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THE CURRENT DEVELOPMENT AND TRENDS OF SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING STRATEGIES FOR BUSINESSES

– CASE STUDY ON AN INTERNET MARKETING COMPANY: LEAD CREATION

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The purpose of this thesis is to highlight the evolution of the marketing strategies of businesses and more specifically of their communication strategies, with the important rise of social media influence, which is changing the way people get informed as well as their purchasing decision process. Indeed, this research is about underlining the fact that businesses, small or big sized, have to get online and to use social media and to adapt their business models if they want to stay on top of the competition on their markets.

The research is supported by a case study of an Australian internet marketing company, in order to get valuable insights from internet marketing experts, which will strengthen the points explained by the different authors in the literature review.

KEYWORDS:

Marketing strategies, communication strategies, social media, community, online presence, brand image

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS OR SYMBOLS

SMM	Social Media Marketing
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
USA	United States of America
CRM	Customer Relationship Management
CtoC	Customer to Customer
URL	Uniform Resource Locator
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
COO	Chief Operating Officer
HTML	HyperText Markup Language
SEO	Search Engine Optimization
LC	LEAD CREATION
B2B	Business to Business
HR	Human Resources
IMI	Information Management Integration
BNI	Business Network International
TEC	The Executive Connection
NHS	National Health Service

1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 THE INTERNET REVOLUTION

According to the World Bank and the International Communications Union, there are nowadays more than 2,512,400 billion internet users in the world (Worldometers, March 26, 2013 at 4:25:28 PM). Since year 2000, the number of internet users worldwide was only of 360,985,492 and was since multiplied by almost 7(Internet World Stats, June 2011). This data furnished by Internet World Stats show us how important internet has become in our everyday life.

Indeed, Internet allows people to interact between each other, whether it is for professional or personal matters, removing the geographical and physical boundaries (U. E. Gattiker and al, 2000) It is the open gate of an incredibly huge amount of informations and entertainments and enables people to share their beliefs, opinions, passions, etc. This is also -and mainly, for this thesis- a new way of doing business. People are able to directly communicate with companies or other people and to negotiate according to their needs and desires. In parallel, companies are able to reach a greater market and to be more visible about their products and services. This is a new feed for creating value and to get well-known from people, internationally. Clearly, Internet has affected the businesses marketing strategies, enabling big companies as smaller ones to provide information on a global scale (P. Herbig and B. Hale, 1997). Indeed, small companies are now able to reach targeted markets at a minimized cost and are able to compete with bigger companies, on an equal footing (F. Palumbo and P. Herbig., 1998).

Being an e-business and doing e-commerce is something really broad and complex to define. There are different forms of e-commerce and being an e-business involves many changes within a company, relating to its marketing strategies, its finance and accounting management, its production and operations management, its management information systems and its human resources management (R. Tassabehji, 2003). This thesis will focus on both Business to Business and Business-to-Consumer e-commerce, e-commerce in general, illustrating the changes in the marketing strategies of companies. Furthermore, the rise of the internet has created new communication ways between

businesses and consumers. Indeed, the relationship between these players is more customized and direct in order to build loyalty and trust (S. Zappalà. and C. Gray, 2006a).

Social media networking appeared few years ago, after businesses started creating online web pages as a "double-page advertising spread", and since then, it has considerably gained importance as it is bringing many benefits to businesses. It is a shift in the way businesses do marketing as the consumers changed the way they engage with brands, driving some of the traditional marketing strategies and structures obsolete (anonymous, 2012).
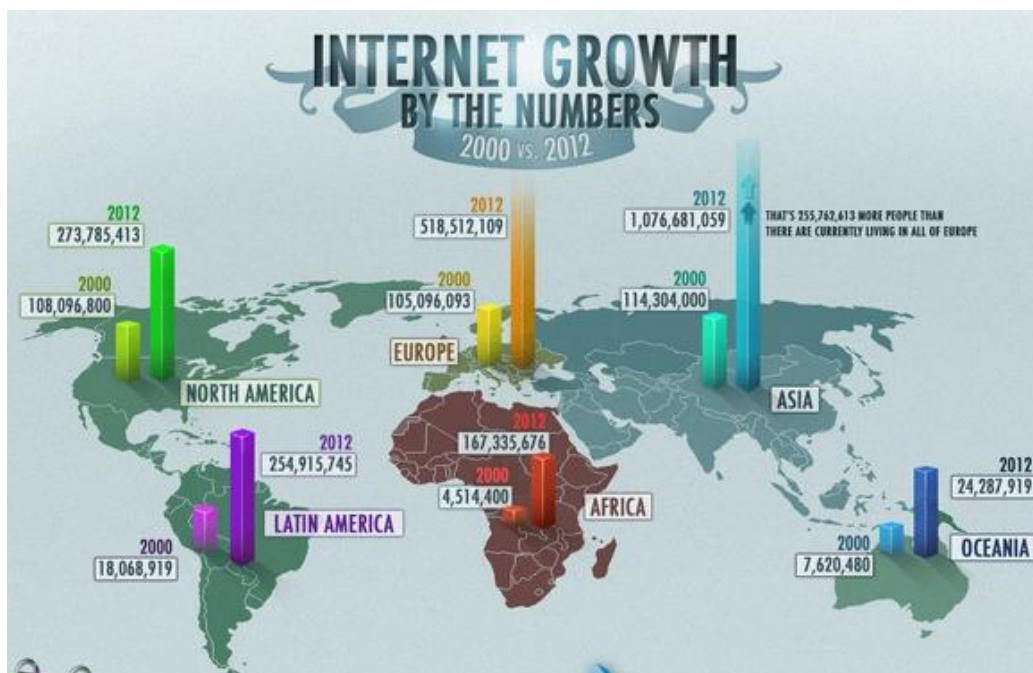
Source: Internet World Stats, June 30, 2012

1.2 RESEARCH MOTIVATIONS AND OBJECTIVES

1.2.1 BACKGROUND

In this section, I will explain what the main concepts about my research are, followed by some important definitions, and explain my motivations to do my research on this topic.

Firstly, my research will be focused on the concept of Social Media Strategies. What I want to show is that Social Media is one of the most important or maybe the most

important thing in Internet Marketing for a business, in order to target and get new clients. Businesses can't afford expensive advertising campaigns as multinationals. This is why they need to concentrate their marketing on internet which is most of the time free or, in some case, affordable for smaller companies. It is not possible to talk about Social Media without talking about Internet Marketing in itself. Hence, these two terms will make what this research is all about.

Let's define these main terms:

- Social Media Marketing (SMM): Margaret Rouse, content writer for IT professionals, defines SMM this way: "Social media marketing is a form of Internet marketing that utilizes social networking websites as a marketing tool. The goal of SMM is to produce content that users will share with their social network to help a company increase brand exposure and broaden customer reach. " (WhatIs.com, March 2011).

- Internet Marketing: as Susan Ward, business writer, says, "Internet marketing refers to the strategies that are used to market a product or service online, marketing strategies that include search engine optimization and search engine submission, copywriting that encourages site visitors to take action, web site design strategies, online promotions, reciprocal linking, and email marketing – and that's just hitting the highlights." (About.com, 2012).

The research deals with this topic because Social Media is nowadays an incredibly huge attraction point for anybody in terms of communication, social networking, information, entertainment and, more and more, in terms of marketing.

The author did his gap year internship in a young medium internet marketing company called LEAD CREATION in Sydney, Australia, specializing in Search Engine Optimization. He wasn't really involved in the Social Media department of the company, however, the activity of this department always was really interesting, as well as the way it was improving day after day. The CEO of the company was managing this department and he always was really dedicated to it and passionate about it.

Social Media offers you a lot of freedom in the way you want to create leads and get new clients; it is a really flexible marketing tool to use. The reasons why the thesis deals with this topic are to complete my internship "duty", being able to provide LEAD CREATION

this thesis which will be a way to show them my gratefulness for hiring me and for teaching me so much about this new field which is internet marketing. Secondly, it is to help me learning new things about Social Media and, maybe, getting more skills in this field.

1.2.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This topic totally fits with the actual matters of any businesses willing to get found online and to optimize their marketing strategies. This is why some interesting questions come to my mind; some questions that will guide my research in delivering relevant answers that could be useful for any start-up/new company which need to build their marketing strategies and which don't know what they should do.

Research questions:

1. How does Social Media affect businesses' performance?
2. Are all the social mediums useful according to business objectives?
3. Are Social Media platforms the new crucial way to get leads?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 MARKETING STRATEGIES ARE CHANGING

Marketing strategies have been changing since the development of the internet and some elements of the marketing mix are affected and evolving with the new technologies, particularly the promotional element. It is important to understand the evolution of marketing and what has changed in terms of strategies thanks to the internet and the new communication tools it offers.

2.1.1 THE EVOLUTION OF MARKETING SEEN BY JOHN FAHY AND DAVID JOBBER

2.1.1.1 ITS DEVELOPMENT

The field of marketing has started growing in the first part of the 20th century (p.9) and since then, has been evolving a lot.

Indeed, marketing in the 1930s was more oriented towards production, focusing on production capabilities. To develop products and services of quality and innovative was seen as the key of the success.

Marketing turned its orientation towards sales in the 1950s; basically, post-second world war in the USA when there was an overload of products in markets. Aggressive sales efforts were needed to make customers buy and companies thought they should ensure the people buy their offerings, regardless the quality of their offerings.

Such an orientation lead to many fails and companies started understanding in the 1960s-1970s that their marketing strategies should be more customer-oriented. Being costumer-oriented is about being close to the customers, understanding their needs and their problems. By following such an orientation, companies got satisfied customers telling others of their experiences, which gave an important impact on one's purchase decisions.

Adopting this marketing orientation has been beneficial to companies and a newer marketing concept saw the day which is the social marketing. Companies socially oriented

care about customers' needs as well as the planet resources, developing corporate social responsibility (p.10-11).

It is in the recent past years that marketers understood they have to move from a transactional exchange to a relational exchange, where the value is co-created with the consumers. Companies who understood this are market oriented, placing the customer as the concern, getting the customer criteria to match with the company marketing mix and segmenting the market according to the customer preferences. Companies who don't do business this way are internally oriented, placing the price and product performance as the key and segmenting the market according to the product only (p.12).

2.1.1.2 THE MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS

The communications in marketing are part of the promotion element of the marketing mix. During a long time, the mass communications techniques such as advertising, sales promotion, publicity and sponsorship, were favored by marketers. Among these techniques, two of them had significant importance in the promotional mix; advertising and sales promotion. The main characteristics of such techniques are that they are non-personal and are aimed at the masses.

More recently, direct communications techniques have become popular. Indeed, new technology-based means as Customer Relationship Management (CRM) and digital marketing appeared, enabling more interactive relationships with the consumers. According to John Fahy and David Jobber (2012a, p.257), CRM is defined as "the methodologies, technologies and e-commerce capabilities used by firms to manage customer relationships" and affirm that it enables "the company to co-ordinate all of its communications efforts so that the customer is presented with a unified message and image".

2.1.1.3 DIRECT MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS

It is composed of several different methods, such as direct mail, telemarketing, door-to-door leafleting and digital marketing. The last method cited here is the one that is the most interesting for the purpose of this thesis. Digital media are

revolutionizing the way people communicate between each other as well as the way they connect, leading to an increase in the Customer to Customer activity (CtoC).

Jonh Fahy and David Jobber define the digital marketing as "the achievement of marketing objectives through the use of digital technologies" (2012b, p.265).

Digital marketing is characterized by elements that completely changed marketing communications. People are *identifiable*, for instance, thanks to the social media profiles; communications, information and content are available *instantly*; the receiver of information is now active and participates in any type of conversation, which enables *interactive* relationships; the consumer can choose what kind of information he wants to receive as well as he can respond to it and give his opinion, which gives him consequent *control*; finally, digital marketing is based on *co-creation*, meaning that all the content is co-created by the marketer and the consumer, placing the latter as a participant and no more as a recipient (p. 254-265).

There are several types of digital marketing. Among them, internet marketing (website ad, online studies…), search advertising (Search Engine Optimization), email marketing (direct mail), viral marketing (word of mouth on internet), mobile marketing (communication on mobile devices through apps and text messages that contain ads) and social media marketing.

As this thesis is about the social media, let's focus on the social media marketing.

This is among the fastest growing components of the internet. Social media are used to communicate and to engage customers. It is becoming an exponentially popular way to advertise as it gives good opportunities for targeting an audience. Social media marketing is, once again, co-created; consumers are able to talk about their experiences, to comment brands, to share videos and so on. Consumers kind of impose their terms, making the brand promotion trickier for companies as they have to give up the monologue and adopt the dialogue in terms of advertising. As John Fahy and David Jobber explain it in their book (2012), companies must stay up to date and go find new generation of customers on the media they use, hence, the growing importance of social media marketing.

The two authors defined three components of social media marketing which are social networks, such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Google+; image sharing websites such as Flickr; blogs and microblogs like Twitter (p.265-267).

2.1.2 FROM TRADITIONAL MARKETING TO NEW, INTERNET MARKETING

Consumers' behavior has been changing in the past years especially because of socio-cultural conditions moves involving that people have less time for themselves. The value of time has become really important in a consumer life and this can be explained by the fact that jobs demand more hours of work and also that there are more and more women are working. These conditions lead people to reduce the time spent in some activities such as shopping and communication to spend more of this time saved on activities like leisure. Hence, the use of internet has incredibly changed the way people purchase and communicate, favoring fast and efficient communication and access to a broad range of quality information. In consequence to that, many aspects in marketing strategies have evaluated to adapt the consequent change in consumers' buying behavior (S. Zappalà and C. Gray, 2006b).

2.1.2.1 THE DIFFERENCES OF STRATEGIES

In their book, *Impact of e-commerce on consumers and small firms (2006)*, S. Zappalà and C. Gray illustrate some differences between the traditional marketing strategies and the new, internet marketing strategies, through six different areas.

