combined with the information from literature handling the topic, the author will present suggestion of how The Solar Company should change their marketing methods in order to attract more potential customers.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Marketing

Marketing is, in its simplest form the way companies boost their position in the competition for the customer's interest, time and money. The customers' true needs are important to be identified to know what customers expect of the product or service and ideally exceed the expectations for guaranteed customer satisfaction. "The goal of marketing is to gain more visibility in the market and boost the company's sales." (Kotler & Keller 2012 p.34)

In a competitive marketplace such as the solar energy industry in Finland, where even small details in the marketing strategy can be vital for gaining market share, marketing managers and company leaders have increased interests in qualitative research methods such as depth interviews and other observational methods. "The ability to analyze the results of marketing campaigns and fairs, requires relevant, evidence-based and practical consumer insights." (Belk 2013 p.134)

Understanding how customers reacts to the company's image and the products and services they are providing can help managers to detect where the opportunities and problems lie. (Belk 2013 p.135)

2.1.1 Lead generation

A lead is a person who has in some way indicated an interest in a company or its products or services. Lead generation, on the other hand, refers to the marketing process where potential customers interest towards a company is mapped and categorized. Lead generation also include some sort of promotional campaign which purpose is to attract potential customers to become interested in the product or service they didn't know they needed or wanted before being exposed to the promotion. (Holenz 2015 p.82-84)

Modern mapping of sales prospects is digital. Modern technology, the internet, social media and digitalization have changed the lead sourcing process over the last ten years. The information available online has created a possibility for customer to efficiently research product information and read reviews of other customers, before approaching companies they are interested in. The rule according to Holenz is that a company must be present wherever the customer is and today that place is online. (Holenz 2015 p.88-92)

Marketing automation has enabled the development of new technologies, where finding leads, qualifying and categorizing them and importing them into a salesman's pipeline has taken an enormous step forward. By creating a working prospect tracking system, sales calls should according to Holenz no longer be unexpected contacts or annoying interruptions for the customer, but rather a value-adding follow up based on a prospects digital footprint. (Holenz 2015 p.92)

2.1.2 Inbound marketing

As a result of the information available online, a customer prepares their own purchasing process on their own time and at their own pace, usually by using Google, searching for answers, comparing and reading the reviews of other customers on the internet. According to Patrick Bugeja, a customer needs to be attracted to the online environment a product or service is provided in. Inbound marketing focus on relevant content from a customer's perspective and getting the customer interested in a company and its products or services through the content. (Bugeja 2018 p.62-65)

In the inbound marketing methodology, lead generation falls into step two of the digital sales funnel, a situation where a company has managed to attract new contacts to its digital environment. This is the time to begin the conversion process to convert these unknown visitors into identified contacts. (Bugeja 2018 62-65)

An inbound lead is a person who has found a company's website and has shown interest, either directly or indirectly, in the company's services or products and is identified, for example, by an email address or phone number. A visitor of a website becomes an inbound lead when someone is willing to give the company its "digital business card" in exchange of relevant, value-adding information such as an e-book, tutorial, educational video etc. (Bugeja 2018)

A landing page is created as the next step for the visitor to see after clicking on an ad online and its purpose is to get the visitor to provide their contact information, such as their email address, in exchange for some significant added value. (Bugeja 2018 p.62-65)

There should always be a form on each landing page. The kind of information asked in the form depends on what the company offers the visitor in return. A company should evaluate how much information the visitors are willing to give about themselves and how much of an effort it is to fill out the form. The basic idea of the trade is that the more information the visitor has to give about themselves, the greater the return has to be.

(Bugeja 2018 p.68-72)

The offer in inbound marketing is something that adds value to the visitor like an e-book, presentation or guide etc. In terms of lead generation, this is the core of the marketing mission, which is only properly targeted material that answers the visitor's questions and understands the lifecycle of a visitor's buying path, will convert them into valuable leads. There has to be enough added value to ensure that the visitor is converted into an identified lead. (Bugeja 2018 p.68-70)

2.1.3 Creating a sales funnel for solar energy



Figure 1: The Beginner's Guide to a Sales Funnel NOVEMBER 7, 2019

The sales funnel is a visualization of the path a customer walks through during the purchasing process. The four main parts of this funnel are Awareness, Interest, Decision and Action. The time spent in each step of the funnel is depending on the business and the buyer persona, and with the right methods, a salesman can speed up the process from interest to action. (Määttä 2017)

Awareness

According to Määttä, a salesman is typically in the strongest position when he manages to explain the reason to a problem the customer has and offer the solution in form of his products or services. A professional salesperson will help the customer identify their problems and provide a suitable solution that will solve the problem. This phase would be the awareness phase when the prospect learns about the nature of their problem and the solution the company can provide. (Määttä 2017)

Interest

When customer has accepted that he has a problem to solve, and that the solution the company is providing may add value in form of lower living or operating costs, now is the time when he expresses his interest in your product or service on a deeper level. When a customer enters this

phase in the purchasing process, the technical questions enters the game. Depending on the customers previous knowledge of the product, a series of questions about the origins of the panels, inverters and mounting mechanics will occur. (Määttä 2017)

This is the phase where the salesman needs to provide the customer with hard facts about the products he is providing and realistic comparison with competing products on the market. (Määttä 2017)

Decision

According to Määttä, email marketing is by far the most effective marketing channel when the customer has reached this stage. The company should provide the customer with precisely personalized, relevant and targeted mail.

