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**Productisation of the case company's bespoke services**

Case study

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## ABSTRACT

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This report has been conducted as the author's final Bachelor thesis for the Programme in Business Administration at Oulu's University of Applied Sciences.

The thesis begins with an introduction to the case company and the problems that have caused the research to happen. The research questions are then stated, the first being "Will productisation of the case companies' bespoke services increase human resource productivity and efficiency?" and the second question is "How can the case company ensure that the offering stays customer orientated?". To reach the aim of answering these questions, the thesis will then introduce the theoretical framework behind the study. This includes a section about product management assisted by Armstrong and Kotler's book Marketing An Introduction. The second section discusses Business orientation.

The author then presents the empirical researches methodology, especially the data collection process, scheduling and analyses the validity and reliability of the research. In this chapter it is introduced that interviews were held with two focus groups; 4 of the case company employees and 5 construction industry clients.

The next chapter will present the findings from the data collection process. The case company interview consisted of 9 questions and the industry client interviews had 8 questions, and the main themes that arose from the findings are used to guide the presentation. In the discussion chapter the author proceeds to take the findings and analyse them together with the pre-existing theoretical framework. It can be seen in this chapter that the case company would benefit from the productisation of part of their processes.

The final chapter is the conclusion in which the author answers the research questions on the basis on the analysis in the discussion section. The author then presents the recommendations for the case company and talks about possible future research.

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Keywords:

Productisation, customer orientation, needs assessment, quality, web design, content creation.

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

The author presents this thesis for the International Business Bachelors course at Oulu's University of Applied Sciences. The thesis discusses the potential business process of productisation in the commissioning company.

The report will begin by presenting the problem statement and the underlying reasons for this thesis. The report will then continue by stating the two research questions to the reader and delve into the factors that lead to these questions. The reader will then be introduced to the case company and the authors observations made during a training period conducted with them. The thesis will then continue by opening the literature used and the methods employed will be described. The next chapter will focus on the background theory that will then link with the primary research to conclude the report.

After the theoretical background is opened to the reader, the methodology of the qualitative research is presented. The reader will discover the interview scenarios and the deployed focus groups will be listed. This introduction to the research will be followed by the findings of the interviews. The outputs of each focus group will be specified. The themes that had arisen from the results will be analysed.

The presentation of the findings will be followed by a chapter discussing the results. The outcome of the interviews conducted will be analysed and connected to the secondary research from the previous chapters. The combination of this information will be used to answer the research questions and to form a final conclusion.

Finally, the thesis will be concluded in the final chapter with the author presenting comments and recommendations together with an action plan for the commissioning company.

The author spent a training period with the case company and the company displayed some inefficiencies in process and allocation of human resources. Members of staff were vocal about the fact that the bespoke nature of the services provided consumed unproportionate resources. Specialised competencies did not appear to be well appointed to the tasks of planning, creation and upkeep of customer website design.

## 1.1 The Research questions

The case company work with many customers on bespoke projects. This individual approach requires significant time and human resources. The author had spent a training period with the case company. During this period, it was regularly discussed quite openly between employees and management that this had been seen as an issue effecting the efficiency and productivity of the overall business operation. Fortuitously the author was studying the topic of productisation at this time. This led the author to engage with the company management, who subsequently requested the identified topics to be studied by the author. When discussing the topic of productisation the author and the case company also discussed how the customer would be kept as the main focus if any changes were to be made. The company management expressed that their main fears surrounded potential adverse effects upon quality and customer relationships, stressing that the company prides itself on building lasting business bonds.

This thesis has two research questions. The first research question is “Will productisation of the case company’s bespoke services increase human resource productivity and efficiency?” and the second question is “How can the case company ensure that the offering stays customer orientated?”.

The first research question explores the main topic of productisation and whether execution would have a positive bearing on human resource efficiency and productivity ie. an enhancing action for the case company. Case company employees and management had discussed that each bespoke project that is delivered requires a considerably high utilisation of human resources and anecdotally there was a feeling that it could prevent the company from taking on new customers due to a lack of resources. The company wished to establish factually and based upon research, whether it would be beneficial for both company and customer without any resulting decline in customer satisfaction.

The second research question is set to focus on the ability of the case company to deliver a customer centric experience and process and identify the tools and actions required to ensure this.

## **1.2 The case company**

Kouta Media Oy is a brand design and digital agency company that was founded in 2011. The Kouta group has seen growth over the years and now operates in Kajaani, Oulu and Helsinki with a team of 13 industry specialists. Kouta's team consists of creativity and design specialists, web developers, client and project managers and AD creators. The company works in the business to business market and has a diverse list of client projects.

The main areas that Kouta offer their clients are web design and upkeep, online retail, logo design, photography services, graphics, 3D design, video design and marketing material design. The client list consists of both continuous and one project customers depending on the nature of the service provided. Whilst the core of the target company's business is business to business, it has over recent years supported public projects and with the potential decline in the segment the company seeks to strengthen its industry specific capabilities.

Cost effectiveness of bespoke industry actions have been challenged by the intensity of company specific requirements. The company CEO has identified the need for more standardized products to improve the efficiency and quality of such segmented product offerings.

Following the recent availability of post corona virus development funding the company was successfully awarded a business Finland support grant. Having identified the construction sector as a potential growth area the company have a specific need to improve and standardize the product offering for this segment. The need behind this thesis was identified to the author during a work placement and the need analysis identified initial potential wins in terms of developer and designer work time efficiencies and ease of sales process, minimizing detailed and time-consuming actions from company specialists. The company expressed a commitment to be fully engaged in the input to this thesis objective.

## **1.3 Aims and objectives**

The aim of this thesis is to answer the research questions and conclude whether the process of productisation would be an efficient change for the human resource management of the commissioning company. The author also aims to respond to whether the adoption of productisation would allow the company to remain customer orientated. The second aim of the thesis is to assist the commissioning company with the analysis of potentially adopting new processes.

The first main objective of this thesis is the research. The author will carry out both primary research in the form of a qualitative interview and secondary research from pre-existing knowledge. The information from the research methods used will be given to the case company and contribute to the authors educated conclusion and recommendations. The second main objective is to be able to give recommendations that will be seen in the shape of an action plan that the author will present to the case company.

#### **1.4 Research methods**

This thesis includes two main methods, the first being the use of primary research methods in the form of interviews and the second used to back up the results from the interviews is secondary from existing research.

To assist the research the author has used Weathington, Cunningham & Pittenger's book *Understanding business research* (2012). The book has been used whilst planning the primary research phase and in the formation of correct and appropriate interview questions.

The central literature used in the thesis is Armstrong and Kotler's book *Marketing An Introduction* (2013). Both of the topics that arise in the research questions are discussed in the book. Raab and Gerhards book *Customer relationship management: a global perspective* (2008) is used to support the second thesis question and exploring the topic of customer satisfaction and orientation.

The primary research process will be carried out with two focus groups in two phases. The first group that the author will interview are from a list of potential construction industry clients (A particular target group for new business). The Industry clients will be from Small and medium-sized enterprises (SME's) as these are the case company's typical clients. The author will attempt to meet in person to conduct interviews. Current global pandemic conditions may make this difficult and accordingly the interviewee will be given the possibility for a remote interview. The second group is the case company's staff and they will each be interviewed in person if possible but will also be offered remote interview possibilities.

## 2 THERORETICAL BACKGROUND

The difference between a product and a service has been discussed widely in existing theory and studies. According to Armstrong and Kotler a product is anything that can be offered to a market for attention, acquisition, use, or consumption that might satisfy a want or need. The product that a company offers is the centre of marketing mix planning and in general the business plan. The offering is the start of a company's ability to build a profitable relationship with a customer. A service can be seen as an underclass of product however the importance of services and the experience economy in present day business models has redefined services. Services are an activity, benefit, or satisfaction offered for sale that is essentially intangible. (Armstrong & Kotler, 2013. P.224)

Products and services are the offerings that companies put out to their customers and these can be separated into four different characteristic groups: Tangibility, perishability, separability and standardisation (Bearden, Ingram & LaForge. 2007) The first group sees the difference between tangible goods that can be touched such as a brochure and intangible services that do not have a physical presence such as the upkeep of a website. Perishability is the durability of the offering. Goods usually have durability after a purchase has been made whereas services do not. The next characteristic group is separability as products can be stored and used later the process of production is totally separated from consumption whereas with services the is no separation as the provider and the service itself are coexistent. Finally, the characteristic of standardization, quality can be controlled when creating products but every time a service is provided the quality can vary.

These characteristics should be taken into consideration by companies when creating new offerings as it is vital that the creator is knowledgeable about what the company is providing, this will in turn allow the company to use the correct marketing tools to guide the offering. A company's offerings can include both tangible products and services yet also can sit at either end of the continuum.

