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HOW COMPANIES UTILIZE MASCOTS IN THEIR DIGITAL MARKETING

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ABSTRACT

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The commissioner for this thesis was Spinfy, a children's mobile applications developer. From August 2012 to December 2012, the author conducted her internship at Spinfy and during this time initiated a marketing stunt/project utilizing the company mascot as an online marketing tool. The main goal of this thesis was to provide the commissioner with a comprehensive digital marketing communications plan for their mascot, Spinky. A company mascot can take on various marketing roles, depending on the particular company's vision and strategy. In Spinfy's case, Spinky's role is to reach potential customers and other target segments in social media, as well as to assist in creating an integrated synergy between all of Spinfy's marketing material.

Through desktop research on profound marketing theories, the author developed a thorough understanding of how to analyze, prepare and implement a strategic marketing communications plan. After reading this thesis, the commissioner and the other audience will gain a basic knowledge of how comprehensive the marketing operations of a company really are. Furthermore, the theoretical framework provides the reader with information about digital marketing, social media marketing and how to utilize a mascot in this environment.

The result of the thesis comes in the form of a marketing plan developed solemnly for Spinky's future marketing communications efforts. A conclusion was drawn that Spinky possesses the right ingredients to enhance Spinfy's overall marketing efforts. However, there are issues which might prove challenging when it comes to executing the plan; lack of resources is an example of such an issue.

To conclude, this presented digital marketing communications plan provides a clear strategy and action plan for how the commissioner can proceed with Spinky's online activities. If the implementation of the plan is successful, Spinky might prove valuable to the commissioner as an active marketing tool. Lastly, the author would like to point out the endless possibilities of utilizing mascots in marketing operations and as for Spinky, it would be intriguing to see further development measures, for example in the form of a follow-up thesis by another student.

Keywords: marketing, social media, company mascots, content marketing , digital marketing

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

"Mascots are brands' best social media accessories", states E.J. Schultz in Advertising Age (2012. Date of retrieval 03.03.2013). Although Mascots have been employed by companies for the past 200 years, their popularity started increasing significantly alongside with the social media boom. One reason for this, perhaps the most important one, is that social media helps breathe life into these already vivid characters.

Even though mascot marketing might be a new term for many, we are all encountered by company mascots in our daily lives. Cute penguins and cuddly teddy bears are to be seen on ice-cream packages and cereal boxes in most grocery stores world-wide. However, the possibility to interact with these mascots through Facebook or Twitter is fairly new. If applied well, the mascot marketing tool might mean a competitive edge on rival competitors.

The commissioner for this Thesis is Spinfy Oy, a children's mobile application developer. Spinfy's main products are mobile games and interactive storybooks for touch-screen devices. For the most part the products feature already-known children's characters and brands, such as *Moomins* and *Tatu and Patu*. As a result of this, some of their products have reached the top of the App-Store book listings in Finland, Norway and Sweden. Their product line consists of classical Tove Jansson originals, new Moomin stories made for digital-purpose only, as well as an original Tatu and Patu storybook. As a small start-up company Spinfy has chosen to cooperate with publishing houses in several other countries for localization and marketing purposes. Their in-house marketing efforts have been mostly related to growing a strong and lasting brand image.

This thesis will concentrate on the digital marketing possibilities for Spinfy's company mascot, Spinky. Spinky is a virtual creature who lives in cyberspace and endorse on high quality mobile applications. His personality traits are: friendliness, curiosity, silliness and absurdity. As a marketing trainee at Spinfy I developed Spinky in an online-environment, mostly on the social media platform Twitter, from October 2012 and I continued the project to this current date. For this reason I chose the topic: How companies utilize mascots in their digital marketing.

Furthermore, a digital marketing communications plan for Spinky is necessary in order to map out the way for Spinfy to reach their goals for Spinky. Spinky's overall purpose is to

draw traffic to either Spinfy's website or directly to the applications' point of purchase. Other functions of Spinky can be recognized to be:

- keeping customers at the website and making them return
- being the face of the company
- making Spinfy memorable and recognizable

By providing a digital marketing plan, the author of this thesis enables the commissioner to not only continue Spinky's social media activities, but develop and integrate the mascot in the overall digital marketing efforts of the company. The theory base of the thesis ensures that real marketing analyses have been implemented and assisted in the development of the final strategy and action plan of Spinky.

The structure of this report is built up by a solid, fundamental base of marketing theories and the strategic marketing communications plan is developed on the bases of the theoretical framework. In more detail, the reader can expect a comprehensive introduction to the professional field of marketing and then a step-by-step guidance of how to create a strategic marketing plan. The plan is built up by five parts: thorough internal and external analysis of Spinky, objectives of the plan, strategy, action plan and lastly, an analysis of the resource required to execute the plan.

The chosen methodology for this research is desktop research. In order to understand where mascots fit into the big picture of marketing and marketing strategies, this thesis will narrow the focus from marketing in general and down to the specific tool of mascot marketing. As Spinfy operates in a highly modern environment and most of their operations are conducted online, the author of this thesis will narrow the focus down even further to digital marketing, with mascots as the chosen marketing tool. In order to get thorough theoretical background, this research will explore traditional marketing theories and strategies from known marketing-experts as well as more contemporary tactics from articles and blogs found online.

After reading this thesis, the audience will have a profound understanding of the basic marketing concepts and be able to create a successful company mascot for digital media purposes. Furthermore, Spinfy, the commissioner, will have a suggested strategy of how to utilize Spinky in an efficient and constructive way for the future. The main goal for this report is to provide a strong digital marketing communications plan for Spinky. In more detail, this means clarifying what content Spinky could be producing and sharing and in what way Spinky can assist in unifying Spinfy's

overall marketing efforts to generate a synergy between all marketing communications channels and various messages.

1. MARKETING

When confronted with the term Marketing many people think about the advertising function only. This is perhaps fairly logical because the most visible outcome of marketing efforts might be commercials on billboards, TV, radio or pop-up ads online. Still, for professional marketers the term represents a whole philosophy (Lamb, Hair & McDaniel 2011, 3). Actually, some marketers go as far as to say that "marketing is everything" (Steve McKee 2006). By and large, this means that every employee within a company, whether she/he works in production or administration, does something that has a say in how customers see the brand.

From a company's prospective, making money is the main purpose of existence. Marketing can set the strategy for how this goal may be accomplished. Overall, marketing enables companies to offer valuable, satisfactory solutions to customers in return for relationship and value exchange. It is fair to say that marketing is an essential part of Business operations, even though some small companies may chose not to pay attention to it at all.

1.1 Definition of Marketing

"Marketing is the process of planning and executing the conception, pricing, distribution, and promotion of ideas, goods and services to create exchanges that satisfy the perceived needs, wants, and objectives of individuals and organizations" (Arens, Weingold, Arens 2011,15).

There are numerous definitions on what marketing actually is as marketing experts focus on different aspects of the complex process. As in the one above, many of these definitions include five core elements. Kotler and Armstrong (2011, 30-31) suggest the elements to be:

- Customer needs, wants and demands
- Tangible and intangible products
- Customer value and satisfaction
- Exchanges and relationships
- Markets

Customer needs, wants and demands

The key to great marketing success is to truly understand the customers, knowing how to reach them and lastly, to offer them value in the appropriate form. However, this might be more challenging than one would initially think. In order to fully understand the target customers, one must recognize the underlying needs, wants and demands of human kind. Such needs can be as primitive as having a shelter, clothes, food and water. Wants are simply the form in which these needs are fulfilled and demands are considered to be wants backed by buying power. Naturally people want and demand different products and services, this can be explained by cultural factors. For example; an East-Asian needs food, but wants rice and demands a specific brand and rice type (Kotler & Armstrong 2011, 30). For Spinfy's customers one could argue that the underlying need, in which to be satisfied, is the need for entertainment and education. These customers want their needs to be satisfied in the form of digital content, preferably on touch-screen devices which enables interactivity. As for the demand, the customers develop a demand for a special type of application, or a specific brand to deliver the application of the highest level of quality and entertainment. Getting the customers to prefer Spinfy as the ideal developer is the main challenge of marketing.

Tangible and intangible products

Once the company has gained a thorough understanding of what the customer wants, a fitting product or service needs to be offered. Many companies develop and produce products they believe to be useful, without the proper market research, only to find that no one wants to buy such a product. In order to avoid such a faith, companies must continuously ask the customers what their preferences are at that certain time. In this fast-pace environment customer wants change as quickly as the development of new products (Kotler & Armstrong 2011, 30).

Customer value and satisfaction

When a costumer decides to buy a product, she/he probably has some degree of expectation to how the product will deliver the expected value and satisfaction. A marketer should be careful with setting these expectations too high. Since the market is full of alternative solutions and products, a dissatisfied and disappointed customer is not likely to return (Lamb, Hair & McDaniel 2011, 9). However, if the received value and experience compliment or even exceeds the customer's initial expectations, the foundation for a strong customer relationship might establish.

Exchanges and relationships

In the past, the challenge of gaining new customers has had a tendency to take over the overall focus of marketing activities. However, the relationship marketing strategy aims at nurturing the bonds companies have with current clients (Lamb, Hair & McDaniel 2011, 9). Nowadays the emphasis on customer relationships is stronger than ever, in fact, it is the core message of Kotler and Armstrong's definition on marketing as a whole: "marketing is the process by which companies create value for customers and build strong customer relationships in order to capture value from customers in return" (Kotler & Armstrong 2011, 29).

From Spinfy's point of view, Kotler and Armstrong's definition could describe the ideal goal for their marketing efforts. Furthermore, a marketing strategy based on building lasting customer relationships is of high importance when it comes to the particular field of industry in which Spinfy operates. When talking about families as a target group there is a certain amount of trust required to gain loyal customers; a close customer relationship can help ensure loyalty. Two important elements parents look for when purchasing mobile applications for their children are; safety and educational content (PBS Parents. Date of retrieval 08.02.2013). Once proven reliable, Spinfy would have an excellent opportunity to create strong customer ties.

Markets

A market consists of potential future and current customers who share common preferences for a product or service. Another way to define a market could be the companies' target audience and partners in a mutual value exchange. (Kotler and Armstrong 2011,31)

Hooley, Piercy and Nicolaud (2008) point out the interests which both the customers and the companies have when initiating an exchange relationship with one another. As shown in the figure below, the common goal between the customer and the provider is mutual satisfaction. By offering products and services, the company strives to reach their set of goals, while the customer on her/his side gains contentment by purchasing and supporting the company's offerings.

FIGURE 1: Beneficial exchanges in customer relationships (Hooley, Piercy and Nicolaud 2008, 7).

1.2 Marketing Mix

Marketing mix consists of product, place, price and promotion, also known as the 4 P's. These four elements represent the core choices a company must make when presenting a product or service to a market (Lamb, Hair & McDaniel 2011, 47). First of all, the product is the core element when talking about marketing, without it, there's nothing to market (Hunderkar, Appannaiah 2010, 49). When talking about a product in this context, we are also talking about other elements than just the physical unit; the packaging, warranty and after-sales service, just to mention a few. When looking at Spinfy's products, applications are not physical products, but they go under the category of products, not services. One special feature with this type of product is that the applications can be updated straight to the customer's smart-phone or tablet. The packaging would in this case be the logo and description text which appears in the store of purchase, which again brings up the next P; place. Quite literally, the place refers to the point of purchase, or the way a product is distributed. In some industries where a physical shop is needed, location is everything and might be very costly. However, nowadays there is a growing trend of online stores. Spinfy utilizes two of the biggest online stores for application purchase: AppStore and Google Play. Place is also in their case crucial and comes with a price. AppStore for example take 30% percent of all sales, but in return, the store is the only way to reach any application customer using Apple devices (itunes.com). The third element in the 4P's is price. There are many factors involved when deciding upon price, here are some of them; manufacturing costs, competitors' prices and brand image. All of these decisions require careful consideration, because pricing is a part of the positioning process which will be discussed on page 19 (Arens, Weigold, Arens 2011, 266)

Last, but certainly not least, we have the final P; promotion. This vital element has one goal, to reach the consumers and persuade them that the brand, service or product in question will satisfy their needs and wants. Hunderkar & Appannaiah (2010, 103) suggest there to be four ingredients in the promotional mix: advertising, publicity, personal selling and all kinds of sales promotion.