At the decision-making stage, the company already has a strong contact with the customer. According to Määttä, the best content to serve the customer is high quality articles, success stories, guides, webinars and a professional and clear offer. According to Määttä, it's important to maintain regular contact with the customer and ask if there is something that can be improved in the offer. (Määttä 2017)

Action

This is when we enter the action phase. The customer is aware, interested, well informed and ready to pull the trigger. At this critical moment it's crucial for the salesman to crunch the numbers one more time and create a detailed timeline and budget for the project to get the final price he's willing to sell for. (Määttä 2017)

When the salesman gets the e-mail with an order, the usual procedure is to call and thank for the purchase and inform the customer of the projected timeline for delivery and installation. This is also an opportunity for some possible up-sale in form of additional products and services that the customer might enjoy. (Määttä 2017)

2.1.4 Pipeline management

Many sales organizations, including The Solar Company does not utilize pipeline management to its full capacity. According to Blokdyk, companies that doesn't use pipeline management do not realize the benefits, or do not know how to use their sales pipeline to produce a strong forecast for the company. (Blokdyk 2019 p.84-85)

Pipeline management is about managing prospects and leads efficiently and closing deals for projects in a continuous stream in a way that the production capacity is always optimally utilized. When the sales and production is uneven, it creates problems for the whole company (Blokdyk 2019 p.88-89)

2.1.5 Marketing mix 4Ps'

Companies use different types of marketing methods, depending on their positioning in the market, the competition they are facing and the customers they are trying to engage. Strategic choices are made based on the field of business the company is operating in. A well-established way of simplifying the factors companies should focus on is the 4P marketing mix. It contains in its simplicity of product, price, placement and promotion. Companies strive to optimize this market mix. The concept became known through management guru Philip Kotler. (Lopez 2020 p.92)

The four Ps':

Product - Customer solution. What need does it solve? How is it designed, and which additional services or upgrades does it have? When it comes to The Solar Company, the product is quite simple. The company offers solar panels, installed on the customers roof or land, including all the components needed for a complete PV system. The company also provides charging stations for electric cars which is a common additional product customers buy, if they either have or is planning to switch their car to an electric version.

The solar panels The Solar Company has chosen to provide to their customers is made by SHARP. This was a strategic choice since SHARP has been producing solar panels for over 60

years and the company itself has existed for over 100 years. According to Salesman A, the idea of having a well-established partner is to build trust in the customer by clearly communicating why the company as a sales and installation provider have chosen this specific brand as their main product including all its technical benefits long lasting warranties. (Salesman A)

Price – The Solar Company often communicate to its customers that they are not the cheapest option on the market. According to the interview with Salesman A the customer often reacts to this in a positive way and wishes to learn more about the reasons why the company is more expensive than some competitors and what added value the more expensive products has to offer compared to the cheaper options. (Salesman A)

Promotion – The promotion part is about how companies communicates with potential customers and tries to attract them to purchase their products and services. According to Miikka Linna, it's important to created targeted content for different customer segments to get them to react to an advertisement. With today's tools on social media and search engine optimization, companies have the possibilities to reach out to a specific target audience with a certain message that suits their needs. It could be considered a waste of resources if for example an ad for solar energy to farms would show on a private house owners feed in Helsinki. (Linna 2020)

Place - The fourth P in the marketing mix is about where and how the marketing and sales takes place. In The Solar Company's case the place is usually considered the southern half of Finland. According to Salesman A, the further away the customers are from Helsinki where most of the salesmen work, the greater importance there is for online sales possibilities, because of the high costs of physical sales meetings and transportation costs for the installation crew. (Salesman A)

2.1.6 Online marketing

According to Miikka Linna, CEO and founder of Sisältömiikka Oy which is a company that consults other companies with online marketing and lead generation, it's important to specify the needs of the customer and create highly targeted marketing that solves their exact problem, instead of creating a too broad message and try to attract all types of customers with the same

message. Since Google Ads and Facebook has made it possible to target a specific audience, it is incredibly important to use these tools when reaching out to the customers. Another thing that Linna points out as a dealbreaker when it comes to marketing on social media is the importance of subtitles of the voiceover in video material used in marketing on social media. This is important because according to Linna a huge majority of social media users scrolls their Facebook pages muted, which means they won't hear the message unless unmuted.

(Linna 2020)

2.1.7 Content and Search Engine Optimization

The most important factor in lead generation is that a company first need to get visitors to their website, and it can be achieved through well designed Search Engine Optimization. The flow of visitors must be of high quality, meaning visitors must be potential customers who are very likely to be interested in the products or services the company provide. (Clarke 2019 p.64)

Search engine optimization aims to indirectly promote the ranking of the target site in the organic search results of search engines. Organic search results are generally considered reliable, as paid ads are now clearly marked in search results. Visitor who ends up on a site through organic links is generally more likely to spend more time on the site and shop online.

(Clarke 2019 p.68)

According to Linna, a good way to think about when writing content for your website is “if I had just done a search on Google myself and clicked on my own site from the search results, would I be happy with the result or would I return to the search and go to another site?”