## **2.1 Product Management**

The process of product management is vital to the success of a business. The ability to recognize when a product or service holds major value to both the company and its customers is central for good product management. On the other hand, in some situations a product or service does not hold value and just drains resources. If this kind of situation is not rethought quickly it can be financially detrimental for the company in question.

In Perri's book *Escaping the Build Trap: How effective Product Management Creates Real Value* (2018) it is explained that customers and users have problems, wants, and needs. On the other side are businesses that create products or services to resolve those problems and fulfil those wants and needs. (2018, chapter 1) In return for these products and services customers add financially to the businesses this is known as the value exchange. However, value can be a difficult factor to measure as it is an objective measurement. A product that is valuable to one customer may not be for another. On the turn side when a company does not know their customers problems well enough, they cannot be sure on the value that their product or service presents to users (Perri. 2018, 1).

### **2.1.1 Product service continuum**

The change from a goods provider to a service provider can be described as an evolutionary transition on a product-to-service continuum (Brax, 2005). This tool is used when the offering of a company is being reimagined. If the company has found reason to believe that their offering would benefit them on the other end of the scale.

The product service continuum is a tool that is used by marketers to determine the nature of the offering. The tool can be used to discover potential opportunities by locating the good on the continuum. The continuum shows the position in which an offering sits from pure commodity good to pure service. The products that sit at the pure commodity good end of the continuum are products that have no relation with services and vice versa at the other end of the scale the services that have no relation with physical products are placed. (Bearden, 2007)

For a customer it is much more difficult to evaluate the quality of a pure service due to the fact that these offerings are intangible, the quality level can vary subjectively. These services can be

affected by many factors, for example the creator of the service and the nature of the project at hand.

### **2.1.2 Productisation**

The oxford dictionary defines productisation as “an article or substance that is manufactured or refined for sale”. There has been a rising interest in the concept of productising services, yet the definition of the process is still quite unclear as there is not a vast amount of research on the topic. The author has seen that Harkonen et al. (2015, p.70, p.71) have the most specifically defined outcome of the process of productising services:

*Productisation is the process of analysing a need, defining and combining suitable elements into a product-like object, which is repeatable and comprehensible. Productisation activities cover those for commercial readiness to enable selling, delivering, using and invoicing. Productisation in the context of services address the objects of exchange that are typically abstract and intangible and has a specific role in clarifying the service offering, creating replicability and enhancing understanding of the offering.*

Flamholtz (2000) described productization as “the process of analysing the needs of current and potential customers in order to design products, or services to satisfy their needs. The productization process includes the design of a product, including services, and the ability to produce it.” In their report “Service productisation: systematising and defining an offering” Harkonen, Tolonen and Haapasalo (2017) discuss the fact that literature has discussed the process of service productization but it has always been in a general manor stated that the basis is offering product-like services to a market, this can be seen in the related research (Flamholtz, 1995; Harkonen et al., 2015; Jaakkola, 2011; Valminen and Toivonen, 2012).

When discussing the reason for productisation companies can face issues both internally and externally when it comes to the suitable form of the products or services that they offer. There are many tools that can be connected to product innovation and development, productisation is one that focuses on customer involvement, innovation and cost efficiency.

There are many reasons that a company would look into productising their services. The main reasons being to improve their competitive stance in the market and maintain a level of quality with a smarter use of their resources (Valminen & Toivonen, 2007). Factors such as low customer satisfaction and interest can result in turning to productisation as usually it includes development and improvement of the product or service offered. Human resource efficiency is a factor that companies want to keep as high as possible and in many situations, this requires re modelling of the offering, as the employees may be stretched in the sense of work to be carried out. This can have an overall effect on how efficiently the company can take on new customers and keep a well running system. Productisation can also assist companies with their pricing strategies as it is easier in many cases to price a product than a flexible service. The pricing of products can be fixed whereas when selling services companies must price their time and resources (Valminen & Toivonen, 2007).

In any case the wider a company extends their knowledge of their products and services and are able to get to the roots of who their offering is for and why it is being offered, the better they are able to market it efficiently and build a connection between their customers and the offering. It is vital in any situation to keep the customers' needs and wants in mind when developing a product or service.

## **2.2 Customer orientation**

Customer orientation is defined by Raab & Gerhard (2008) as the entirety of a company's thought and action should be focused on the customer's current and potential needs, wishes, and problems. To that end, it is important to have exact knowledge of markets, products, competition, and of course the customer.

Customer orientation is a vital factor when it comes to competition in a market. A company that focuses their energy on keeping processes customer orientated are more likely to have a competitive advantage compared to companies that focus mainly on their offering. It can be seen that a company focusing on their relationship with clients also have a higher reactiveness level and can adjust to new customer wants and needs. It is very easy to concentrate solely on the offering and forget the reason why the product or service was created in the first place, but this is dangerous. For a company to be able to be customer orientated all processes must be centred around a customer way of thinking. (Raab & Gerhard, 2008, p.15)

Customer oriented companies also focus on maintaining a high level of quality throughout their products and services. Making sure that the offerings quality is high may take time and resources but in the long run will result in pleased customers and a bigger chance of profitability. If quality is maintained and customer orientation focused on clients will naturally want to return, recommend and not be so sensitive to changes in for example prices. (Raab & Gerhard, 2008, p.15)

Efficient communication falls centre to be a customer-oriented company. If a company takes time to keep open communication channels with their clients and listens to feedback and comments, the end product will be more tailored for the customer. This approach although vital can be very time consuming and resource blocking as it requires staff members to be closely involved with not only the offering but also the needs and wants of the customer.

### **2.3 Needs Assessment**

Needs assessment is used mostly for estimating deficiencies that have been noticed by either parties involved. Not only does a need assessment estimate issues but also unravels perceived needs of the customer. (Royse et al, 2009, p.3) Needs assessment is also described in Gupta's book *A practical Guide to Needs Assessment* as a process for examining and framing people-related problems and performance improvement opportunities.

To be able to carry out successful need's assessment specific information about the situation at hand is needed. There are four situations that typically result in a company turning to needs assessment: Solving a current problem, avoiding a past or current problem, creating or taking advantage of a future opportunity and finally providing learning, development and growth (Gupta, 2014, pp. 17).

### **2.4 Customer satisfaction**

An important part of assessing the needs of customers is evaluating customer satisfaction. In their paper Milner and Furnham say customer satisfaction is an assessment of how well a company's

products or services meet customer expectations. When companies measure customer satisfaction, they can predict factors such as loyalty and repurchase possibility (Milner & Furnham, 2017).

In the book *Customer Relationship Management: Global and Local dimensions* the authors Raab and Gerhard evaluate customer satisfaction as the happening after the consuming or use of a product, the customer will ask themselves if they were happy with the product. If they answer yes, they will tend to choose the product when they shop again, to recommend it to others, and to perhaps become a regular customer.

In current day it is important that companies are able to stand out from the competition as there are so many other companies with the same offering. Customer orientation is a strong factor when looking at who is successful in standing out from the competition. Due to the fact that customer orientated companies have a wide understanding of their market they can usually adapt to changing market states in a more efficient way, this also applies to the changing wants and needs of customers (Raab & Gerhard, 2008, pp. 13).

Quality is a factor that product and service producers must take into consideration. Measuring quality through the customers satisfaction is imperative as it will allow the company to focus on improvement and product growth. Armstrong and Kotler say in their book (2013) that product quality is one of the marketer's major positioning tools. Quality affects product or service performance; thus, it is closely linked to customer value and satisfaction (2013, 229).

### 3 METHODOLOGY

The following chapter will discuss the research process and the factors attached to it. The author will present the data collection process that was carried out and touch on the aspects of reliability and validity.

This thesis has utilised both primary and secondary research sources. The relevant secondary research used is introduced in the theory section of this thesis and will be used together with the results from the primary research to structure the conclusion section of the thesis. The primary research was carried out in the form of a qualitative interview with two focus groups. The first group interviewed was the team from the case company and the second group were construction industry SME owners. The author found it essential for the thesis to consider both service provider and customer responses. Muganda discusses in his book (2020, 18) how a large amount of business and management research is problem-based and carried out with the objective of providing a solution to the occurred problem. The author designed the interview questions to specifically achieve results that abled the thesis to answer the research questions. The authors secondary objective of the research is to add to already existing knowledge on the topic for future research. It was clear from the start of planning that interviews would be the most appropriate type of data collection.

The author designed the interview questions on the basis of the knowledge received from a business research course previously completed. In this case and taking the nature of the research into consideration, the author saw fit to have a mixture of both scaled and open-ended questions. This enabled the author to have a clear scale from both focus groups that could then be strengthened by the extended comments and free conversation held with the interviewees.

### 3.1 Data collection

The author started the data collection process by planning out the interviews and looking at the research questions. Two interview plans were created one for each focus group. Once the plans were completed the author contacted ten SME construction industry managers by email. The email requested an interview offering time and date choices and the face-to-face/remote interview option. In addition, a group interview request was sent to the Managing director of the case company, with the same options for face-to-face/remote interview.