1.3 Strategic Marketing

Successful marketing companies have reached their success through well planned, long-term marketing strategies, not by a single lucky strike. If planned and implemented well, a strategic plan could ensure a company's future growth. On the other hand, if a strategic error occurs, it could impose an immense threat upon the survival of the company (Lamb, Hair & McDaniel 2011, 15). This section will focus on the techniques behind a solid strategic plan for future corporate marketing efforts.

If we break up the phrase *strategic marketing plan* we are left with three separate words; strategy, marketing and plan. The word strategy means, according to Gillian & Wilson, "knowing where you want to go and then deciding upon how to get there" (Gillian & Wilson 2003, 53). Marketing was already well defined in the chapter above and plan refers to the result of anticipating what the future holds and reaching the organization's objectives (Boone & Kurtz 2012, 37) Hence, a strategic marketing plan usually identifies marketing objectives over a longer period of time and concludes on the most suitable method of achieving those objectives (Gillian & Wilson 2003, 43).

Many authors have written hundreds of pages on this particular subject and there are numerous models made up for how a strategic marketing plan should look like. In short, a typical strategic marketing plan will contain the following elements:
- Setting goals and objectives
- Internal analysis
- External analysis
- Marketing strategy
- Implementation, evaluation and control

Lamb, Hair & McDaniel have set up the following elements as to be the most essential (Lamb, Hair, McDaniel 2011, 36):

:

FIGURE 2: Elements of a Marketing Plan (Lamb, Hair, McDaniel. Essentials of Marketing 2011, 36)

When initiating the process of developing a marketing plan, the first issue a company should attend to is their mission statement. Knowing the customers which you want to serve and the benefits possibly attained from them is utterly important. A technique for such a customer analysis will be explained under the subtitle "Segmentation" on page 15. The mission statement is also based on a thorough analysis of the external environmental circumstances of your company in the present as well as in the future.

As with Spinfy, they have come up with two missions, one for each main target group. Their first mission is: "Support storytelling, reading and joyful moments with children" (Spinfy company presentation, 2012). This one is directed at their end-customers; the families who buy the applications. The second mission is more directed at the cooperating partners. These partners may be authors, publishing houses or other organizations. "Enhance interesting stories and characters with fascinating interactions" (Spinfy company presentation 2012).

Another important aspect with the development of a company's marketing strategy is understanding the resources which the company possesses as well as the environment in which it operates (Hooley, Piercy and Nicolaud 2008, 29). A good way to gain insight in these areas is to utilize already existing internal and external –analysis, for example the SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis. The Strengths and Weaknesses of a company represent the

internal factors such as financial resources, employees' skills and competences and available technology. On the other hand, the Opportunities and Threats are factors met outside the company, like openings in the market, competitors and change in legislation (Lamb, Hair, McDaniel 2011, 36). In this fast-pace world we are now living in, the external environment changes rapidly. Competitors, recourses and customer preferences may be completely different one year from now. Therefore, it is crucial that the strategy is developed to adapt. (Hooley, Piercy and Nicolaud 2008, 29)

Looking closer at the marketing strategy itself, this will naturally vary according to several factors, for example the specific company's earlier strategies and current mission statement. Since all companies have different objectives and different goals, the strategy will reflect the companies' overall vision. But whatever your objectives are, it is usually wise to utilize theoretical knowledge about different types of strategies and try to find the most suitable for your situation. A strategic decision present in most strategies could be, as Lamb, Hair and McDaniel points out, the two alternatives a company has when it comes to expected profit, the first alternative is to pursue profit immediately. The second option is to build a strong brand and a significant market share first, then reap the benefits (Lamb, Hair & McDaniel 2011, 36).

Having gone through the four first points in Lamb, Hair and McDaniels' figure *elements of a marketing plan,* it would now be logical to look at the fifth and sixth element, namely target market strategy and marketing mix. However, choosing the target market and customers is such a large and comprehensive field, that it will be discussed in detail in the next section of the Thesis: segmentation, targeting and positioning. The sixth element, marketing mix, is one of the basic elements, which was explained on page 12. It is now time to look at the last text box in figure 2; implementation, evaluation and control. These elements are usually a part of any plan, may it be related to marketing, politics or personal goals. The implementation of a marketing plan is perhaps the most important one. Anyone can have a great plan, but it takes persistency and insight to go through with it. Along the way one should always evaluate whether things have gone according to the plan or not. One must also be aware of the changing environments and evaluate the current situation on a regular base; maybe the original plan needs modifications in order to stay up-to date. When the plan is set into action, it needs to be controlled and analyzed.

A marketing plan is usually a written document, because of its comprehensive content. Some marketing plans contain accurate information about specific tasks and timetables; it is in these

cases quite natural to have the agreements in writing in order to avoid errors in communication. The outline of the document varies based on the tools and culture the specific company has.

1.3.1 Segmentation

There are three important strategic elements which together form an essential process in strategic marketing, those elements are; segmentation, targeting and positioning. This section will describe the first of these three elements.

Segmentation is a process where the target costumer group or groups are defined. Typically these groups have similar preferences when it comes to personal characteristics and buying behavior of a specific product. Croft wrote that: "market segmentation is the process of identifying different groups of users within a market who could possibly be targeted with separate products or marketing programmes" (Croft 1994, 1). The benefits sought by targeting a certain segment is that one might be able to find a group of people which competitors are not serving at that moment, this leaves a window of opportunity for a new company to occupy that specific segment and gain profit from it. Ruskin-Brown (2006, 70) states that the characteristics of an ideal segment would be a group of people/families/organizations who the marketer believes:

- has needs which are not properly fulfilled by other companies
- will be satisfied by the specific company's offerings
- is big enough to generate profit
- the company is able to reach through their marketing channels

A common way to start dividing the market into segments is to first place the potential customers into groups based on:
- demographics
- socio-economic factors
- geographics
- psychographics
- buying behavior
- benefit seekers

The first three points are relatively easy to research, because they are possible to see or obtain information about through public documents. Demographics refer to a person's age, race and

gender just to mentions some elements. Socio-economic factors tell something about a person or household's income level and occupation, while geographic factors naturally pinpoints the physical location. All these three factors might be slightly relative when deciding upon prospect segmentations, but the next three points will probably give more revealing information. Psychographic factors tell something about the personalities of the group, for example about their hobbies, beliefs, opinions and level of education. Such facts can prove useful when conducting segmentation. Buying behavior on the other hand, gives us an idea about how often, how much and when a person buys a specific product. Brand loyalty is also revealed by studying peoples buying behavior. Lastly, there is the method of examining the benefits people seek when buying a product. Some people are concerned with trends and fashion and will gain satisfaction through purchasing popular products and brands, whilst others might buy the same product because of its quality or green-image. (Ruskin-Brown 2006, 78), (McDonald 2012, 120)

There are three named segment terms related to size. The largest segment group is called "market segment", it refers to the situation when the market is divided into rather large groups and where every group can support two or more average sized suppliers (Ruskin-Brown 2006, 72). The second term is a known phrase; "niche" market. Ruskin-Brown (2006, 72) defines a niche as when a group is small and can only support one supplier. Taking the concept even further, the last term is called "micro segment", this segment is typically generating high profits despite its small size. Or as Ruskin-Brown (2006, 72) states: "a small group of high value – low volume business".

1.3.2 Targeting

As mentioned in the section above, there are three elements in an essential process in strategic marketing, the second one will be defined in this section; targeting. Simply put, targeting means choosing the segment or segments in which the company will appeal to, design products to and tailor their marketing efforts towards (Arens, Weigold, Arens 2011, 204). After a long segmentation process it is time to analyse which segment matches the company's mission and purpose the best.

Another point of importance when selecting the right segment is to what degree the segment is already served by other companies. As you would expect, a well-served segment might mean

tough competition, in comparison with an unsatisfied segment, which will most likely be easier persuaded. Going back to the matter of segment size, there are pros and cons with both small and large segments. In addition to the size, one must also recognize the speed in which the segment is growing, or retreating. A fast growing segment might sound appealing at first, but there is the threat of just as fast-growing competition (Perner 2013)

Once the segmentation process is done, the search for the target segments begin. Maybe some companies choose only to target one segment, while others might choose several. However, when this decision process is over, one can choose between three segment strategies which each represent different levels of product and marketing differentiation. Ruskin-Brown (2006, 73) claims the three strategies to be:

- the undifferentiated strategy
- the concentration strategy
- differentiated strategy

The undifferentiated strategy applies the same marketing mix to all segments. This way of running a business is highly old-fashioned and will probably not receive very positive response from customers today. On the other hand we have the concentration strategy, which means selecting only one attractive segment and tailoring the marketing mix towards the segment's needs. This might very well ensure the satisfaction of the target customers, but it might be too low scale for most companies. If the product in question is of high value and the segment is prosperous, it might work. Lastly we have the differentiated strategy in which the company targets several attractive segments and provide a tailored marketing mix for each chosen target. This strategy requires much research and dedication, but the results from companies applying it have been excellent (Ruskin-Brown 2006, 73-75).
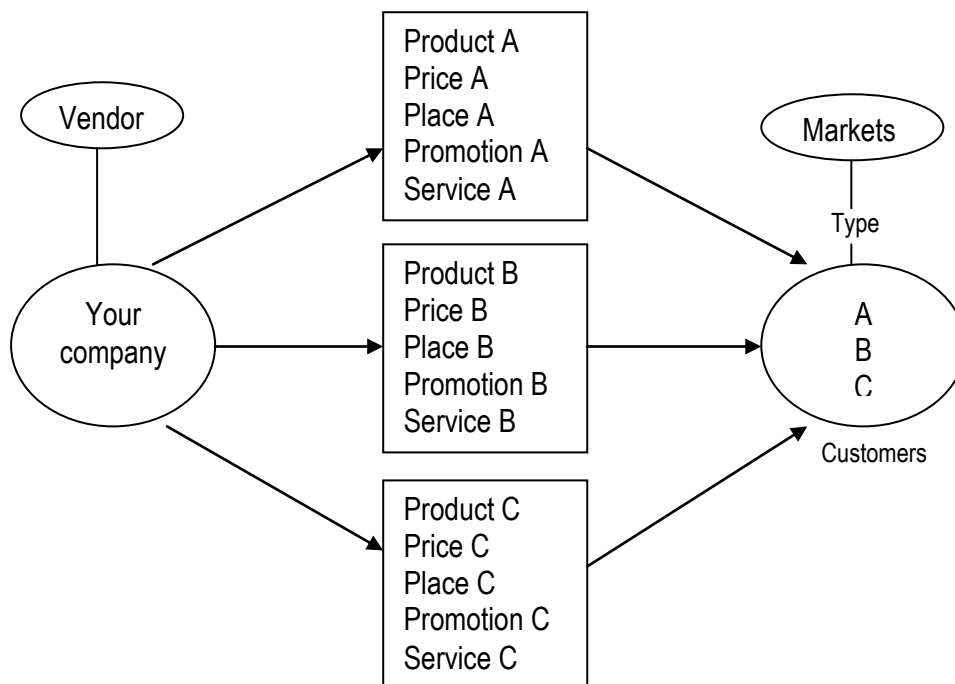
FIGURE 3: Differentiated strategy (Ruskin-Brown 2006, 75)

1.3.3   Positioning

After carefully selecting the segment or segments in which to serve, it is finally time for position-ing. The word positioning is defined by BusinessDictionary as: "A marketing strategy that aims to make a brand occupy a distinct position, relative to competing brands, in the mind of the cus-tomer" (BusinessDictionary 2013). Arens, Weigold and Arens (2011, 210) explain that the main task of a positioning strategy is to take ownership of a descriptive word which will occupy a cer-tain spot in the consumers' mind. This word should describe the core values or characteristics of the specific product or company, for example: safety, comfortable or entertaining.