(Linna 2020)

2.1.8 Marketing on Social media

Optimizing the visibility of social media today is part of the whole of search engine optimization. Social media has come to stay and has changed a lot of the way people work online. This has also been understood by Google, when something is popular on Facebook, it means that people are interested in that information, which means it also deserves visibility in search engine results. (Patel 2017 p.168)

With a Facebook ad, a company can reach virtually anyone out of Facebook's users, and according to Dhaval Patel a company can create target groups based on a variety of factors, such as location, demographics, occupation, interests etc. In addition, the ad can be optimized for various purposes, such as directing people to a website or watching a video attached to the ad. A Facebook ad is a good choice especially when reaching a wider audience and brand-new customers. (Patel 2017 p.174)

Facebook has according to Dhaval Patel reduced the visibility of page publications in user's news feeds, but with sponsored publications, companies can get the visibility they pay for, building customer loyalty and brand awareness among their preferred target groups. The price of Facebook ads depends a lot on the target audience and the ads used. In general, the average price for a thousand views of a Facebook Ad cost around 7 euros. (Patel 2017 p.178)

2.1.9 Fairs and promotional events

Fairs are sales and marketing events that involve an exhibition and very often other program as well. At fairs, companies present and sell their products or collect leads for future contacting. Fairs can be either organized as public events open to the general public or as professional events for a limited target group. (Solberg Söilen 2013 p.26-28)

The benefits with fairs compared to other forms of marketing is that it offers the opportunity for personal contact and the utilization of all the senses in marketing. This makes the fair an experiential and effective media for fields of businesses that rely on the customers seeing the product or representatives before placing an order.

(Solberg Söilen 2013 p.34-35)

For many companies' fairs are a time-consuming and costly form of marketing compared to the other channels of communications with clients. (Solberg Söilen 2013 p.42)

2.1.10 Webinars

A webinar is a virtual event organized on the internet that both audiences and performers join from their own computers, regardless of location. Customers interested in a company's products or services can join the webinar is from their own computer.

A webinar broadcast is a seminar broadcasted over the web and this form of educational and promotional method has increased in popularity during the past years. A webinar typically includes a spokesperson giving a presentation of any given topic and the audience can follow the presentation including the visual material in the presentation on their own screen. (Covey 2015 p.82-83)

A webinar is an effective channel to share marketing content to potential clients who wants to learn more about a company's solutions. By organizing a webinar, a salesman can get the time and attention of potential customers in a tremendously cost-effective way. Instead of short slogans and crystallized messages, a webinar provides a scene for a salesman to carefully go through the details of the product or service and interact with the clients in real time. The webinar is especially useful for marketers whose products are relatively complex and customers have long purchasing processes. (Covey 2015 p.88)

3 METHOD

3.1 Data and methods

The theoretical part of this thesis is based on theories about lead generation, inbound marketing, sales funnel, pipeline management, a marketing mix and the theoretical aspects of marketing channels such as online marketing, fairs, and promotional events and word of mouth marketing. These theories were chosen by the author as a base of which upon the questions for the interview was built around.

In this thesis the author has chosen to use a qualitative method. It was chosen mainly because the qualitative research is suitable for discretionary sampling. The material conducted from the interviews should be comprehensive in relation to the type of analysis and interpretation

that will be made. The material should be appropriate and theoretically justified. (Eskola & Suoranta 1998 p.28-30)

3.1.1 Qualitative research

When conducting qualitative research, you primarily use words. A qualitative research is based on the respondents' perception of a situation or event. The researcher strives to understand the respondents' perception of a topic which the researcher can do through a discussion or interview. (Bryman & Bell 2013 p.124-126)

3.1.2 Quantitative research

When conducting a quantitative research, you primarily use numbers and statistics to generate material to further analyze. This form of study can be done by a survey where the participant can answer questions with measurable answers such as “1-5” or “Strongly disagree – Strongly agree”. Quantitative research is suitable for studies that aims to see trends and general differences or similarities among certain groups of people or a bigger picture of a phenomenon. (Bryman & Bell 2013 126-128)

3.2 In depth interviews

The author has chosen to use in depth interviews as the major source of information to conduct this thesis, in order to gain a deeper understanding of the research subject. In depth interviews are most commonly held with one person at the time. The interviews are carried out in a formal way, including a list of mostly open-ended questions with follow up questions, using the laddering technique providing follow up questions depending on the answers the interviewee is giving. In depth interviews differ from survey research, which has fixed questions in fixed order. (Belk. 2013 p.84-86)

In an in-depth interview, the interviewer strives to obtain the widest and deepest possible information related to the issue. The purpose of the interview is to understand the interviewees experiences and feelings about the topic on a deeper level and by asking follow-up questions, really get to the core of the answer.

In-depth interviews can be very time consuming because the interviewee often needs plenty of time to reflect properly on the topic. Even if it may be time consuming there is no guarantee that the interviewee provides the researcher with all the information relevant to the subject. (Belk. 2013 p.86-87)

3.3 Information retrieval

Information retrieval is a process that does not only involve the process of finding information from different sources but also feelings and thoughts about the way the information is presented.

Information retrieval requires a series of sub-skills in order to be practiced appropriately. This view of information retrieval includes more than the ability to search for information in a search engine to find sources of information. The ability to be critical about the information is getting increasingly important since the internet is full of false or heavily angled information

(Chowdhury. 2010 p.44-46)

Information retrieval is a complex process. As the information overflow increases, the interest is partially shifted from how to search for information, to how to use information and what information is reliable.