The interviews with the industry customers were carried out remotely (Due to the current global pandemic).

Five out of the ten construction industry companies that were contacted replied. Each construction industry client that replied, was sent an email agreeing a time for the interview. In this email the author gave a two-week period during which the replicant could choose a time and was informed that the interview would take 10 minutes at maximum. Each interview was sound recorded after receiving permission from the interviewee. Transcripts of the recorded interviews were created after the process to create a clear showing of findings. Even though the interview was held remotely the recording was clear and allowed the interviews to be analysed subsequently.

An interview day was arranged with the team at the case company and they were informed beforehand that the author would record the discussion, this was approved by the team. A group interview was held with four of the staff members. The reason for the decision to hold a group interview was the objective to spark conversation about the topics and get different points of view, this proved to be not only a good environment for a close knit team to open thoughts and bounce of others but also made the process quicker for the busy team. As the nature of the interview was not very personal and did not specifically deal with negative feedback, a group interview was appropriate. The author wanted to create a relaxed atmosphere to encourage open conversation. Subsequent to the interview day the recordings were turned into transcripts for post interview analysis.

### **3.2 Scheduling**

The schedule for the interviews was planned to take place over a span of two weeks to allow the interviewees to arrange a time that was convenient for them. The whole process of the interviews was slightly delayed due to the current global pandemic. This changed the original plan that the author would meet with the Industry customers face to face causing the re-evaluation that a remote meeting would be more appropriate to avoid health risks. The arranging of these online meetings took longer to execute as it required the interviewees to have all of the needed technology.

### **3.3 Validity and reliability**

Ghuri & Gronhaug (2005) say that validity explains how well the collected data covers the actual area of investigation. In their book *Research Methods in Business Studies* (2005, 216-218) Ghauri and Gronhaug continue to differentiate the four types of validity in research: descriptive, interpretative, theoretical, and generalisable. Descriptive validity discusses the adequacy and objectivity of collected data. In the data collection process of this thesis both of the focus groups interviews were recorded and transcribed word for word. The second type of validity interpretive deals with the researcher's accuracy when translating the data into the findings. The open discussion that occurred after every interview question allowed the interviewer to have a better understanding of the viewpoints of the interviewees. These two factors are the most relevant from the theory that are connected to the thesis.

Reliability concerns the extent to which a measurement of a phenomenon provides stable and consistent results (Carmines and Zeller, 1979). In any research that is conducted, and results are received, it is important to remember how reliable the results are. Reliability is also concerned with repeatability (Moser and Kalton, 1989).

## **4 FINDINGS**

This chapter will present the data and received findings from the interviews. There will be a short introduction to the data collection process and then the case company and industry customer interview findings will be presented. The different themes that came from the interviews will structure the findings presentation.

### **4.1 Case company findings**

This section will present the findings from the case company group interview. The case company interview was held as a group interview on the company's premises. This took place during the employees working hours and they were informed beforehand. The group interview consisted of the author as the interviewer and four of the company's staff members, not all company staff members were present due to the current pandemic, other members were working remotely.

The interview scenario opened with the interviewer explaining the reason for the interview and background information on the thesis. To start, the first background question was asked, and this was an enquiry as to the working titles and roles of the present members of staff. The team consisted of corporate management, project management, design team members and technical staff.

The second introduction question asked the interviewees to describe the typical structure of a web project team and each of their roles and scope. The team members that the group listed were as follows; graphic designer, who works with the design and creation of the web project. The project manager, who is mainly customer focused and deals with the planning of the project. In addition, the process can require a few coders. This would depend upon the nature and the size of the project. This is the basic structure of a web project team, however some projects may require the assistance of a copywriter, photographer and video specialist, translators and various other specialists.

The questions asked were used as conversation ignitions and after every question the interviewer invited comments and discussion on the topic. Once the interview had ended the interviewer asked

the group whether they had any additional comments or any key topics that they feel had been overlooked. The group mutually agreed that all topics had been covered and that they did not have anything to add after the discussion. The interviewees were then thanked for their participation and the interviewer repeated that if there would be any further issues or additional questions needed that they would be in touch.

#### **4.1.1 Productisation**

**Q: “Customers want to be involved in every aspect of the Web design process” Choose one of the following responses:**

- **Strongly agree**
- **Mildly agree**
- **Neither disagree nor agree**
- **Mildly disagree**
- **Strongly disagree**

The employees came to a unanimous decision that the most appropriate response to this statement is mildly agree. The interviewer asked for further comments on this response and it was further discussed that it is very dependent upon the nature of the project, but most customers have a clear idea of what they want their website to look like and the features that should be present on their pages. However, a large number of customers choose to outsource the design and creation of their web pages because they do not have the significant design skills that are required when building and designing a website.

A further comment to arise during this discussion was the fact that customers tend to give their vision of their website at the beginning of a project, allowing the design team to take the basic instructions and then develop refinement from this starting point, making the necessary changes that will make the web site more effective and visually impacting. The design team members commented that in a typical web project they are in regular contact with the customer about changes to original design plans and ideas. The contact with the customer also varies with the nature of the project.

Based on the information gathered, it can be seen that from the case company's point of view the customers want to be involved with the design process but also want to use the expertise of the case company.

**Q: "Customers want to have complete control over the website content creation" Choose one of the following responses:**

- **Strongly agree**
- **Mildly agree**
- **Neither disagree nor agree**
- **Mildly disagree**
- **Strongly disagree**

The discussion of this question started with the employees reflecting that it was to be expected that customers would want to be highly in control of the content that appears on their website, yet this, surprisingly to the team, is not always the case. This resulted in the answer being mildly disagree. Many customers who are creating websites have a ready base with 'for example text' and materials that they want added during the design phase, but it has been seen that some customers do not know what they want and how or to whom they should promote their company on their websites.

The employees commented that this is a very important stage of the process and one that they would want to keep as an add on pricing possibility. It has been seen in previous projects that this is the phase that can cause the project to end as the customers budget runs out and does not stretch to the expensive use of other specialisation such as translators and copywriters. Content creation is often left for the project manager to generate and this includes the searching of suitable materials such as pictures and videos and the adaptation of texts from customers old websites.

The employees discussed that this stage it would be appropriate for productisation process generated options and selections to be made by the customer. It would be possible that the customer themselves could add or decline content and materials from an online platform that would then be inserted by the company's team or even automated. If customers choose to continue using the company's services during and past the point of content creation it can be a very long and time-consuming process with multiple customer comment stages.

From the information gathered in the interview a conclusion can be made that the content creation stage is a core financial part of the process for the case company, but at the same time it is a very human resource consuming stage and has required the company to have the most iterations and iterations with the customer.

**Q: What productisation steps has your company taken thus far in your web design offering, if any?**

The employee's response was that the company has started in some areas to think about the process of productisation. For example, an idea had been previously discussed that the web design offering could be made into product levels and the customer could choose from a set of product packages for a set price. This however has never been taken any further especially due to the fact that the global pandemic has caused uncertainty and instability within the company.

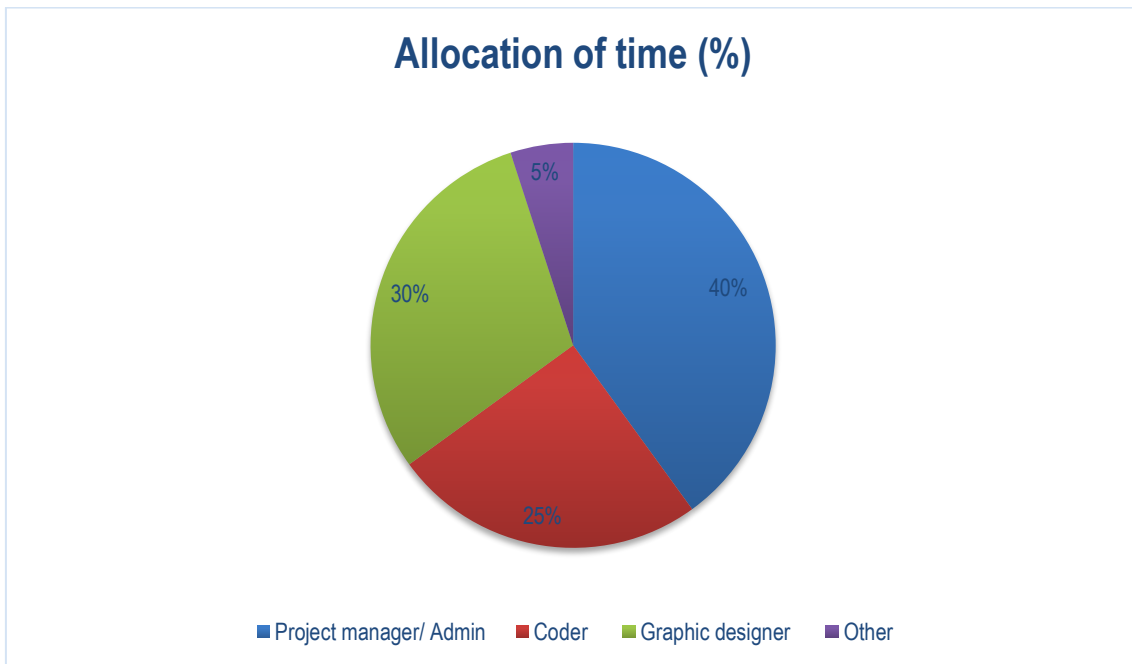
The discussion centred around product packages versus projects that are off the shelf from start to finish. In connection to this idea, the company has planned that if steps towards productisation were to be implemented, the company would focus on presenting the different stages of a web design process to the customers so that they would have a wider understanding of where their expenditure is being directed. The project management had suggested that this could be done in video form and could be presented on the case company's own website. The reason for this is that many customers who approach the case company with web work do not understand the scale of creating a new website from scratch. There have been issues in the past with clients who have not understood the pricing of the different bespoke services that the company has offered. The employees agreed that it would be good to have a package price that is stated very clearly to all potential customers to avoid this issue, with the option given to take additional and more bespoke services for extra specified fees. It also was discussed that the difference between web design and content creation should be clearly iterated as many customers do not understand that these are two different processes that require a varied amount of time, knowledge and resources.