They have firstly described noticeable differences in the information area. Indeed, an incredible amount of information and better quality of information from businesses are available on internet allowing the consumers to get many details on products, services, companies' events, special offers and so on. This is one difference with the traditional marketing way, delivering really few information details and being less approachable from consumers. The new thing with the internet marketing is that the information not only comes from companies but also from partners called "infomediaries", which are people that compare products and services and who rate companies, as well as from customers. Finally, internet offers an important potential of data collection for companies which allows them to target their audience more easily and to adapt their offers to not masses anymore but individuals.

The second area in which we can notice differences, according to S. Zappalà and C. Gray, is the customer relationship. Basically, there was pretty much no relationship between the

consumers and the companies, or when there was one, it was not direct but it was made through intermediaries. Nowadays, the marketing strategies require that companies have a one-to-one and interactive relationship with the customers and directly engage and talk to them. Another thing is that businesses are able to create partnerships more easily in order to deliver specific offers to the customers. What has risen with the internet is the importance of virtual communities, demonstrating a critical potential for companies to get leads. People, through this, exchange information on the products and the services, and they also share their interests with other members, enabling businesses to, once again, target their audience in an easier way.

The third area studied by the two authors is the targeting one. The way businesses target, although internet is a very helpful tool for them to reach more consumers, is more complex than in the traditional marketing. The targeting process is done on the basis of behavioral patterns such as websites search and transactions made, whereas in traditional marketing, businesses target according to demographical factors and also according to the product rather than the consumer.

Communication is the fourth area where differences have obviously been noticed between the traditional marketing strategies and the internet marketing ones. This area has been experiencing important changes in the way business do marketing. The biggest change is that businesses using internet marketing strategies implement a personalized and interactive communication whereas the traditional marketing strategies require mass communication and push advertisement. The "rules of the game" are not the same for businesses as the consumers are the ones who decide what to do with the load of information available to them; they are the ones to decide to enter a website and to receive more detailed information about specific products and services. This idea of control by the businesses on the information spread to the consumers has kind of lost its meaning, whereas in traditional marketing strategies, companies control the content and the consumers' buying behavior. Now, the contrary seems to happen; consumers control the information they want from businesses and companies have to adapt to their buying behavior by having more interactive advertisement.

Another area the two authors have studied is the accessibility. Obviously, before the development of internet, companies were facing some barriers. Indeed, they were geographically restricted, in terms of selling, dealing hours and delivery, to their locations.

Now, internet marketing strategies enable the access to a website 24/24 on a global scale. Imagining a website is a virtual shop window, consumers can have a look to a business's products and services whenever they want and wherever they want. Delivery is not much of a problem anymore as it can be arranged by the customer.

Last but not least, the sixth area S. Zappalà and C. Gray talked about is the consumer. The consumer, as explained earlier in this part, has evolved and its purchasing decision process has changed. In traditional marketing strategies, the consumer was characterized as someone passive, that we can see like driven by the advertisements in its decision making. Nowadays, thanks to the internet and all the possibilities it offers, the consumer has become active, well informed but also more demanding as well as more complaining, as internet clearly offers more freedom of expression.

Having a look at all these differences between traditional marketing strategies and internet marketing strategies through these six areas, businesses should understand they have to get online and adapt to the new communication tools that are "offered" to them. Important opportunities can be taken by customizing the communication, by delivering new types of content, by gathering and making good use of data collected about customers through databases and by adapting to the increasing power of internet users (p.140-150).

The internet is bringing so many benefits of all kind to anyone, it is now almost impossible to live without it. The world interacts through the internet, people communicate, share their interests, businesses create partnerships and get online to, more and more, do business with other companies or with consumers. Pretty much any human activity can be shared online and people act with more freedom, which leads to a natural phenomenon existing since the essence of the human species. This phenomenon can influence anything we do, any decision we have to make: the word of mouth phenomenon.

We will learn more about this thanks to E. Qualman.

2.1.3 THE SOCIALNOMICS CONCEPT

Erik Qualman, an international author, keynote speaker and number 1 best-selling author on digital trends, motivation and leadership, has greatly illustrated the huge influence that social media is getting on everyone's life, as an individual or a business, in his book *Socialnomics: how social media transforms the way we live and do business* (2012a). This revolution is explained through a concept he called socialnomics.

Socialnomics is, according to E. Qualman, "the value created and shared via social media and its efficient influence on outcomes (economic, political, and relational)". More briefly, he defines it as "a massive socioeconomic shift" or as "word of mouth on digital steroids". By defining this, we can understand that social media are affecting any aspect of our lives and it can involve important changes in many ways.

As mentioned previously, E. Qualman better explains this natural phenomenon that word of mouth is. According to him, word of mouth is the most effective kind of marketing. This kind of marketing has for sure already been working while traditional marketing strategies were implemented. However, the traditional word of mouth can be slow to process, which has clearly changed with the apparition of social media, through for instance Facebook updates or tweets, which are spread to all friends and followers in one's network and that can be spread to incredible amount of people that are somehow able to get your message online. This has advanced the word of mouth phenomenon to what E. Qualman calls the "world of mouth".

The "world of mouth" happens on social media and is definitely better than having someone telling just a few friends. Indeed, the scale of influence is tremendous on social media as it is naturally global. Moreover, your opinion, in a digital format won't be misunderstood and won't lose its original content as this can easily happen in a traditional word of mouth; the message is intact. Also, we are able to know who is at the origin of the message or thought. These criteria illustrate how the "world of mouth" overtops the word of mouth.

The socialnomics concept is happening through the "world of mouth" and completely revolutionizes the way societies generally function; all this has been enabled thanks to social media.

"The word of mouth on digital steroids" can create nice opportunities and even help you to see things bigger than you expected. E. Qualman in his book tales the interesting story of a company which saw the day thanks to the world of mouth, Bacon Salt.

Two guys, Justin Esch and Dave Lefkow from Seattle, have had a random idea while sharing some beers: to create a powder that makes everything taste like bacon. They then created a Myspace profile in order to get access to the available data to find people mentioning the word bacon on their profiles. There were 35.000 people that they surveyed in order to find out the potential interest they would have for such a product. The results were very encouraging and they even started getting orders for it whereas they didn't even have any product.

This experience went so viral that it even went offline as the two guys got an official support from the Gotham Girls Roller Derby team. This shows the power of socialnomics. They finally sold 600.000 bottles of this product in one year and a half.

The brand Bacon Salt and the product have been built from the beginning to the end using social media and by following people's opinion and desires.

2.1.3.1 THE EMPOWERMENT OF SOCIAL MEDIA

In his book, E. Qualman mentions that social media is now the most popular activity on the Internet and this, becoming more popular than pornography for the 1st time in Internet history and this, in less than 3 years. This is mostly due to the ability of social media to help users limit the too big flow of information they can receive and to help users to understand what the people are doing. Another reason is that social media enables anyone to stay connected and accepted to people having importance to them.

The author wants to demonstrate that social media can make you save time more than making you waste it and that it actually makes you really more productive. An easy example he gave in his book is the one of a woman going to a supermarket to buy groceries. She is stuck in a long queue to pay everything for like 10 minutes. Several options are offered to her: reading some random magazine without interest, calling someone just to beguile the time, or go on the social networks. We understand, reading

the example to the end, that there are many benefits in using social media, even in this simple case. Indeed, by choosing the option of checking her social networks, she can post on Facebook about the fact she didn't find mayonnaise for her tonight dish and getting good tips from friends answering this post to replace it, she can stay up to date about her sister who passed an important exam and quickly find a gift to congratulate her, she can read the post of her best friend who's pregnant, clearly mentioning she decided not to know if it is a boy or a girl, which alerts her she shouldn't bother her friend with the recurring question "so, is it a boy or a girl?" and so on.

We have moved from an environment in which information was owned by a few people and was distributed to millions to an environment in which information is owned by millions and distributed to a few people, or more explicitly, to niche markets. Indeed, basically, the Internet has forced the newspapers and magazines to rethink their business models. Especially now, with the social media apparition, these traditional media are facing important losses and are dramatically losing their influence. As E. Qualman affirms it, "we no longer search for the news, the news finds us" and people are already used to this, which could not be changed anymore. The author makes it clear that an alternative for traditional media such as newspapers have the alternative to implement an online subscription to face their revenue losses and that it could work, at the condition that you are the only one owning the information; in the case the information is available faster and for free, this can't work. Unfortunately for this media, social media makes it happen faster and for free.

What I understand when reading this is that people, through social media, are kind of collaborating in order to satisfy their interests. As social media enables such collaboration between people on internet, businesses can for sure get benefits from it too. Indeed, E. Qualman explains us that more and more companies use social media tools in the workplace for a collaborative purpose; social media networks such as Yammer are very useful for the use inside a company and make the use of e-mail obsolete.

Social media, according to the author, is revolutionizing the businesses' recruiting process as well. As stated in the book, "According to the 2009 Jobvite Social Recruitment Survey, nowadays, 80% of all companies use social media tools in order to recruit, of these, 95% are using LinkedIn". Traditional recruiting mediums such as job boards, job fairs and job search firms still exist but their influence is decreasing in

consequence of this shift in the recruiting process. Social media tools like LinkedIn or Craigslist are a good way to get more direct and useful connections between the employers and job seekers. The benefits for a company are that to spend an important amount of money in recruiting a human resources team or intermediaries. Also, the recruiter is saving important time deciding whether a person is suitable for a specific position as social business networks enable to get very concrete information about people; these people are able to post many things on their online resume such as links to articles they are involved in, a video resume, references… Even more important is that, these social business networks enable a recruiter to have more recruiting influence thanks to an employee's network. Indeed, recruiting someone having hundreds of professionals in its network, that can be tracked on social media sites, offers even more recruitment potential to the company (p. 177-179).

Another important side of social media that E. Qualman explains in his book is the possibility to tag things. This helps people to filter the information that makes sense for them among all the information available on the web and to categorize conversations, thanks to what is called "hash tags". This makes social media less confusing although it produces an important amount of content.

E. Qualman underlines the fact that search engines and social media are now interconnected and search engines like Google, Bing or Baidu (Chinese search engine) are willing to offer more social alternatives. Also, these ones look for and gather the tags and names of the links to rank social media items. For instance, a blogger will receive an important amount of traffic from search engines as people vote for him through social bookmarking, by re-tweeting his articles or reposting articles.

One key point for businesses, that the author explains, is that thanks to social media, companies are now aware of customers' disappointments regarding a product or service, as the customers now give their feedbacks at any time and any place from a computer or a mobile device. Hence, companies can quickly and easily respond to customers' complaints on social networks like Twitter and improve their offerings to stay ahead of the competition. This is a critical opportunity for businesses to strengthen their relationship with the customers, something that some companies don't understand yet and see customers' feedbacks as a bad thing and avoid them. This is a big mistake as, nowadays, as E. Qualman explains, consumers want to create a relationship with the

brands they have an interest for and are even willing to give them a hand however they can.

2.1.3.2 THE STORY OF A MAN AND A COMPANY

This "world of mouth" phenomenon requires businesses to consequently transform their business models in order to take advantage of the social media and to be able to respond to the new demands and impact it breeds. Some companies got it and E. Qualman, in his book, provides us the nice example of a chewing gum company, Stride.

I guess it will ring a bell if I say "where the hell is Matt?" .Matthew Harding has realized a video in which he performs a unique dance in different locations he has been visiting, with a nice music in the background. What makes his video really beautiful, and E. Qualman specifies it, is that there are no language barriers as Matthew is just dancing. He shared this video with his family and friends who really loved it.

He realized a second one which got a lot of success as he broadcasted it on his server which got him more than 20,000 hits a day. The company Stride saw here a huge opportunity and got in touch with him in order to sponsor him and to realize a third video, even more important than the previous ones Matthew shot. He travelled to 42 countries for over 14 months and shot the video in 70 different cities and locations. The video had, in May 2012, over 60 million views on YouTube and "Matt" is the top result on Google.

This case proves us that the socialnomics concept is not only acting on the web but it can also create activity in the offline world. Indeed, Matthew was voted a Top 40 Internet celebrity by VH1, he also made guest appearances on TV Shows like Good Morning America and his video is often displayed on the giant screens of Times Square in New York. Hence, his video became viral on social media which made him become someone well known in the non-virtual world. We would never have heard of him if he hadn't done such a video. Sponsoring such a video made Stride a successful brand of chewing gum; so businesses can really take advantage of social media, following this example.

We have seen through these different parts and thanks to several authors that today, Internet marketing and more specifically social media are of huge influence for individuals as for businesses as it is completely revolutionizing the way we communicate,

the way we purchase and the way we do business. As stated by E. Qualman (p.144), "Companies don't have a choice on whether they do social media; they have a choice in how well they do it".

So, it is good to know that this new media is something crucial for individuals and professionals but it is also important to know which social mediums to use as an approach for businesses.

2.2 SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING

Margaret Rouse, writer and manager of the website WhatIs.com, TechTarget's IT encyclopedia and learning center, defines social media marketing as "a form of Internet marketing that utilizes social networking websites as a marketing tool" in order to "produce content that users will share with their social network to help increase brand exposure and broaden customer reach". (WhatIs.com, March 2011).

According to Mashable, a leading source of social media news and tips, states that "this form of marketing is driven by word-of-mouth", which supports the theory of Erik Qualman. (Mashable, 2013).

It is possible to implement social media marketing strategies through several different social mediums.

2.2.1 THE DIFFERENT SOCIAL MEDIUMS

The social media phenomenon has appeared during the last decade and the huge influence it has been gaining until now is impressive. Many researchers have been analyzing this shift from an offline world to an online one through social media and how important the need for companies to get online is.

Several researchers have defined the different mediums used in social media marketing; researchers like Dan Zarrella (2009), Dave Evans (2012) and David Meerman Scott (2011). Through their good analysis, we can say that social media marketing strategies are implemented via social networks, blogs and micro blogs, video and image sharing websites, social bookmarking or voting websites, wikis and forums.