Ruskin-Brown suggests some positioning options available for companies entering a market. If there is a strong leading brand in the industry, one might position oneself as a satisfactory alter-native. In this way it is possible to take advantage of the leader's strengths, but accept the faith of not necessarily becoming the leader. Alternatively, one could do the complete opposite and posi-tion the company away from the competition, by either serving a niche market no one else have reached, or by finding completely new positions.

Arens, Weigold and Arens (2011, 266-267) list seven approaches to developing positioning strategies. Here are the three most outstanding: product attribute, price/quality and product user. The first of three approaches focuses on a specific feature within the product, which is essential to the consumer. A totally different approach would be the price/quality approach, where a company can position themselves or their products as either the best in quality, or the most price-compatible. An example of a high quality brand is Ralph Lauren, with expensive, high-fashion clothes. On the other side of the table you have H&M which is known for affordable fashion. Whereas the first two approaches evolved around the product, the last chosen approach focuses on the consumer buying it. Dew is a good example of a company applying this approach; their target group is young, active people, mostly males. "With all its high energy and exhilaration, "youth" is not only the positioning of Mountain Dew, it's the heartbeat of the brand" (Arens, Weigold, Arens 2006, 267).

Tailoring the marketing mix for each segment is the next step in the positioning process. All of the so-called 4p's need to be modified especially for the target segment in question. The pricing strategy has to fit with the prospect and end-customer, as well as all of the product features, like packaging and localization. The appropriate distribution channels must be addressed according to where the target group is most likely to conduct the purchase. And last, but not least, the Marketing channel has to reach and appeal to the customer (Arens, Weigold, Arens (2011, 267). As an addition to the 4p's, Ruskin-Brown (2006, 73) has added "service" to the marketing mix.

1.4 Marketing Communications

BusinessDictionary defines marketing communication as: "Coordinated promotional messages delivered through one or more channels such as print, radio, television, direct mail, and personal selling" (Business Dictionary. Date of retrieval 14.03.2013). In other words, marketing communications is the term for all messages the company gives out to its audience through all possible communication channels.

Harold Lasswell, a marketing communications theorist, came up with a famous question-sentence which every marketer could benefit from: "Who (says) What (to) Whom (in) What Channel (with) What Effect?". This is a question worth contemplating before setting up any marketing strategy. Basically the sentence address the most critical issues in a marketing strategy; who is the mes-

sage from, what does the company represent? The second element refers to the message, what is being said? This is a very important question because it reflects the objectives and goals of the whole message. The third element will be discussed in further detail later on in this thesis, it deals with the customer, or the person/organization receiving the message. Naturally, the channel is directly related to the marketing channel used to deliver the message; traditional media or digital media. In more detail, a marketing channel could include radio, tv, magazines, social media, websites and many more. The last element refers to the effect created out of the particular message and what response is received from it.

When the elements above have been addressed and decided upon, it is time for the implementation of the planned communications' efforts. Typically, the process of marketing communications is explained by a model such as the one made by Czinkote and Ronkainen. In the model below, there are three required elements: the sender, the message and the receiver, while the media channels works as a connector between the elements. As explained by Czinkote and Ronkainen (2007, 387), the decoding of the message sent and received is of high importance, since the message itself might change slightly due to the noise created by other messages or misunderstandings between the sender and receiver.
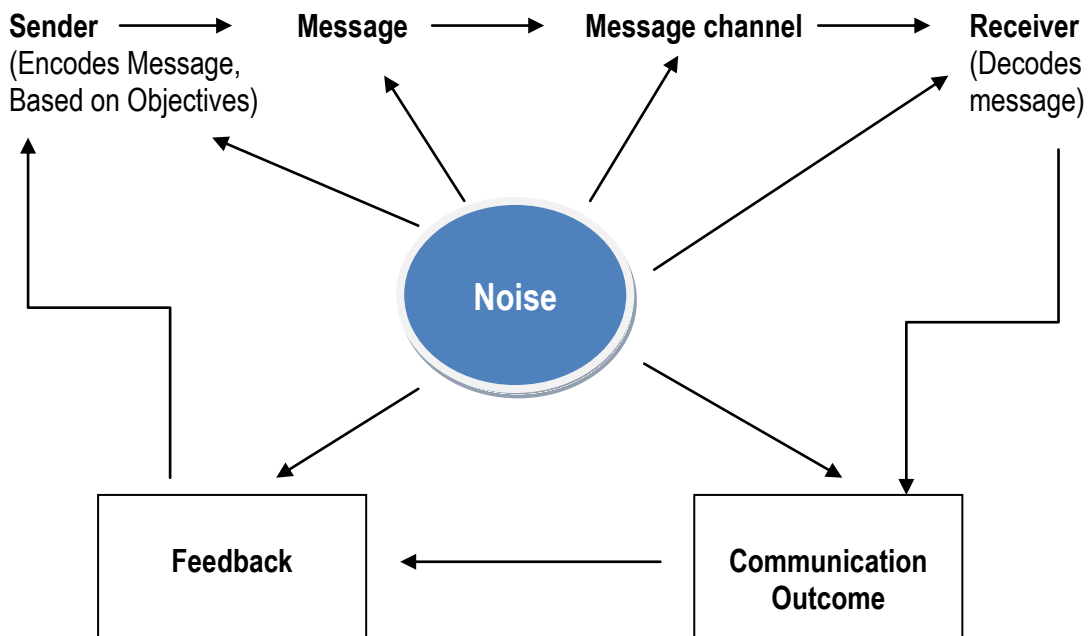

FIGURE 4: Marketing Communications Process (Czinkota, Ronkainen 2007, 387)

1.4.1 Integrated Marketing Communications

Taking marketing communications to the next level is integrated marketing communications (IMC). The overall purpose of the IMC process is to ensure that all communicated messages from one company is relevant to the costumer receiving it and consistent over a long period of time (Kotler, Keller, Brady, Goodman & Hansen 2009, 714). In practice, this means that all visible marketing material as well as other written or spoken messages from the company should together form a recognizable image and reflect the same values. In order to accomplish such a synergy between all communications, the company in question needs to make a comprehensive plan and follow up on its implementation on all levels within the organization.

The growing trend today within marketing is a rich promotional mix, with many different channels in use, both offline and online. For consumers this means hundreds of commercials and advertisement bombarded from all directions. If a company is handling its IMC poorly, these messages may be confusing or in the worst case scenario; damaging the company's brand, image and reputation (Armstrong & Kotler, 2007, 365). In many big companies the different marketing communication messages are assembled by totally different parts of the organization, Armstrong & Kotler explain, for example the sales management form the messages which the sales force communicate through personal selling, the website might be created by an outsourced company as well as some of the advertisements. Consequently, the overall message and design might differ a lot within the company's promotional mix and it is here the need for IMC is evident.

As a small company, Spinfy does not have too many people handling their communications. However, they have used advertising agencies to produce some marketing material and the marketing efforts of their cooperation partners are out of their control. When it comes to the visual design of their webpage and social media pages, the use of the same colours and logo gives a coherent image of the company. Since this Thesis is about Spinfy's mascot Spinky, there will be a more detailed analysis of how Spinky can be better integrated into the whole IMC of Spinfy later on in the empirical part of the study.

1.4.2 Digital Marketing

Digital marketing can also be called e-marketing and online marketing. As the term reveals, the practice revolves around marketing conducted on the internet. When it first got popular, it really revolutionized the way of searching for, reaching and communicating with customers and prospects (Arens, Weigold & Arens 2011, 525). Furthermore, digital marketing enables companies to build relationships with their customers and all this at a relatively low cost. Compared to the traditional media channels, like radio and TV, the cost of space and time on the internet is inexpensive. As all other forms of marketing communications, the digital marketing needs to be synergized with the whole promotional mix. Hence, it importance of IMC is still highly significant for digital marketing as well.

Like many other companies today, Spinfy's products are available online, actually only online. And since the product itself is of a digital nature, the customer will get access to it immediately after purchase. Armstrong and Kotler (2007, 438) point out some of the benefits for a customer purchasing online. Online buying is convenient, easy and private. A customer can decide her/himself when to buy, the buying process usually consists of a few clicks made from home or travelling and no one needs to know what you bought. In addition, purchasing online will typically provide the customer with a better selection. When in doubt, comparative information is easy accessible in the form of professional reviews and customer feedback. After conducting research, if there are still unanswered questions, the customer support is usually very willing to help and interact with their online consumers. On the other hand, there are clearly many benefits for the online sellers as well (Armstrong & Kotler 2011, 439). As Arens, Weigold and Arens pointed out, online selling and marketing offers a great opportunity to build strong customer relationships. In comparison to mass-media advertising, a company can effortlessly engage in one-to-one conversations. Moreover, interactive, digital communication can increase customer value and satisfaction. From the financial point of view, online selling will in most cases reduce costs and increase speed and efficiency. Lastly, an online approach will offer more flexibility as one can without difficulty modify product announcements, specifications and prices.

There are many elements in digital marketing which needs to be addressed in order to generate good results. The website is usually the core, main attraction. Here customers can find the information they need to make a purchase. Most of the other elements of digital marketing aim at drawing attention and guiding the audience to the website. Such elements are: search engine

optimization, blogs, social media, advertisements and banners. The image below shows what elements digital marketing consist of and how they revolve around the website (Peter Hollier, 18.03.2013)
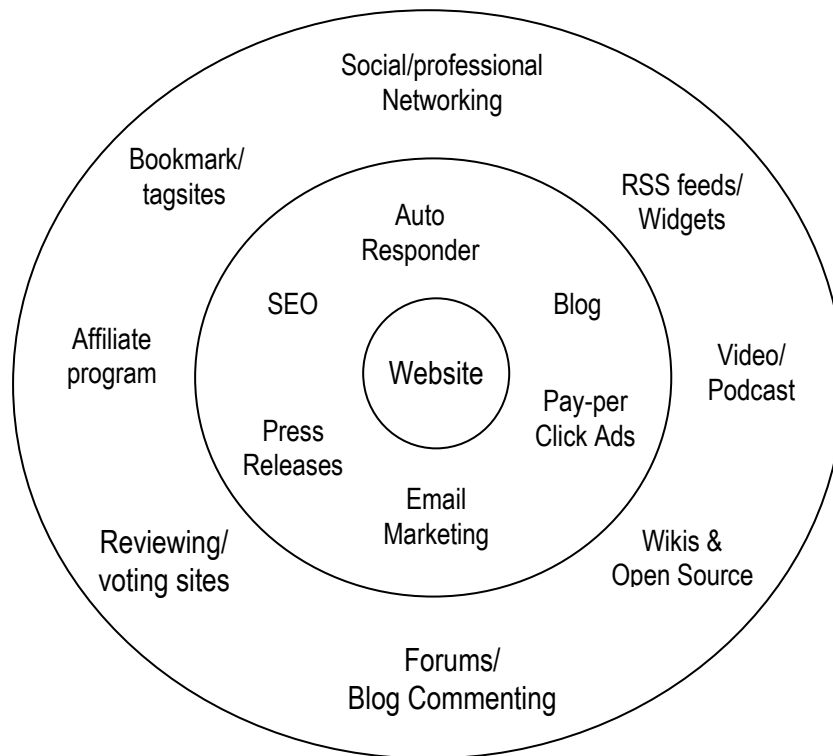

FIGURE 5. Elements of digital marketing (Best practices. Date of retrieval 18.03.2013).