One of the company's most popular services is after care and the updating of websites. This was also discussed that the company have thought about how this process could be productised in the future. Even though from the beginning of an after-care project the company is in regular contact with the customer about schedule and changes, it is very usual that changes can occur, and this

can happen with little or no warning. This in turn can have an effect on human resourcing other projects that are running at the same time.

#### 4.1.2 Human resource management

**Q: Please indicate in a typical Web design project the current estimated allocation of time (% per team member) from project start to project delivery (100% maximum)**



*Figure 1 The allocation of time for each main role during a typical website project*

The discussion began with the employees stating that this can vary between projects and is totally dependent on the nature and size of the offering that is needed. However, a certain base can be seen in most web projects.

The employees were in agreement that the project management had the largest role in a typical web design project as the amount of contact with the customer that this role has is the highest. The kick-off and completion of a project is planned by the project management and through this the team receive their task allocation. By way of illustration of this, there have been projects where the project manager has been required make site translations of text, even though this would usually be outsourced to a translation specialist. This creates disturbances in the human resourcing of a project. The group reflected that the customers budget and the time urgency of the project have a large effect on the scale of the project managers role.

The Graphic designers are in many cases given freedom with the design process. This can be a lengthy process and can consist of many rounds of customer commenting. The design team members in the interview mentioned the fact that towards the end of a project there can be a lot of “small tweaking” of minor issues such as colouring and logo design. These small changes can take a lot of time and can require assistance from other designers from outside the project team. The graphic designer employees discussed the fact that it is very difficult to take on many projects at concurrently, because a single project takes a large amount of human resources and demands focus. This also opened the challenge that if there are too many projects running at once the designer can feel like they cannot put the needed energy fully into any of them, which can have a detrimental effect on the quality of the end product. Each graphic designer has their own personal style of design, together with the case company’s own style, the lack of standardisation can also have an effect on the amount of time that a graphic designer can put into a project.

The coders function in a web design process usually follows the same framework and can be a relatively quick process. It was highlighted by a coder that the coders part of the project can vary depending on the scale of the project and whether the customer has an existing web presence. The case company uses the platform WordPress to expedite many projects, and this will require the coder and the content creator and designers to procreate. The coders very rarely are in contact directly with the customers, but this can happen if the company have been hired to continue with the care and updating of the web pages. Coders can also be in direct contact with customers if problems arise in the process if for example there are issues with the website as it is launched.

For clarity, the segment “other” in the chart was specified by the employees as “Other specialists”. Other specialists as discussed in the introduction questions are for example copywriters, translators, photographers and videographers. These specialists are partly in house and partly outsourced and are not always used, yet many projects require at least one of these specialists to contribute.

**Q: Which of the following activities below could be standardised, if any?**

	Fully possible to standardise	Partly possible to standardise	Impossible to standardise	I don't know
<b>Coding</b>			X	
<b>Administration/ Project management</b>		X		
<b>Design</b>		X		
<b>Others</b>			X	X

*Figure 2 The possibility of role standardisation*

The results shown in the table were gathered through conversation between the employees. The discussion began with the employees evaluating the job of the coder. A coders job is so technical and specifically concentrates on circumstantial details that it would be impossible to standardise; this was the opinion of the group. The coders that were present in the discussion agreed heavily as there is no platform or process that could do the work on their behalf as they would always have to code something. The group were strongly of the opinion that the coders process and tasks could not be productized in any way as it could then affect not only the quality of the coding but also create even greater issues. It was stated that even though this maybe be in some cases the quickest part of the process it is also the most specific keystone when creating a website, if this part fails nothing can be built on top.

The discussion then turned to the project management and administration roles. The employees were unclear about how the role of project manager could be made more efficient. They were however of the opinion that this role had the most potential to influence an improvement from a concerted productisation move. The basis for this conclusion was that time efficiency could be enhanced by rethinking the structure of the project managers role, this took on further clarity through the example of a situation where a project has overrun due to communication and timing issues between the customer and the project manager. One employee was remarked that in this case the package system would be particularly useful if the working time of the project manager

could be costed, suggesting that a customer could see visually that using additional project manager time would have effect upon final cost to the customer.

The same themes appeared as in the case of the project management when the employees discussed the role of the graphic designers. The one big difference that was discussed was the freedom of design. The designer in the group opened the fact that it would make their job a lot easier and quicker if there was a ready base that they would work off of with basic web design projects, then again even though they are time consuming the projects where the designer has more freedom to produce a bespoke final product are the reason that they enjoy the job so much. It was quickly touched on that the designer would happily have a mix of the two options, this would allow them to possibly take on more projects at one time.

During discussing the other specialists that are used in web projects it was made very evident that the team could not see a possibility to standardize their work, as most of the other specialists' tasks include very technique specific skills.

#### **4.1.3 Customer orientation**

##### **Q: On average how often are you in contact with the client themselves during a project?**

The employees were given choices for this answer and they were daily, weekly or other. The employee's initial response was that it depends on the project at hand. A usual web project can last from about one to three months provided that no major issues occur. The overall opinion was that most usually the contact between the company and the customer is once weekly, as weekly meetings are held to update the customer on work progress and to get comments on the work so far. The customer also has the opportunity to give feedback and steer should any alterations be made.

Towards the end of a project it is not unusual that contact can be increased to a daily call between the company and the customer. The employees were of the opinion that it is vital in the final weeks to have the customer as involved as possible to ensure that the final products quality is good enough and that the project would not stretch too badly over time, this then causing extra fees for the customer and possible delay of next projects.

One of the employees told the interviewer that their main goal is to keep their operations focused on the customers wants and needs. The ultimate goal of the company is to always provide a high-quality service, and this has resulted in the project management having very regular contact with the client, even though this may not be the most efficient way of working. The employees raised the doubt about how they would be able to maintain their current high-quality level if a “blanket” productisation was adopted. The general view was that a generous provision of customer contact should be maintained in the project manager role.

**Q: Which of the following customer satisfaction tools do you employ?**

The group was given a list of some examples of customer satisfaction tools such as follow up meetings, satisfaction questionnaires, online rating systems, and variations of such tools. The employees were very frank that they do not currently employ any customer satisfaction tools other than project progress meetings. The discussion lead to the fact that it would be useful to adopt a specific tool to gather and measure customer satisfaction particularly should productisation be investigated and implemented further. One of the employees commented that the use of a tool would be helpful to receive concrete feedback and process specific improvement points to allow the company to keep a customer orientated way of working.

The company have communicated with some of the customers via email after the project stage and have been updated on any issues that have appeared. It was also said that in most cases “you just know how it went”.

## **4.2 Industry client findings**

This section will present the findings from the Industry client interviews and show the complimentary perspective to the themes discussed with the case company. The Industry clients that were interviewed were five construction industry SME managers or company owners. The interviews were conducted on a one-to-one basis with the interviewee in a remote meeting during their working time. The meetings being held remotely and not in person due to restrictions under the current global pandemic. The interviews were recorded with the prior permission of the interviewee.