We will go through the most important of these mediums, regarding the potential they have for businesses.

Here is a table made from all the findings below, summing up the specificities of the different social media sites.

Facebook	Social network - Young people oriented – sharing of random content: images, videos, opinions, articles.
LinkedIn	Social network - Business oriented – sharing of specialized and professional content: resume, professional tips, job offers.
Tumblr	Social network/blog - People and business oriented – sharing of random content: photos, videos, quotes, music.
Twitter	Micro blog- People and business oriented- sharing of short content: text, articles, links.
YouTube	Video sharing website - People oriented – sharing of random video content: music, ads, comedy, movies trailers, any kind of tips…
Flickr	Image sharing website - People oriented – Sharing of random content: photos about any kind of topic.
StumbleUpon	Bookmarking website- People oriented – sharing of random content: websites according to interests.
Pinterest	Bookmarking website – People and business oriented – Sharing of random content : websites, photos and videos.

Facebook was founded in 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg. Since December 2012, it counts more than 1 billion monthly active users and an average of 618 million daily active users. Basically, the role of Facebook is to get people connected and to make them open to others, to share their interests and to express themselves about anything. (Facebook, 2013)

D. Witek and T. Grettano (2012) explain how Facebook works as it offers many communication possibilities. They talk about the three main functions of Facebook which are feeds, shares and comments.

The feeds appear on your Timeline (profile page) and in your news feeds, defined as an "individualized homepage". This is the content appearing on these two pages, refreshing in real-time and displayed in a reverse chronological order. This content is mainly made of photos, videos, status updates as well as links. The feeds a user receives can change according to the friends you want to get information from and according to the fan pages you like. It is possible to decide whether to subscribe or not to friends, according to your interests and if you don't want to see any information from specific people in your network.

The shares are an important function on Facebook as well as on any other social media. It enables users to post links of information sources outside Facebook to their Facebook news feeds. There are different ways to share a link with your network and the authors have defined 5 different ones. The first way is the "copy and paste method" which consists in copying the URL into your news feeds. The second one is the "bookmarklet method"; this method is simple as you can share an article, a video, a photo from any website provided with a bookmarklet, composed of an automated button "share on Facebook" or an automated Facebook logo button. The third method is to share information appearing on your news feed by clicking the button "share". The fourth method is to click the "share" or "like" plugin appearing on top of or on the bottom of an article or video on other websites. The last method the two authors have defined is the "frictionless sharing"; this method is implemented regarding Facebook apps you use. Facebook will automatically

share on you profile page (timeline) the fact you listened to music or that you read some news through a Facebook app.

The comments are the function you find underneath any post, in a box combined with the "like" and "share" buttons. This function is very simple but so important as well as it enables the users to communicate, to share their opinions and to create relationships with other users.

According to Shell Robshaw-Bryan, a marketing consultant at Surefire Media, an e-commerce and marketing company, Facebook is the biggest social network today and she sees good benefits for businesses, to get from it. Indeed, this social network, as already mentioned, has the biggest user base and this one keeps on growing. Thus, it has a great potential for companies, which are able to reach 1 billion consumers and to build communities. These communities enable companies to increase the brand loyalty with current customers and more importantly to turn community members into potential customers.

Businesses are able to build a brand personality by showing their values and their expertise. Facebook provide businesses good tools to reach their goals, such as free business pages where the relationship with the users is built, promoted posts that enable a company to make a specific post seen by everyone, and Facebook ads, which means that Facebook publish specific ads to an audience according to demographic factors and also to the users' interests and hobbies. (Social Media Today, 2013).

The Facebook page is surely a very important tool that gives good opportunities to businesses. B. Jahn and W. Kunz (2012) support this idea and explain us that it genuinely is a "new online service for the customer-brand relationship". By creating a Facebook brand page, a business is able to engage, integrate and immerse Facebook users into an active community. Indeed, the potential for a business to get new leads is big; however things need to be done properly in order to make it work.

A business can be successful on Facebook if it builds relationship based on values acknowledged by consumers. Reaching users through a Facebook page is not about advertising or selling always more, it is about delivering valuable content, meaning this must be interesting as well as innovative and entertaining, in order to attract consumers and to build loyalty.

The two authors underline the fact that a Facebook page has a great influence for businesses as it enables consumers to interact between them and more importantly to interact with the company. This way, consumers can deliver requests or complaints to the brand at any time and if the company wants to have a good image, it is critical to constantly answer the consumers on a very short time limit. Hence, businesses need to be proactive when using Facebook.
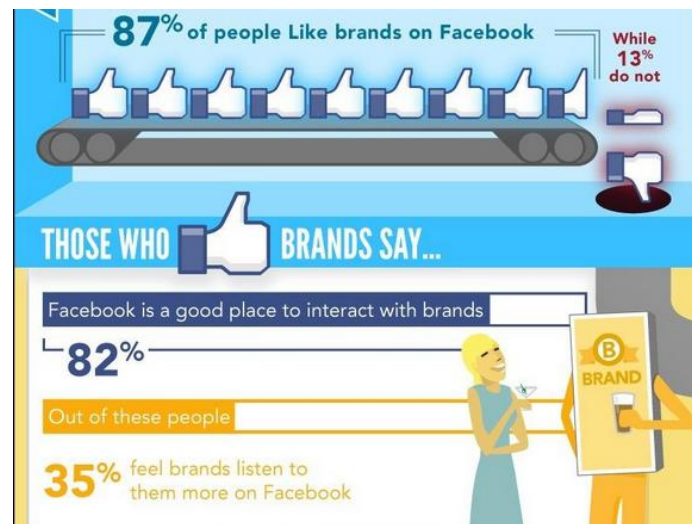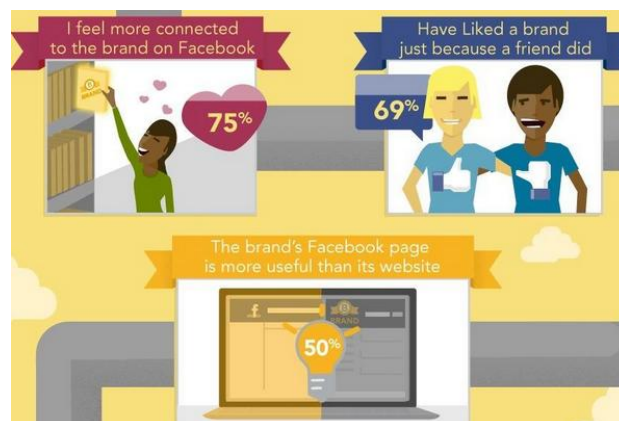

Source: Lab42, September 24, 2012a

M.M. Haigh and al (2013) have demonstrated in their study the need to mix the strategies of communication when engaging Facebook users on a brand page, in order to be successful. According to them, businesses should first of all implement a Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) communication strategy which consists in delivering information on the Facebook page such as the company culture, their environmental responsibility, the worker's policies… In clear, it is about delivering some information that the consumers need to engage with a brand. It has been stated in their study that businesses implementing such a communication strategy get better purchase intent as well as a better perception of the business public relationship and greater attitudes from consumers.

It is then important to implement, in complement of this first communication strategy, a corporate ability communication strategy. This consists in delivering information on the expertise of the company about the products and services they offer. These two communication strategies combined enable businesses to connect with and to engage consumers as well as creating a brand personality and building loyalty.

K.S. Coulter and A. Roggeveen (2012a) illustrate another facet of Facebook that can be really beneficial to businesses: the perceived credibility. You become "member" of a Facebook page by liking the page. The more members a brand page gets, the more "likes" it gets too. The fact that a brand page has a big amount of "likes" can influence other users to join and become a members or fans as well.

This is a way to assess how many people follow your brand, contrarily to Twitter where you can follow superstars, companies, agencies, politicians and so on, but these people are able not to follow you in return and it is often the case. On Facebook, the "likes" system makes it more appropriate to evaluate your product network. Hence, the number of members of a page can influence other users to think there is information of value for them and a product or service of quality.

It can be beneficial for a business as people believe what other people say or follow what other people do; that is what the author called the credibility of the network or the perceived credibility.

Source: Lab42, September 24, 2012b

Facebook is still evolving and keeps on offering new features that can totally benefit businesses. Facebook has recently initiated the New Replies system. This feature consists in replying to a specific comment and to launch a direct conversation with someone. This can for sure be useful for businesses as it is a way to strengthen the engagement of customers and prospects to the brand. It enables businesses to have direct conversations with the users which improve the quality of the customer-brand relationship (Social Bakers, March 28, 2013).

2.2.1.1.2 LINKEDIN

LinkedIn was founded in 2002 by the Reid Hoffman, Konstantin Guericke, Eric Ly, Jean-Luc Vaillant and Allen Blue and the site was launched on the 5th of May 2003. It is the largest professional network in the world and is counting more than 200 million members over 200 countries since December 31 2012. LinkedIn counts among its members, executives from all the 2012 Fortune 500 companies and more than 2.7 million companies have a LinkedIn company page. Also, the website is composed of more than 1.5 million groups (LinkedIn, 2013a).

LinkedIn offers very useful tools for companies in order to "hire market and sell". Indeed, LinkedIn enables companies to reach a big bunch of professionals who can be potential future partners, employees or clients and it gives the opportunity to engage them and to share valuable content, actions that can lead to actions offline. Some LinkedIn features are used by the users to reach their goal, such as the Talent Solutions, making the recruiting process way easier for businesses; the Marketing Solutions, consisting in delivering valuable content to the most relevant prospects for a business; the Premium Subscription, providing effective tools to any kind of user to reach and manage people corresponding to their needs, the best and easiest way possible (LinkedIn, 2013b).

Keenan and A. Shiri (2009) see LinkedIn as a niche social website as it is business oriented and it encourages professional relationships. Indeed, they explain that LinkedIn is a way to reconnect with associates and colleagues but also to explore the job market through your connections; a job market invisible in the offline world. It is a way to get in touch with experts in order to get more insights about a specific topic as well.

M. E. Zaglia (2013) supports this idea of niche social website as she explains that the LinkedIn groups, the communities created are specialized consumer communities and that the users get into LinkedIn groups focusing on business matters as well as on shared interests.

According to J. H. Kietzmann and al (2011), the thing businesses have to focus on when using LinkedIn, is the relationship building. They explain that LinkedIn offers different features that let its users manage their network in a very efficient way. Indeed, the users can see how well they are linked to other users and what is the degree of separation they are from a specific user they are targeting (a prospect, an employer, etc.). Also, companies are able to build their reputation thanks to the endorsement from

other users/companies. This becomes possible thanks to a great feature: the recommendation. This feature gives users the possibility to leave other users testimonials according to a specific experience they had with them: two professionals who are/ were partners, an employer to a current/former employee, two colleagues who are or used to work together… Some valuable testimonials are critical for a business in order to build truth and be seen as an expert in its field.

T. Marshall and L. Smith (2013), respectively CEO and COO of the internet company LEAD CREATION, which I am going to base my case study on, wrote a guide about how to build a good LinkedIn profile and the benefits LinkedIn offers to a business. They explain that LinkedIn is perfect to offer valuable insights to a user's connections and to place his company, but more importantly his employees and himself, as experts and as knowledgeable in his industry, by giving advice and being helpful. This is made possible by joining groups where potential clients are gathering and by engaging and building relationships with the members of these groups. A user can also make this possible by using the LinkedIn applications on his profile. These applications give him the opportunity to show his best work and to discern his business by uploading PowerPoint presentations, images, videos or portfolio.

E. Qualman (2012b) has talked about the importance of social media and the way they are shifting the recruiting process within businesses. He talked more specifically about LinkedIn and mentioned that it provides "more direct and insightful connections between the employer and potential employee" and that it "should monopolize this sector for many years to come" (p. 178). Also, he noted that, contrarily to other big social media sites as Facebook or Youtube, LinkedIn is not prohibited and blocked in China, which is probably due to the fact that it is a niche social website.

The author underlines the fact that a website like LinkedIn is critical to any business as it keeps you from giving calls to people in order to know if they may have some potential job candidates, or potential clients for you. Indeed, LinkedIn allows you to directly see someone's network and to exponentially extend your audience according to what you are looking for (p.180).

2.2.1.2 THE BLOGS AND MICRO BLOGS

2.2.1.2.1 THE BLOGS

Susan Gunelius, president and CEO of KeySplash Creative, Inc., a marketing communication company, and also author of several books talking about the blogosphere and other social mediums, defines a blog as "a website consisting of entries (also called posts) appearing in reverse chronological order with the most recent entry appearing first". It is also called a "weblog" or "web log".

She also defines three other main terms linked to the blog medium that are "blogging", "blogger" and "blogosphere". Blogging is "the act of writing a post for a blog". A blogger is "a person who writes content for a blog". Finally, the blogosphere is "the online community of blogs and bloggers". (About.com, 2013).