Knowledge as we know it is created by applying special perspectives on reality and consciously highlighting or ignoring certain components. This means that there are conditions and assumptions behind everything we call knowledge. (Chowdhury. 2010 p.48)

3.4 Validity and reliability

The reliability of qualitative research is not as easy to assess as quantitative research. It is significantly harder to repeat the research just to check the results, compared to an

experiment that is easy to repeat. An interview is difficult to repeat in the exact same social environment. (Denscombe, M. 2014 p. 88-89)

Validity / Credibility

The question is, to what extent qualitative researchers can demonstrate that their data is correct and appropriate. There are things to do to convince the reader that it is correct. One can ask participants in the study to go through the results and check that there weren't any misunderstandings during the interviews. This measure can increase the credibility of the research. (Denscombe, M. 2014 91-92)

Reliability

Qualitative research means that the researcher is heavily tied to the research instrument. In the form of participants, observers, or interviewers, the researcher becomes almost a fundamental part of the data collection technique. A good rule to keep in mind is to ask oneself if another person would have obtained the same result if they had conducted the interview. (Denscombe, M. 2014 p.92)

3.5 Data analysis and interpretation

Studies using in-depth interviews about why we do what we do, how people think and reason, how decisions are made, and how they differ within different groups are harder to analyze compared to quantitative studies where the results can be measured in numbers. (Bryman, Nilsson 2002 p.32-33)

One problem with qualitative research is that it can be more easily colored by the researcher performing the study than quantitative research. In quantitative research, a researcher must actively cheat on his results if he wants to prove something that the results do not actually show. A quantitative study is also easier to repeat with another research group, to prove a pattern in the results. For these reasons, quantitative research is often preferred to qualitative. Qualitative research is often seen as something that you can use to find possible new research areas, to find new phenomena that you can then break down into more quantitative variables and investigate further. (Bryman, Nilsson 2002 p.33-34)

3.6 Data collection

The data was collected through in-depth interviews during the spring of 2020. The researcher invited the interviewees one by one into a room and followed the interview guide, asking questions in a well-structured order. The researcher recorded and wrote down the answers during the interview and asked follow-up questions whenever he felt like there was something that the interviewee could elaborate. The researcher later transcribed the material in order to easily further process it.

3.7 The research questions

The research questions for this thesis are divided into two parts. The first part includes improvements to the sales process and the second part is about how The Solar Company should generate leads in a cost-effective way.

The research questions are:

- What can be improved with The Solar Company's' sales process in order to achieve a shorter sales cycle?
- Which customer segments are the most profitable for the company?
- Which customer segments should the company focus more on in terms of marketing?
- Which marketing methods should the company implement in order to generate leads in a cost-effective way?

The author analyzed the interviews of the salesforce and the sales numbers from previous years. The aim was to find the right category with a high purchasing volume, high margins and fast journey through the sales funnel. The author also identified methods from the interviews, that can speed up the process from first contact to purchase.

The basic idea is to find out what methods can be used to reach out to more prospects and to get more potential customers aware of The Solar Company. The aim was to develop methods of prospecting ideal customer for The Solar Company, based on the building type, company

profile and buying persona. By interviewing The Solar Company's salesforce, current customers and a Finnish politician the author defined the major segments The Solar Company should focus their marketing on.

3.8 Interview guide

An interview guide serves as a support for the researcher during the interview with the questions listed in the preferred order. The researcher doesn't need to follow the guide from point to point, but it is there as support for the researcher to keep the interview within the primary subject. (Bryman, Bell 2013 p.89-90)

The purpose of the interviews is to investigate the respondents' perspectives and experiences regarding the sales process of The Solar Company from both the salesforce and the customers perspective, as well as the political aspects, regarding government issued subsidies for sustainable energy. The questions used in the interview guide for this thesis are placed in a logical order, and the researcher asked follow-up questions based on the answer the respondent gave.

The author has designed an interview guide with the following questions for The Solar Company's existing customers:

- Why did you invest in solar energy?
- How did you find your products and installation provider?
- What made you choose them?
- What was the most challenging part of the purchasing process?
- What could have been done better?
- Were you positively surprised with anything?
- How would you describe the installers?
- How would you describe the salesman?
- Do you have any suggestions for improvement?
- Are you satisfied with the product you purchased?
- Comments on the company's website.
- Does it reflect your view of the company?
- +elaborating follow-up question

The author has designed an interview guide with the following questions for the salesforce of The Solar Company.

- Why do people and companies invest in solar energy?
- How do you find your potential customers?
- What is your favorite type of customer?
- What was the most challenging part of the sales process?
- What could improve your sales?
- What has improved your sales in the past?
- Walk me through your current sales process with a private customer?
- Walk me through your current sales process with a farm customer?
- Walk me through your current sales process with a business customer?
- What would help to speed up the sales process?
- +elaborating follow-up questions

The interviews of both customers and the salesforce of PlayGreen Finland took place during the spring of 2020. Another in-depth interview from a political perspective was conducted with the former Chairman of the Green League Party in Finland, Touko Aalto. The aim with this interview is to get a deeper look into how solar energy is discussed in politics and what possibilities and challenges are we facing in the future. The goal is to reach a deeper understanding of the possible changes in how the government is planning on subsidizing solar energy investments in the future.

The author has designed an interview guide with the following questions for Touko Aalto.

- What is the role of wind and solar power in Finland's fight against climate change?
- How do you think government subsidies for renewable energy are split between the two?
- In which segment do you believe that solar energy will increase significantly over the next 10 years? Industrial? Small businesses? Agricultural? Housing cooperatives? Schools? Detached houses? Municipalities?
- What do you think are the most suitable alternative to replace coal and how will the distribution among them look over the next 10 years?

- Are large solar power plants a solution for municipalities and agricultural associations?
- Do you believe that this is going to change so that locally produced renewable energy is more economically viable and can be exploited across property boundaries?
- Access to electricity is a vital for critical functions in society, such as water and waste management, food supply, banks and financial institution, transport and fuel supply, telecommunications, heating, kindergartens and schools, hospitals, health centers, agriculture and the military.

Should the properties of these activities be equipped with their own small-scale production (solar or small-scale wind power) to ensure that the operation can be maintained in the event of a crisis in electricity distribution?