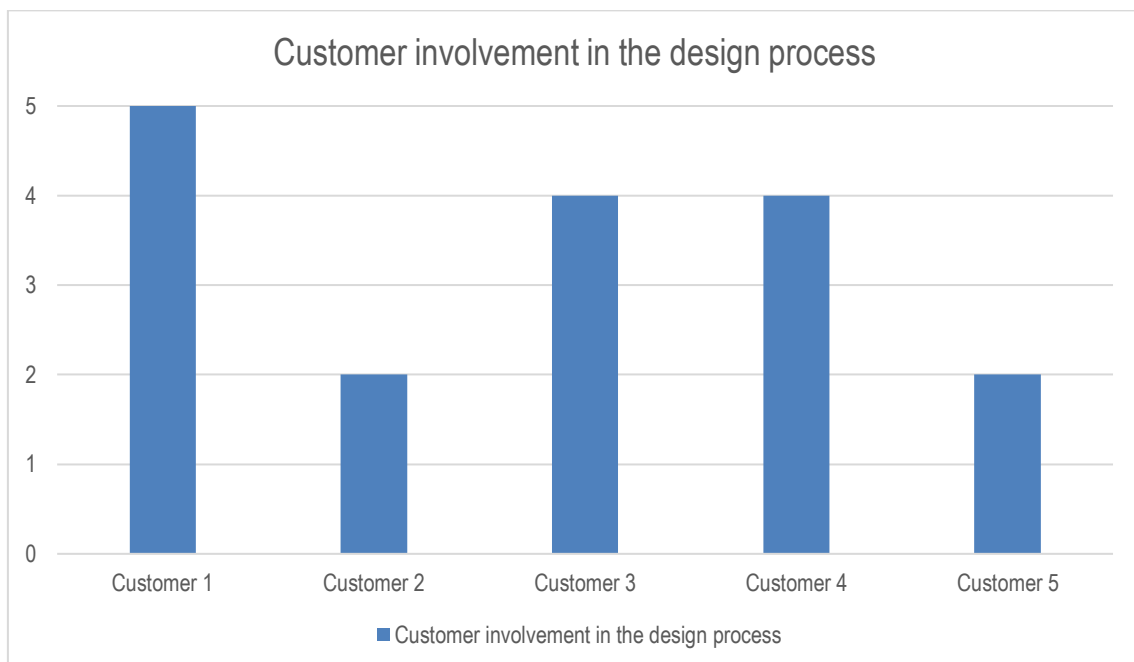
The interviews commenced with a short introduction to the authors thesis and the subject of the work. The interviewee was introduced to the specific topic of the thesis, that being web design and

content creation projects. The author started by asking the customer about their own company's web presence, do they currently have a website and was the design and creation outsourced. All of the five interviewees stated that their company does have an existing website and the creation was outsourced to a media company. Only one of the respondents said that the upkeep of their website is done in house.

#### 4.2.1 Customer project involvement

**Q: If your company was outsourcing the creation and care of your website, how involved in the process would you want to be?**

The customer was presented with two phases of the website creation project, the design process and the content creation phase. They were asked to rate the involvement level that they would like to have in both of the process phases. The scale was 5 Heavily involved – 1 Not involved.



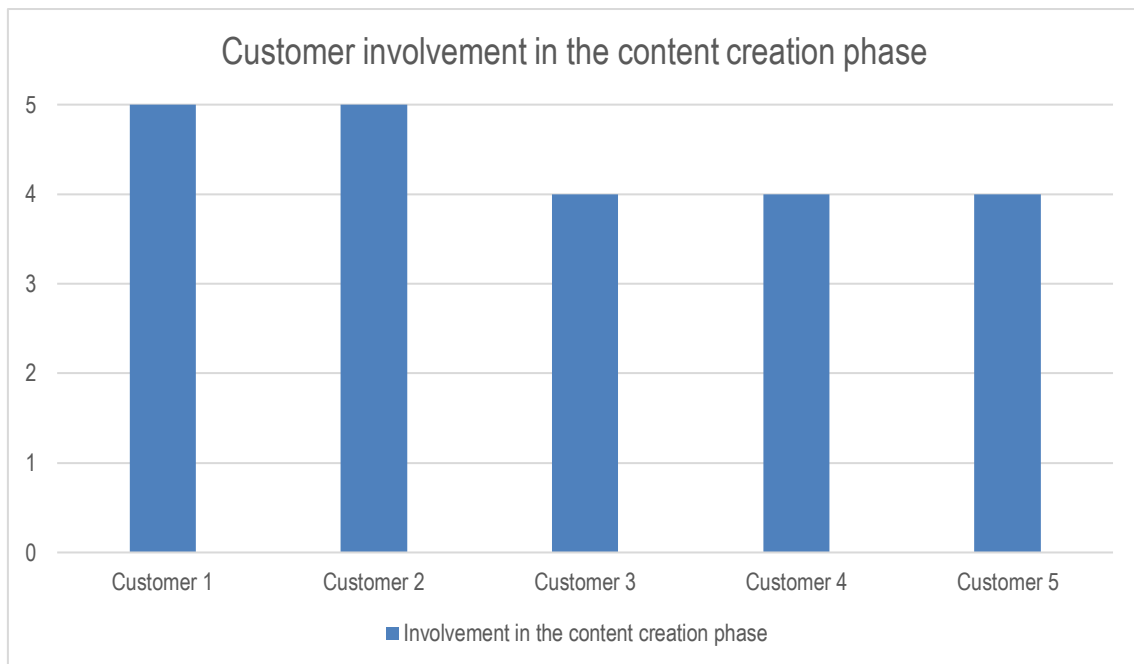
*Figure 3 Industry customer involvement in the website design process*

The results from the first part of the question can be seen in the graph above. It can be seen that 60% of the interviewees felt that they should have a large involvement in the design process and 40% do not think that they need to be as heavily involved.

The customers that belonged to the 60% commented on that they want to have a significant influence upon the final product, this included the design. Even though the outsourced company have the specific expertise of web design, these customers wanted to have overall control when considering how their own customers would see their website.

The remaining 40% of interviewees commented that the reason that they would outsource the designing of their website is because the outsourced company have the specific expertise in that area. One of the interviewees that belonged to this 40% said “I am just a builder, web design is not my strong point. I would keep an eye on the process and give my ideas, other than that I trust in the designers”. This sentence described the general feeling perfectly of 40% of respondents and their reasoning for rating themselves a low involvement score.

The following graph shows the results from the second part of the question. This part deals with the customers want to be involved in the content creation phase. The scale was 5 Heavily involved - 1 Not involved.



*Figure 4 Industry customer involvement in the content creation phase*

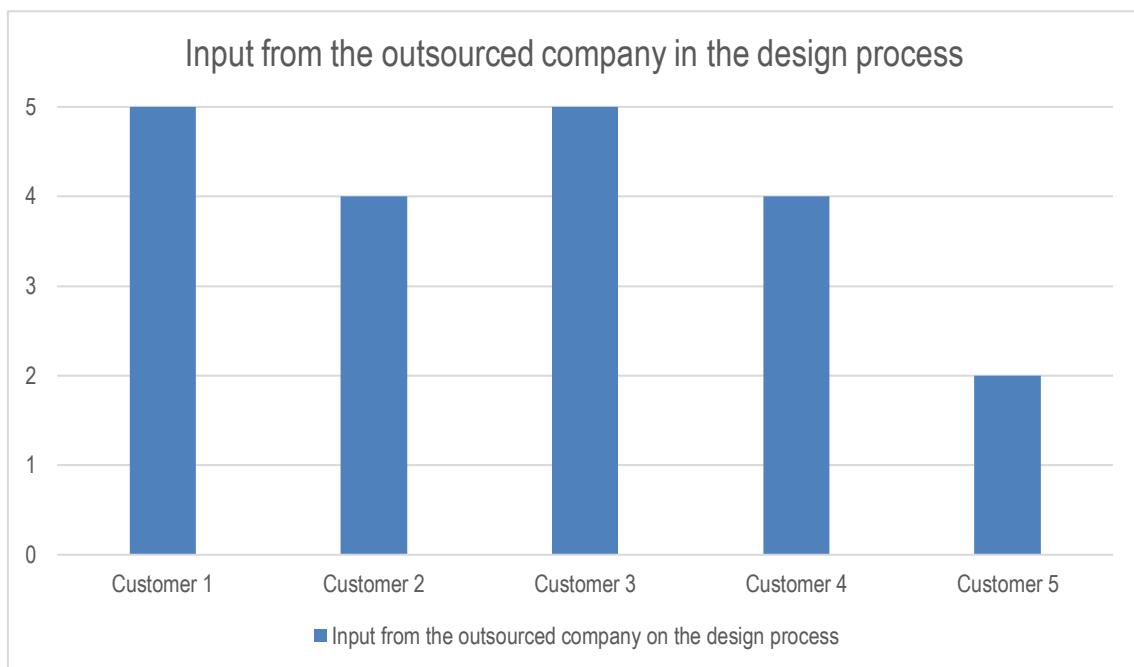
The responses to this question followed the same line and similar themes that were lifted by the interviewees. Four out of the five respondents mentioned that it would be foolish to task an outsourced company, who may not know enough about the business of the client to create the content, therefore it was considered critical that the customer would have a high involvement in this

phase. In addition, the majority commented that it was key to differentiate their own company by representing faithfully their companies' style and message.

#### 4.2.2 Case company project involvement

The second question was focused on the involvement of the outsourced company from the perspective of the potential customer. This question was also separated into the same phases as the first question: The design process and the content creation phase. The same scale was provided 5 Heavily involved – 1 Not involved.