This Thesis will mainly focus on the aspects of digital marketing which are directly related to Spinky's possible marketing efforts; website and social media, with most attention on Twitter, Facebook and Youtube.

Website

Armstrong and Kotler (2007, 438) claims that almost every company has a website in order to promote their products and provide potential and existing customers with necessary information. Some companies also use websites to communicate better on an internal level, through intranets. An intranet allows the employees of a company to firstly, communicate with each other and secondly, to gain access to internal company information such as Human Resource policies and time schedules.

Arens, Weigold & Arens highlights that technically, a website consists of web pages, images and videos, even though the terms website and webpage might be referred to as the same thing by many people. Further, they state that for a company, the website is "an extension of the brand and that the website experience is synonymous with a brand experience" (Arens, Weigold, Arens 2011, 538). This statement goes hand in hand with the philosophy of IMC. Keeping the brand experience in mind, Spinfy's website could still use some work in order to fit the expected brand experience. At this moment, their website is more informative than entertaining, which is one of Spinfy's most important attributes. The website is at a need-to-know basis, most of the information a customer needs to know in order to make a purchase or ask product related questions. However, the website is maybe lacking elements of joy and fun, which will attract an audience to visit repeatedly and spend time there. A suggested solution for this problem will be presented later in the Thesis.

Continuing on the same note, Armstrong and Kotler (2011, 449) states that everybody can set up a website, the challenge lies in keeping the customers there and making them return, time after time. Overall, the successful websites offer great value and excitement to their visitors, whether this comes in the form of current information or funny videos, depends on the industry and the purpose of the site. Many companies spend a large amount of their budget guiding people to their website, using traditional and online marketing. Obviously, the website should then live up to the consumer's expectations, because if a customer visits a seemingly useless website, 66 % say they do not return (Arens, Weigold, Arens 2011, 449). According to Peter Hollier, one must pay special attention to the following element, to make a good first impression: graphic design, webpage design and layout and lastly, web usability standards. If handled correctly, the website will tell the visitor what company is behind it and what their products or services are. A clear and welcoming website should also give a distinct feeling of what benefits can be sought as a visitor (Peter Hollier). From a more technical point of view, a website should have an easy-to-use navigation, with clear tabs such as home, about, contact and products/services. Nowadays, a standard company website often contains a company blog and a section for news as well. The blog serves as a content creator as well as an arena to interact directly with costumers. If the company uses social media, it is essential to have direct links to these accounts.

1.4.3 Social Media Marketing

Social Media is a way for people all around the world to stay connected online. The social media trend has grown very fast in popularity and in users. Arens, Weigold and Arens (2011, 521) claim that social media has enabled us to have conversations with more people than what has ever been possible before. Furthermore, they state that customers are now able to express their opinions to anyone willing to hear and the companies in return are able to hear and listen to direct feedback from end-consumers. Why is social media growing in such a hasty rate? Powell, Groves & Dimos (2011, 33) point out that the answer to that question lies within the human basic need for social interaction and a feeling of belonging.

According to Powell, Groves& Dimos (2011, 32) social media is a component of word of mouth. Word of mouth has been around as long as people have been able to communicate. It basically refers to the conversations between friends, family members or other acquaintances about specific products or brands. 90% of all word of mouth conversations still take place offline, but as social media tendencies grow rapidly, online talk is expected to take over more and more (Powell, Groves & Dimos 2011, 32). A new twist to the word of mouth method with social media is that the group of conservationists might consist of strangers, people who don't know each other directly, but share some sort of hobby or interest.

Powell, Groves & Dimos (2011, 3) stress that social media will only be a complementing part of the whole promotional mix; it does not serve the purpose of taking over the other, more traditional medias. It is true, however, that for some brands and some products social media might be the preferred platform for target customers to receive information. Spinfy could fall into this category, since their products are typically purchased by highly "wired" people, although one must be cautious with making such assumptions.

1.4.3.1 Types of Social Media

Blogging
refers to the act of writing and publishing personal posts in an online journal, called blog. There are many blog platforms which creates a whole community of bloggers who read each other's

posts, comment on them and share them in Social Media (About.com ret. 20.3.2013). In the early 1990's the first blogs appeared in the shape of personal diaries, where people would write about their day to day lives and opinions. These blogs were at first monologues, which little after little developed to be more interactive with the possibility for others to response directly to the author. Nowadays, blogging is much more than writing online diaries, it has become an important factor in the society, a way for politicians, companies and trendsetters to share their views and knowledge (About.com ret. 20.03.2013). In fact, many young people today have made a career out of blogging about fashion, baking and interior design. From a business perspective, company-blogs are becoming more or less a must. It enables the company to share their expertise and views with customers as well as competitors.

Social networking

is perhaps the most common way for the average person to engage in social media activities. Safko (2010, 23) points out that social networking has been around since the beginning of time. Humans have a basic need to communicate and socialize with other humans. Hence, social networks are actually dated back to the stone-age when people lived in caves and formed families and groups which protected each other and cooperated with daily chores. The term social networking is in this Thesis referring to the act of digitally interacting with an already existing network and expanding it through sharing bits of you and your life and receiving the same from others. The more you share and respond to other's written or visual content, the more likely it is that your network will grow. According to Safko (2010, 43), "the key to networking, as with all of the social media tools, is to participate". Some social network sites are mostly based on keeping in touch with your already existing friends, an example of this kind of network is Facebook. On the other side of the table, we have Linkedin which is the most used professional network. Instead of sharing bits of your personal life, you share your professional expertise. It is becoming more and more normal for head-hunters to scout for new talents via networks like Linkedin (About.com ret. 20.03.2013).

Facebook

is the largest social network in the world through which people can stay connected with friends, family and co-workers (Mashable 2011, day of retrieval 18.03.2013). However, friends and family are just a few of those people interact with on Fabebook; companies are also highly active on this Social Media platform (Stephanie BuckMay 16, 2012. Mashable). Facebook has long been an arena for businesses to reach and interact with customers and the trend is only increasing. Big,

well-established companies were the first once to enter Facebook, but now it seems like this trend is taken on by even the smallest of start-up companies as well. Spinfy is a good example of such a phenomenon. One of the first marketing actions taken by Spinfy was to create account in the most outstanding social networks, Facebook being one of them. When a person posts a status update or picture/video, it appears on the newsfeed of her/his friends' accounts. The post will appear on the person's wall and anyone with access to it can like or comments on the post. The same goes with company pages, although in this case, the followers of a company page will see the post made by the company, not mutual. For companies, this feature of direct messaging is very useful when for example launching a competition: a Facebook competition often involves fans/customers responding in public on a company post, then the winner might be contacted personally with an instant message in order to give sensitive contact information.

Twitter

is also a social network, however, the nature of it differs from the one of Facebook. While there is little limitation to the length of a post in facebook, a tweet (post on twitter) can only contain 140 characters. This makes the pace much faster and the tweets are less permanent than a Facebook post. In Twitter, an account can follow other accounts without being followed back. As in most social networks one can like, share and comment on tweets, these features are called favorite, retweet and mention in Twitter (Twitter.com ret.20.03.2013). As in Facebook, Twitter also has an instant message feature called Direct Message. Unlike Facebook, this feature is limited in order to protect people from spam. One can only send direct messages to accounts that are following the account in question.

Video and photo sharing

means literally the sharing of videos and photos. Personal videos of cute babies and office pranks, professional music videos and commercials are just a few examples of what can be found from video sharing sites like Youtube and Vimeo. Although video sharing beats photo sharing, by far, in popularity, sites like Pinterest are also gaining attention from the public as well as companies. The elements of interactivity between users are also highly present in these types of social media.

Youtube

has only been around since 2004 (About.com ret.20.03.2013), but it has had around 140 views for every person on Earth (youtube.com ret.20.03.2013). In 2006 Youtube was bought by Google,

which ensures good results in Google's search engine. One of the great advantages with Youtube is that one can upload an unlimited amount of video content and the potential in terms of viewers is enormous. However, since over four billion hours of video content is viewed on a monthly base, the competition for the viewers' attention is fierce (About.com ret.20.03.2013). Spinfy has uploaded five product trailers, two logo presentations and one company video to Youtube, together the videos have had over 9000 views. Since Spinfy's applications are not available as light-versions (free try-out versions), the products trailers have been enough to convince many customers of the products' quality and value (Youtube.com ret.20.03.2013).

1.4.3.2 Social Media Marketing Strategy

Lon Safko and David K. Brake have developed a theory about social media marketing which is build around four pillars explaining how the core concepts of social media marketing may be employed in the company's social media strategy. According to Safko and Brake (2009, 675), there are four pillars needed to create the platform for an efficient and successful social media marketing strategy, namely:

- communication,
- collaboration
- education
- entertainment

Before exploring these pillars, Golden (2010, 81) has a good point which is important to address in advance of any direct communication with customers; who is the customer with whom the company seeks to communicate? As explained in the segmentation section of the thesis, knowing the target customer and choosing the right one is essential in order to create an effective marketing communications strategy.

When the target audience is decided, the marketer needs to come to a conclusion on what she/he wants the customers to talk about. This is where Safko and Blake's first pillar, communication, comes into the picture. In social media the golden rule for success in activity. Interacting with customers in a conversation-like way will enable the marketer to gain feedback about the brand or product in a more personal and effective way, compared to traditional media (Safko & Blake 2007, 675). Being on the look-out for people talking about the brand or products

might be a good way to become a part of an existing community with interest in your company. On a few occasions customers on Twitter have talked about Spinfy's products and been very excited to get direct response form the company itself. One can imagine that after such a response, this customer feels more connected to Spinfy than other competitors and is more likely to buy more applications from the same provider also in the future. This last example raises an important question; how does a company measure the impact social media marketing has? And how to distinguish the already existing buzz from what is generated by social media marketing efforts? Safko and Blake (2009, 675) explain how a company can measure the response of its social media communication, by for example having cupons in the monthly newsletter or by analysing user traffic on its Youtube account, website and company blog. Means of measurement will be looked into more closely in the next section of this Thesis.

Moving forward to the next pillar in Safko and Blake's marketing strategy process, which is collaboration. Collaboration internally, within the company is essential to gain good communication and to create a strong company culture. There are tools available for enhancing such collaboration. Spinfy is using a tool called Wiki, which allows the employees to allocate tasks and plan current and upcoming projects together. External collaboration is a totally different matter, as Safko and Blake (2009, 677) states: "you cannot control what customers say about your company". In Spinfy's experience, it might be beneficial to spot some loyal, satisfied customers who are willing to collaborate with you, by for example blogging about your products or engage in conversations about your brand and industry. In return, Spinfy has given free promocodes (personal codes one can use to get an application for free, which would normally cost money) or a chance to become a guest blogger in the company blog. Another result of customer collaboration Spinfy's has engaged in was translation help and proofreading in Japanese, Chinese and Russian. These collaborations were all results of social media activities. Back to the down-side of customer feedback; it is occasionally negative. In cases where some customers or influencers are saying negative things about your company or products, responding might be the best defense. Ignoring such messages could be considered as a bad thing, in the world of social media. However, be sure to respond in a positive, maybe even humorous way and avoid getting personal (psu.edu ret.21.03.2013). One should always keep in mind that everything posted on social media is public and is close to impossible to erase.

The third pillar provides a great opportunity to show the skills and knowledge the company and its employees possess, through its employees and customers, the third pillar is education. By

creating visual content, such as video clips on Youtube or infographics on image sharing networks, you can educate your customers about your field of expertise. Infographics are visual representations of a data set or instructive material (Techopedia.com ret. 21.03.2013). The popularity of infographics is increasing with rapid speed in digital media. Many companies find that customers are more attracted to visual presentations of heavy facts than pure text, this again makes it easier to gain the essential information in a quick and interesting way. Spinfy has actively been using educational content such as infographics, product videos and blog posts talking about inside information in their field of business as well as the process of making children's applications.

Last, but certainly not least, there is entertainment as the fourth pillar for forming a solid social media strategy. Since entertainment is perhaps the most important characteristic of Spinfy's products, is goes without saying that any content or communication should be entertaining to the audience. However, as Safko and Brake 2009, 680) point out, entertainment is not a synonym for funny. Being funny is often very challenging, espcially in a global context where different cultures have a different view of what funny is. Funny is one culture might be insulting in another. Luckily, there are other ways of being entertaining, by for example presenting interesting, fascinatic or appealing facts, images and videos. Appealing to people's feeling is usually a trick which works well in the world of marketing.

By utilizing all these four pillars mentioned above, one will have a solid base for a social media marketing strategy. Further, Safko and Brake have ellaborated on their theory on social media marketing, by introducing five steps to integrate social media into the overall marketing strategy of a company. This Thesis will not go into futher detail about the steps, only listing them as follows (Safko and Brake 2010, 669):

- analyzy your existing media
- the social media trinity
- integrate strategies
- identify resources
- implement and measure

1.4.3.3 Measuring the results of social media marketing

Many marketers have little belief in measuring the return of investment of social media marketing. In their opinion, social media marketing sould be measured based on the influence and brand awareness which it creates, not in financial terms. Powell, Groves and Dimos (2011, 42) disagree with this view and states that social media is like any kind of other marketing channel and the results of social media marketing should be measured in the same way.

This paragraph will discuss some necessary decision-making objects related to social media marketing. First of all, one must know how the existing tactics used by the company are performing. Identifying the successful and the ineffective tactics is a good start (Powell, Groves & Dimos 2011, 42). When the unproductive tactics are recognized, there are basically three actions one can take: improving, reducing or eliminate the tactics. Which alternative is the most suitable may differ from case to case, the important thing is to change what is not working. Next up on the decision-making list is how much time and resources should be allocated to social media and how much to traditional media channels. Naturally, the best tactic for the particular company should be provided with more resources. Lastly, one should gain an understanding of how social media tactics build on each other to deliver overall success (Powell, Groves & Dimos 2011, 42).

When a company first initiates social media marketing efforts, it is useful to analyze to already existing buzz about the brand and products. If the company has a good amount of customers, it is quite likely that there is conversations and comments about the company and products in social media. These conversations are referred to as buzz, which usually is a good thing; it means that customers care enough to talk about the brand. However, this background "noise" is good to differentiate from the attention and response which comes directly from your own social media activities. Why? Because a separation of the two sources of buzz is necessary to analyze you return on investment in social media (Powell, Groves & Dimos 2011, 23).

When marketers talk about social media marketing, it is referred to as inexpensive and therefore a good alternative or supplement to traditional marketing. In order to calculate return on investment, one must know the cost, or the amount invested. Typically the costs of social media marketing comes in the form of personnel costs and the occasional marketing material costs, such as videos, images and maybe the price in a competition. Consequently, it might be difficult and in many cases impossible for the marketer to get a hold of information concerning

employee's salary (Powell, Groves & Dimos 2011, 52). This is a dilemma which the organization needs to handle, may be the cost calculations must be based on an educated guess. Another issue brought up by the others' of "ROI of Social Media" is the risky factor of social media marketing. Some brands have very bad experiences with social media activities weakening the brand image. The brand manager is no longer the only person behind marketing communications content and the lack of control over what is being said by customers can come at a costly price. To measure a social marketing campaign, one can use similar metrics as with traditional marketing. Elements included in such measurement procedures are: reach, engagement, reputation, sentiment and trust (Powell, Groves & Dimos 2011, 36). Further, there are many social media measurement tools available. Examples of measurement tools are: Alterian SM2, Radian6, Scoutlabs and Brandtology. These tools search the social media space for any comments, posts, conversations about a specific topic, such as a brand or a product. Measurement tools can also grade a topic based on popularity, influence and other measurements. By utilizing the tools mentioned above, one can measure the success of the company's social media marketing (Powell, Groves & Dimos 2011, 67). The exact process of further calculating the actual return on investment is very complex and will not be discussed in detail in this Thesis.

1.5 Mascot Marketing

The term Mascot emerged in the late nineteenth century and was at that time referred to as objects or people which brought good luck. Today the meaning of the word has changed slightly, as it means character or person which represents a certain brand or organization (Nutt 2008d). In North-America mascots were for a long time used to represent sport-teams, often in the form of real animals displayed on the team's uniforms. However, the animals required too much care and attention and have been replaced with furry costumes. Most mascots today are found in the form of graphical images, used alongside with logos and slogans (Nutt 2008d).

The benefits of mascots are that they are memorable and with the help of social media, highly interactive. Other pros of mascots are that they never get sick, retired and they do not get in trouble with the law (Advertising Age 2012. Date of retrieval 03.03.2013). Carol Phillis, president of consulting group Brand Amplitude, stated that mascots are "the gift that keeps on giving".

Searching the most popular social media networks, one can find thousands of brand mascots. A few of the most popular ones are: the Geico Gecko, the Aflac Duck and Mr.Peanut. Sparkha, an marketing agency, explains in a youtube video how both the Aflac Duck and the Geick Gecko have chosen their well-known names. Both mascots belong to insurance companies, which is quite unique when thinking about the boring nature of the insurance business. The Aflac insurance company chose a Duck as their mascot, because Aflac sort of sounds like a sound a duck would make. Geico, the other insurance company chose a gecko to be their mascot, because the name Geico Gecko has a nice rhyming sound to it (Youtube 2012. Date of retrieval 25.03.2013). Spinky's name was chosen the same way, something that sounded nice and cool and could be related to the company name, Spinfy. The Geico Gecko has now over 12 000 followers on Twitter (Twitter 2013a. Date of retrieval 25.03.2013) and more than 300 000 likes on Facebook (Facebook 2013a. Date of retrieval 25.03.2013). The Aflac Duck has over 18 000 followers on Twitter (Twitter 2013b. Date of retrieval 25.03.2013) and over 360 000 likes on Facebook (Facebook 2013b. Date of retrieval 25.03.2013).

Basically the same rules apply for the social mascots as for the other types of company accounts in social media: the most important thing is to be active and establish relationships with customers. One advantage the mascot account has over a company account is that it can get away with content and presence which would seem like spam coming from a company account. However, when a mascot contacts new people, it can use humour and comment on thing not related to the company or industry at all. A common way for social media mascots to connect with its audience is to post videos of funny babies or pictures of delicious-looking dishes. These items might have nothing to do with car-insurances, in Geico Gecko's case, but the mascot might connect with people on an emotional level and these people will also be exposed to the more commercialized messages posted by the same mascot (youtube 2012. Date of retrieval 25.03.2013).

2   DIGITAL MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS PLAN FOR SPINKY

In this part of the thesis the plan for Spinky's digital marketing communications is presented. The structure of this plan contains the most common elements of marketing plan theories mentioned on page 12. More specifically, the structure of this plan is based on the elements picked out by Lamb, Hair and McDaniel (2011, 36) to be the most essential. At this point it is important to recognize that the plan is meant solemnly for Spinfy's mascot Spinky and not for Spinfy's overall marketing efforts. As mentioned in the introduction, Spinky's purpose is to draw traffic to either Spinfy's website or directly to the applications' point of purchase. The other goals of Spinky can be described as follows:

- keeping customers at the website and making them return
- being the face of the company
- making Spinfy memorable and recognizable

In order to accomplish such goals, it is necessary to create a strategic plan for Spinky's future marketing efforts as well as to recognize the current position of the company mascot. As for the commission company, this thesis will provide a suggestion for how to proceed with the utilization of Spinky in Spinfy's digital marketing.

2.1 Situation analysis

In this section the current situation of Spinky as a digital media marketing tool is analyzed. In order to best plan the future, understanding the past and present situation is of high importance (Lamb, Hair, McDaniel 2011, 36). Spinfy has had a logo and mascot since March 2012 which have appeared in all marketing materials, both online and offline. The mascot was at this time only an image, in other words not an active character with a life of his own. Spinky as he is today was born in October 2012, when the author of this thesis created a unique personality and an own Twitter account for him during her internship. The name of Spinky's Twitter account is @thespinky and his introduction text is as follows: *Spinky's always hungry for some tasty apps, so watch out! Say hi if you see him around and, please, tell that @Spinfy is looking for him.*

Spinland or Lost on the Web · http://www.spinfy.com/spinky (Twitter 2013c. Date of retrieval 23.4.2013)

FIGURE 6: Spinky's Twitter profile (Twitter 2013c. Date of retrieval 23.4.2013)

From October until December 2012 Spinky was highly active on Twitter and gained a little over 1000 followers. He also made an appearance in Spinfy's company blog as a guest blogger. As more applications were released, new marketing material naturally found its way to youtube and other social media channels with Spinky posing as company mascot. After December 2012, the trainee behind Spinky was done with the internship, but agreed to continue the tweeting, to some degree, while writing this thesis on the same topic. However, due to lack of time and resources, the activity level of Spinky in Twitter has been difficult to maintain. From January to April 2013 Spinky has been much less active and this shows directly in the amount of new followers: 22nd of April the amount of followers was 1580.

Looking closer into Spinky's activities one can clearly see that a lot has changed from the first day Spinky was active, and up to this date. In the beginning of his journey, Spinky chatted to anyone who would tweet about eating, being hungry or news within the application industry. This was one of the main reasons he was created: to engage in conversations with normal people who could be potential customers. The enthusiasm and personality of Spinky showed to be working, because he gained many close friends during the first months. One boy in particular thought Spinky to be very fun and entertaining and they endured a couple of App-tasting adventures together, gaining more followers. However, this type of activity is difficult to continue in the long run. Twitter has some rules about chatting too much with unfollowers, or so-called strangers. Another issue, per-

haps the most important one: this level and type of activity is extremely time-consuming. After the internship ended, it became close to impossible to continue with Spinky's odd, random conversations and the focus became more and more on the industry network. Today most of his friends and followers are other game developers/authors or children's entertainment enthusiasts. The conversations vary in topic from the normal small-talk about weather and news to more industry related matters, such as new applications or famous industry brands.

Going back to *why* Spinky was created, it is important to understand the difference between a mascot account and a company account in social media. While a company account typically talks about matters directly related to their own products or industry headlines, a mascot can talk about pretty much anything (Youtube 2012. Date of retrieval 25.03.2013). By posing as a non-threatening character, using humor and wittiness, the mascot can get away with a lot more than a company account would. Another aspect is that a mascot does not directly advertise, he just attracts attention from the public which ultimately end up learning about the company behind it all. In the beginning this boy whaich was mentioned in the previous paragraph only talked about his own interests with Spinky, not Spinfy related issues. However, after a while he got curious about who and what this creature really is, so he investigated Spinky a little bit closer and found that he actually was a company mascot. For quite some time he was one of Spinfy's biggest fans, actively following the company accounts in both Twitter and Facebook.

Since Spinky has an unusual habit of eating applications, he has gained a status as an application reviewer and promoter in the developer community. On several occasions other developers have contacted Spinky and requested some promotion in return for free promocodes. This is something that is very fun and exciting and clearly shows that he has had some impact on his followers. Apart from promoting, he has also provided Spinfy with competitor analysis, by testing other developer's applications and gaining insight in the industry at large.

When it comes to Spinfy's website, the lack of Spinky as the face of the company is striking. The same colors are repeated in the design of Spinky, his Twitter account and for all of Spinfy's designs. However, there are no pictures of Spinky. The link visible in Spinky's Twitter account only leads to his secret hideout, which is available only through this link and not accessible if you go through the original website. Basically, if you only visit Spinfy's website, Spinky is nowhere to be seen. This is one of the main issues of improvement this thesis will discuss.

2.1.1 Product analysis

To clarify once more, this marketing communications plan is created for the commissioner's mascot and not for the whole company's marketing communications. These two might be difficult to distinguish, because they contain some of the same elements and there might be some overlapping. In addition to the value which Spinky single-handedly brings to his followers, Spinfy's products will also be analyzed in this section, because they are what Spinky ultimately is trying to sell. In the end of the analysis, there is a section describing what Spinky alone offers his audience, which differs from that of the company's offerings.

All of Spinfy's applications are meant for children in different ages, from 2-12 year olds. These applications are divided into two categories: games and interactive storybooks. It is rather difficult to define what the difference is between the categories, because a storybook often contains gamifications as well, but in this thesis the products are defined by the products' definition in the place of purchase. In the Appstore one can find Spinfy applications in the book and education section. As mentioned earlier, the commissioner works with already-known brands, such as Moomins and Tatu and Patu. Looking closer at the Moomin brand, they have been selling all kinds of merchandise through their licensees. However, the core product of Moomin has been books. What Spinfy is doing is giving the books a new and more exciting format which appeals well to the new generation of readers. Spinfy/Moomin games and other entertainment are also available now as applications.

On the other hand, Spinfy also does project work, where they are paid based on the project and not on the product sales. In these cases, the expertise in technology and knowledge in the creative arts are the main products. A result from such a project is for example the interactive book which Spinfy created for BRIS (Barnens rätt I samhället).

As promised in the introduction to this analysis, Spinky's offerings will be described here. Going back to Spinky's personality, it is obvious that happiness and curiosity are the wanted responses which Spinky seeks from his audience. By entertaining and teaching people on Twitter, the audience will hopefully get curious enough to investigate who this mascot belongs to. Education and entertainment are two out of the four pillars needed in a successful social media marketing strategy, according to Safko and Brake (2009, 675). Apart from a feeling of happiness, Spinky also tries to provide his followers with tips on what applications to. His app-eating habits works as an

inspiration to buyers and as promotion for the developers. The latter has proven to be very thankful for any attention Spinky directs towards their products and the feedback Spinky gives them is usually positive. Finally, the community which has emerged from application developers, where Spinky is very active, offers support and feedback among the professionals.

2.1.2 Customer analysis

This paragraph will utilize Croft's (1994, 1) segmentation theory in order to define who Spinky's target segments are. Here, as in most marketing plans, the topic of this section is *customer analysis*, but a more suiting headline could be *target audience* since this is Spinky's customer analysis, not the company as a whole. The author has divided the target audience into four groups:

- potential customers
- developer community
- reviewers
- partners

Spinky is mostly focusing on the three first groups, since they are easily accessible on Twitter and prefer contact in form of social media. As to the last group, partners, they might observe what goes on in social media, but is more likely to contact the company directly rather than to develop a relationship with the company mascot. The lines between these three target audiences may be blurry and in many cases overlap each other. An example of an overlap is when *reviewers* and other *developers* purchase a big amount of applications either for professional purposes, or because they are parents themselves and are very interested in what is new in this particular industry, this fact places them also in the category *potential customers*.

When looking at the end-customer of Spinfy's applications, one must keep in mind that the person buying the product typically is a different person than the one using it. Since the users of these applications are children, one can say that in most cases the parents or other adults are the actual purchasers. However, although the money comes from an adult does not necessarily mean that the buyer and the decision maker is the same person. Children often have a strong opinion of what they want and when they want it, so if they are not acting directly as decision makers, it is likely that they are strong influencers. Of course the matter is very different depending on the age of the target group. A ten-year-old will probably be able to influence the buying

decision more than a two-year-old. Spinky's task is to influence the parents by convincing them about the quality and safety of the applications and the children might be drawn to his appearance and become unknowingly brand-loyal because they want the application with the funny animal on it. Something which has been discussed with the marketing team of Spinfy is to involve families to a higher degree on the company website, by creating fun tasks and entertainment for children with Spinky as the host. Examples could be mazes, drawing competitions, colouring sheets and small games.

The second target audience is the developer community. This community exists on Twitter and is growing fast. It has become a place where children's application developers meet to keep up to date on what is happening in the industry as well as offer each other daily support. This is a warm community where many company accounts and mascots help each other market a newly released application and give feedback on how well others have succeeded.

The internet is full of all kinds of reviewers and there are countless children's application reviewers as well. For them it is very difficult to stand out, so the developers and reviewers often work closely together to market themselves and each other. The more your company share and comment on their reviews, the more likely you are to get your products reviewed. Spinky has actively created strong relationships with application reviewers and lowered the threshold for Spinfy to get their applications reviewed. In practice, Spinky has shared and commented on reviews made for both Spinfy's products as well as other developers' products.

As mentioned above, the partners are an audience group which Spinky is aware of, but does not spend much time on reaching. The reason for that was also explained in the analysis' introduction. The table below shows the different target audiences and what Spinky could contribute with in order to appeal to them on the various channels in which he operates.

TABLE 1: How to appeal to the different target audiences through various channels

Target audience	Website	Twitter	Facebook	Company blog
Potential customers	Fun and games with Spinky	Entertainment through odd conversations with Spinky and interesting content	Daily feel-good posts about family-related issues (for.ex funny babies and animal videos)	
Developer community and reviewers	Spinky as the face of Spinfy, connecting the dots	Creating a tight community. Daily contact with Spinky. Interesting industry-insights through content marketing.	Craeting a chat-room for the community where all voices are heard and seen.	Spinky can reveal what is going on behind the scenes at Spinfy.
Partners	Convince future partners of Spinfy's ability to market by utilizing Spinky as the face of the company.	Easy access to information about Spinfy's ongoing and upcoming projects.	Easy access to information about Spinfy's ongoing and upcoming projects.	Spinky can reveal what is going on behind the scenes at Spinfy.

2.1.3 Competitor analysis

In short, Spinky's competitors are all social media accounts creating entertaining content for the crowds. However, looking at the particular target segments, one can say that Spinky is quite unique in the way he is utilized in this particular industry. His role as a reviewer/promoter makes him more attractive to follow than an account only promoting one single company's products. From the opposite prospective, the other company accounts usually spend less effort being weird and entertaining. When it comes to mascot accounts from other developers, angry birds and the bad piggies are very active mascot accounts. They however only talk about themselves.

2.1.4 PESTEL

The PESTEL analysis is a well-known marketing tool which helps analyze and monitor the company's macro environment, in other words the external factors (Professional academy 2013, date of retrieval 23.4.2013). PESTEL is an abbreviation from the following external factors: Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Environmental and Legal. If this was a PESTEL analysis for Spinfy, all these external factors would be very important to thoroughly analyze, but in Spinky's case the political factor is less applicable. The economic factor on the other hand is worth looking into. Since Spinky is active online in free-to-visit websites and social media platforms, the cost for an audience to reach Spinky's content is minimal, the cost is basically the fee it takes to get online. Turning the tables, for Spinky to reach his customers is also low-cost since social media is free to use, but the time and effort put into the mascot's activities is a different matter. Another positive side is that if the economy is experiencing a downfall in a particular market, the time spent online will probably be effected minimally. However, the money spent on products such as children's entertainment might be of suffering more. The upside to both Spinfy and Spinky is that they operate in an international market which gives them the possibility to choose which market seems most promising in terms of strong economical growth.

Social factors might be difficult to analyze when dealing with digital and social media, because the whole world has access to your content and products. One important factor is that all content from Spinky is in English. This means that most of Spinky's audience probably is located in an English speaking country, or has the ability to communicate well in English. Typically, the users of digital media are from a newer generation and the age-range might be expected to be between twelve and fifty years of age. However, the most active social media users are between the ages of 18 and 29 (Socialnewsdaily 2013. Date of retrieval 09.05.2013). It is difficult to create a social analysis of Spinky's followers, because they originate from many different countries and cultures. However, one can generally assume that people interested in children's digital entertainment are usually open to new ideas and like humorous content.

Technological factors are very visible in Spinky's world. If people experience problems with their internet connection, social media platforms or other websites, this might mean that it is impossible to reach them. When it comes to Spinfy's products, they require that the customers already own some sort of touch screen device and have access to the internet. With technical products, the technical difficulties are usually just around the corner, but so is the solution to the problem. In other words, technology is the bases of both Spinky and Spinfy's operations and they are both

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highly dependent on everything working the way should, technical difficulties will shut down their whole operations.

Environmental factors are more straight forward to analyze. Since Spinky operates in a digital world, the environmental concerns are few. There is little waste and natural resources involved in Spinky's day-to-day operations. Because Spinky is some sort of animal, he has experienced being contacted by animal and nature enthusiasts on Twitter. So far, the sustainable aspect of business has not been intended for Spinky to pursue, but there is obviously an opportunity for sustainable marketing also through such a character.

Legal factors are also very visible when dealing with marketing in social media. There are many rules to follow and all social media platforms have a different set of rules. First of all, you have to know the basic rules which are meant for the general public, then you should familiarize yourself with the restrictions made for companies related to marketing on the particular site. Spinky has for example been warned on one occasion that his behavior contradicted one on Twitter's rules. The consequences of breaking the rules vary, but typically your account might be frozen or banned and you will lose all of your followers (Twitter 2013d. Date of retrieval 06.05.2013).

2.1.5   SWOT

A SWOT analysis is a marketing tool used to analyze a company's internal strengths (S) and weaknesses (W), as well as the external opportunities (O) and threats (T) (Armstrong & Kotler 2007). After conducting the PESTEL analysis, one should have a good idea already about how to define the external factors contributing to opportunities in the market and threats to watch out for.

Some of Spinky's strengths were addressed in the customer analysis, such as his likable personality, reviewer status and membership in a strong developer community. One other important strength is that digital marketing costs very little, because all the channels are free to use and unlimited. The advantage of utilizing a mascot for this purpose is that you have free hands in terms of creativity. A company account will have its hands tied when it comes to what content to post and how to deliver a message; a mascot can pretty much do whatever he wants, as long as it behaves in a proper manner. A mascot can become friends with competitors and other influencers in the market much quicker than the official company account. The face of a mascot softens any encounter and brakes most barriers which might exist between a company and potential

buyers. Spinky was designed by one of Spinfy's graphical designers and his apperance repeats the same feeling and design of the rest of Spinfy's marketing material, such as website, logo and company introductions in youtube or for example powerpoint presentations of Spinfy. This is a strong value which helps make the synergy of all marketing efforts continues and recognizable. In other words; the message and the way it is presented should be constant and recognizable, as Kotler, Keller, Brady, Goodman & Hansen state in their book "Marketing Management" (2009, 714).

Moving to the negative sides of the internal factors, the most vital element is lack of resources. If Spinfy wants to keep Spinky active in social media, more resources needs to be allocated for this particular purpose. Running a successful social media account requires much time and effort. However, if the social media part of Spinky is less important, one could focus more on integrating Spinky better in the overall visual aspects of Spinfy. This should in any case be improved and the first place to start is the website. Since Spinky was originally a project by a temporary marketing trainee, the "project" status has not been upgraded to a part of overall marketing communications. This might prove to be a hinder as the priority of Spinky's integration is minor.

When it comes to the external factors, there are many positive aspects worth looking at. First of all, the popularity of digital media and especially social media is booming. This means a bigger audience and more potential customers. As more people are getting familiar with social media, they are also warming up to this new way of interacting with companies. Company mascots are gaining more and more attention and the general public seems to welcome these brand creatures with open arms. Perhaps the time was due for companies to reinvent themselves in a more friendly and accessible manner; through mascots. As mentioned earlier, Spinky is active in a developers' community, this community could offer possibilities of more organized cooperation. On Twitter some companies and mascots are already airing the idea of cooperating in issues related to marketing.

The last element of the SWOT analysis is the negative external factors; the threats. As one can imagine, the digital media space is packed full of other companies trying to catch some attention and space. The social media room is quite crowded with competitors and it is getting more and more difficult to stand out. The legal issues also proposes some challenges, one must tread carefully in order to avoid breaking the rules and regulations imposed by the various social media platforms. All four SWOT factors can be seen in the table below:

TABLE 2: SWOT analysis of Spinky

	Positive	Negative
Internal factors	**Strengths** • likeble personality • status as a promotor/ reviewer • strong developer community • free to use • free hands, get creative • Spinfy design and colors	**Weaknesses** • resources • measurement of ROI • poor integration of all digital marketing media • lack of presence in website • status as a "project"
External factors	**Opportunities** • rise in popularity in social media / on the website • popularity of company mascots • possible cooperation with other developers/partners in SM • high usage of SM	**Threats** • strong competition • legal restricktions • difficult to catch attention in the jungle of SM

2.2 Objectives and issues

Next in line is the task of setting goals an objective, which has been recognized by Lamb, Hair, and McDaniel (2011, 36) to be an important part of the strategic marketing plan. The ultimate objectives of Spinky's digital marketing efforts are to generate more traffic to Spinfy's website, increase sales, increase visibility and create strong customer bonds. These objectives should be reached by keeping an active mascot account in social media and integrate Spinky in the overall marketing actions and material. When it comes to the website traffic, there are three challenges: generate more traffic, getting visitors to spend more time there and lastly, making the visitors return.

In order to achieve these objectives, Spinky could arrange competitions across various digital media channels and create and share more content in form of pictures, infographics and blog posts. The content should be engaging/ entertaining/ educative/ interesting for the audience to pay attention to it and ultimately click on the links behind the picture or infograph, which typically

leads to a page on Spinfy's website. As a mascot, it is also possible to participate in competitions and comment on blog posts created by other relevant companies. He should also continue making friends with customers, bloggers, professionals and reviewers. Even though Spinky has independent social media accounts and share content which is not always related to Spinfy directly, it is vital that the connection between Spinky and Spinfy is subtle, but easy to research and find out.

Some issues that may arise are resources in form of capital and working hours. In the case of active social media presence, this might take a few hours every day and content such as pictures, inforgraphs and video cost money to make. It is possible to create some of the content in-house, but then the working hours of the graphical designer is spent on marketing and he will have less time for production. Spinfy being a small company has limited resources to allocate to marketing and the execution of a marketing plan. This might mean that parts of the plan will be prioritized and other parts will have to wait. If Spinky is meant to be very active in social media, the issue of which media platform to use arises. At the moment he only has a Twitter account, but it might be advisable to also create a facebook account in order to optimize efficiency between all channels. Another issue which concerns many is the difficulty in measuring the effect digital marketing has on sales. There are tools one may purchase for such measurements, but they obviously also cost money.

2.3 Strategy

The strategy for Spinky's digital marketing plan will be directed towards the two main goals which are the most urgent and important to address: the integration of Spinky on the company's website and the presence and activities in social media. Furthermore, the improvements and developments in the social media activities should aim at gaining attention and creating strong relationships with each target audience. Social media activities are again meant to facilitate the generating of traffic on the website. Once the customers have been directed to the site, the content and design should be satisfactory enough to get visitors to spend time and return again. A suggestion of such content is to give Spinky his own space for families and children to play and learn. If the play-corner is sufficient, one could expect families to spend time there and also recognize what Spinfy is offering and notice when they release a new application. Looking back at the strategic decision about expected profit pointed out by Lamb, Hair and McDaniel (2011, 36), there are two alternatives available:

- pursue profit immediately
- build a strong brand and a significant market share first, then reap the benefits

The most suitable expected profit –strategy for Spinky would be the second alternative. Spinky seeks to build relationships and recognition and earn Spinfy profits as a result of the gained attention.

In order to fully take advantage of the mascot as the face of the company, Spinky should be highly visible on the website's home page and perhaps also on all other pages as well. Being visible on the home page will ensure Spinky's followers and friends a feeling of being welcomed and they will right away recognize that they have come to the right place. For people who are not familiar with the mascot, being greeted with a picture of a friendly animal could soften the first meeting with Spinfy and set the right atmosphere: warm, friendly and playful. The picture could show Spinky waving and welcoming the guests, maybe with his mouth full of applications. Perhaps he could also lead the visitors to his own play-corner by pointing at the link, or by holding a sign saying "join Spinky in fun and games". Such a play-corner can be developed at a relatively low cost and maintaining it should be rather uncomplicated. However, if Spinky was to engage the visitors in drawing competitions or something similar, this would require more time and resources. At the moment there is little to do and little to see on the website, this makes visitors lose interest quickly and they are not likely to return.

In social media there is known to be one golden rule: be active (Brickmarketing 2013. Date of retrieval 30.04.2013). As one can see, this rule applied well for Spinky as he gained significantly more followers and contributed to more website traffic in the most active period, compared to the last few months when resources have been scars. The relationship between amount and quality of content and level of activity is important to recognize. Actually, they go hand in hand with each other. Furthermore, content marketing also boosts your company's Search Engine Optimization (SEO) as search engines recognize popular and sharable content and consequently serves your content higher rankings (Socialmadiatoday 2013. Date of retrieval 30.04.2013). In the period when Spinky was very active he also had solid content to share in the form of videos, pictures, blog posts and infographics. As a result of cut in costs, the marketing content has been modest and this along side with fewer resources for Spinky's activity has resulted in less significant response from the social media audience. However, the upside to social media marketing is the possibility of success on a low marketing budget. The pictures can be taken with a normal camera or smartphone and edited with free-to-use image editing programs. Content in form of text is

very popular and all you need is something to write about and skills to write it well. Video content is not a necessity, but this can also be done with a minimal budget. Hence, when talking about content, it really is the content that matters and not the format it comes in. A homemade prank video often gains more attention than a professional video made by a production company. How and how much you share the content is obviously the next concern. By utilizing your network and social media communities you can gain far more shares and comments than if you only rely on your own channels. As mentioned earlier, Spinky already has a network and community which could help with the sharing of content.

The relationship between a company and its mascot might be difficult to define without being too direct. Spinfy's company account and Spinky have interacted on many occasions in Twitter and Spinfy has developed a parental figure for Spinky. If Spinky is too excited about something, Spinfy might interfere in the ongoing conversation and apologize to the audience on Spinky's behalf. As it says in Spinky's profile description: "If you see him around, please, tell that @spinfy is looking for him", many people have done just this and consequently come in contact with both. This relationship between company and mascot has shown to be a valuable factor when it comes to engaging the audience in Spinfy's activities. When Spinky has made a group of friends, or has been integrated in a community it is time for the company account to join the conversation and connect the dots of the diffuse, maybe mysterious relationship between Spinfy and Spinky. On a few occasions some followers have directly asked either Spinfy or Spinky what the exact relationship is between the two.

Considering the lack of resources, keeping only one social media account for Spinky could prove to be sufficient. It is always possible to create a facebook account if the situation changes. In the case of Spinky utilizing more than one social media platform, one can introduce social media management tools, such as Hootsuit. This management tool is helpful even if the company chooses only one social media account, but in the case of using for example Twitter and Facebook, one can track conversations and send out tweets and posts in a much more efficient way (Hootsuite 2013. Date of retrieval 30.4.2013). Furthermore, Hootsuite can analyze and schedule messages and tweets, this makes it possible to keep a continuous flow of activities, even if the marketer is unavailable for a longer period of time.

Even if Spinfy chooses to use only one social media platform for Spinky, this should not stop him from being more active on the company website and blog. Actually, it has been discussed that

Spinky could develop his reviewing skills and create an own blog where he talks about the last applications he has tasted. This could generate more traffic as people are looking for good tips about what application to buy next and it would also become an arena for Spinfy to showcase their new applications. The downside to this is that it would be time consuming and actually helping competitors. One must look at the pros and cons of promoting competing products and remember that in such an industry, a purchase of a competing product does not equal loss for you. The whole application industry is at the moment growing rapidly and typically if a customer buys one application, she/he is more likely to buy another. In other words, if you help your competitor sell a product, your product might be the next in line.

A strategic decision should be made on which target audience Spinky should focus on. The recognized potential groups are as follows: potential customers, developer community, reviewers and partners. The potential customers are meant as the typical end-customers (or buyers), in other words parents and other adults who want to purchase digital entertainment for children. Within the segment, cultural background might vary, but they have sufficient English skills and can be described as "wired" or as familiar with technology. This target group is extensive and it might be difficult to further divide and categorize, hence: challenging to reach. Utilizing the benefits of the mascot marketing tool, one can act like Spinky did in the beginning: directly tweet to members of this target audience randomly, who has a similar interest as Spinky. An example: Someone tweets: "I don't know if I'm hungry or just bored". Spinky replies: "Or just boringly hungry, Spinky knows the feeling. It ain't cool. Wanna grab an app?". In some cases the person will continue the conversation and be curious of who this weird character is, in other cases they might ignore the tweet. A few of Spinky's biggest fans were found this way and their relationship got strong through odd, off-the-topic conversations.

The next two target audiences, developer communities and reviewers, are usually interested in the same content and will often be more than happy to create bonds with a mascot such as Spinky. These groups could be merged into one, because of their similar interests. Taking the initial contact to this segment is much easier than the "potential customer" segment, because both parties can benefit mutually from each other. There are many ways to engage in the initial contact: comment on a tweet, picture, blog post or video or you can just retweet or favourite some tweet from your targeted account. Another popular gesture could be to add them to a listing which you have created, for example "fun and educational applications" or "best reviewers". Of course, following them is important and might just be enough to get a follow-back. Any of these acts are

considered friendly and will most likely result in many new followers and some new close friends. One good advice when trying to gain followers is to have a look at the amount of followers and followings the other account has. If an account is following more than it has followers, they are more likely to follow you back and vice versa. However, having many followers might look good, but does not necessarily mean that anyone is paying attention to your content. The best way to ensure engagement is to have weekly direct contact with as many followers as possible and to be engaged in their content as well.

As for the last target audience, partners, Spinky should not pay too much attention to reaching them. The partners will probably find other ways of contacting Spinfy than through their company mascot.

2.4 Action plan

The action plan describes how the strategy could be implemented in practice. First of all, Spinfy should recognize the value of having a mascot and a strong face of the company. If everybody within the organization agrees on this matter, the attitude towards marketing in general might improve. The task of running the company mascot might seem irrelevant and unimportant to many, but if done right, a successful mascot may just be the ingredient which makes this company stand out from the crowds.

The first step is deciding who will be responsible for Spinky's social media activities. A possibility is that for example two people divide the task, but it would be preferably if one person only has the main responsibility, in order to keep the same style in speech and it will be easier to keep track of the most active and important followers. A personal relationship is often established between the marketer and the other person behind the social media accounts and if a new employee was to take over Spinky's activities, remembering who is who and what has been said before might prove to be challenging. An alternative to allocating this task to an employee could be taking on a marketing trainee to handle this duty as well as other marketing related tasks. It is of course advisable that the person behind the Spinky account knows the company and its values and practices well before taking over.

After one person has been assigned the task of handling Spinky's social media activities, the whole marketing team should sit down together and decide upon what changes could be made for the website in order to integrate Spinky better into Spinfy's visibility and finally, to make the site more approachable and customer friendly. The graphical designer could start by drawing a few new images of Spinky to be used on the website and as general content in social media. These images can be used in various ways, especially if the background could easily be changed by the marketer later on.

Designing the play-corner could be the next move to make. There are ready-made coloring/drawing programs one can purchase online at an affordable price, as a subscription. Another activity which would go well with Spinfy's operations would be to make a simple web version of one of the applications, enabling visitors to test the principal of the game. Spinky could act as a host in this play-corner by giving instructions and maybe automatic comments on the child's performance, for example by saying "well done" after completing a drawing or a level in the game. There should be a tab on the homepage leading to the play-corner. Furthermore, competitions can be arranged without spending budget money and both Spinky and Spinfy's social media accounts could share such happenings to their respective followers.

As Spinfy gains new partners with known brands and popular social media accounts, Spinky could actively support the partner's marketing of Spinfy's products and create more buzz around them. Whenever someone in Twitter talks about Spinfy's applications, Spinky could support and boost the conversation, so that more people will see it and get engaged in the topic.

On Twitter it is common that people sharing the same interests use hashtags in order to communicate with similar-minded people who are not necessarily their followers. Spinky could use popular hashtags like #kidsapps, #app and #blog when linking to relevant content. It is also possible to create own hashtags, like Spinfy did during November and December 2012, they would initiate a conversation about Moomins, by using the hashtag #MoominMonday. Every Monday there would be a new topic to be discussed. For loyal followers, this type of weekly conversations becomes a rutine in their daily lives which they depend upon and return to week after week. Spinky could initiate a tradition of having an #Apptalk every Tuesday for instance. This could result in the whole children's application community expecting application news from Spinky every Tuesday. Such a tactic is used by many companies and industries and it allows people and businesses to reach the right audience at one specific time, to share their news and views.

As Spinky has more followers than Spinfy's company account on Twitter, he also has the most impact on the masses when it comes to launching a new product or sharing a new blog post. So far, Spinky has actively shared all posts by Spinfy and this is important to continue in the future as well. This thesis has focused mostly on Spinky's activities on Twitter, but the fact is that he is also to be seen on youtube, facebook and Pinterest as well. In each product trailer in youtube, Spinky is visible as the face of the company, where he runs across the screen and through the logo. Spinky is also visible in Spinfy's facebook page, as a cover photo and in some pins in Pinterest. This is an important element in the integrated marketing communications plan: show consistency in design, colour, logo and mascot in all marketing material.

If the commissioner decides to create a facebook page for Spinky later on, it would probably be used in a similar way as the Twitter account. However, the posts on facebook can be longer and contain more characters than a tweet. The post will also be more permanent and probably be read by a bigger percentage of the followers. Facebook is known to be much slower-pace than Twitter, this could mean that fewer posts and less content is a better strategy. People may pay more attention to a facebook post than a tweet, this is one of the reasons why facebook is a very popular arena for companies and Spinky would probably gain from having a facebook account as well, considering his upfront, close-to-people marketing approach.

To sum up the action plan, allocating tasks, improving the webpage and creating content is a good start for implementing Spinky's digital marketing communications plan. After these initial steps have been taken, the day-to-day running of Spinky's social media activities is in focus. A continuous presence and high level of different activities would most likely ensure a sustainable growth in the traffic to the company website. The integration of Spinky in all marketing material will make Spinfy more approachable and recognizable to both customers and industry professionals.

2.5 Resources

The issue of resources has been discussed already in several places and the core message here is that social media requires time and resources. Giving this task to a marketing trainee could be a good solution if the resources are too scars. When it comes to the rest of Spinky's digital mar-

keting plan, the improvement on the website can be done at a low cost and could make a big difference in traffic. If the game developers find themselves out of things to do for a short period, creating the web-version of a game would be an excellent addition to the site. Such a version could be implemented on external sites as well and increase product awareness in place out of reach for Spinky.

When it comes to other content which Spinky could share, expert blog posts are always popular. Each employee at Spinfy is an expert at something and could write a short post on something current in their field. By allowing the whole team participates in content creation, Spinky's digital marketing becomes a team effort and not just a one man's job.

3 CONCLUSION

The research task of this thesis was to create a digital marketing communications plan for the commissioner's mascot, by applying marketing theories and strategies from well-know marketers. This part of the report will discuss the findings and results of the thesis project.

The commissioner of this thesis, Spinfy, operates in an exceedingly digital market, with online products and highly modern and technical familiar customers. Consequently, most marketing activities are conducted online, including the activities of Spinky, the company mascot. Most companies within the children's application industry have a strong presence in social media and other online channels, this might be because the costs of online marketing is known to be lower than the cost of traditional marketing and of course, the target customers spend a significant amount of time on various social media platforms. This relatively new trend is growing rapidly and the importance of digital marketing is expected to exceed the one of traditional marketing.

Facebook and Twitter are two of the most popular social media sites today and they are crowded with companies fighting for the consumers' attention: this calls for innovation. By applying Spinfy's company mascot in a creative and attractive way, the commissioner might gain a competitive edge over other application providers. When looking at the basics of marketing, one can conclude that in order to gain strong customer bonds and brand awareness the company should communicate with its customers on the customers' terms. This includes choosing the appropriate channel in which to reach them, delivering an interesting and valuable message and lastly, approaching them in a desirable manner. All these points have been taken into consideration when developing the plan and Spinky seems to be a suiting "form" to use when delivering such a message.

As the theoretical background of this thesis covered almost everything from the very basic marketing theories to specific marketing tools, the reader should now be able to see a clear connection between the result of the study and the underlying theoretical framework. A good example of such theory implementation is that by utilizing some marketing analyzing tools, the author of this thesis was able to divide the market into four separate segments and then choose which of these segments, or target groups to focus on. A specific strategy was suggested to how Spinky could best reach these groups and what tactics to use when contacting them. Furthermore, some suggestions were also made on the issue of integrating Spinky into to the website, the theory of integrated marketing communications was the source of the result for this particular part of the plan.

Looking closer at the purpose of Spinky, one can understand better the reasons for some choices made in the marketing communications plan. Spinky's overall purpose and main functions have been mentioned on several occasions and here they are once again: draw traffic to either Spinfy's website or directly to the applications' point of purchase. Other functions of Spinky are: keeping customers at the website and making them return, being the face of the company and lastly, making Spinfy memorable and recognizable. These goals and functions have all been taken into consideration throughout the analysis process and into the action plan.

The challenges which Spinfy probably will encounter are mostly related to the lack of resources and the ability to continuously generate creative new ideas for Spinky's content marketing. By utilizing social media management tools such as Hootsuite, the marketer will be able to handle multiple social media accounts over multiple platforms. Hence, Spinky's social media activities can be managed more efficiently and the marketer will have time to attend to other tasks as well.

4 DISCUSSION

The goal of this thesis was to provide the commissioner with a comprehensive digital marketing communications plan for their mascot. The mascot's intended purpose is to play a significant role in Spinfy's online marketing efforts and to enhance the visual synergy of Spinfy's marketing material and own digital media channels. The reason for why the author chose this topic was that she has herself has been a marketing trainee at Spinfy, where she took on the task of developing a personality and social media presence for Spinky, the commissioner's mascot. She took the initiative herself to start the project, because she thought it sounded interesting and beneficial for Spinfy. When it comes to the process of writing the thesis, a thorough theoretical framework was first created from a desktop research on marketing theories. The aspect of utilizing mascots as a marketing tool in a digital environment was also investigated. After the theoretical framework was completed, the various theories and concepts were set into practice while executing the marketing plan. This methodology proved to be helpful for the author to fully grasp the bigger picture of marketing communications. Instead of exploring only the term "mascot marketing", as was first planned by the author, this thesis now presents mascots as a marketing tool in a web of various, profound marketing theories.

The main findings of this thesis evolve around specific tactics the commissioner may use in social media in order to reach their prospects. Another significant outcome was the suggestions to what alterations the commissioner's website would need to optimize the synergy between the mascot and the company's marketing efforts. Furthermore, the issue of a shortage in resources has been addressed as the most significant challenge. In detail, the resources needed for the implementation of the marketing plan are: good content of various sorts and a person to conduct the day-to-day social media activities. As Spinfy is a small start-up company with limited resources for marketing purposes, some compromises might be made on the time spent in social media. One suggestion also made was to hire a marketing trainee to take over these tasks, this would ease the difficulty with financial resources.

Before starting this thesis work, the author was already familiar with social media and had spent a significant amount of time on twitter, suing Spinky to build awareness around Spinfy. She also had a good picture of basic marketing theories, after studying these in several courses the last three years. However, the ability to link the mascot together with the theory was lacking. A certain naivety was present in the starting phase of this work, which, by the help of good tutoring, has

developed into a more mature and professional way of thinking. As mentioned in the beginning of this section, the author had first planned to research only the term "mascot marketing", but she decided after a few sessions and brain storming meetings with the tutor teacher that a more comprehensive theoretical background is needed to understand the connection between theory and practice. After much hard work and many hours writing theory, the empirical work proved to be a much easier task. The structure and strategy for writing the plan was already there and all that was left was to analyze the particular task at hand and form a tailor made marketing plan.

The author has created the digital marketing communications plan so that the commissioner will be able to know what to do and how to do it. The plan consists of a strategy and an action plan which are easy to understand and easy to follow. First of all, the commissioner should assign the task of dealing with Spinky's social media activities to one person. Then the whole Spinfy team should get together and discuss the matter of the website and the issues which have been addressed in the plan. The next thing in line is to delegate small tasks to each of the team members, where they can all contribute in content creation. Some might write a blog post, another might design some visual graphics, all which Spinky can use in his day-to-day activities. The rest of the work comes in the form of daily tweets and maintaining good relationships with the target audiences, specified in the plan.

Due to a tight schedule, the methodology of the thesis had to be changed. At first the meaning was to conduct a bench-mark research in addition to the desk-top research. The idea was to observe and analyze how other companies utilize their mascots in social media. This method might have been useful to better understand how the mascot tool is used in digital marketing, but the author is pleased with the information attained from the method actually used. As for the time-management, despite the tight schedule, the process has been surprisingly smooth. A good cooperation and communication between the author and the tutor has made the time frame possible to manage.

As for further development tasks, it could be interesting to investigate the possibility of using Spinky as a real reviewer. The idea of a developer's mascot reviewing other company's applications might be contradictory, but worth analyzing. This possibility has been discussed with Spinfy's marketing team, so it would be appealing to learn about the pros and cons about such an approach. At a more personal level, I have finally learned the value of having strong theoretical knowledge before starting an analyzing or implementation task. During my whole studies I have

not appreciated the basic theories much at all, but looking back at my thesis work, I can say that I finally get it. My advice to fellow students who are just about to start the journey of writing their thesis is: pick a topic which you really want to learn more about, set up a realistic schedule and do not expect too much of yourself. In my opinion it is better to chose an easier task and research question and be able to write a good thesis, than to chose a vast and complicated topic and end up with a less satisfactory result.

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