- Do you believe that there will be significant changes in the governments support structures for renewable energy projects in the near future?
- What kind?
- For whom?

4 RESULTS

4.1.1 Online marketing

The role of online marketing as one of the main channels for businesses to communicate to their customers, can no longer be disputed. Depending on the field of business, online marketing can be essential for a company to reach out and attract customers to their website, where they find more information. The Solar Company has invested a large amount of time and resources to update their old webpages. According to Salesman C the webpages haven't still gotten their final form, since the market and products have developed and the information presented on the pages are soon to be outdated, again.

The lack of active online promotion is seen as an issue by the author. When compared to many of The Solar Company's competitors, who are investing more in especially Facebook Ads, The Solar Company is increasingly losing market share in form of visibility.

Even though The Solar Company is growing rapidly in form of sales at the moment, marketing professionals such as Miikka Linna emphasizes the importance of increasing visibility in order

to not be left in the shadows of competitors who are investing more in high quality content and proper distribution of the company's message online.

4.1.2 Fairs and promotional events

According to most of the salesforce of The Solar Company, the attendance of fairs and other events have been disappointing and only resulting in a fraction of their current sales. The time and money spent on these events, does not reflect the outcome and many stated that they would wish that the company would spend the marketing budget on other channels. The main issue with fairs was according to Salesman B that especially people who attend public fairs are rarely interested in something specific and are rather walking around looking at new things on the market. Another issue with many fairs with focus on renovation and construction is that people are there to look for solutions for a home they are about to build in the future and even though solar energy might be interesting for them, the expected time for a possible installation is too far ahead in the future and brings no value in the moment. The salesforce attitude towards professional fairs, aimed for building managers and professional buyers are more interesting since the discussions about solar energy with attendees are of higher quality and the sizes of the installations discussed are significantly larger. Agricultural fairs are also interesting, especially if the timing is enough before the deadlines for the applications of subsidies.

4.1.3 The customers' perspective

The customers interviewed for this thesis, were in general very satisfied with the products they have purchased, and many expressed that the production have exceeded their expectations. All of the customers highlighted the importance of technical knowledge in both the salesman and the installers and felt that they've got all the necessary information they needed to comfortably chose The Solar Company as their provider. According to Customer A the installers behavior and professionalism exceeded their expectation and that the installers were able to explain the technical details they were working with and why things were done in a certain way. The only thing Customer B commented as something that could be improved was the communication between the salesman and the installer, since some details that were discussed between the customer and salesman, had not reached the installer and the customer had to explain it to them.

4.1.4 The salesforce perspective

According to the salesforce, including Salesman A and Salesman B, the main reason customers are willing to purchase solar panels to their home or business, can be divided into two categories. Ideological and economical. Usually it's a combination of both, but some customers lean more to one than the other. According to Salesman A it's important for the salesman to be able to read the customer and angle the selling points based on what factor motivates the customer the most to purchase solar panels. Only a few years ago when prices were significantly higher, ideological reasons were the main motivator among customers, but when the prices declined, the economic reasons for purchasing solar panels increased.

When it comes to customer segments, the salesforce shared a common view that small and mid-sized privately owned companies were the best target group for The Solar Company. The reasons for this shared view was that the communication with the customer was simple when there is only one or two persons involved in the purchasing process and they have all the information needed and the possibility to make purchases without any further corporate bureaucracy. According to Salesman B this category is also the most rewarding since they are the ones paying the highest price for the electricity and the profitability of the solutions The Solar Company is providing is highest. According to Salesman C the motivation to sell is highest when the salesman can truly provide a solution that solves the customers problem and provide a well-planned system that brings both financial and promotional value to the customer.

According to Salesman A the current most challenging part about the sales process is to explain the long-term value of high-quality products to clients who are highly price orientated, and managing the time used for clients in all segments. The private home segment takes up a large share of the time salesmen have during a week, in relation to the financial value. Although the private home segment is declining in its financial significance for the company, it's according to Salesman C important to maintain this segment because of the steady income it brings, because of the short sales cycle compared to larger installations for businesses and farms.

According to Salesman A the recently introduced CRM system has improved the efficiency of offer calculation and the amount of offers sent out to potential clients have increased significantly since the new tool was introduced to the salesforce. The new system has also cut down

the workload for the financial department who sends out the bills to the customers, since most of the process is automated and can be easily exported from the system.

In order to speed up the sales process in all segments Salesman A would like to see The Solar Company further develop a real time inventory system for both products and human resources where a salesman can easily look up quantities of products in stock and the installation calendar, and directly communicate precise delivery times to the customers. This would ease the workload of the production planner, whos' job it is to coordinate the installers and deliveries and contact the customers about installation dates.

In the interview with Salesman B elaborated the importance of a well-structured partner network with companies that The Solar Company could outsource both sales and installation to. In these kinds of partnership, The Solar Company would only operate as a product distributor, utilizing its highly developed supply chain and knowledge of materials needed for PV installations. In a way The Solar Company would compete with wholesalers on the material side that some companies want to avoid. The benefits of a nationwide partner network would be that the possible customer base would expand to all of Finland, instead of the area they are operating in at the moment, and successful partnerships would bring in remarkable additional cashflow to the company with only a small increase of workload for the staff.

4.1.5 Segmentation

Based on the interviews with the salesforce, there are several different sorts of customers with category specific buyer personas. Some customers can make a purchase within hours from first contact and others might take many years before they are ready to pull the trigger. There are according to Salesman B five different segments with specific characteristics that needs to be taken into consideration. (Salesman B)

The five main categories for The Solar Company are:

1. Private home and summerhouse owners
2. Small business and farm owners

3. Apartment buildings and condominiums
4. Large businesses and organizations
5. Government owned facilities

Each of these segments have different ways to walk through the purchasing process. The most simple ones are the private homes, where a homeowner can freely purchase anything to their home, without having to apply for subsidies or permits. These customers invest their own personal money in the product and are according to Salesman A more emotionally involved. The reasons for investing in solar energy are according to Salesman A and Salesman B usually a need to lower the electric bill combined with wanting to do their part in the fight against climate change. (Salesman A & B)

The second segment is the small business and farm owners where one or two persons often own the whole company and have the majority vote to themselves. They too can easily make purchases but there are often applications of subsidies involved which makes the process a bit longer. The investment size is usually larger compared to private homes, so according to Salesman B the customer usually asks other companies for competitive offers. (Salesman B)

The third segment which is apartment buildings and condominiums can according to Salesman A be one of the harder ones. Usually the contact person is the technical manager of the building or the chairman of the board. This specific target group is challenging because the first step is to sell the idea to the chairman, who then has to sell the idea to the rest of the board in that condominium. The decision-making process in this specific segment tends, according to Salesman A to be a lot longer compared to all the other segments. (Salesman A)

The fourth segment is the large businesses and organizations, which usually have a building manager that takes care of the company's facilities and oversees every building related purchase in the company. The challenge according to Salesman B and Salesman C with this category is that the building manager himself, rarely has the power to make large purchases himself, but needs the board's approval. The timeline is also challenging for this segment since many companies prepares their budgets for the upcoming year in the fall and in many cases the purchasing process can take several years from first contact to closing the deal. (Salesman B&C)

The fifth segment is the government and municipality owned buildings. These customers are according to Salesman B, easily the most challenging for many reasons. One reason is that this specific segment only makes purchases that have been decided internally, which is followed by an offer request to selected companies of their choice. The offer request is usually written by that specific buildings' facility manager with support of an energy management consultant and includes certain technical frames, which within the offer needs to be written. The customer in this case is legally required to choose the cheapest option among those offers that has been given within the frames of the offer request. This leaves companies that provides high quality products that costs slightly more than the cheapest options on the market, with razor thin margins. (Salesman B)

4.1.6 The political aspect

The Finnish government will act in a way that will make Finland carbon neutral in 2035 and carbon negative soon after. According to Touko Aalto, the role of wind power and solar energy in this change is significant. The magnitude depends on political decisions as well as lobbying. Much can be done to increase the use of both wind and, in particular, solar energy, but this means changes in energy taxation and various forms of support, as well as the introduction of new wind and solar energy technologies. If boosting one form of energy gets more financing, that money is taken from some other form of energy.

According to Aalto, the opportunities are greater for solar energy compared to wind, because the storage technology has evolved a lot and costs have come down significantly. Solar energy is also a more attractive target for an outside investor, which does not involve similar zoning problems and resistance as wind power. While the potential and attractiveness of solar energy is greater, the construction of significant additional wind power capacity is more impressive and faster. Therefore, Aalto believes that state subsidies will be split between wind and solar energy over the next 10 years in favor of wind power in a 70-30 ratio.

According to Aalto, Municipalities can be significant producers of solar electricity if the roofs of houses and the built environment are harnessed for storing solar energy in a cost-effective

way. Within municipalities, detached houses, housing associations and agricultural producers in particular, are the most enthusiastic producers of solar electricity.

According to Aalto, Finland aims to be the world's first fossil-free welfare society.

The production of electricity and heat in Finland must be almost emission-free by the end of the 2030s.

The energy support system will be developed by shifting the focus from production subsidies to investment subsidies for new energy technologies including solar energy and storage solutions.

The use of coal will end with the decisions already made in May 2029 at the latest. Support for coal-substituting investments by coal companies that give up coal by 2025 at the latest will be supported by a separate incentive. According to Aalto, energy produced by coal will be replaced by a combination of increased energy efficiency, intelligent regulation of demand, geothermal energy, hydropower, wind and solar energy. Aalto emphasizes the importance of harvesting wasted heat from nuclear power plants and using it for district heating. Decentralized energy production also includes the possibility of making better use of agricultural by-products in combined heat and power production.

Aalto believes that within 10 years, 60% of the energy needed for replacing coal will consist of energy efficiency updates, energy storage solutions and efficient use of wasted heat from nuclear power plants. Decentralized energy production will replace the remaining 40%, of which bioenergy accounts for 10%, wind and hydropower for 15%, geothermal for 10% and solar energy for 5%.

According to Auvinen,, 11 000 GWh was produced in Finland by burning coal in 2015. 5% of this is 550 000MWh, which is equivalent to the production of about 2,2 million solar panels. (Auvinen 2017)

Aalto sees a lot of potential in large solar power plants, but this requires some sort of new solution that also considers the grid operators business model. These forms of power plants

would need new forms of structure in the distribution of energy and large subsidies from the government.

Aalto believes that that locally produced renewable energy is in a key position in the fight against climate change, security of supply and the goal of energy self-sufficiency, as well as better deployment of regional and local energy sources that already exist. Large solar power plants support this goal so much that it will slowly become more widespread over the next decade. If the price of energy rises through a market mechanism or regulation and the cost of introducing renewable energy sources decline even more, the financial aspects will support this change quickly.

Aalto believes that critical functions in society, such as water and waste management, food supply, banks, transport, fuel supply, communication, heating, schools, hospitals, agriculture and the military, will be equipped with their own small-scale electricity production plants, to ensure that their operation can be maintained in the event of a crisis in electricity distribution.

As technology evolves, costs fall and the potential benefits are realized, renewable energy will according to Aalto certainly be used to an increasing extent in the maintenance of key functions for security of supply and other security solutions. This development is according to Aalto accelerated by the EU's and Finland's emission reduction and carbon neutrality targets.

According to Aalto, private households will be encouraged with household reductions as well as investment subsidies. Oil boiler replacement subsidies are according to Aalto probably the most important way to accelerate the introduction of new energy solutions. For municipalities, different performance-based impact investment funds are the best way to get initial investments that are repaid from future savings. Support is available from the EU's Smart City Fund and other EU project funding to finance mission- and phenomenon-based projects, as well as from state financiers, Vake and Business Finland.

The subsidy finance structure will according to Aalto consist of state budget funding to households. Through state funds to municipalities and EU funding to and state and municipal joint projects.

4.1.7 Marketing budget

According to the CEO of The Solar Company, the annual marketing budget has remained steady for the past years, around 20 000€. A large part of the marketing budget has been spent on attendance fees for fairs, and other costs of participating in them. The management team of The Solar Company has as a result of this thesis taken a strategic decision to cut down the budget for fairs and rather invest the money in search engine optimization, sponsor deals with chosen customers and promotional campaigns on social media. The annual marketing budget will remain the same, around 20 000€ but it is according to the CEO expected to bring in up to three times more high-quality leads than the former promotional methods.

5 DISCUSSION

The aim of this thesis was to analyze The Solar Company's current sales process and marketing methods, and conduct a list of suggestions of how the company could develop its process and methods in order to shorten the sales cycle and generate more high quality leads in a cost effective way. The author finds that the chosen research method, which was in-depth interviews were suitable for this study. The in-depth interviews provided valuable detailed information that would have been impossible to find with any other method and the follow-up questions asked, provided more valuable information than the author had expected. In retrospect the author thinks that a survey for how current customers of The Solar Company could have provided valuable and measurable information regarding which marketing method made them contact the company.

The author has analyzed the results and combined them with the theories regarding lead generation, inbound marketing, sales funnel, pipeline management, a marketing mix and the theoretical aspects of marketing channels such as online marketing, fairs, and promotional events and word of mouth marketing.

Based on analyzing the current marketing methods The Solar Company is using in order to collect leads, the author believes that The Solar Company have failed to keep up with technology and should modernize their marketing methods in the ways described in the Suggestions for The Solar Company part.

The author was pleased with the valuable information gathered from the interviews and believes that implementing the theories discussed in this thesis into the company's sales process and marketing methods, will result in a positive outcome.

The author would like to emphasize the importance of increasing online promotions and implement Jörg Holenz theory by including some sort of promotional campaign which purpose is to attract potential customers to become interested in The Solar Company. To further develop the lead generation system, The Solar company should create a working prospect tracking system, so that cold phone calls would according to Holenz's model no longer be unexpected contacts or annoying interruptions for the customer, but rather a value-adding follow up based on the prospects visits on the website.

One result that came up with both the salesmen and customers was that one of The Solar Company's absolute strengths were the style of selling. Customers commended that they felt like the salesman was genuinely trying to provide a solution suitable for their needs, instead on trying to sell as much products as possible. The salesforce also expressed that the best sales experience in terms of customer satisfaction comes from solving a problem, instead of just selling a product with little additional practical value.

The author believes, based on the issues that came up during the interviews that The Solar Company should focus especially on improving their pipeline management and implement Gerardus Blokdyk's model to produce a strong forecast for the company, in order to foresee the needed capacity on the production side. The author also found out based on the interviews that The Solar Company should replace the budget for fairs and events with investments in marketing on social media and inbound marketing in order to increase the quality and quantity of the leads generated.

The political aspect of this thesis turned out to be more important than the author had predicted in the beginning. Touko Aalto provided valuable information about how the government is

likely to develop the structure for sustainable energy investments. This factor determines heavily on the segments that The Solar Company can choose to target their marketing to and further develop and expand their product portfolio suitable for these specific segments.

The author believes that the method used for this thesis was the right and most suitable one, considering the topic. The author gathered a lot of valuable information that wouldn't come up using any other form of research method. The author believes that the reliability of the information gathered in the interviews are high, since the interviewees have no reason to lie or be dishonest in any way, since they too want to improve the sales process and lead generation for the company they work for in order to increase their own sales.

5.1 Suggestions for The Solar Company

Based on the literature review of marketing methods and interviews with the salesforce, customers and a political figure in Finnish politics, the author has concluded a list of concrete suggestions of how The Solar Company should modify its marketing strategy to improve the sales process, the return of investments in marketing and more efficiently collect high quality leads from different promotional channels. The suggestions are divided into the following categories:

1. Fairs and promotional events

According to the salesforce and after analyzing the financial returns of attending fairs targeted to private homeowners, the author suggests that The Solar Company should avoid attending fairs aimed for events aimed for this segment. The annual fair and event budget should be decreased by 50% and the focus should be on events where the target audience is farm owners and property management professionals, where the potential project sizes are significantly larger. According to the salesforce and based on the sales from 2019, there are more efficient ways to attract and approach private homeowners than attending fairs and events.

2. Online marketing

After analyzing The Solar Company's current actions regarding marketing online and social media, there are plenty of room for improvement. The marketing budget saved from decreasing

the fair and event attendance, should be invested in production of high quality, engaging and highly targeted material for different segments. Based on the interview with Miikka Linna, sponsored video campaigns should be distributed on Facebook, with a link to a landing page where the prospects can fill in their contact information. Search engine optimization should be according to Adam Clarks theory, further developed and taglines and pictures should be tagged so that people who are searching these words would end up on The Solar Company's webpage instead of the competitors. Inbound marketing should be implemented by offering interested visitors high quality information in form of a guidebook for purchasing solar energy or EV-charging stations, in change of their contact information. Also sales calls should according to Holenz no longer be unexpected contacts or annoying interruptions for the customer, but rather a value-adding follow up based on a prospects digital footprint.

3. Webinars

The author suggest that The Solar Company would implement webinars based on Adam Clarks theory, to their weekly sales routine, by organizing segment specific interactive group presentations for customers interested in the solutions they provide. A benefit from organizing groups sessions is that when one prospect asks questions about something specific, all of the audience can hear the answer. This means that the salesman doesn't need to answer the same questions for different prospect, since they all get the same answer at once. The author suggest that The Solar Company would further develop their visual material from previous installations and use them as examples to visualize to the prospects how things are done. This part could also include involving existing customers in the webinars to tell their own experience as a customer to the prospects.

4. Engaging customers to promote The Solar Company

By offering something of value to existing customers who are happy with their own PV-system, The Solar Company should implement a promotion program that would encourage customers to suggest to their own customers, partners and friends to also purchase solar panels from The Solar Company. According to Salesman B it is much more likely for a person to buy something that was recommended by a friend compared with something the same person would find in an ad. The Solar Company already has a few promotional deals with customers, and it should be further developed.

5. Segmentation

It is important for The Solar Company to be able to provide solutions for many different types of customers. The authors conclusion of thesis based on the financial data and the interviews of the salesforce is that some segments are more valuable than the other and time, money and effort should be focused on those who brings in the majority of the total income.

The author suggest that the salesforce should focus most of their resources on the following segments because of a short sales cycle and high profit margin:

- Privately owned small and mid-sized companies with some sort of electricity consuming production or storage, with an annual consumption over 30 000kWh
- Farms operating with dairy, beef, pork, egg or poultry production with an annual consumption over 50 000kWh
- Privately owned hotels and restaurants and gas stations with an annual consumption over 30 000kWh
- Car dealerships, car wash companies and car repair shops with an annual consumption over 30 000kWh.

The author suggest that the salesforce should outsource a large part for the following segments to partner companies that offers additional products and services:

- Off grid summerhouses
- Private houses with annual consumption under 20 000kWh

The author suggest that The Solar Company should further develop marketing material and the sales process for the following segments:

- Schools and other educational institutions
- Healthcare related facilities
- Shopping centers and Supermarkets

6. Partnerships

The author suggests that The Solar Company should thoroughly research and build a network of potential partner companies that could implement solar panels into their own product portfolio and sell them directly to their own customers. The benefit of this kind of arrangement is that it's easier for a company to convince an existing customer to buy products from them instead of having The Solar Company start from scratch with building the trust among these prospects. Companies suitable for this kind of partnership could be companies operating with:

- Roofing
- Prefabricated house manufacturing
- Energy efficiency
- Agricultural machinery
- Architecture and construction
- Chimney sweeping
- EV-charging installation companies
- Car dealerships with EV options

7. Consultants

The author also suggests that The Solar Company would conduct a complete list of all the third-party consultants operating in Finland and develop and maintain a personal relationship with them, including educational sessions about new products and solutions. By doing so, The Solar Company can influence the standards of which upon the consultants are advising their clients. The author believes that with developing and maintaining these relationships, the amount of offer requests will increase, and the requests will most likely match the products The Solar Company is providing, if the consultants conception of the standards have been influenced successfully.

8. The political aspect

The author suggest that the Solar Company would increase their activity in networking on a political level and expand their network on the public side. Because of the massive changes Finland is facing on a energy political level, it is critical to have the latest information about changes in subsidies and government projects. The author believes based on the interview with Touko Aalto that the demand for The Solar Company's product will face a massive increase in

demand and would like to emphasize the importance of having the right connections and being prepared to provide large scale solutions with the best possible products. The author would also like to emphasize the importance of energy storage solution and suggests that the company would look more into the solutions available for large scale projects, and alternatives for Lithium based products.

6 CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this thesis was to analyze the marketing methods The Solar Company and how the company could generate more high-quality leads in a cost-effective way. Based on theoretical data and in-depth interviews with the salesforce, customers and a politician, the author has conducted a list of suggestions of how the company should change their marketing strategy. All the suggestions stated in this thesis are suitable for a company to use. This analysis offered useful information about the possibilities of marketing online, including campaign structures on social media and inbound marketing.

The author has conducted a list of several marketing tools and the aim was to offer the company a variety of tools that are appropriate for their different customer segments. The interview with Touko Aalto provided valuable information about the political aspects of the solar energy industry in Finland and concrete ideas about which segments will likely see an increased demand of The Solar Company's products. This thesis also brought up the importance of carefully following the changes in the in the political environment in order to react to them in time and switching the salesforces focus to the segments with the highest purchasing power.

To conclude this thesis, there are many actions The Solar Company can take in order to improve their sales process and the author feels confident that by following the suggestions stated above, The Solar Company will experience improvement in terms of shorter sales cycle and increased generation of high quality leads.

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Figure 1: The Beginner's Guide to a Sales Funnel NOVEMBER 7, 2019 15

Figure 2: Sales Targets The Solar Company 17

APPENDICES

Interview Customer A

Interview Customer B

Interview Miikka Linna

Interview Salesman A

Interview Salesman B

Interview Salesman C

Interview Touko Aalto