**Q: If your company was outsourcing the creation and care of your website, how much input would you want from the outsourced company when it comes to the final product?**



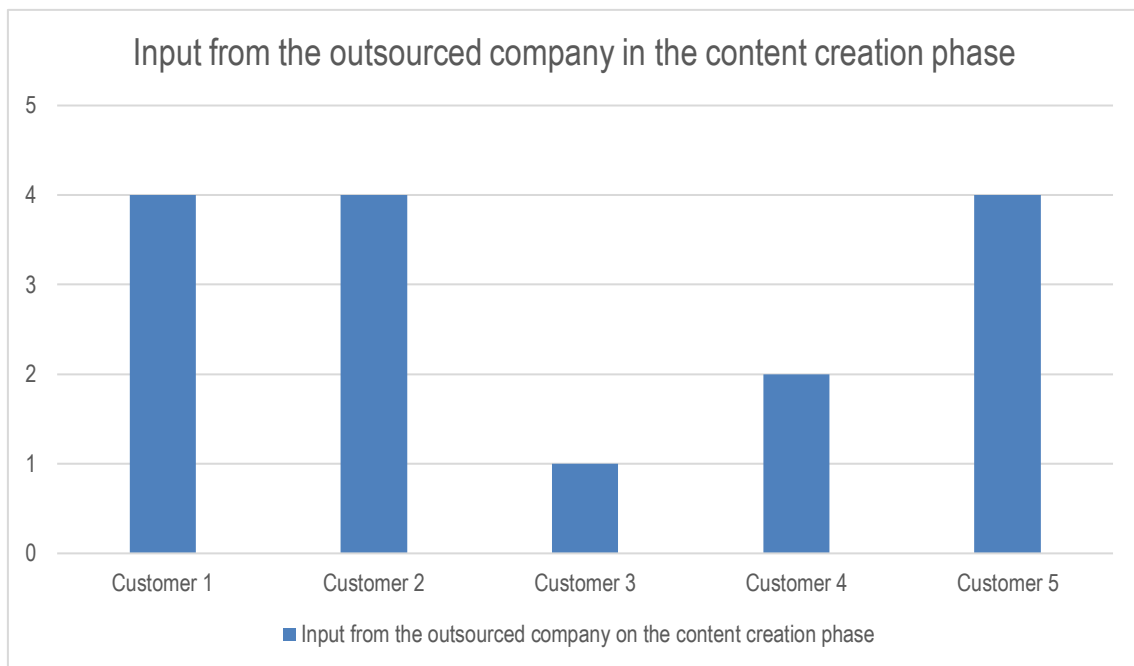
*Figure 5 Input from the case company in the website design process*

The most consistent comment mentioned in some way by every respondent was that the client company would want the outsourced company to regularly keep the client up to date with the process and send samples of the material for the customer to comment. It was very clear in the results from this question that the full involvement of the case company, especially in the design process is the reason why a company would choose to outsource, the case company are the experts in this field and therefore should have a large input into the design of the final product.

One of the interviewees however was of the opinion that the design of the website should mostly come from the client and that the outsourced company should only provide input if the planned design had issues. The same interviewee stated that it would be less necessary to be in contact with the outsourced company often if they were provided with clear direction from the very beginning of a project.

The overall outcome from this question was however that the input of the case company in the design process is the most important phase that the outsourced company will take part in.

The second part of this question in turn focused on the content creation phase. The respondents were given the same scale as in the previous section. The scale is 5 Heavily involved – 1 Not involved.



*Figure 6 Input from the case company in the content creation phase*

Two out of the five interviewees commented that they would want the outsourced company to have near to no input on the content creation as it would be a waste of time if they were not familiar enough with the kind of content needed on a construction company's website. The other respondents expected that the outsourced company would be capable to offer experience and knowledge in every phase of the project, including the creation of content, this being the reason for turning to an external company for the service.

### **4.2.3 Post project web care and customer satisfaction**

The interviewees were asked to indicate how they would see the value of post website production aftercare and updating. The interviewees were given a scale from 5 Very useful to 1 Not useful. Four out of the five respondents gave a score of four. The high scores were seen, due to the fact that the interviewees wanted to have regular updates to their websites such as seasonal offers and client reference cases.

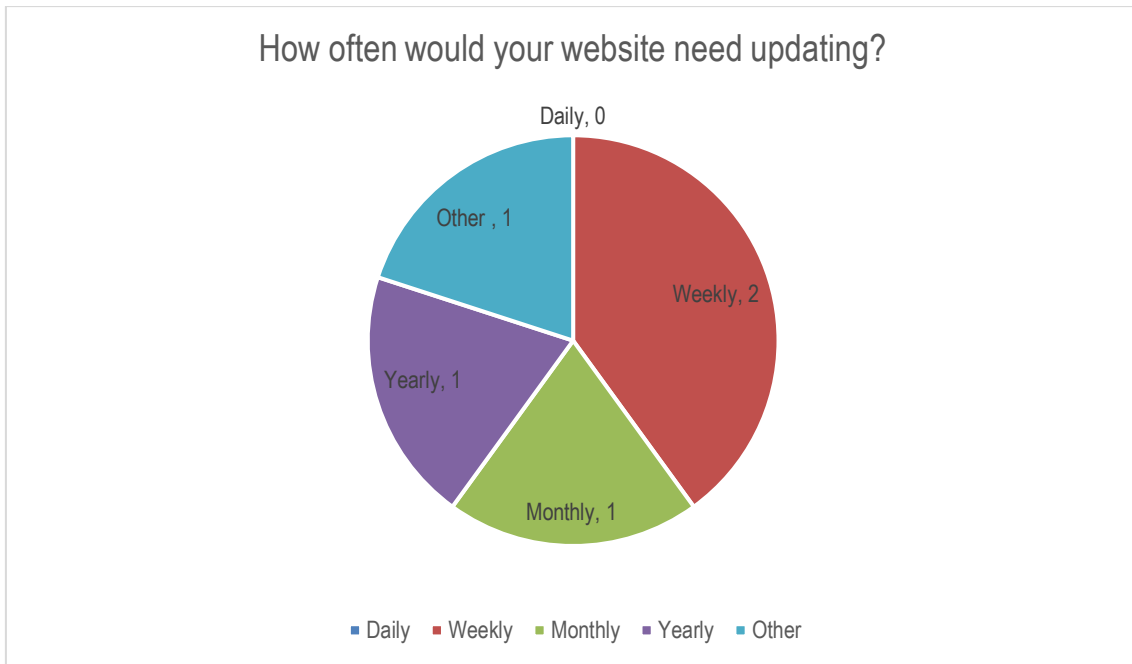
One of the interviewees found this a very interesting idea as they had been planning to add an option for customers to contact the company and purchase services via their website. To the point of an interview, their clients have been only able to contact them via phone and arrange a live meeting. Due to the current global pandemic the company wanted to update their online presence and see that it would be necessary to have the assistance of professionals.

The fifth interviewee gave the response of two, indicating the need for updating and website care was not of great use to their company. This company customer then explained that they have kept the updating of their website as an inhouse function within their relevant team. They have their own content management system and have in-house WordPress competency.

**Q: How often would your website need updating? (Choose one)**

- **Daily**
- **Weekly**
- **Monthly**
- **Yearly**
- **Other \_\_\_\_\_**

The chart below shows the results from the previous question. As can be seen from the pie chart all but one interviewee saw the need for regularly scheduled updating and care of their websites. One respondent chose to comment only using the free text option, to put into context this was the company that have an in-house website updating team. They did not indicate an update timescale. They did however suggest that it would be helpful to have the option for assistance if needed in future.



*Figure 7 The industry clients need for website updating (time)*

The final interview question asked the industry customers, which customer satisfaction tools they would be most likely to complete. The discussion around this topic started with the interviewer presenting a few options and then giving the respondent a chance to add comments or detail any additional tools that were not mentioned. The examples that were given to the customer were a follow up meeting, satisfaction questionnaire, Net promoter score, none or other.

All but one respondent chose the follow up meeting as their preferred tool, the most dominant reason behind this being that after a larger project that has included many phases it could be beneficial for both the client and the outsourced company to have a discussion on how the project went. One commented that there would be a better chance for factors that could be improved or changed to be opened up through conversation rather than form filling. The possibility for the customer to ask project related questions was also identified as easier in a follow up meeting. Lastly, one respondent commented that future projects could be discussed in follow up meetings.

## **5 DISCUSSION**

This chapter will discuss the findings from the interviews conducted together with the pre-existing research. The author will also reflect upon the research methods by discussing the strengths and weaknesses of the process, this will include the validity and reliability of the process and findings. The chapter will end with the presenting of an action plan created as a suggestion for the case company on the basis of the findings.

### **5.1 The findings**

The previous chapter presented the findings from the interviews and this section will open the results and discuss the different themes that appeared. The author aims to present and compare the findings from the two focus groups and begin to build a base from which to conclude and answer the research questions.