Between 2006 and 2011, the amount of blogs has exponentially increased, from 36 million to 181 million (E. Qualman, 2012c, p.217) and this number is for sure still increasing day after day.
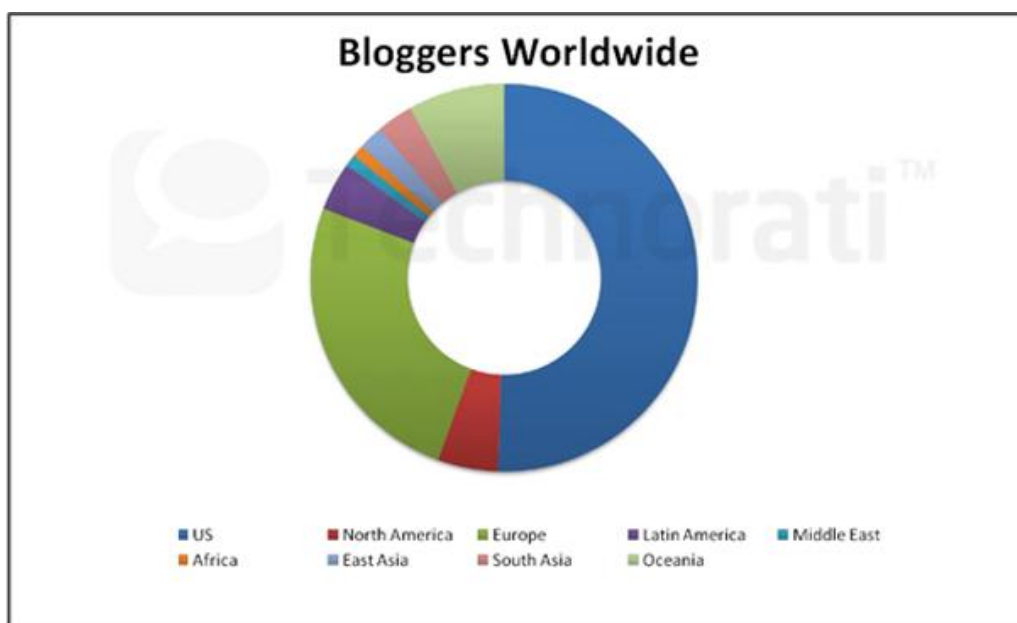
Source: Technorati, 2011

T. Singh and al (2008a) retrace the beginnings of the blogs in their article. It was basically used in the late 1990S as a web-based project management tool for tech-based companies. It has become very popular and its usage has grown very fast, so much that the first blog publishing software, blogger.com, was launched in 1999, which gave the opportunity to anyone to have a blog. The authors explain that a blog is made of

categories, comments, permalink (URL of a specific post) and trackbacks (in a specific post, link to another related blog post).

We learn more about the rise of blogs with D. C. Wyld (2008a) who tales that it is due to the innovation of Evan Williams who, in 1999, developed a software solution that exclude the need to know how to use HTML. This software solution gave the opportunity to edit websites just by writing content in a textbox (Hence, the foundation of the blog hosting and creation site, blogger.com). This innovation enables users to easily add content as text, video and audio material on their website and to constantly update it.

T. Singh and al (2008b) enlighten us about the several benefits blogs can have for businesses. Indeed, demonstrate that a corporate blog can be really valuable for the internal communication chain as well for the communication with customers. Focusing on the customer communication, they support the fact that it allows firm to connect with them in a personalized and unique way, and to communicate about anything.

The main point of their blog analysis is that a blog is described as a tactical and strategic tool by the authors. Effectively, it can be a tactical tool for businesses in order to drive traffic to the company website or for punctual promotions. On the other hand, it can be a strategic tool as companies can implement different strategies as gaining "marketing intelligence" or creating an on-going dialogue with the customers, but they can also improve their internal and external communications, drive market researches, improve their offerings through feedbacks as well as complement promotional efforts. Their conclusion is that such strategies will give consequent value to businesses.

D. C. Wyld (2008b) points out that, internet users put more trust in blogs written by the employees and the executives of a company than in official corporate blogs as blogs allow dialogue, comments and feedbacks and as it is a way for a business to be seen as real people and not just a brand. According to his study, companies see a real interest in blogging as it gives them "a voice" and it gives many advantages as improving the transparency of activities but it also allows getting precious feedbacks from employees and customers, as well as to directly engage with stakeholders, and it can improve the internal communication in businesses as well.

C.L. Hsu and al (2013) have focused their study on the fact that people put more interest in blogs contents than other traditional media as they find it more trustworthy

and more useful. Why do they think so? Because the blog is, according to the authors, a new kind of electronic word of mouth, enabling bloggers to give recommendations about a product or service of a business, which influences the buying process of consumers. Indeed, it influences the users' intention and attitude of purchasing something and it can has an effectual marketing impact for businesses, to get at consumers. However, the impact can be positive or negative, regarding the quality of a business products or services and client service. Also, a blogger's level of reputation has to be taken in account as it will influence the users as well. Thus, positive recommendations from a well-known blogger is an important source of leads for one business and, in the opposite, negative recommendations induces that one business takes note about the bad feedbacks and improves its offerings.
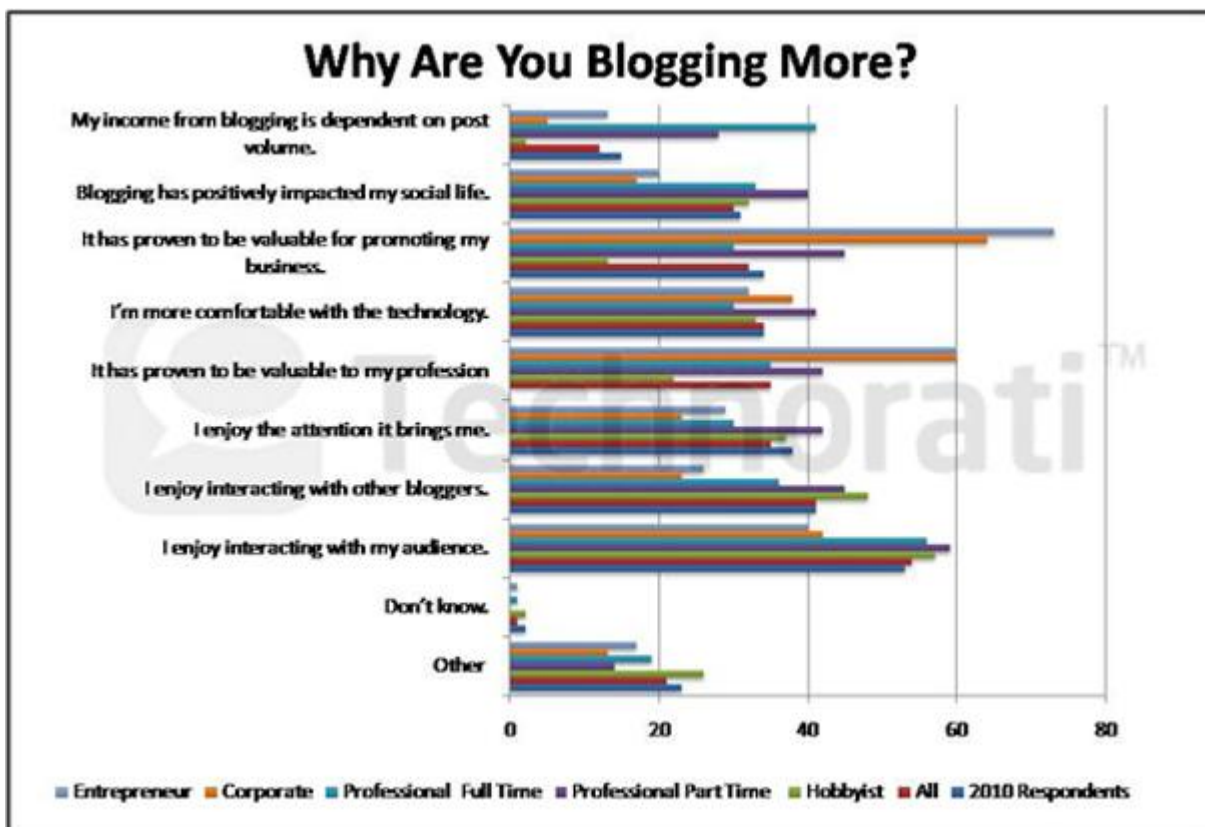
Source: Technorati, 2011

Let's take a closer look at a blog creation and hosting site that is nowadays in complete growth and that shows many facets that can benefit businesses: Tumblr.

2.2.1.2.1.1 TUMBLR

Tumblr was founded in February 2007 by David Karp, in New York City, USA. The website hosts more than 104 million blogs. The site enables its users to post any kind of content, like music, quotes, photos and to edit and it gives them a lot of freedom in the sense that they can edit any aspect of their blog, until the HTML codes, for the specialists (Tumblr, 2013).

According to Amy Gahran, an independent writer and mobile technology enthusiast, Tumblr is both a blog platform and a social network. Indeed, it is quite close to Facebook but it presents some other features that this latter doesn't have. For instance, the Tumblr content is indexed by search engines, which can definitely increase a user's visibility, hence a business visibility. It is also a very mobile-friendly platform, which means that its viewership is quite important. One of the latest feature launched by Tumblr and that definitely increase posts sharing, is the integration of posts on Facebook Timeline.

Amy Gahran also explains that Tumblr is right behind Facebook for engagement, regarding the average amount of time users spend on the website. Finally, she underlines the fact that it is also quite similar to a micro blogging platform for several reasons; like it allows you to post and share short texts, like on Twitter; it is increasingly used on mobile devices; the website has a re-blogging feature, just like the re-tweet one on Twitter as well as tags in order to categorize blogs in specific and popular topics (Entrepreneur, July 30, 2012).

Chris Crum, a team member of the WebProNews, an online publishing site, supports Amy Gahran in the idea that Tumblr has characteristics of a social media, and this, way more than any other blog platform, like WordPress. He joins the majority of Amy Graham's arguments about Tumblr, concerning the micro blogging and mobile-friendliness aspects of the site.He explains that Tumblr managers have no problem in having businesses using their website to improve their visibility and engage their audience. In the contrary, the encourage them to do so by engaging other blogs, by posting on a regular basis, by following their target audience…

The writer also shows that Tumblr already has few tools that can help brands improve their presence and visibility on the website, such as the "highlighted posts", aimed to help promote some specific posts, with a wild choice of "stickers", according to the nature of your message; although this is not free. However, it is developing more features that will

benefit businesses, which will appear in the near future. A business also has the possibility to make its blog its main one on Tumblr (Web Pro News, April 16, 2012).

The Wishpond Blog (April 10, 2013) also wrote an article about Tumblr, demonstrating that it is an efficient tool to describe products and to gain followers. It is explained the site offers different tools that can help businesses get more visibility and assess it, such as the Tumblr Sponsorship, which consists in having a blog sponsored by Tumblr, in order to show up as the first result when someone's searching for specific posts. However, this feature is not accessible to any blogger; indeed, you have to have an innovative and creative blog to be sponsored. Tumblr offers different analytics features to assess your visibility and viewership on the website, like Unionmetrics. This feature requires a subscription, though. Two other ones, free, are Tumblrstats and Numblr; the statistics delivered are really basic but it is still a helpful insight for businesses in order to have an idea of what to improve on the platform.

Mashable (July 07, 2012) has also studied the case of Tumblr and have explained the different benefits it brings to businesses. The first thing is that there is a high engagement from the users and these ones are welcoming any kind of content, as long as it is attracting. Then, it is easy to navigate on the website and the mobile application is increasingly used. Mashable also supports that this website is more social than any other blog platform and that it is very popular. The key benefit of this website is that it gives the opportunity to business to get more creative and to deliver attractive, interesting content, which has nothing to do with the content of a corporate blog. The last benefit Mashable explained and that joins once again the arguments of the previous writers, is that the site is well categorized, thanks to the tag feature, making it easier for businesses to target their audience and then to follow and engage them, as well as delivering them content having value to these users.

According to M. Coeckelbergh (2011), micro blogging is "the publication of short text messages (it can also be a photo, a video, an audio fragment) to update status, share information, ask questions and to communicate between two or more people".

The author underlines the fact that micro blogging has an impact on the way businesses and, more generally, people think. Indeed, micro blogging allows no time and no space for complex thoughts. This is all about quick and very short communication, which increases the communication activity.

Micro blogging, as J. R. Coyle and al (2012) demonstrate it, delivers an important CRM potential, as it enables businesses to get into viral conversations in which users and more precisely customers ask questions, give concerns and also make suggestions to these businesses, which can respond the customers as well, with ease and effectiveness. This CRM potential on social mediums is called Social CRM which is defined as "the integration of social media into Customer Relationship strategy" (Inc. Magazine, Technology, June 1, 2009).

Nowadays, the main micro blogging and social CRM platform is Twitter

2.2.1.2.2.1 TWITTER

Twitter was founded in March 21, 2006 and was launched in July 2006 by Jack Dorsey, in San Fransisco, California, USA. The social and micro blogging platform counts over 500 million registered users and 200 million active users, worldwide (Wikipedia, May 2013). The site enables to share real-time information as well as participating in conversations according to what interest people, under the form of messages with a limited amount of characters (140 characters) called tweets. This platform is also ideal for businesses as it enables them to engage their audience in real time and to build or strengthen their relationship with their customers, by instantly responding to feedbacks and sharing information (Twitter, 2013).

K. S. Coulter and A. Roggeveen (2012b) demonstrate that marketers use Twitter in order to develop closer relationships with their customers by, for instance, "following their followers" instead of just running a monologue.

Touch Agency, a North West leading design and marketing agency provided great recent statistics about Twitter, confirming that this platform provides important benefits to any business using it and in some extent, confirming what K.S. Coulter and A. Roggeveen (2012) support. For instance, 75% of users are willing to purchase from a brand they follow. Also, 67% of users would recommend a brand they follow to others. Twitter is a critical tool to answer customers' complaints and feedbacks and to strengthen the brand image of a business as 80% of customers' tweets relating to customer service are negative or, at least, critical (CMS Wire, August 19, 2011)

According to S. Burton and A. Soboleva (2011), the social platform gives businesses the possibility to interact in two ways. The first way, called interpersonal interactivity, consists in exchanging messages between a company and an individual and to refer other users' messages or replies, re-tweets... The second type of interactivity is the machine interactivity; this is about using internal and external links in a message. According to the goals of a company, these two types of interactivity can be mixed to optimize its way to interact in one-to-many or one-to-one conversations.

2.2.1.3 THE VIDEO AND IMAGE SHARING WEBSITES

2.2.1.3.1 YOUTUBE

YouTube was founded in February 2005 by Jawed Karim, Steve Chen and Chad Hurley (YouTube, 2013a) and the platform counts more than 1 billion monthly unique users worldwide. YouTube has a Partner feature that was created in 2007, enabling video creators to earn money from it. Also, businesses, mainly small ones, have the possibility to use an ads platform via Google to promote them on YouTube, which is a way of monetization for the social website (YouTube, 2013b).

S. Pace (2008) supports that YouTube is also a platform to create communities, but in a more original and attractive way than blogs. Indeed, a video is more attractive than text or images; a thing that businesses should not ignore.

The iMarketing Factory (2011), a website development company, has illustrated the different benefits a business can reap from YouTube and there are quite enough to convince one to use it. Effectively, this website is a good place to popularize a product has it is wildly used as well as to get feedbacks and rates if the product isn't finished. Also, it is an efficient tool to solve a repetitive a problem that your customers encounter, by showcasing a sort of tutorial via a video. YouTube enables a business to increase its brand visibility as well, by rating, commenting and sharing videos of other users, relating to the brand and its values. The website provide an analytics tool called YouTube Insight, which is good to follow the amount of views, likes or dislikes a business gets on its videos. A key point is that YouTube makes possible to increase a business' website traffic, by inserting the business site URL in a video and because the videos are indexed by the search engines. Finally, something basic and so important that this company underlines is that the video sharing platform is free of use for most of the things, which makes businesses save money, unlike newspapers, TV ads…

An article from the Inc. magazine (technology, August 8, 2008), written by Renee Oricchio, also demonstrates that businesses can be successful on YouTube if they create informative, creative and educative videos and if they are engaged in their community. They join the points of the company iMarketing Factory concerning the potential that the website has, to increase business website traffic and that it can help them to be more visible on search engines, by finding the right keywords for a video description and title.

Bianca Male, writer for Business Rider (February 12, 2010), a business website providing valuable information related to several industries, underline the fact that YouTube is a way to get your business as a reference among your community, by posting videos educating and informing the customers about a product or a service. This is also the place to showcase your product and its specificities to get consumers aware and familiar with it.

Flickr is an image hosting and sharing website founded by Ludicorp in 2004 and acquired by Yahoo! In 2005 (Wikipedia, May 4, 2013). The website counts 51 million registered members and approximately 80 million unique visitors worldwide (Yahoo!, 2011).

According to Marcus Burnette, a website designer and developer, Flickr is very helpful for a business as it can link its Flickr account to its website, which is good to be better indexed by the search engines and to get more visibility. It is also possible to display the Flickr albums on a business website, which allow the website visitors to have more interesting views of the products, without having to go to another website for that (by another website, I mean Flickr). The writer also underlines the point that especially hospitality-based and fashion/design-based companies can take a strong advantage of this platform as they can share really interesting photos of events and so on (Flitehaus.com, August 1, 2011).

Matt McGee, an editor of two online marketing websites, demonstrates that Flickr can definitely increase a business' brand awareness by telling who they are in an original way, by sharing their website but also by posting photos of their products or illustrating their services well described. Matt also underlines the fact that Flickr users are really engaged in their communities and is willing to interact with other users and, in some extent, with companies as well as long as they share interesting, creative content. This way, businesses can benefit from it and engage their target audience efficiently (Smallbusinesssem.com, June 15, 2006).

Kim Bhasin, a writer for Business Insider, explains that businesses have the opportunity to "tell their brand story" through photos in order to engage the users and get them involved, which can create a close relationship with them. Another key point he shows is that by using this platform, people can share your photos and increase your brand visibility, which can be good to reach more potential customers (Openforum.com, November 20, 2011).

2.2.1.4 THE SOCIAL BOOKMARKING WEBSITES

Susan Gunelius (About.com, 2013) defines social bookmarking as "a method of saving and storing web pages in a single online location for future use or for sharing with other internet users."

2.2.1.4.1 STUMBLEUPON

StumbleUpon was founded by Garrett Camp and Geoff Smith in November 2001 in Calgary, Canada (StumbleUpon, 2013). The platform counts more than 25 million registered users since April 2012 and this number is for sure still increasing (Wikipedia, 2013)

Sophie Southern, writer for the Houston Chronicles (2013), a news provider, argues that StumbleUpon can generate a tremendous amount of traffic to a business website or blog. Indeed, a webpage is suggested by the social bookmarking website and people click to visit it. If they liked it, they mark it via the "thumbsUp" button and the webpage is then sent to more people that could possibly like it too, and so on. The sharing of a business webpage via StumbleUpon can provide a huge amount of traffic, which is taken into account by search engines that will rank a business website even better. Also, the writer explains that this traffic generated by StumbleUpon is done on the long term as the platform keeps on re-sharing it to other users.

Libelty SEO (January 30, 2013), an SEO company, says that the massive amount of traffic you receive is relevant as well as users told the social website about their interests when signing up. Using this social bookmarking website can make a business being known very fast and give it an important visibility on the web.

Neal Schaffer, a social media conference speaker and writer of two social media books as well as founder of WindMill Networking (January 27, 2012), joins the previous arguments and also demonstrates that this website is a very good tool and also easy to use to promote a business, as it will make a business website or blog "go viral". The good thing for any business is that they get feedbacks from users, when they visit the web page and like or dislike it and leave comments about it, this way, they can improve

their content in order to better engage their audience. The author also explains that StumbleUpon can generate business big revenue and get them a good brand image, as it goes viral. Another feature helping businesses to do so is the StumbleUpon Paid Discovery. It promotes web pages to its users and gets 5 cents per click on the page in return. This is a cheap investment for businesses in order to engage an important amount of potential customers.

2.2.1.4.2 PINTEREST

Z. Wilkinson (2013a) explains that Pinterest is a bookmarking website but also a photo and video sharing site, launched publically in March 2010 by Ben Silbermann and Paul Sciarra, then opened to the whole public in August 2012, as it was first opened on invitations. According to ComScore, the site counted in January 2012 11.7 million unique visitors, which indicates that the website is growing really fast (Wikipedia, May 2013).

Z. Wilkinson (2013b) supports the fact that more and more businesses are using Pinterest as it appears that Pinterest users are really likely to purchase a product found on Pinterest, more than on any other social platform, like Facebook. Pinterest has a bookmarklet feature called Pinmarklet, allowing any user to pin photos on any website he visits, which can definitely increase the visibility of a business website on search engines as well. The article this author wrote is based on the example of libraries, however, it can completely work for businesses as well; the benefits are the same. Indeed, the website is perfect for building a community and to share the story and lifestyle of the business through photos as well as showing products, getting in touch with other businesses having a similar activity and strengthening the brand image.

Shell Robshaw-Bryan mentions that Pinterest is a way to add value to one business as it is about increasing its presence through attractive and innovative photos and to share content about the company culture, passion, know-how. It is also the opportunity to improve the loyalty of current customers and to engage with potential ones (Social Media Today, March 13, 2013).

The Forbes magazine (November 11, 2012) as well as Anchor Wave (Anchorwave.com, January 3, 2013), a web design and internet marketing company, argued that Pinterest is even more useful for businesses as, from now on, they can have

business accounts. Indeed, this type of account helps business to promote their brand as well as to directly engage its audience. It enables more traffic to the business website and a better presence on the web. Moreover, businesses can create secret boards (topics), which are really efficient to communicate internally; for instance, to let all the employees now about the details of a new product or event, to facilitate the inter-office communication…

Jeff Bullas (2013), an internationally recognized digital marketing and social media mentor and speaker, highlights the fact that Pinterest has now an analytics feature, which is very beneficial for businesses, in order to assess how their audience is engaging with them. Indeed, this tool analyses the "repins", "pins", impressions and clicks, and help to see who is clicking on the business page as well as which content is the most popular. This tool can benefit companies in the way that they can improve the content they share to their audience and get more creative and innovative thanks to that, which is the most important thing on Pinterest.

3. CASE STUDY: LEAD CREATION, AN AUSTRALIAN INTERNET MARKETING COMPANY

3.1 THE COMPANY

LEAD CREATION (LC) is an online marketing company for Business to Business (B2B). It specializes in Internet Marketing, Social Media Marketing and Marketing Strategy. LC works with small and medium enterprises (SME's) and creates and implements whole marketing systems.

The products of LEAD CREATION are different from their competitors as follows (according to the website):

Brainstorming – Strategy: The marketing tools are provided with a clearly defined strategy that drives them. It is created together with the client in cooperation with ten to twelve of Lead Creations young internet specialists.

Tailored B2B social media products: Lead Creation has a radically different Social Media approach than other companies. By building a professional online community, leads are created and engaged.

Utilizing undergraduates: All teams are supported by international interns; this way of working brings innovation and a lower cost base. Regularly the organization exists out of international interns for 70 to 80 percent.

3.2 HISTORY

The company was founded in 2008 by Toby Marshall and Lincoln Smith. They were working together at Abucus Recruitment when the financial crash took place. They saw great opportunities in building websites for companies that were hit, and started to work on an idea.

At that time Lincoln Smith, student in internet marketing and specialized in Google Adwords, was working as an intern for Toby Marshall. Toby has had a very extensive and diverse career in business, accounting, financial recruiting and banking. So with Toby's experience and Lincoln's knowledge of online marketing they started a project at Macquarie Bank, as a test. The concept worked so they decided to go for it.

The concept they worked with became a direct success and under pressure of the growing demand, they needed people to work for them. During his career Toby gained a lot of experience working with undergraduates, so they decided to hire an intern to assist them. In the first year they worked with five to eight interns, in the years that followed the amount grew till a maximum of thirty interns.

One of the interns that joined the company during its first year was Sarah Wooltorton. She now owns ten percent of the company, whereas the other shares are divided between Toby and Lincoln, respectively 60 and 30 percent.

Eventually the company evolved to an online marketing company for b2b, with eleven staff members and a constant amount of approximately 25 interns.

3.3 STATEMENTS

In order to formulate a relevant strategy statement it is important to take the vision and mission of the organisation in consideration. In order to get everyone involved and to reach the statements that are closest to reality, we formulated vision and mission together with the whole staff during three plenary meetings. The outcomes of these sessions led to the following statements:

3.3.1 VISION

'To be the leading B2B marketing company for major corporations, build long term relationships and become the outsourced marketing department for clients who want to be the market leaders in their niche.'

3.3.2 MISSION

'To enable our clients to build the business relationships they need, and to shorten their sales lead time.

We also aim to cut through the fog of this New Media landscape and educate our clients on the most effective and innovative tools for their business'

These statements will function as the framework for strategic planning for the coming period of at least three years. Because of the dynamic and, sometimes, turbulent environment Lead Creation is operating, it is hardly possible and risky to think further ahead than three years.

3.4 STRATEGY

The strategic goals are:

- Raise awareness for product
- Building distribution partnerships
- Recruiting ongoing clients

To achieve these goals the following steps are required:

- Delivering innovative, complete marketing systems
- Optimizing Lead Creation marketing
- Improve customer relation management (CRM)
- Organize talks, events and presentations

These goals and strategies lead to the following strategy statement:

Create distribution partnerships and ongoing clients by raising awareness for our product.

3.5 STRUCTURE

The functional groups of the company are listed here:

-Adwords	-Copywriting	-Web Development
-Sales	-Multimedia	-Strategy and management
-SEO	-Social Media	-HR

A characteristic of Lead Creation that shows signs of a simple structure is that it is under high influence of one charismatic leader. He is a key figure in the company, which makes it dependant of his unpredictability. Therefore the company needs to stay flexible. This flexibility is also required because of the market dependency, which forces the organization to be able to respond quickly to changes.

Management is in hands of Toby Marshall, Lincoln Smith and Sarah Wooltorton. They are all responsible for different functional groups, but some of the groups are under supervision of two or more. The strategy and sales part are exclusively in hands of this board. In practice the decision making and influence is more or less conform to the share in the company that each of them has. Moreover, the opinions of the members of the Lead Creation team are seen as important input for decision making and direction, but the actual decisions are made independent from the team.

3.6 KNOW-HOW AND SERVICES

I already specified some products delivered by the company to the clients in the beginning of this presentation. However, LC offers way more than this:

Search Engine Optimization: this process enables a company to be more visible on search engines as Google, Bing, Yahoo, by prospects.

Copywriting: this is all about writing marketing documents such as newsletters but also editing websites content to provide useful and persuasive informations to the prospects. This department is strongly linked to the SEO one.

Website development and design: to build and design websites to improve clients impact on the internet.

Online advertising: increasing the client's visibility on internet via Adwords, Facebook and LinkedIn advertising.

Social Media: make sure the clients' profiles are "findable" on LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook and that clients receive all the benefits possible from the optimization of their social media tools.

Multimedia: LC creates testimonials videos and animations that are edited on the clients' websites.

First Wednesday Workshop: LEAD CREATION opens its doors to various clients, prospects, partners every first Wednesday of the month in order to make a lucrative presentation on a wide range of business and marketing topics. Doing this shows the reliability of the company and can create new leads.

3.7 THE CLIENTS

The company targets three different categories of clients:

Business coaching (e.g. Craig Bulmer, Empire)

IT Technology (e.g. IMI)

Industry Associations (e.g. BNI, TEC)

Eventually, LC isn't only targeting SME's, but every company willing to improve its marketing strategy and to get leads on internet. The author has seen this confirmed in the end of his internship; LC signed a contract with an Australian leading distributor and manufacturer of steel, tube and pipe.

3.8 THE COMPETITORS

LC has an unbelievable amount of competitors. Indeed, you just have to type internet marketing company to realize how busy this market is already. However, most of these competitors offer specific products and services. For instance, some will be specialized in SEO, some in Social Media, and so on. But almost none of them offer all the products and services that Lead Creation offers. What makes LC different from the others is that they analyse with the client the whole strategy that needs to be implemented and then implements a whole ongoing process that involves all the departments of the company.

3.9 A GROWING COMPANY

LC, named in an article of the Campaign Brief (March 13, 2013) as a "leading Australian digital marketing firm", recently run a research about the social media presence of the top 200 Australian B2B companies. This study was "funded by the Australian Government Department of Industry and Innovation" and it is "the largest study ever done on B2B companies globally." This study aims to show what are the companies having a good social media presence and how to gain a good online presence on the most important social networks. The success of this research will bring valuable leads to LC for sure.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 RESEARCH METHODS

Research is about finding information about a specific topic or problem. It is also about analyzing and interpreting them. There are several research methods possible; among them, the qualitative and quantitative research methods.

QSR International (2012), as its name says, an international data analysis software developer, defines qualitative research as "the analysis of any unstructured data, including: open-ended survey responses, literature reveiws, audio recordings, pictures and web pages".

The Education Development unit of NHS Education for Scotland (2012) affirms that the quantitative method "adopts the scientific method and focuses on controlling variables, gathering measurable evidence and coming to generalisable conclusions or providing new explanations".

It is possible to combine these two methods together, which is called the mixed methods.

The mixed methods is defined by Johnson and al as "the type of research in which researchers or team of researchers combines elements of qualitative and quantitative research approaches (e.g. use of qualitative and quantitative viewpoints, data collection, analysis, inference techniques) for the broad purpose of breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration" (R. L. Harrison and al, 2011)

The qualitative method has been the one to use to explain the increasing influence of social media in the business environment and to make companies aware they have to use the different mediums it offers, thanks to previous and current litterature reviews. The qualitative aspect of my research is also illustrated through the case study of an Australian internet marketing company, for which I've been working for 10 months. I've been able to realize a questionnaire addressed to the employees of this company, which enables me to insert quantitative data in my research as well. By sending a survey to this company, I am willing to strenghten the findings of my litterature review with the answers of internet marketing and more specifically social media experts. The fact that the

company is based in Australia is not an obstacle to my research as internet and social media have no geographical barriers and this is a global matter.

4.2 DATA COLLECTION

When talking about data collection, we mean the way we have gathered the information and what kind of information we have gathered. When realizing a research, it is possible to gather secondary data, which is "data that have already been collected for some other purpose" by other researchers and primary data are "new data", not yet collected by other researchers, as these come from personnal experiences and observations (M. Saunders and al, 2009a, p. 256).

For the good fulfilling of the thesis, mixed methods were used, by combining qualitative and quantitative approaches. Indeed, a qualitative approach for this paper has been chosen, to elaborate the literature review and the presentation of the company on which the study is based. Primary data were used for the presentation of the company, thanks to the experience I had within LC. Secondary data were used for the literature review; books and articles of other researchers were found through Google Scholar, Science Direct and the online library of Turku University of Applied Sciences, Nelli Portal, and more specifically on the online publishing platform Emerald. Other secondary data were found online through blogs, internet marketing websites and news articles.

The quantitative approach of my thesis is illustrated through a questionnaire. Survey-based secondary data are used for the analisis of the findings. The research was runned through the free online software Survey Expression as it is simple to use and it has a data export feature. The stats were analyzed through Mircrosoft Excel 2007. The sample for this study is made of 107 members of the LC alumni group that could be reached via the social network Facebook. 21 people answered the survey and among them, I can affirm from a reliable contact in the company that the 13 current staff of the company answered the survey. The rest of the answers are from former staff of the company, coming from all over the world and who worked, for most of them, or who were involved in the Social Media department.

4.3 CREDIBILITY OF THE RESEARCH

4.3.1 RELIABILITY

M. Saunders and al (2009b, p.156) define reliability as "the extent to which your data collection techniques or analysis procedures will yield consistent findings."

The findings are reliable as this study was run about an internet marketing company composed of young international social media and other internet marketing experts who totally know what social media is about.

4.3.2 VALIDITY

This means "whether the findings are really about what they appear to be about." (M. Saunders and al, 2009c, p.157).

My findings, although they are from a majority of social media experts, also come from professionals in other internet marketing department, such as search engine optimizers, web designers, copywriters… Also, the company I based my study on is specialized in Business to Business marketing, which makes possible the fact that they fulfilled my survey with a BtoB opinion.

4.3.3 "GENERALISABILITY"

This term is explained as "the extent to which your research is generalisable: that is, whether your findings may be equally applicable to other research settings, such as other organizations." (M. Saunders and al, 2009d, p.158).

The topic of my study remains a bit broad as it focuses on the general growing importance that social media have in a business environment, talking about any size of enterprise. My findings, in this sense, remain broad and some of them could not be generalized as, not every social medium specified in my study are relevant, depending on a business activity

as well as its size or reputation. However, some other findings could be generalized as they are widely applicable to any kind of business, taking into account that social media is a phenomenon that has no geographical barriers.

1. What is your main position at LEAD CREATION?
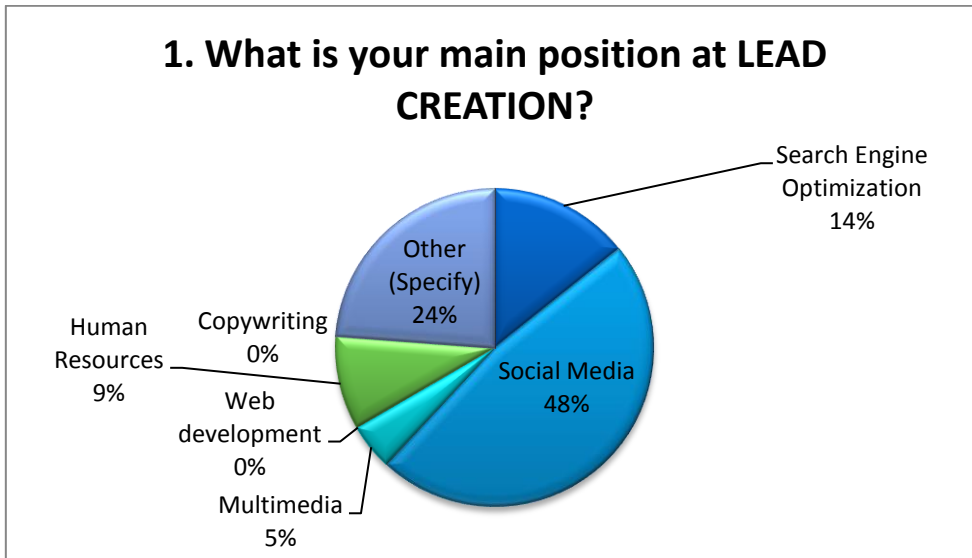
The aim of the first question is to know the field of expertise of the respondents. 48% of them are or were working within the Social Media department, against 14% in Search Engine Optimization, 5% in Multimedia, 9% in Human Resources. The 24% left are research supervisors and managers.

2. What is your level of involvement in the social media department?
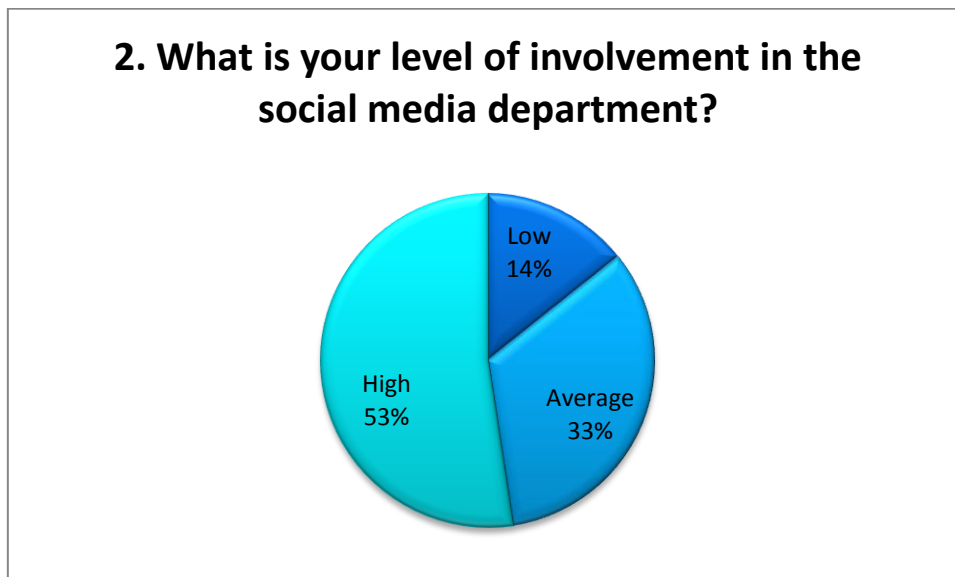
All the departments together, the level of involvement in the Social Media department is or was high for 53% of the respondents which is the majority of them. It is or was average for 33% of them and low for only 14%.

3. The businesses' marketing strategies and, more specifically, their communications strategies have evolved since the development of the Internet.

Strongly agree	16
Agree	5
Undecided	0
Disagree	0
Strongly disagree	0
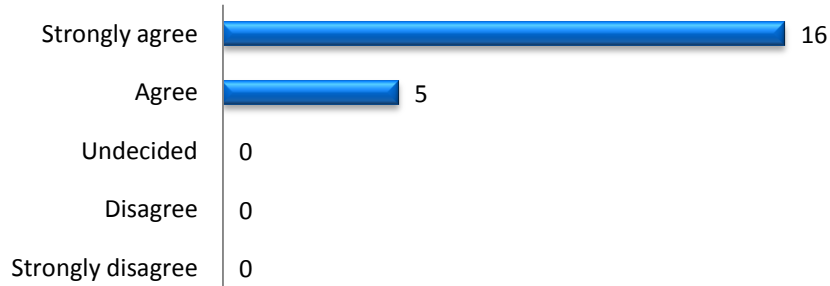
76% of the respondents strongly agree that the businesses' strategies and, more specifically, their communications strategies have evolved since the development of the Internet. The other 24% agree with this statement as well. The respondents completely support the point of J. Fahy and D. Jobber (2012), who explained the evolution of the businesses' marketing orientation since the 1930's.

4. Businesses should implement interactive and personalized communication strategies rather than mass communication strategies with the consumers.

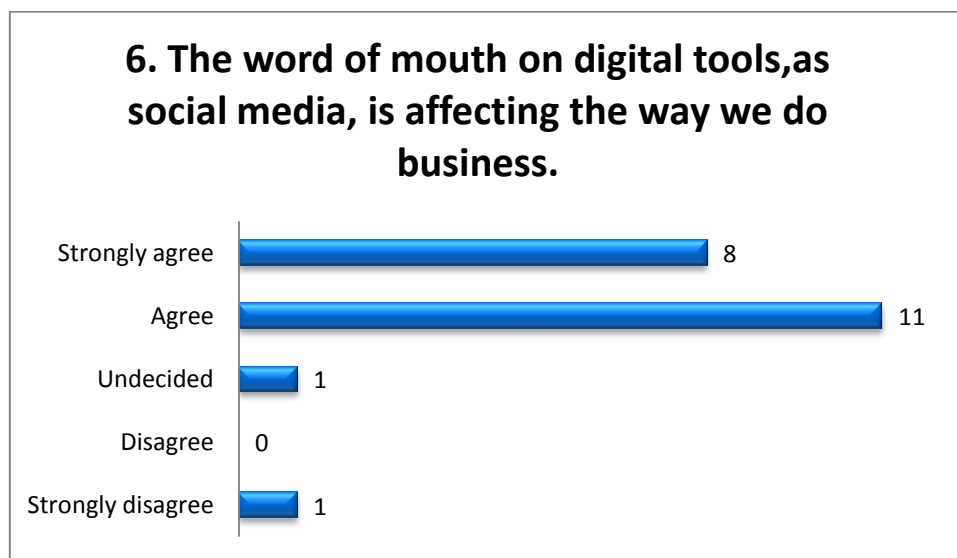|	
Strongly agree	11
Agree	7
Undecided	2
Disagree	0
Strongly disagree	1
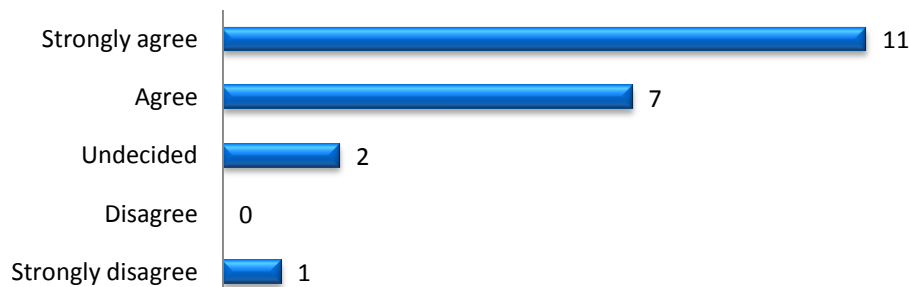
52%, the majority of respondents strongly agree with the fact that businesses should implement interactive and personalized communications strategies rather than mass communication strategies with the consumers, as well as 33% of them agree with this. However, 10% of them are undecided about this statement and 5% strongly disagree.

Here too, these stats confirm the shift from mass communication strategies to more personalized communication strategies, highlighted by J. Fahy and D. Jobber (2012).

5. Order the different components according to their importance in digital marketing strategies. 1 is the most important and 5 the least important.

	1	2	3	4	5
Internet marketing (website ads, online studies…)	3	5	9	2	2
Search advertising (search engine optimization)	8	7	3	1	2
Email marketing (direct mailing)	2	2	6	6	5
Viral marketing (word of mouth)	2	5	2	6	6
Social media marketing (interactivity on online social mediums)	**11**	5	0	3	2

The different components of digital marketing, defined by J. Fahy and D. Jobber (2012), were used to make this question. The obvious data to read here is that 11 respondents out of 21, that to say 52%, think that social media marketing is the most important component in digital marketing, against 38% (8 respondents out of 21) who think search advertising is the most important. The results for the other components are quite divided; however, following the stats, the ranking we could make from this table is that search advertising is the 2nd most important component, followed by internet marketing, email marketing and finally viral marketing.

6. The word of mouth on digital tools,as social media, is affecting the way we do business.

Strongly agree	8
Agree	11
Undecided	1
Disagree	0
Strongly disagree	1

90% of the respondents join the point that the word of mouth on digital tools as social media is affecting the way we do business, against 10% who are undecided or in disagreement with this statement. We can say that 19 out 21 respondents support Erik Qualman's (2012) statement, on which his book is made.
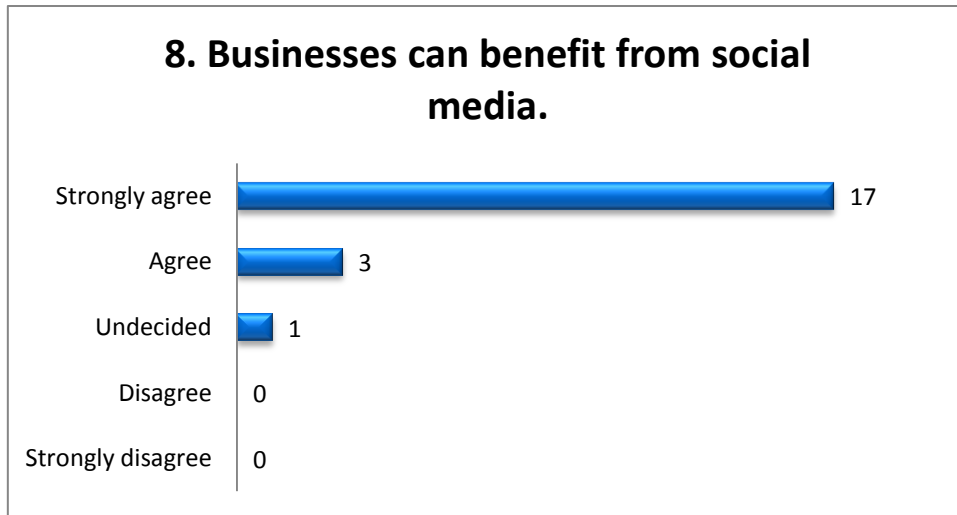
7. The word of mouth on social media is affecting the way we do business in different ways.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly agree
Viral promotion of a product/ service / business idea	0	1	2	**13**	5
People control a business brand/ recommendations and feedbacks widely available	0	0	2	**13**	6
The information is not owned by a few but by millions	0	2	5	6	8
The recruiting process has changed	0	4	4	5	8
Interactivity with a business audience is the key	0	0	1	**10**	**10**

More than the majority, 62%, of the respondents, agrees with the fact that the word of mouth on social media is affecting the way we do business, via a viral promotion of products, services or business ideas but also because people control a business brand through recommendations and feedbacks that are widely available. Moreover, 96% of the respondents agree or strongly agree with the fact that it affects the way we do business since this is all about implementing interactivity with a business audience.

Also, 67%agree or strongly agree that the information is now owned by millions against 24% who are undecided about this statement. 62% of respondents also agree or strongly agree when saying that the recruiting process has changed against 19% who disagree. Hence, an indisputable majority among the respondents support the fact that these different ways are the result of the word of mouth on social media.

All these points have been explained by Erik Qualman (2012) and seem to be unanimous.

8. Businesses can benefit from social media.

| Response	Count
Strongly agree	17
Agree	3
Undecided	1
Disagree	0
Strongly disagree	0

95% of the respondents agree or strongly agree when reading that businesses can benefit from social media, against 5% undecided.

9. Order these different social mediums from the most important to the least important. 1 is the most important and 6 the least important.

	1	2	3	4	5	6
Social networks	16	2	1	0	1	1
Blogs and micro blogs	0	8	7	4	1	1
Image and video sharing websites	1	5	7	4	2	2
Social bookmarking websites	1	0	3	9	2	6
Wikis	1	1	0	2	10	7
Forums	2	3	1	4	7	4

The different social mediums selected to make this question are based on the researches of Dan Zarrella (2009), Dave Evans (2012) and David Meerman Scott (2011). The respondents have in the majority answered that social networks are the most important social medium for a business use; 76% of them. For the rest of the mediums, the answers are quite divided and don't enable us to provide an accurate ranking. We can only affirm that wikis are one of the least important mediums to use for businesses, with 48% of answers.

10. How would you rate the use of the different social mediums for businesses? 1 is the worst and 10 the best.
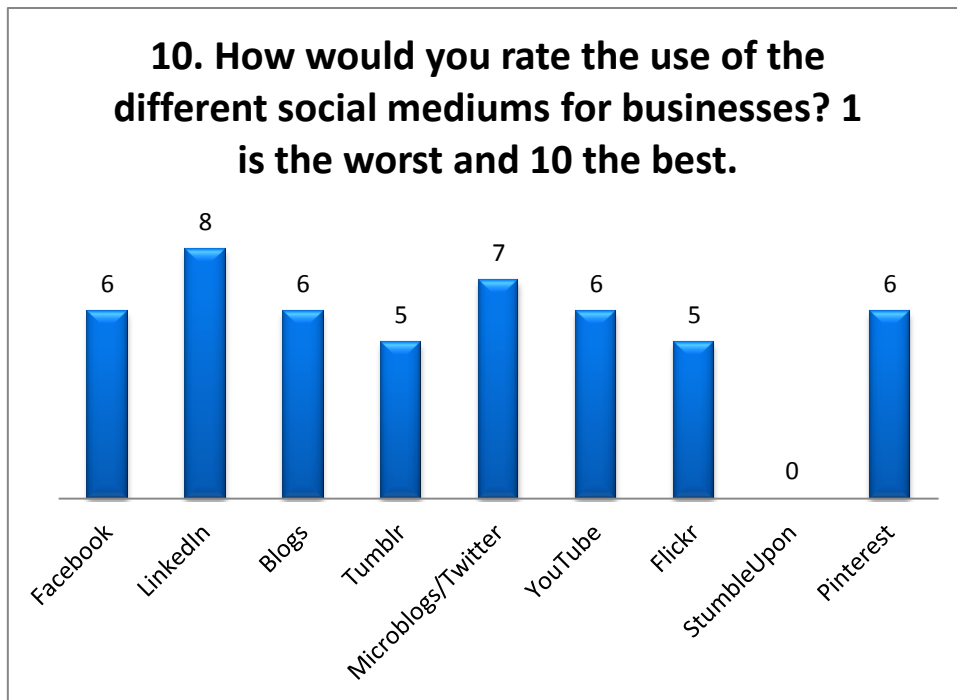
This graph sums up all the rating questions of the survey concerning the different social mediums stated in this thesis. An average of all the rates has been made for each of them. It is important to know that the ratings above have been made by internet marketing experts specialized in the Business to Business activity and that they may have judged according to their activity and not in a more general way. We can imagine this as LinkedIn got the best rate, 8/10, whereas it is a business oriented social platform; although it can definitely benefit Business to Customer companies in some ways as well.

The second best rated social medium is the micro blog/Twitter with a 7/10.

Facebook, blogs, YouTube and Pinterest have a rate of 6/10 which puts them after LinkedIn and Twitter, but the rate shows they are definitely useful for businesses.

Tumblr and Flickr got the lower rate with a 5/10; the respondents are divided on the usefulness of these mediums for businesses.

StumbleUpon didn't really get a rate of 0/10 but a majority of the respondents didn't know how to rate this medium.

11. How could Facebook benefit businesses? Choose 1 to 3 answers.

The biggest user base and a greater audience for businesses	**12**
Interaction with an active community through a business page	**13**
Increase brand loyalty	5
Delivery of valuable content to the community	**13**
Perceived credibility through the amount of likes of a business page	4
"Replies" feature/closer and more direct relationship with a business audience	10
Other	1

The benefits that the majority of the respondents have chosen are that, as it is mentioned in an article of Social Media Today (April 3, 2013), Facebook has the biggest user base and businesses can reach a greater audience (57% of respondents). The second one, referring to B. Jahn and W. Kunz (2012), is that Facebook enables the interaction with an active community through a business page (62% of respondents). The third obvious benefit is that businesses can deliver valuable content to their community (62% of respondents), which B. Jahn and W. Kunz (2012) define as interesting, innovative and entertaining content. With a lower percentage of answer but still important enough to be noticed, respondents think that the "replies" feature, as explained on a famous social media analytics platform, Social Bakers, (March 28, 2013), can enable closer and more direct relationship with a business audience (48% of respondents). 5% said they had no idea about other benefits.

12. How could LinkedIn benefit businesses? Choose 1 to 3 answers.

Reach potential partners, employees and/or clients	**17**
The "Talent Solutions", the "Marketing Solutions" and the "Premium Subscription"/ easier recruiting and engagement process with other professionals	2

Business oriented platform encouraging professional relationships	**13**
Specialized communities, about shared and professional matters	**13**
Focus on the relationship building	6
The testimonial/recommendation feature: perfect to showcase expertise	7
Delivery of valuable content	3

LinkedIn has, according to most of the respondents three major benefits for businesses, that are the possibility to reach potential partners, employees and/or clients, as it is explained on website itself (LinkedIn, 2013) (81% of respondents); this is a business-oriented platform encouraging professional relationships, as explained by Keenan and A. Shiri (2009) (62% of respondents); the third benefit is that businesses can join specialized communities dealing with shared and professional matters, which is highlighted by M. E. Zaglia (2013) (62% of respondents).

It is surprising that the "Talent solutions", "Marketing solutions" and "Premium subscription" as well as the testimonial/recommendation feature didn't get a bigger percentage as they seem to be a critical plus for businesses and anyone using LinkedIn, especially in the recruiting process.

13. How could blogs benefit businesses? Choose 1 to 3 answers

Internal and external communication	**12**
Implement tactics (punctual promotions, driving traffic to the website)	6
Implement strategies ("marketing intelligence", on-going dialogue with the customers)	5
Feedbacks from customers to the businesses on their posts	**9**
Businesses can be seen as "real persons"	**8**
Interaction between the consumers and the businesses through comments and feedbacks	6
Recommendations influence consumers in their purchasing intentions/ trustworthiness	6

Other	
	1

The 21 respondents have in the majority answered that the main benefits of blogs for businesses are the possibility of both internal and external communications, which have been supported by T. Singh and al (2008) (57% of respondents); a benefit also covered by T. Singh and al (2008), the opportunity to get feedbacks from customers on the blog posts, as part of the strategies they talk about (43% of respondents); a benefit explained by D. C. Wyld (2008) is the chance for businesses to be seen as "real persons", and to get a "voice", by delivering posts written by employees and executives of a company (38% of respondents).

However, we can see that the respondents are quite divided on the other possible benefits of blogs, giving them some credit as well. 5% said they had no idea about other benefits.

14. How could Twitter benefit businesses? Choose 1 to 3 answers.

Relationship building	3
High communication activity: quick and short messages	**17**
Strong engagement of followers	**10**
Importance of users' recommendations and feedbacks	2
Important Customer Relationship Management potential	7
Instant sharing of information and interaction with the customers	**12**

Some of the benefits mentioned in this question seem to be unanimous, such as the high communication activity the platform offers, through quick and short messages, a point argued by M. Coeckelbergh (2011) (81% of respondents); as the Touch Agency supports it through their findings (CMS Wire, August 19, 2011), the followers of a brand are strongly engaged (48% of respondents); Twitter, as it is demonstrated on the website itself (2013), enables an instant sharing of information and interaction with the customers, through informative tweets and feedbacks (57% of respondents).

15. How could YouTube benefit businesses? Choose 1 to 3 answers.

Original and attractive way to reach a business audience	**12**
Good way to promote a product and get feedbacks, rates about it	**12**
Tutorial videos to solve customers' problems	**15**
YouTube Insight/ analytics tool	1
Important traffic to a website and search engines index YouTube videos	5
Inform and educate their communities through creative videos	10

The respondents have made it quite clear what are, according to them, the three benefits of YouTube. Indeed, they support the point of view of S. Pace (2008), saying that YouTube is an original and attractive way to reach a business audience (57% of respondents); they also reckon it is a good way to promote a product and get feedbacks and rates about it, like the iMarketing Factory (2011) argued (57% of respondents); the third benefit they answered, which has also been supported by the iMarketing Factory (2011), is the possibility YouTube offers to users, and indirectly businesses, to create tutorial videos to solve customers' problems (71% of respondents). Besides, a considerable percentage of respondents think that YouTube enables businesses to inform and educate their community through creative videos; a point that has been showed by Business Rider (February 12, 2010) (48% of respondents).

In the contrary, the YouTube analytics tool doesn't seem to be a big benefit according to the respondents (5% of them).

16. How could Flickr benefit businesses? Choose 1 to 3 answers

Increase visibility on search engines: the Flickr account is linked to the business website	6
Increase a business' brand awareness by posting photos of its products, business events	9
High engagement and interaction with businesses sharing original and creative content	7

61

Relationship building	5
Viral aspect: users can share a business photos and increase its visibility on the web	5
Other	2

The 21 respondents seem really divided about the benefits of Flickr for businesses. Indeed, the diversity of answers show they are not properly aware of the benefits Flickr could bring to businesses. However, reading the stats, one of the benefits getting the higher percentage and supported by Matt McGee (Smallbusinesssem.com, June 15, 2006), is that Flickr can increase a business' brand awareness by posting photos of its products, its business events (43% of the respondents). 5% of respondents said they had no idea of other benefits and another 5% of them said businesses have the ability to reach a niche segment of consumers through this platform.

17. How could StumbleUpon benefit businesses? Choose 1 to 3 answers.

Important amount of traffic to a business website or blog	6
Better ranking on search engines	9
Relevant audience sent to a website	7
Viral influence	**10**
Improves the brand image	2
"StumbleUpon Paid Discovery": Better promotion of a web page and higher visibility	5
Other	1

The same thing happens here concerning StumbleUpon, except that the respondents are pretty confident in the fact that the platform has a viral influence, which is important for a business willing to widely talk about itself, as Neal Schaffer (January 27, 2012) demonstrates it (48% of them). A reasonable amount of respondents (43%) think the platform enables better ranking in search engines, which is demonstrated in an article of the Houston Chronicles (2013). 5% of respondents said they had no idea of other benefits.

18. How could Pinterest benefit businesses? Choose 1 to 3 answers.

Fast growing social network and important potential to reach a greater audience	8
Users are more likely to buy a product seen on Pinterest than on any other social network	5
Increase the visibility of a business	5
Share the culture of the business, its lifestyle through photos/ added value	**13**
Improve the brand image	8
Improve loyalty of current customers	2
Business accounts: direct engagement with an audience and better brand promotion	4
Improvement of the internal communication thanks to secret boards	1
Analytics feature: assessment of an audience engagement towards a brand	1
Other	1

For this last question, the respondents were once again quite divided about the different benefits of Pinterest for businesses. This can be due to the wide choice of answers. However, one benefit, supported in an article of Social Media Today (March 13, 2013), is unanimous among the internet marketing experts; Pinterest is a way to share the culture of a business, its lifestyle, through photos and this gives a true added value (62% of the respondents).

Despite the diversity in the answers, some benefits got noticeable percentages, such as the fact that, according to ComScore (Wikipedia, May 2013), Pinterest is a fast growing social network with an important potential to reach a greater audience (38% of the respondents) and, as Z. Wilkinson (2013) demonstrates, businesses can improve their brand image via this platform (38% of the respondents). Again, the other answers respondents gave are that they had no idea of other benefits (5% of them).

6. CONCLUSIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

We have learned throughout this thesis that the Internet has generated consequent shifts in the way we communicate, in the way we inform ourselves as well as in the way of doing business. Indeed, the whole study is based on the evolution of marketing strategies and more specifically the communication strategies of businesses, which have reported many changes among its techniques. We have understood, thanks to several researchers, that businesses have to become customer oriented and that they should implement interactive and customized communications strategies, through some digital marketing components, the most important and the fastest growing one being social media marketing.

Indeed, businesses, because of social media, don't control the information as they did in the past and the consumers are able to control their brands, since a real word of mouth phenomenon was born through social mediums, which become critical for businesses to use. We have learned that several different social mediums exist, that can definitely benefit businesses.

In this thesis, we analyzed the following mediums: the social networks, the blogs and micro blogs (mainly Twitter), the video and image sharing websites and the bookmarking websites. These mediums are composed of a wide range of websites and we have described the benefits of the most important ones, according to our findings.

We acknowledged that businesses can really benefit from social networks like Facebook and LinkedIn, thanks to attractive business pages and specialized communities enabling to interact with other professionals that could be potential partners, clients or employees.

Also, we demonstrated that some video and image sharing websites like YouTube and Flickr have a potential for businesses to be used. Indeed, these platforms are original ways to promote a business products or services and to increase its brand awareness.

Finally, some bookmarking websites appear to be useful as well for businesses, such as StumbleUpon and Pinterest. These platforms enable businesses to be more visible and to make their content go viral. They also give a business the ability to create some added value by showcasing the culture of the company, its lifestyle and to promote its products through photos.

This thesis was the object of a case study about an Australian internet marketing company named LEAD CREATION. This company, made of internet marketing and more specifically social media experts, brought to this research precious insight, supporting the whole literature review. Indeed, the current staff, as well as former staff, members of the company alumni group answered a survey following the process of the literature review and referring to the secondary data collected. Their answers confirmed most of the statements written in this conclusion, although their opinions differ according to the social platforms to use, as there exist so many and all are not necessarily relevant according to a business activity.

The thesis is starting with research questions that we are now able to answer.

1. How does Social Media affect businesses' performance?

Social media has shifted and is still shifting the way people communicate and the way they select the information, which has consequences on how they decide to buy some product or service. The value of time has also changed, making communication a process that has to be instant and simplified. Hence, businesses have to join social media platforms and to deliver the content people are looking for. People are owning the information and businesses have to look transparent to consumers, by interacting with them and taking into account their feedbacks and complaints as well as by delivering information about products and services in real time. Businesses' performance is definitely affected this way and they have no chance to face their competitors if they don't adopt social media marketing strategies.

2. Are all the social mediums useful according to business objectives?

Every social medium has many benefits that businesses can take advantage from. Indeed, each of these social mediums is a way to benefit a business in a different way, in a different process. We have seen that social networks are a way to directly interact with a business audience and to increase brand loyalty by answering the feedbacks and complaints of the customers. Blogs and micro blogs are a way to improve the internal and external communication of a company as well as to show the human side of it and to improve its products or services thanks once again to feedbacks of customers, through an instant sharing of information. Video and image sharing websites are useful to promote a product, a service or a business idea and to improve it thanks to comments and rates, but

also to get more visible in an original and attractive way. Finally, the social bookmarking websites are useful to get a viral visibility and to gain an important amount of traffic to a website in order to get a better ranking in search engines; it is also the way to improve a brand image and to gain loyalty from consumers by revealing the culture of a company, its lifestyle and its new products or else through photos that are widely shared.

Hence, not all the social mediums are useful or relevant according to business objectives and it is important to define clear objectives and to analyze the most efficient tools to use to complete them.

3. Are Social Media platforms the new crucial way to get leads?

According to what has been explained previously, it seems quite obvious that social media platforms are the new crucial way to get leads. Indeed, Social Media is affecting us in every aspect of our lives. Companies have to adapt their business models to the online phenomenon if they want to "stay in the game" and get new clients. Getting online, joining these social media platforms is a must as the current generations are being educated to live with them and the coming generations will totally be educated by them. It is important to note that social media marketing is a complement of offline marketing strategies that are for some of them, such as advertisements on TV and in the streets, still needed. However, Social Media marketing is gaining in power and businesses are investing more and more in it. There is no doubt that companies will have a bigger budget for online marketing strategies than for offline marketing companies in the future.

This research remains quite general in the sense that it covers social media for businesses generally. It would be interesting to run a further research in which the relevance of the different social media sites is measured, according to a business activity, whether it is a Business to Business company or a Business to Consumer one. While writing this thesis and reading other researches, it has been noticed that social media is present everywhere, including on mobile devices like smartphones and tablets. Moreover, the use of social media through these devices is becoming globally more and more important, which could make it interesting to study the importance to combine mobile marketing and social media marketing strategies.

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The current development and trends of social media marketing strategies for businesses
Answers marked with a * are required.

2. The marketing strategies

1. What is your main position at LEAD CREATION? *

Other (Please Specify)

2. What is your level of involvement in the social media department? *
- ○ Low
- ○ Average
- ○ High

3. The businesses' marketing strategies and, more specifically, their communications strategies have evolved since the development of the Internet. *
- ○ Strongly Disagree
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Undecided
- ○ Agree
- ○ Strongly Agree

4. Businesses should implement interactive and personalized communication strategies rather than mass communication strategies with the consumers. *
- ○ Strongly Disagree
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Undecided
- ○ Agree
- ○ Strongly Agree

5. Order the different components according to their importance in digital marketing strategies. 1 is the most important and 5 the least important. *

	1	2	3	4	5
Internet marketing (website ads, online studies...)	○	○	○	○	○
Search advertising (search engine optimization)	○	○	○	○	○
Email marketing (direct mailing)	○	○	○	○	○
Viral marketing (word of mouth)	○	○	○	○	○
Social media marketing (interactivity on online social mediums)	○	○	○	○	○

6. The word of mouth on digital tools,as social media, is affecting the way we do business. *
- ○ Strongly Disagree
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Undecided
- ○ Agree
- ○ Strongly Agree

7. The word of mouth on social media is affecting the way we do business in different ways. *

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
Viral promotion of a product/ service / business idea	○	○	○	○	○

People control a business brand/ recommendations and feedbacks widely available	○	○	○	○	○
The information is not owned by a few but by millions	○	○	○	○	○
The recruiting process has changed	○	○	○	○	○
Interactivity with a business audience is the key	○	○	○	○	○

3. The social media marketing strategies

8. Businesses can benefit from social media. *

○ Strongly Disagree
○ Disagree
○ Undecided
○ Agree
○ Strongly Agree

9. Order these different social mediums from the most important to the least important. 1 is the most important and 6 the least important. *

	1	2	3	4	5	6
Social networks	○	○	○	○	○	○
Blogs and micro blogs	○	○	○	○	○	○
Image and video sharing websites	○	○	○	○	○	○
Social bookmarking websites	○	○	○	○	○	○
Wikis	○	○	○	○	○	○
Forums	○	○	○	○	○	○

10. How would you rate the use of Facebook for businesses? 1 is the worst and 10 is the best. *

○ Don't know
○ 1
○ 2
○ 3
○ 4
○ 5
○ 6
○ 7
○ 8
○ 9
○ 10

11. How would you rate the use of LinkedIn for businesses? 1 is the worst and 10 is the best. *

○ Don't know
○ 1
○ 2
○ 3
○ 4
○ 5
○ 6
○ 7
○ 8
○ 9
○ 10

12. How would you rate the use of blogs for businesses? 1 is the worst and 10 is the best. *

○ don't know
○ 1

○ 2
○ 3
○ 4
○ 5
○ 6
○ 7
○ 8
○ 9
○ 10

13. Is Tumblr a useful blogging medium for businesses? 1 is the worst and 10 is the best. *
○ Don't know
○ 1
○ 2
○ 3
○ 4
○ 5
○ 6
○ 7
○ 8
○ 9
○ 10

14. How would you rate the use of micro blogs or, more specifically, Twitter for businesses? 1 is the worst and 10 is the best. *
○ Don't know
○ 1
○ 2
○ 3
○ 4
○ 5
○ 6
○ 7
○ 8
○ 9
○ 10

15. How would you rate the use of YouTube for businesses? 1 is the worst and 10 is the best. *
○ Don't know
○ 1
○ 2
○ 3
○ 4
○ 5
○ 6
○ 7
○ 8
○ 9
○ 10

16. How would you rate the use of Flickr for businesses? 1 is the worst and 10 is the best. *
○ 1
○ 2
○ 3
○ 4

○ 5
○ 6
○ 7
○ 8
○ 9
○ 10

17. How would you rate the use of StumbleUpon for businesses? 1 is the worst and 10 is the best. *
○ Don't know
○ 1
○ 2
○ 3
○ 4
○ 5
○ 6
○ 7
○ 8
○ 9
○ 10

18. How would you rate the use of Pinterest for businesses? 1 is the worst and 10 is the best. *
○ Don't know
○ 1
○ 2
○ 3
○ 4
○ 5
○ 6
○ 7
○ 8
○ 9
○ 10

19. How could Facebook benefit businesses? Choose 1 to 3 answers. *
☐ The biggest user base and a greater audience for businesses
☐ Interaction with an active community through a business page
☐ Increase brand loyalty
☐ Delivery of valuable content to the community
☐ Perceived credibility through the amount of likes of a business page
☐ "Replies" feature/closer and more direct relationship with a business audience
☐ Other (Please Specify)
[   ]

20. How could LinkedIn benefit businesses? Choose 1 to 3 answers. *
☐ Reach potential partners, employees and/or clients
☐ The "Talent Solutions", the "Marketing Solutions" and the "Premium Subscription"/easier recruiting and engagement process with other professionals
☐ Business oriented platform encouraging professional relationships
☐ Specialized communities, about shared and professional matters
☐ Focus on the relationship building
☐ The testimonial/recommendation feature: perfect to showcase expertise
☐ Delivery of valuable content
☐ Other (Please Specify)
[   ]

21. How could blogs benefit businesses? Choose 1 to 3 answers *

- [ ] Internal and external communication
- [ ] Implement tactics (punctual promotions, driving traffic to the website)
- [ ] Implement strategies ("marketing intelligence", on-going dialogue with the customers)
- [ ] Feedbacks from customers to the businesses on their posts
- [ ] Businesses can be seen as "real persons"
- [ ] Interaction between the consumers and the businesses through comments and feedbacks
- [ ] Recommendations influence consumers in their purchasing intentions/ trustworthiness
- [ ] Other (Please Specify)

22. How could Twitter benefit businesses? Choose 1 to 3 answers. *
- [ ] Relationship building
- [ ] High communication activity: quick and short messages
- [ ] Strong engagement of followers
- [ ] Importance of users' recommendations and feedbacks
- [ ] Important Customer Relationship Management potential
- [ ] Instant sharing of information and interaction with the customers
- [ ] Other (Please Specify)

23. How could YouTube benefit businesses? Choose 1 to 3 answers. *
- [ ] Original and attractive way to reach a business audience
- [ ] Good way to promote a product and get feedbacks, rates about it
- [ ] Tutorial videos to solve customers' problems
- [ ] YouTube Insight/ analytics tool
- [ ] Important traffic to a website and search engines index YouTube videos
- [ ] Inform and educate their communities through creative videos
- [ ] Other (Please Specify)

24. How could Flickr benefit businesses? Choose 1 to 3 answers *
- [ ] Increase visibility on search engines: the Flickr account is linked to the business website
- [ ] Increase a business' brand awareness by posting photos of its products, business events
- [ ] High engagement and interaction with businesses sharing original and creative content
- [ ] Relationship building
- [ ] Viral aspect: users can share a business photos and increase its visibility on the web
- [ ] Other (Please Specify)

25. How could StumbleUpon benefit businesses? Choose 1 to 3 answers. *
- [ ] Important amount of traffic to a business website or blog
- [ ] Better ranking on search engines
- [ ] Relevant audience sent to a website
- [ ] Viral influence
- [ ] Improves the brand image
- [ ] "StumbleUpon Paid Discovery": Better promotion of a web page and higher visibility
- [ ] Other (Please Specify)

26. How could Pinterest benefit businesses? *
- [ ] Fast growing social network and important potential to reach a greater audience
- [ ] Users are more likely to buy a product seen on Pinterest than on any other social network
- [ ] Increase the visibility of a business
- [ ] Share the culture of the business, its lifestyle through photos/ added value
- [ ] Improve the brand image
- [ ] Improve loyalty of current customers
- [ ] Business accounts: direct engagement with an audience and better brand promotion

☐ Improvement of the internal communication thanks to secret boards

☐ Analytics feature: assessment of an audience engagement towards a brand

☐ Other (Please Specify)

3 / 3		100%

Exit

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SURVEY EXPRESSION

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