#### **5.1.1 Customer and case company involvement**

The interview series all commenced with a discussion surrounding the involvement of the customer and the case company in the web project process. The author considered that it would be key to establish how both sides see the execution of this type of project. This would aid to understand more clearly the gains that could be made through productisation, to understand tacitly how any subsequent recommendations or conclusions would impact upon both the client company and the industry customer.

The separation of the design process and the content creation phase was also important as the author wanted to establish through research, would it be possible for both of these main phases to be productised.

Whilst discussing the focus groups involvement in the web design process, the case company employees mostly agreed that their customers typically would want to be involved in the design process. In many situations' customers give an initial vision for the end product and then pass over the designing and building to the company. The employees revealed during this conversation that

they have previously considered a productisation tool that would include online product packages with fixed productised pricing. This indicated that the case company already understood that they would need to consider a more standardised approach and that customers and indeed themselves could benefit from an off the shelf productisation tool. If an online customer facing platform was available, a customer could initiate a templated vision of their final product and then allow the case company to refine from that starting point. This would eliminate the need for a start-up meeting and therefore open up more time for more projects. This platform would require a ready-made web base that could then be adapted to the style of the customer.

When focusing on the topic of involvement with the industry client interviewees, the design process was something that 60% of the respondents wanted to be heavily involved in. Despite this, the respondents conceded that the expertise for design lay inside the case company, this being the principle reason for outsourcing.

An online platform would give the client companies an opportunity to monitor the ongoing development of their new website in real time, with pre-selected options and opportunities to upload their own content and material. This would increase the customers possibility to ensure that quality was checked fully before publishing the completed work. It would also minimise the case company project managers time pressures.

The case company did not want to lose the close connection with their customer but providing a direct line of communication to the project manager would also be far more efficient if unnecessary calls were minimised. Client interviews did suggest that there was a demand for bespoke website design and yet the case company often found that the client didn't know exactly what they wanted. The online platform could support productisation in that the client would be able to visualise their options more easily, reducing the time burden of discussion and ground-up design.

The content creation phase stimulated a weighty conversation with both of the focus groups, and some unexpected findings came from the case company's employees. Industry Customers would normally have a plethora of expertise specific to their own industry. It would be quite reasonable given the strong willingness to be involved in the content creation phase to expect a customer to have readily prepared specialised content. Contrary to this expectation, the case company have experienced many incidences whereby the industry customer asks for assistance in content creation, this reality may have some bearing upon any recommendations towards productisation.

The introduction of an online customer facing platform can also prepare the industry client in terms of pricing and how the options of pricing are affected by the allocation of human resources such as creating content that could be created by the customer. On the basis of the research the clients who really insist on a fully bespoke web project could have exactly that, this would also suit the case company who indicated that this should remain an available option. The pricing of such an option can transparently test the clients real need.

It became clear to the author that a post project web care possibility would be very welcomed to the industry customers, especially the customers who felt that their website would benefit from an outsourced company updating on a regular basis. This option could be sold as a continuation or support package that would allow the customer to upload materials and content from a content management system and additionally have a specific package deal with specialised skills such as coders, photographers or designers. The author researched other examples of companies who use an online package deal system and noted that there were a few packages on offer giving a frequency choice such as daily, weekly or monthly and describing them as bronze, silver or gold packages. The package presented a short explanation of the offering and the customer then had the option to purchase the selected package without contacting the company directly.

The project managers resource efficiency was discussed in most detail and it was obvious that the employees were in clear agreement that the standardisation of this role would be most possible. The allocation of the project management time is taken up by the continuous communication with the client, not only in relation to the specifics of the project but concerning the functions of the other team members skillsets. Weekly and even daily emails regarding changes and new ideas could be channelled more effectively if there was a platform where the client could input content at their own pace. This platformed approach would then function as a direct communication line between both the project manager and the client, but also the design team and technical team. Having the current communication method as it is, heightens the likelihood that information can be overlooked or misunderstood, this can result in delays in the process and in the worst-case scenario the customer can become dissatisfied.

The design teams human resource efficiency was clearly also of concern to the employees, it was evident that the amount of work that the team has, prevents them from taking on additional client cases. The nature of the bespoke style of design is very time consuming and requires a great deal of contact with the customer. Samples must be sent back and forth between the graphic designers

and the customers, often this can include multiple comment rounds from the customer. As the communication route is not direct, these comments do not always give a clear instruction to the designers of the desired outcome. As previously discussed, the creation of an online platform would also create a direct communication line between the design team and the customer. The case company interview highlighted a concern that the technical teams' tasks, specifically coding, cannot be productised as this function is so skill specific that it would not be possible. As an observation from the period of work experience conducted with the case company, the author had already observed some technically specific skill sets clearly standalone and unlikely to be brought into a more standardised approach.

The findings observed from the data collection process have a strong connection with the information in the theoretical framework of the thesis. Remembering the research of Flamholtz (2000), the most important aspect that the productising company must keep in mind is their ability to satisfy the needs and wants of the customer. The other topic that was clearly shown through the findings was that the customers wanted to achieve high quality end products that met with their visions and expectations. This can be seen in the existing research of Valminen and Toivonen (2012) where the higher level of quality that is produced will show positively in the company's placement in the market.

The authors evaluation of the findings is that should this part of the process be productised it would not necessarily need to eliminate the option for customers to be able meet with the case company on a regular basis and receive a bespoke service from the case company. When taking into account the current style of offerings, it can be human resource draining for the case company and to be able to work in a more efficient way, productisation could improve efficiency in human resource terms. The industry customers were quite clear that their main demands were to receive a good quality end product created with skill and delivers their company's message and style. Both the design process and the content creation phase could be based around a more standardised version and at an additional cost the client could receive a more personalised service. This change would need testing by the case company and to focus upon whether the quality of the produced products would be maintained at the high level that it has been.

### 5.1.2 Customer orientation

The case company's perspective on their customer orientated style was very expected, and the author was not surprised about the sceptical attitude towards the productisation process in this area. The employees expressed a concern surrounding the level of quality, should they offer a more standardised product base. The possibility of a decrease in quality is always possible in a badly executed productisation process, however, the importance of having a quality offering would not necessarily reduce as a result of a move towards productisation, conversely it may improve customer orientation significantly. The same high skill set would still be present in the final product, but the standardised process would allow the project members to have better human resource efficiency thus improving the capability to function in a more customer orientated way. If the process of content creation was standardised and expedited by the customer directly into an online platform using a content management system, this would open the potential for a more direct communication line with the customer and allow the team to focus on the other stages of the process that require the most specific skilled attention. This was strongly backed up by the wants and needs of the industry customers as they saw that the most important factors of the project would be an easy and fast communication line and the combination of their own style and the outsourced company's expertise.

The author was surprised to learn that the case company does not have any customer satisfaction tool in use, this was more surprising given the case companies express desire to be customer orientated in their *modus operandi* and central to their ethos. The continuous contact between the client and the case company can give an indication of how a project is performing but it would not formalise a more neutral environment for critique to be shared, removing personalities and driving objectivity.

The industry clients revealed that a follow-up meeting would be the preferred tool, of course depending on the nature of the project. The case company could offer a follow-up meeting to the client but if the client does not feel that it would be necessary then a net promotor score would be a fast option to receive feedback and may allow a more objective and less personal opportunity for opinion.

The theoretical framework explored information about the process of needs assessment, Royse et al (2009) said that when a company performs a needs assessment it can assist in estimating deficiencies in the existing processes and allow the company to have a better understanding of the perceived needs and wants of the customers. This supports the need for an urgency to evaluate the customer orientation style and for example adopting the customer satisfaction tools. This is deepened even further by Milner and Furnham's (2017) discussion on the process of measuring customer satisfaction. A company who measures the satisfaction of the offerings can predict for example loyalty and the repurchase possibility. This is a key driver when wishing to build long term relationships with clients.

## **5.2 Action plan**

The author saw it fit to create an action plan for the company on the basis of the research findings. It is evident that in most stages of the web design and content creation process productisation would have a beneficial effect on the efficiency of the human resources. It is understood by the author that the decision to add a more standardised option for customers is not a minor business change, it would require the case company to re-evaluate the bespoke nature of their services, notwithstanding the commitment of the case company management.

The action plan follows the SMART goals that were developed by George Doran, Arthur Miller and James Cunningham. In Doran's article "There's a S.M.A.R.T. way to write management's goals and objectives" he says, "How do you write meaningful objectives?" - that is, frame a statement of results to be achieved, Managers are confused by all the verbal from seminars, books, magazines, consultants, and so on. Let me suggest therefore, that when it comes to writing effective objectives, corporate officers, managers, and supervisors just have to think of the acronym SMART (Doran, 1981). The acronym SMART consists of five criteria for effective objective making; S stands for specific, the objective must be specific and target a certain area. Measurable is the next criteria, the objective must be quantified or at least a suggested indicator should be provided. A is for assignable and this means that the task should be clearly directed to an employee or department. Realistic is the next criteria and it is imperative that the objectives stated have a realistic achievement rate. Finally, T stands for time-related and refers to the possible achievement time of the objective.

Due to the scale of the potential changes the author is aware that the time scale must be adaptable.

The process of adopting a shift towards productisation would require a deeper knowledge of how the transition on the product service continuum would work for the case company's offering, therefore the action plan sets out that the case company would initially conduct additional research on the topic to arrive to a conclusion about the scale of productisation. This additional research could be carried out over a trial period with existing client web projects. On the basis of this research and the company's knowledge of the industry, an online product package system could be built and tested in the market. The author has estimated that the creation of the online platform would take three months, as during the interviews it was discussed that a web project typically takes this amount of time. The creation of this platform would be directed towards the Technical team and specifically the coders as a considerable amount of this skillset is needed to develop a working platform. The next step would be the planning and creation of the product package offerings, this would be in the domain of the case company management team and it is estimated that the same timeframe would be required.

The final task of the action plan should be the adoption of a customer satisfaction measurement tool. The author would see that the case company should consider the immediate adoption of a formal customer satisfaction tool.

*Figure 8 Action plan for the case company*

Action Description	Responsible department/ Employee	Timeframe	Required resources	Outcome
Add on research and trial period	PM/ student	Three months (Adaptable)	Existing client details, time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To strengthen the research base.</li> <li>- To research similar offerings on the market and the results.</li> </ul>
Creation of an online platform	Technical team members and management	Three months (Adaptable)	Workforce, sufficient platform builder tools	- The base component to accommodate the productization process
Productization package planning and creation	Management	Three months (Adaptable)	Knowledge of similar market offerings, workforce, time	-The base component to produce a more standardized product offering to clients.
The adoption of a customer satisfaction tool	Management	Two weeks (ASAP)	workforce	- The case company maintaining a customer orientated system that will strengthen the communication line with clients.

### 5.3 Evaluation of the research

As the author had spent a training period with the case company it could be considered as a weakness that the interview questions, even though constructed with the help of literature and with the information learned during a business research course, were built with some previous knowledge on the situation at the case company. On the other hand, this can also be seen as a strength as the author has a wider knowledge of the scenario. A factor that can be seen as a weakness is the amount of literature behind the theory part of the thesis. The author used main literary sources by Armstrong & Kotler and Raab & Gerhard. The reliability of the thesis could be higher if the author would have included more literary sources. The reason for this shortfall is that the author had difficulties finding relevant literature. Additional research and a more applied approach to research made some compensation for the lack of suitable reference material.

The research process was clear from the beginning of the planning stage of the thesis. The author wanted to hold live interviews with two focus groups that could give two perspectives, unfortunately this was affected adversely by serious implications of the global pandemic 2020/21. The authenticity of the data collection stage would have been higher if the author would have been able to meet with the industry customers in a more natural setting than remotely. A remote meeting, although very common due to the current global situation, is not the most relaxed of scenarios for an interview, the author was challenged to enable the most natural framing of the remote interviews.

The group interview with the case company employees realised as a very efficient way to instigate discussion and collect themes. In the case of this research the group scenario was very fitting especially because the interview did not include any information that was too personal or could restrict participants from speaking freely, nevertheless the author was aware that employees may have felt uncomfortable to be seen as negative in front of their senior management. This was a regrettable condition from the pandemic situation.

There were however details in the interview process that could have been more fitting. Upon reflection, the author considers that even though open conversation was produced, the interviews could have included more open questions. The design of the interviews aimed to make it as simple as possible for the respondent to reply and needed to respect the limited and generous time offered by the case company management and team. This factor could also have been adjusted as the participants were very open to helping and discussing the topics presented.

## **6 CONCLUSION**

This final chapter will be the conclusion section to this thesis, the conclusion will be the authors final comments on the basis of the pre-existing theory and research, the findings from the interviews and the results of the discussion stage. This section will also focus on fulfilling the aim of the thesis, which was to answer the research questions, they will be reintroduced to the reader and answered. The final part of the conclusion chapter will be the authors recommendations to the case company.

### **6.1 Answering the research questions**

As mentioned in the introduction, this thesis has been built around two main research questions. The first being “Will productisation of the case company’s bespoke services increase human resource productivity and efficiency?” and the second question is “How can the case company ensure that the offering stays customer orientated?”.

The first research question is centred around the main theme of productisation and in the case of the case company whether it would be a beneficial change for the business process. The underlying reason for this research question and in whole the thesis, is that the case company have faced issues with the efficient use of human resource use due to the bespoke nature of their current service proposition. The answer to this question would be to form the basis of a Stop/Go decision by the case company to investigate further the productisation of both the design and content creation phases. In this case, it can be concluded from the findings and research that the adoption of a more standardised offering would lower the amount of time used in back and forth communications and clarifications with the customer. The creation of an online product platform will make the process straight forward and allow the customer to upload and enter content themselves. This would again lower the amount of work that the content creation team would have to take on, almost eliminating the need for a content creation team, unless the client wishes to buy this additional service.

The second thesis question seeks to establish the ability of the case company to maintain their customer orientated business model whilst following a productisation process. The findings highlighted the key customer orientation demand was for an effective and open communication channel, required to monitor progress and handle problems. This can be ensured through the

simplification of a direct platform led communication system such as a chat function. Whether the case company choose to productise or not, they could ensure that their product offering remains customer orientated by improving their current telephone and email-based communication system. The case company should take into consideration the value of feedback as simply speaking the quality of their offering is measured by their customers alone. The case company can definitely remain customer orientated but the introduction of a customer satisfaction tool is an essential step described in the action plan proposed by the author and should be introduced regardless of the adoption of further productisation.

## **6.2 Recommendations**

On the basis of the gathered research the author can see that the case company would benefit widely from the productisation of their bespoke services. The specific area's that the findings have shown to be considered for productisation are the design, content creation and communication line phases of a project. The author suggests that the company follow the action plan that has been presented and this includes comprehensive additional research, the creation of an online platform that holds product packages and the trial run of this platform.

Customer orientation can only be maintained by formalising the adoption of a customer satisfaction tool. This should be implemented as a priority and is included as an action point in the proposed action plan.

The author suggests that additional research would be beneficial both for the case company and the offering of theoretical framework around the topic of productisation. The following topics could be extended through continual research:

- Productisation in the media industry
- The effect of productisation on offering quality
- How does the adoption of productisation effect upon companies' financial performance?

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Case company interview

Background questions

1. What is your job title?

Productization

1. Describe the typical structure of a usual web project team and their roles.
2. "Customers want to be involved in every aspect of the web design process"  
Choose one of the following responses:
  - Strongly agree
  - Mildly agree
  - Neither disagree nor agree
  - Mildly disagree
  - Strongly disagree

Comments?

3. "Customers want to have complete control over website content creation"  
Choose one of the following responses:
  - Strongly agree
  - Mildly agree
  - Neither disagree nor agree
  - Mildly disagree
  - Strongly disagree

Comments?

4. Please indicate in a typical web design project the current estimated allocation of time from project start to project delivery (100% maximum)
 

Coder	%
Administrator	%
Designer	%
Others	%

5. Which one of the activities below could be standardized?

	Fully possible to standardize	Partly possible to standardize	Impossible to standardize	I don't know
Coding				
Administration				
Design				
Others				

6. What productization steps has the company taken thus far in your web design offering?

Customer orientation

1. How often are you in contact with the client themselves during a project?
  - Daily
  - Weekly
  - Other
2. Which of the following customer satisfaction tools do you employ?
  - Follow up meeting
  - Satisfaction questionnaire
  - Online rating system
  - None
  - Other, please specify...

Comments:

Industry customer Interview Questions

1. If your company was outsourcing the creation and care of your website, how involved in the process would you want to be?

(Scale 5 Heavily involved – 1 Not involved)

**Design process:**

- 5
- 4
- 3
- 2
- 1

**Content creation:**

- 5
- 4
- 3
- 2
- 1

Comments:

2. If your company was outsourcing the creation and care of your website, how much input would you want from the outsourced company when it comes to the final product?

(Scale 5 Heavily involved- 1 Not involved)

**Design process:**

- 5
- 4
- 3
- 2
- 1

**Content creation:**

- 5
- 4
- 3
- 2
- 1

Comments:

3. In the case of your company, would you find it useful that a website after care plan would be arranged with the outsourced company?

(Scale- 5 Very useful- 1 Not useful)

5

4

3

2

1

4. ...if so, how often would your website need updating? (Choose one)

- Daily
- Weekly
- Monthly
- Yearly
- Other

Comment:

5. Which of the following customer satisfaction tools are you most likely to complete?

- Follow up meeting
- Satisfaction questionnaire
- Online rating system
- None
- Other, please specify...

Comment: