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CUSTOMER ACQUISITION AND HOW TO IMPLEMENT IT – CASE SATATUOTE OY

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Tämän opinnäytetyön tarkoituksena oli selvittää mitä uusasiakashankinta on ja kuinka se yrityksissä käytännössä toimii. Esimerkkiyrityksenä työssä toimi Satatuote Oy, joka on Raumalla toimiva pakkausalan yritys. Tutkimuksen teoriaosiossa käsitellään asiakkuuksien hallintaa, uusasiakashankintaa, henkilökohtaista myyntityötä ja myyntiprosessia sekä myynnin johtamista. Työn empiirisessä osiossa tutustutaan esimerkkiyrityksen uusasiakashankintaan ja sen seurantaan.

Teoreettisen osion tarkoitus oli selvittää myyntityön perusajatus aina sen aloittamisesta loppuun saattamiseen. Sen aineisto kerättiin jo olemassa olevasta materiaalista, pääsääntöisesti kirjoista ja Internet-sivustoilta. Empiirisen osion tavoitteena taas oli soveltaa tutkimuksen ensimmäisen osion teoria käytäntöön. Empiirisen osion tutkimus suoritettiin käyttäen kvalitatiivista tutkimusmenetelmää esimerkkiyrityksen henkilökuntaa haastatellen sekä yritykseltä saatua materiaalia haastattelujen tukena käyttäen.

Tämän työn tavoitteena oli selvittää niin myynti- kuin uusasiakashankintaprosessien eri vaiheet alusta loppuun niin teoriassa kuin käytännössäkin. Satatuotteen uusasiakashankintaprosessin tutkimisesta kävi ilmi kuinka yrityksille tulee joskus vastaan tilanteita jolloin muutokset myyntiorganisaatiossa ovat välttämättömiä, jotta yritys voi jatkaa kannattavaa liiketoimintaa.

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The purpose of this thesis was to study the meaning and purpose of customer acquisition and how it can be implemented in practice. Satatuote Oy is used as an example company. It is a company that is specialized in thermoformed packaging and it is located in Rauma, Finland. In the theoretical part of this thesis there are studied customer relationship management (CRM), customer acquisition, personal selling and sales process as well as sales management. In the empirical part a closer look is taken to the customer acquisition of the case company and to the follow-up of it.

The objective of the theoretical part was to study the basics of sales all the way from the beginning to the end of the process. The data was gathered from already existing material, mainly from books and websites. The purpose of the empirical part was to bring the theory studied into practice. The empirical part was implemented by qualitative research by interviewing the personnel of the case company and by using the supporting material that was gotten from the company.

The objective of this thesis was to study the different phases of sales and customer acquisition processes, both in theory as in practice as well. By studying the customer acquisition process of Satatuote, was found out that sometimes companies face situations where there is no other option than make changes in the sales organization to be able to continue the business successfully.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Sales activities are important for every company, since there is no company that would exist without selling anything. No matter whether it is a product or a service, a company needs the right people to implement the plans and strategies to sell those. One key part of the selling process is customer acquisition, which every organization needs to do, no matter they want to put effort to it or not. This thesis is about the sales and customer acquisition process organizations normally implement. These processes are about taking logical steps towards reaching the sales objectives of a company, no matter what size it is or in which industry area it is operating in.

The theoretical part of this thesis has been divided into four main subjects; customer relationship management (CRM), customer acquisition, sales process and sales management. Each of these topics is carefully studied all the way from the definitions of the terms into more detailed information. In the chapter that covers customer acquisition and CRM the importance of both of them are emphasized and the reasons why those are so important are explained. Not just one perspective is studied. The second chapter is about the sales process and it goes through every step taken in a normal personal sales process. The last part of the theoretical part is about sales management, which has an essential impact to the work efficiency of the sales team. Sales management includes topics such as selecting, recruiting, motivating and training the sales force as well as budgeting, forecasting and creating sales strategy.

The empirical part of this thesis starts with an overview of the study; why was this topic chosen and what were the research objectives. Then a closer look is taken on the research methods used and after that follows the actual research findings. Since the purpose of this thesis was to get a deeper insight into a company’s customer acquisition, is the case company Satatuote Oy taken closer look at as well. The company is introduced and after that its customer acquisition process is viewed, keeping an eye on the whole sales process too. The summary and conclusions of the entire study can be found at the end of the empirical part.

2 CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT

Customer relationship management (CRM) is usually seen as a strategic management concept of an organization, but nowadays the definition also includes the information systems that help to manage the customerships. In general CRM is managing the whole organization; it is choosing the customers, setting goals, and drawing up action strategies that are implemented and followed. To be more specific, customer relationship management is the way organizations manage their customerships and it consists of the information systems and databases, which help the companies to implement this approach. The CRM process includes different ways and actions taken to manage the customerships, such as marketing, sales and customer service. All in all CRM is an approach to identifying, acquiring and keeping the clients; it is a business strategy which helps to maximize the profitability and satisfaction of the customers.

The purpose of customer relationship management is to create value for the organization, but very often it is seen as self-evident and organizations do not want to put much effort into it. Usually it is seen only as an obligation for the marketing and sales departments of a company. When this is the approach the whole CRM process is implemented only to half way, since CRM should be the whole approach of the management of organization's customerships.

To manage their customer relationships companies have different tools, such as call centers, data analysis services and website management systems to use. These systems help the interactions between the company and the customer. In addition to this the organization should also have so called single customer view on each of its customer. This means that a company should not see its customers as a one big group; it should see one customer at a time. The interaction between the company and the customer can also happen through many other ways as well; directly through sales force, website and for example via email. It is important that no matter how the customers contact the organization, that all the employees have access to the same data so the customers can be served in the best way possible, based on their needs. This can be ensured by a mutual database. As organizations have nowadays much wider options to communicate with its customers than ever before, an advantage should be taken out of it.

When an organization is starting to implement CRM and using new information systems and databases, there are some things that should be taken into account. First of all the whole information system should be organized around customers and the common database should be created so that every employee has access to it. It is important to involve the people that will use the database or information system to the designing of it too. The systems should be designed so that in the future when changes happen, the information can be easily modified. Before the beginning of the implementation phase of CRM the common strategies and single customer views should be agreed so that everything is well thought and that every member of the sales team has the same goals. The information system and the database should be piloted before the actual run, so that all the mistakes and problems that occur can be fixed. (Jobber & Lancaster 2009, 361-362)

The reason why customer relationship management is so important for companies is that when it is well implemented, it brings benefits with it. Not only does the selling company benefit but CRM gives advantages for the buying party as well. The most important benefits CRM can bring for the selling company are increased profitability, increased sales, decreased costs, spreading of “word-of-mouth”, the decreased price sensitivity of the customers and the decreased employee turnover.

Based on the study made by Harvard Business School, the profitability of whole clientele of a company changes, when the clientele grows at least by five per cent. The profitability of a company can grow even from 35 to 95 per cent when the amount of new customers increases by five per cent. Also the sales increase when the customership deepens. The longer the customerships last the more the clients usually spend money to the products or services of the selling company.

Well managed customer relationships decrease the costs of a company, since acquiring new customers is rather expensive due to the whole sales work as well as marketing practices. When a company has many loyal customers it does not need to spend that much resource to acquiring new ones and a fact is that the old customerships do not require that much work either. Also the word-of-mouth spreads quite quickly from customers to potential ones, and this is more or less free marketing for a company. Especially in business-to-business markets the references of existing customers matters significantly for the clients that are considering of buying from the selling company. The word-of-mouth does have its other side too; if the selling company has not done its work properly, the negative things spread too.

Other benefit of a proper customer relationship management is that when a customership gets deeper the less price sensitive the customer gets. Usually the risk to lose a customer because of a price increase decreases the longer the relationship has lasted. Also a company can predict its future sales and the stability of its operations easier when it has many loyal customers. Still it should be taken into account that a company should never take its customers for granted. Even though loyal customers are not that price sensitive, they still need to be paid attention to. Company should always be interested in its customers and their plans. This way it can be seen if the customer has some thoughts of changing the amounts they order or if they are planning to finish the co-operation completely. The rule of thumb is that the longer the relationship has lasted, the more awaken the company needs to be.

A company might be able to benefit of the networks of its big customers and therefore gain contacts it would have never been able to gain by itself. For example for small companies or for organizations that are going international these contacts can be very valuable. When a company properly manages its customer relationships and that way gains the benefits mentioned above, the whole business of the organization grows and stabilizes. This makes the employees of the company usually more satisfied and when employees are satisfied the employee turnover stays low. Also these employees learn more of their work and deepen their knowledge and learn to do things more cost-efficiently and with higher quality. When considering of recruiting new employees this is only a positive thing, since people want to work in a company which has satisfied and appreciated its employees.

As mentioned, also the customer benefits from well managed CRM. First of all the client can gain more value for itself if the selling company offers products or services that really help the client with their business activities. In this case the customer company has a clear motive to hold on to the selling company and more likely does not even consider other options. Long supplier relationship brings confidence; the customer can trust its supplier and less time and money is spent to monitor the actions of the selling company. Also the quality provided by the supplier can be trusted. Sometimes loyal customers get some special treats too, the selling company can offer for example special prices or extra quantities or other bonus programs based for example on the volume purchased. Even in business-to-business contexts the social benefits customer relationships bring are more important than usually are understood. Social benefits are for example the relationships between the salesperson and a client.

In addition to all the benefits and advantages, long customer relationships do have some risks too. For example a company can put too much effort into one of its customers, so that it does not concentrate enough to its other existing customers or to acquiring new ones. If and when the one big and too important client stops purchasing, it might have some serious consequences. By focusing solely to one customer the company also has the risk of not noticing some good deals and this way it may close some important doors. The most common ways to fail the implementation of CRM is to see it only as information systems and databases but not as a real action towards better strategies and longer relationships. Too many organizations do not organize their operations and goals around the customer and they do not put enough value for the lifecycle of a customer relationship and too often the sales team does not get enough support from the top management of the company. Many companies also have the problem of not being able to change their processes enough and integrate all the information concerning the customers into one database. (Jobber & Lancaster 2009, 361-362. Ojasalo & Ojasalo 2010, 121-133. Oksanen 2010, 22-25.)

3 CUSTOMER ACQUISITION

Customer acquisition is part of normal sales process in which a company is trying to find new potential customers. At first the goal is to make the customers to acknowledge the company and the product or service they are offering. The second goal is to make them interested in the product or service and the final goal is to make them actually purchase those. Companies usually put much more effort on taking care of customers that are already purchasing from them than reaching the potential ones. This is because selling for a new customer is estimated to be sometimes even five times more expensive than selling for already existing one. Because of the expense to reaching new customers, companies try to focus on the unused potential of their current ones, which is seen much more cost-effective than focusing on customer acquisition.

Even though organizations want to focus on the customers they already have, they still should not forget customer acquisition entirely. It is estimated that in average companies lose 3-10 per cent of their customers annually. These losses happen mainly because of natural reasons, such as when a customer is lost to competitor or a customer company stops their business completely. However, there are new potential customers entering the markets all the time, and the company should make sure to get their share of them. Since customer acquisition is expensive, companies should acknowledge what exactly they want from new customers. This makes it a little bit easier to manage the costs customer acquisition causes.

If an organization is entering new markets the customer acquisition faces new challenges. More likely the consumers are not familiar with the company and their values and they do not know their products and services. Also there might be a similar kind of product already existing in the markets. These are just few examples of the challenges company faces when entering new markets. It is not difficult to understand that gaining new customers requires a lot of work. In a situation like this a company normally wishes to get profitable customers as soon as possible and to build up a long-lasting relationship with them. The problem is not only how to sell the product or service of a company. A bigger problem is to make the customers so convinced of it, that they are willing to change the product or service they have utilized earlier and are more familiar with to this new one.

The goal of customer acquisition is to find potential customers to create long lasting relationships right from the beginning. A clear, systematic customer acquisition process is a key factor in forecasting the future sales, usually it is co-operation between marketing and sales departments of an organization. Customer acquisition requires attention and time. Depending on the customer and the product or service it may take from weeks even to months and in some cases, years. (Bergström & Leppänen 2003, 417-420. Hellman 2003, 256-259. Storbacka & Lehtinen 1998, 86.)

4 SALES PROCESS

4.1 Personal selling

Personal selling is a method used in marketing communications to reach small amounts of customers at the same time. Compared to pure marketing, which can happen for example in magazines or in Internet, that reaches big audience at once, personal selling has some significant advantages and benefits on its side. Since it happens in interaction with the customer there is plenty of room for questions, explanations and handling the objections and this way there is not that much misunderstandings taking place. The objective of personal selling is not just to sell the product or service, but also to introduce and present it and answer the questions potential customers have. The whole personal selling process is usually done in six different steps: Preparing, contacting, negotiating, handling objections, closing the deal and follow-up. These steps will be studied later on in this chapter.

There are no specific characters, like gender or age, that a good salesperson has, but some skills are still needed. First of all, the salesperson needs to be able to not just to talk but also to listen. This way she/he can understand what the customer needs and with this information the right benefits can be introduced to the customer, the salesperson sells the benefit of the product, not just features of it. A good salesperson is also hard working and motivated and she/he is able to arouse interest and trust of the customer. The customers need to feel that the salesperson cares about them and not only about making profit. The more the customer trusts the salesperson, the more the salesperson can affect on the customers purchase decision.

When marketing is mainly used to arouse interest and to modify the attitudes of the customers, the purpose of personal selling is to help the customer and strengthen the purchase decision. The main point in sales is not to get as much sold as high profit as possible, but to benefit both parties, the selling one and the buying one too. Usually both parties are looking for partners to build a strong and long lasting relationship with. In marketing the role of the salesperson is important since she/he has straight connection with the customer. The salesperson is the one who ensures the promises made with the marketing are actually kept.

Nowadays sales people are seen as experts on their own field, they are the ones who give customers advices and help them to fulfill their needs. As mentioned earlier, there are no specific features a good and effective salesperson has, but skills that are needed are for example good communication skills, suitable personality, and determination, motivation and product knowledge. In addition to these skills, the salespeople need the whole support of the company and its management.

The sales work can be divided into three basic types: order-takers, order-creators and order-getters. Order-takers are for example banks, shops and restaurants since those are in direct contact with consumers. Order-creators are the sales people that are not expected to actually sell anything, but to arouse interest and act as specifiers. The third type of sellers is the order-getters. These are the “front-line” salespeople and their job is to make direct purchase.

In the past the sales techniques have been more focused on getting sold as much as possible and as fast as possible as well. Nowadays the whole selling process is focused more on the customers and on their needs. Companies are trying to find out how their products can help customers with their problems and this way create a situation that both sides are benefitting. The advantage of personal selling is that the salesperson is able to modify the message the company gives depending on the receiver each time. Personal selling should be used at least in situations in which the product that is sold is complex or if it is tailor made to the customer. Also if the customer needs detailed and deeper information about the product to make the purchase decision then personal contact with the customer is recommended. (Vuokko 2003, 168-172. Raatikainen 2008, 140-141. Bergström & Leppänen 2003, 359-364. Rope 2005, 390-391. Jobber & Lancaster 2009, 8-9.)

4.2 Preparation and Contacting

Proper preparation is an important base for a successful sales meeting. It saves time and costs and it serves the customer better. In well prepared meeting the results will be better too. There are some points that the sales management and the salespeople need to take into account before contacting the potential customers. Those matters are as follows:

- *Develop the basic knowledge*
- *Search and identify potential customers*
- *Select the customers with most potential as the target for the sales*
- *Prepare contacting and meeting with customers*

Developing the basic knowledge means gathering and memorizing information that is relevant for the sales process. All the data gathered will not be needed in the actual sales meetings, but the more the salesperson knows, the more confident she/he is. Basic knowledge includes the background of the company such as the history, development and business idea and financial facts (market share, sales quantities, etc). Also all the details, like technical information, manufacturing process and pricing of the product should be clear for the salesperson. The salesperson should also know the current situation at the markets; the competing products and companies. (Lahtinen & Isoviita 2001, 2015-216)

Companies should divide their customers into different groups by gathering information of their buying behavior, creditworthiness, needs and values and about the stage of the customership. Usually this is done by the sales management. In any case it is important for companies to identify its customers, but when preparing the sales process, updating the customer groups and customer database is vital. (De Pelsmacker, Geuens & Van Den Bergh 2001, 395-398. Bergström & Leppänen 2003,417-420.)

The common way to divide customers into groups is as follows: Potential customers, non-regular customers, key accounts and past customers. This is the big picture which can still be divided into smaller parts. Potential customers can be divided into suspects and prospects. Suspect is a customer of which the company does not know a lot about but which is in their target segment. Prospect again, is a customer that has already showed some interest towards the company and which has for example sent an inquiry. Prospects are a group that a salesperson should actually put effort into, as those are the ones that are most likely really willing to purchase the product or service.

Non-regular customers can be divided into first time buyers and to customers that randomly, every once in a while, buys the company's products or services. The first time buyers are extremely important for an organization, since the continuation of a customership always depends on the first purchase and the experiences quickly after. If the business with a first time buyer is well managed they might become even key accounts. Key accounts can be divided into regular customers and key customers. These are customers that are buying the company's products or services frequently. Key customerships are important for organizations, since usually those are the ones that form a great share of the whole turnover, and that is why every company should develop and deepen these.

Even though the potential and current customers are important to identify, a company should not forget its past customers. Company should try to find out why the customerships have ended and by that way divide the former customers into smaller groups. Reasons for the end of the co-operation can for example be the change of the needs of the customer or dissatisfaction. Sometimes it might be difficult for a company to find out the real reason behind the end of a customership, but trying is still important. That is a way a company can learn from its own mistakes.

Since it is extremely difficult and expensive for an organization to get its former customers back, the problems and reclamations should be reacted early enough. To make sure the customers stay satisfied, a company should keep its operations as transparent as possible and maintain fluent information flow between them and the customers. Many companies execute customer satisfaction surveys in order to stay up-to-date in how they are performing in their customers' opinion. These surveys are usually done once a year. At the end, there is also a customer group called references. These are customers which do not necessarily buy a lot from the company, but who anyway are satisfied with the products or services they are purchasing and who then spread "the-word-of-mouth" to others.

Before contacting any company, the salesperson should find out which companies really are their potential customers. Then it is important to find a right person in that company, a person who has the right to make decisions and to purchase. This is a phase that the sales management should control, since there is always the risk that without a little push from the management the sales team would not go beyond its comfort zone. Any information gathered should be marked into the customer database of the company; contact person and her/his title, address and other contact details, former business that is made with the customer (what, when and how much) and the contracts. Also should be viewed whether someone has contacted the customer before, and if so what have been offered and what was the outcome.

This customer identification process is valid for both customers; consumers as well as companies. This is the ideal way the process goes, but it is important to remember that very rarely everything goes like in the books. Every situation and every customer is different.

After deepening the knowledge of the operations of the company and of the whole industry area as well as after identifying and selecting the target customers, the salesperson should prepare herself/himself to contacting and finally meeting the customers. This includes familiarizing herself/himself with the potential customer company; its products or services, its history and other important details. Also the salesperson needs to know what the customer wants and more importantly, what the customer needs.

For every sales meeting the salesperson needs to set herself/himself goals; what should be discussed about and what is wished to be accomplished. There are some features that a good salesperson has; she/he needs to be able to "small talk" and should be dressed properly. In the sales meetings she/he should have supporting material such as brochures, samples of the products and possibly some presentation with her/him. These features make the salesperson more convincing and professional and help her/him to sell the products and services easier. Preparation can be seen in the results of the sales meetings.

In addition to all the skills mentioned before the salesperson should keep in mind that customer is normally not buying features, the customer is buying benefit, benefit that satisfies their needs. This is called a strategic benefit. Every salesperson should be able to answer a question “what is the benefit your product or service offers”. Benefit is what customer gets if she/he purchases the product and what she/he loses if she/he does not purchase. (Bergström & Leppänen 2003, 417-420. De Pelsmacker, Geuens & Van Den Bergh 2001, 395-398. Lahtinen & Isoviita 2001, 2015-216. Raatikainen 2008, 34-42. Rope 2005, 167-169. Niininen, personal communication on 8.2.2013.)

After the preparation and before the actual sales meeting the salesperson needs to contact the customer. There are different ways to contact potential customers such as e-mail or phone calls. The decision of how to contact the customer should be made by the salesperson considering the current situation, product and the customer. The first contact should leave good impression of the salesperson and of the company she/he is representing and it should evoke the interest of the customer so that a meeting can be arranged. (Lahtinen & Isoviita 2001, 217)

4.3 Sales Negotiations

When the first contact is made the next stage in the sales process is sales negotiations. Sales negotiations have four different steps that a salesperson can follow and those steps can and should be considered before the negotiations even start. The first step in the sales negotiations is the opening. The opening of the meeting can be seen as a warm-up, as in every meeting like in a private life, the first impression is the one that counts. It is said that the first 30 seconds and the first 30 words are the ones that matter the most, when meeting new people. This is something to remember and related to this, small talk is the key skill to start a successful sales meeting. Usually in the opening situations the sales person is presenting the company too. This should not last long, and very often what the customer wants is the sales person to go straight to the point. A good tip for the company presentation is to keep it simple.

After the opening of the meeting, the first thing a salesperson should do is the customer's needs analysis. The salesperson can try to give the customer time to define her/his needs, but very often it is easier and more time saving if the salesperson asks some questions. This is another skill needed in sales negotiations, the capability to ask the right questions in a right way. It is not appropriate to ask tens of questions, since this makes the customer only feel confused and uncomfortable. The customer should be given enough time to answer the questions and explain herself/himself. When asking the right questions, the salesperson is able to get some valuable information which can be used later on in the negotiations. When customer is describing her/his company's needs and wishes, the salesperson should listen and write the most important details down. When the customer is explaining its problems, the salesperson should convince how her/his product can help in this matter.

The product presentation is made based on the customer's need analysis. The presentation should answer to question "Why should I buy this product". The salesperson should use only the arguments valuable to the customer. For example, if the customer is looking for a product which is long lasting and cost-efficient, the salesperson should present these advantages for the customer; which features makes the product long lasting and how is it more cost-efficient compared to other similar products. The salesperson should keep in mind that a customer wants to hear how she/he benefits from the product. In any cases what a sales person should not do is to speak out what her/his own company benefits if the deal is made.

What a salesperson should try to avoid in the product presentation is the usage of technical terms and specialty vocabulary. Of course this depends of the other party as well, but for many people these are difficult to understand, and often this detailed information will not be remembered afterwards. The salesperson should also consider to whom the product is sold to; different customers are interested in different benefits and features of the product. To make the product presentation more interesting and convincing, the salesperson can use some supporting material in it. There can be samples of the products and in addition to this there can be some brochures, videos, PowerPoint presentations for example. However, the salesperson should keep in mind the time usage, the customer is not always interested in seeing more.

The last step in the sales negotiations is handling the objections. These objections are all kinds of doubts and concerns that a buyer may have. Even though this has a bit of a negative sound it is a normal part of the sales meetings, but still every customer does not feel confident straightly doubting the product. Questions can reveal the concerns. Sometimes the customer wants more detailed information about the product, and this way shows interest towards it even though she/he is not yet convinced. The matter that most often causes objections is the pricing. That is one reason the salesperson should be able to sell the benefit. When the customer sees the real advantage of the product, the pricing is not such a big matter. (Bergström & Leppänen 2003, 367-372. Jobber & Lancaster 2009, 250-267. Raatikainen 2008, 140-141. Rope 2005, 391-401. Vuokko 2003, 172-175.)

4.4 Closing the Deal

After handling all the objections the next thing for the salesperson to do is to finally close the sales. Closing the sales is the part where the product or service is actually sold. Very rarely the closing goes so easily that the customer suggests making a deal. This is why the salesperson needs to be the active party in the negotiations and lead the conversation towards the purchase. Usually customers do not offer to buy the product because they still have doubts about it. The salesperson should keep in mind that if the customer postpones the purchasing of the product, usually they do not buy it at all or they might buy a similar kind from a competitor.

The reason why many deals do not take place, is because the salesperson is afraid to do the closing properly. The fact is that the salesperson needs to be straight, she/he needs to ask whether the customer wants to purchase or not. Many sales people see closing as a difficult thing to do, but they should remember not to feel guilty about selling the product, they should be confident about it instead. Normally sales people are afraid to be turned down, and a true fact is that sometimes customers buy, sometimes they do not.

One important thing in closing the deal is the timing. During the whole negotiation process the salesperson needs to look for the buying signals. The more experienced the salesperson is, the better she/he identifies these signals. The buying signals can be for example physical actions such as nodding, or the customer can ask for more information and this way shows interest towards the product. The hardest part in closing is to be able to try to close when the interest of the customer is at its highest point. This is not always an easy task to do, but usually this point is right after the salesperson has presented the benefits and advantages of the product. An important fact is that the longer the meeting takes the less interested the customer usually gets.

Like in any other part of doing business, in closing the deal the experience plays an important role. If the salesperson has identified the problem of the customer properly and recognized their needs as well and this way the advantages of the product has been brought out, the closing should take place right after. There are different sort of techniques also for closing that salespeople can study and learn from. However, a salesperson should find herself/himself an efficient way of doing business that feels comfortable as well. It is important to remember that everything cannot be found from books. In different sources there are different names used for the closing techniques, but the basic ideas are the same.

The main closing techniques are as follows:

- *Asking for the order – "Would you like to buy the product?"*
- *Summarizing and asking – Summarizing the key points of the negotiations, the advantages of the product and the problems it solves, and then asking straight whether the customer would want to purchase.*
- *The concession close – I.e. "If the product is ordered right away, the price will be lower"- Salesperson can offer special reasons to close the deal such as extra quantity for the same price or a discount.*

- *The alternative close – "Would you like the product to be delivered on Wednesday or on Friday?"*
- *The objection close – After the customers' objections have been handled, the salesperson can ask whether the customer would like to purchase the product*
- *Action agreement – Usually used in different industry sectors where the sales process is time consuming. The salesperson is not trying to sell the product right away, but tries to close the action plan.*

The salesperson needs to be persistent when it comes to closing a deal. If she/he is selling an expensive product or a product that requires investing from the customers' side too it is not easy for the customer to make the purchase decision. Still, the seller should be careful not to turn from persistent into annoying; she/he should be able to draw a line somewhere to quit early enough. Of course there is the possibility to support the customer by offering a trial heat or placing a rudimentary order, but the fact is that no matter how hard the salesperson tries to sell the product, if the customer does not want to buy it, she/he will not. Nowadays it is also common that a customer suggests the salesperson to send an offer via email. Sometimes this might work, but unfortunately very often this is an easier way for the customer to reject the offer. In situations when the customer rejects the offer, the salesperson should solve the reason why. There are two other rules for the salesperson as well. First of all emotions should not be shown. Since doing business should not turn too personal, no matter whether the salesperson is disappointed or excited, feelings should be hidden. Another rule is to leave soon after closing the deal, since as long as the salesperson stays in the meeting situation the longer customers have the opportunities to change their minds. (Jobber & Lancaster 2009, 267-271. Kotler & Armstrong 2006, 503. De Pelsmacker, Geuens & Van Den Bergh 2001, 400-402. Rope 2005, 402-405. Bergström & Leppänen 2003, 373.)

4.5 Follow-Up

The last part in the sales process is the follow-up after the deal is closed. When the deal is closed, the salesperson should make sure everything that was promised to the customer will be done. In the follow-up the salesperson ensures that all goes without problems; from the delivery of the product to the assembly of it and finally to the usage. Also it should be ensured that the quality is what was promised. The salesperson should remember that she/he is the one who should take the responsibility of the product and the delivery of it, although there are many factors from the company's and the customers' side that can affect to this. Usually it is rather optimistic to think that all will automatically go smoothly, since very often problems do occur.

All in all after closing a deal, the salesperson should ensure that:

- *The production department receives the order and it has all the right numbers and codes needed*
- *The schedule of the production is made so that the delivery of the product can be placed in time*
- *The product and all the other supplies promised are properly packed*
- *The delivery is sent when promised*
- *The assembly and training to use the product goes smoothly and quality promises are reached*

If all these steps are taken care of, it is more likely that the customer will be satisfied, and customer satisfaction is what every salesperson should be targeting to. Also this is the reason why the follow-up is very important, this way the problems and dissatisfaction can be recognized and handled immediately. The main point in the follow-up is to make sure the customer is satisfied with the purchase. This is an important stage of the whole sales process since if the follow-up is well managed the customer will feel that the salesperson cares not only about the sales but about them too. This kind of approach deepens the trust between the company and the customer and this can lead to a good, long-lasting customership.

The problem with the follow-up stage is that many salespersons are completely ignoring it. Still too often the sales people just "forget" the customers' right after the deal is closed. They are not calling or otherwise contacting the customer for making sure everything is going fine. This is not the right way of doing business, since this shows disrespect towards the customer. The satisfaction of customers can be assured by phone calls or by questionnaires, just to mention few examples. Salesperson should also remember the importance of complaints and reclamations, which should be handled carefully and with respect. In addition to contacting the customers, also the prospects that did not purchase should be contacted. The salesperson should find out the reason why the prospect did not buy. This helps the salesperson to learn from her/his mistakes and this way the mistakes made can be avoided in the future.

Follow-up is made to ensure everything goes well after closing the deal. Properly managed follow-up can lead into another purchase and into a loyal and long-lasting customership; it is a good base for continuation of the co-operation. When contacting a customer after closing a deal, it shows respect towards the customer and this way makes the customer less concerned whether the purchase decision was right or not. (Jobber & Lancaster 2009, 271. Kotler & Armstrong 2006, 503. De Pelsmacker, Geuens & Van Den Bergh 2001, 402-403. Rope 2005, 405-408. Bergström & Leppänen 2003, 373-375.)

5 SALES MANAGEMENT

5.1 Definition of Sales Management

Shortly said, the definition of sales management is the actions that are made to reach the sales objectives of a company. Such actions are planning, organizing and monitoring the sales. To be more specific these actions include things such as recruiting the sales force, formulating the sales strategy, training and developing the sales people and evaluating the performance of the whole department. The persons that are usually responsible of leading and guiding the sales people are sales managers. In this chapter the activities and measurements used in sales management in general are studied. (Website of WebFinance. Website of About.Com.)

5.2 Planning

Usually sales activities should be included in the overall strategic marketing plan and according to David Jobber and Geoff Lancaster, there is no one right way of establishing this plan, but there are some logical steps to take. These steps help to ensure that the sales efforts complement, not compete, other marketing activities. Nevertheless, before anything else is made some consideration should be done to define or redefine the overall mission of the business. Usually this is the task of senior management and it should be done by thinking what customers actually need and that the product or service of the company fulfills.

It has been proven that strategic planning creates a real competitive advantage for companies. Since companies with proper goals and strategies have done their homework, they know what their customers need and this way the implemented strategy increases the number of closed deals as well as the loyalty of these customers. And since the word-of-mouth is spreading fast, the sales cycle shortens and the company outsells its competitors.

In the figure below the whole sales planning process can be seen. The first step taken in the process is setting the objectives, such as how much of the total selling should be made for new customers. There can be more than just one objective and from the basis of these objectives the strategies and techniques are selected. To be specific, sales objectives are the common goals for the whole sales team and normally the defined things are the profit margins, revenue targets, distribution channels, advertising methods and the targeted demographics. The next stage is to determine how these objectives set are actually met and which procedures should be taking place to reach the goals. After that it should be ensured that all the resources that are needed are available, for example enough sales people. Then the implementation can be started, which follows with measuring the results. At this phase it is checked that the methods and systems used are working properly. If there is something to fix or to do better, it is reported and corrected and then re-evaluated. (Lancaster & Jobber 2009, 46.)

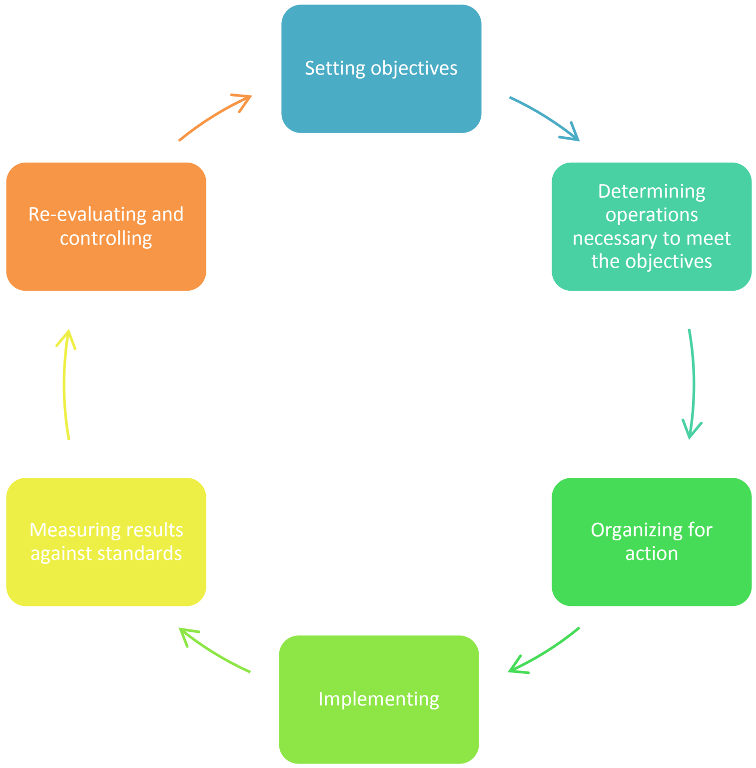

Figure 1. The sales planning process (Jobber & Lancaster 2009, 46.)

When creating the sales plan, also the situation and market analysis should be done. Normally these include at least the SWOT-analysis, which describes the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of a company. The internal and external audits should be considered too. Internal audit means for example analyzing customer needs, doing competitor analysis and the current marketing mix as well as studying the current size and growth of the market. For external audit there are also different tools and methods to use such as the PEST-analysis, which includes analyses of political, economical, social and technological factors.

An important, but rather difficult part in the sales planning is forecasting. Without a clear idea of the future sales, a company cannot manage its inventory or cash flow or plan for growth either. Even though it is impossible to see the future, there is always the possibility to try to predict what is going to happen. Sales forecasting is the estimation of what the company's sales are going to be in the future during a certain period. It happens mainly by analyzing the numbers and figures from the past. What is forecasted is never 100 per cent fact, since there are many factors that affect the future sales. These factors are for example the economic fluctuation, the changes in competition and employee turnover.

Sales forecasting can be seen as self-assessment tool and as a critical part of the financial planning too. It is noted that properly executed sales forecasting drives the company for better results; the business runs more efficiently, money is saved and profits increase. The easiest way to predict the future sales is the annual sales forecast, but also monthly and quarterly forecasts are done. These forecasts should be reviewed regularly. Also new businesses need to forecast their sales. This is crucial since when applying for a loan or searching for investors, the bank and the investors want to see real numbers. A starting company can predict its sales for example by viewing the results and numbers of their competitors.

Sales strategy is the actions taken to reach the sales objectives or quotas that have been set and the key point of it is closing the deal. Normally sales strategy answers to the following questions:

- *What are we selling?*
- *To whom are we selling?*
- *How are we selling?*
- *When are we selling?*

All in all, sales strategy is planning the sales activities, but it should create competitive advantage to the company too. The sales strategy defines how the right customers are reached and it ensures that the business is marketed properly. When creating a sales strategy, the past sales practices should be analyzed to see which practices did not work that well and which methods were effective and could be implemented to the new strategy as well.

When the sales strategy is designed there are some things that should be considered. For example it should be cleared up why the current customers need the company, this information is helpful when the company is approaching new potential customers. Very often the critical part in the sales work is explaining the benefits of the product or service to the customer. That is why the benefits and the features should be clearly defined and differentiated in the strategy. It is also recommended to create profiles for different customer types the company has. This can be done by listing the similarities and differences of them. This is useful when considering the approach methods and tactics used to new clients. Also the sales channels used should be thought; whether the sales process is completely executed face to face, or should the Internet be utilized?

When creating a sales strategy, it should be remembered that it should include something concrete for the sales people to implement. It should not be just something that is written on the paper, but it should be something that the employees can rely on and that gives some specific tools, methods, techniques and other instructions on how to reach the sales objectives. For example the methods on how to reach the clients should be clearly defined in the strategy as wells as the resources available to the sales team and the competitive differences of the company and its products.

In most firms, the end of the year is busy time since that is when the budgets for the following year are prepared. Usually each operating unit develops their own budget, and for the sales department the budget determines how the objectives are reached and strategies implemented. A sales budget is a valuable tool that gives direction to the company towards its targeted sales and it helps to improve the profitability of a company. The company makes a financial plan with regard to the amount of goods and services that it plans to sell during the year and the price at which the goods and services are to be sold.

One key factor of the budget is that it restricts the sales management to spend too much resources. It helps to prevent the costs and other expenses getting out of control. One method to create the sales budget is to divide it into three different budgets; the sales budget, the selling-expense budget and the administrative budget. An accurate sales budget is the key to the entire budgeting. If the sales budget is not properly prepared the rest of the budgeting process is just a waste of time, since the sales budget is the starting point for the whole budget of the company. It sets out how much the company expects its turnover to be for each month of the next year.

The sales budget is either the revenue or the unit volume that is expected to be reached from the sales of the firm's products. This is the main budget and it is the basis of all operating activities in the sales department as well as in the production and financing. This is why it should be carefully and accurately created. The selling-expense budget includes the expenses that come from the personal selling activities. These are things such as salaries, commissions and travel expenses. Also recruiting new sales people should be budgeted. The administrative budget again includes the expenses of the office workers, supplies, heat, rent and office equipment.

The first step that should be taken when starting to prepare the budget is to translate the sales forecasts into work that needs to be done in order to achieve the objectives. Normally budgets are planned yearly, semiannually and quarterly periods. Some companies create budgets for all these three periods, but others prefer to operate just on annual basis. When the budget is prepared it becomes one of the manager's tools that are used regularly. The previous month's actual sales and expenses come back from the accounting department by the middle of the present month. All figures that are over budget should be marked for attention.

Too often the problem with the sales team is that the information does not flow between the management and employees. In this kind of situation everyone does not have a clear picture of their duties. However, the last parts of the sales planning are implementation and controlling. The implementation stage includes informing everyone involved about the new plan and strategy and these plans and strategies should also be clearly documented. When everyone knows what to do, then the new plan should be taken into usage and if problems occur, those should be solved. (Bergström & Leppänen 2003, 373-375. Jobber & Lancaster 2009, 46. Website of WebFinance 2013. Website of managementstudyguide.com 2013. Website of About.com 2013. Website of HowStuffWorks 2013. Website of Virtual Advisor 2013. Website of McGraw-Hill 2013. Website of Hearst Communications 2013. Website of Smarta Enterprises 2013.)

5.3 Implementing

One of the tasks of sales management is organizing the sales, which is ensuring that the plans made are implemented and coming true. There are many things to be considered, such as the decisions concerning recruiting, training and instructing the salespeople, dividing the tasks and responsibilities and choosing the organizational structure of the sales department.

The most common organization structures are geographical structure, product specialization structure and customer-based structure. The names of these structures tell the basic features of them. In geographical structure the sales organization is divided so that every salesperson is responsible of some specific area, for example East Europe can be someone's responsibility while Northern Europe is another's. Product specialization structure means dividing the products of the company so that one salesperson is responsible of selling some specific products and then another one sells different products. In customer-based structure every salesperson has their own customers they are responsible of, no matter where they are located or what products they are purchasing.

The geographical structure is the classical one used, but in practice the sales organizations are usually combinations of the structures mentioned. The reason for this is that at the moment customers are more aware of the technological development and they have much wider knowledge than before. Because of all this knowledge and technological development, also the sales organization has had to change. When choosing the organization structure the factors that should be considered are the size of the company, the field and location of the business, and the amount and diversity of the products and the customers.

One key task for sales managers to focus on is instructing and supporting the sales people. This means for example motivating the employees and evaluating and developing their actions. The things that affect on the motivation of the employees are always personal, but good examples of these are proper feedback, variability of the work, compensations and incentives, relationships, training, responsibilities, promotion possibilities and succeeding in work.

The selection of the sales people is an important and surprisingly challenging task for a sales manager to do. The whole recruiting and selecting process is rather long and time consuming. This process includes for example the identification of ways to recruit (inside house, agencies, etc.), preparation of the job description, designing a proper application form, interviewing the potential applicants and deciding whether some additional selection aids, such as psychological tests, are needed.

Since the sales people are not the cheapest employees to maintain and keep, the management should understand the importance of training them well. Very often it is thought that it is enough for the sales people to first see how the older and more experienced salespersons are handling their work and that way the new sales people would learn. This “watch and learn” approach is not a bad idea, but it is not working all by itself. Some practical training is needed too and not only at the beginning of the employment relationship.

A good training programme covers both, knowledge and skill development. Since a salesperson needs to have wide knowledge of many matters when visiting a potential customer the training should cover topics that are relevant in negotiation situations. At the beginning of the employment relationship the training programmes should include at least general information of the company (objectives, policies and organization structure), its products, competitors and their products. Other subjects handled can be for example the selling procedures and techniques, negotiation skills and report preparation and relationship management.

There are many ways to execute the training of the sales people. There can be lectures, e-training, case studies, role playing and films for example. The key purpose of these trainings is that by this way the sales people are able to get real teaching as well as the opportunity to practice the skills learned and get feedback. A good thing to keep in mind is that not only the new employees need training, but also the more experienced sales people as well as the sales managers should take part into trainings every once in a while too.

Motivation is an important part when managing the sales department. It is a challenging thing to do, since the unfortunate fact of the sales work is that the sales people get rejected everyday by the customers. Also the problem with a work that is not focused on the office together with co-workers and with the management is that the salesperson may feel left alone. The key features of a sales manager are emotional intelligence and understanding of the sales people. The sales manager should be able to see the subordinates as individuals and understand their personalities, wishes and values.

A simple way to see motivation is to see it as a relationship between needs, drives and goals. In a working life it can be seen for example so that the salesperson needs money and that need drives the person to work harder to achieve her/his goal, which in this case is increased pay. It has been studied that the more motivated a person is, the more creative she/he is, the harder and smarter she/he works, the higher self-esteem she/he has and the more relaxed attitude towards work the person has. When thinking it this way, the benefits and importance of motivating the salespeople are obvious.

There are different ways to motivate the sales people. There are always the financial incentives such as commissions and bonuses. Setting sales targets and quotas so that there is something concrete to reach, can be used as a motivator as well. Sales contests and promotions can be used, but the management should be careful with these; contests can put too much pressure to the employees and this might lead to cheating and the problem with promotions is that not all good salespersons are good managers. Meetings are always effective to motivate the employees. Group meetings with the whole sales team can be used so that everyone can exchange their experiences, thoughts, problems and techniques used and this way see that they are not alone. Also one-to-one meetings with the management should be arranged. This way work related matters can be discussed confidentially.

As mentioned, compensation can be used to motivate the sales people, but it can also be used to attract and keep successful salespeople. Usually compensation (monetary reward) gives the salespeople a good standard of living and this is something that motivates many employees. A sales manager should keep in mind that not everyone is satisfied with money, some might appreciate more free time in exchange. Nevertheless, there are at least five different types of salespeople identified by Darmon. These types and their special features are important for sales management to understand, when considering the compensation of their employees.

1. *Creatures of habit – People who try to maintain their standards of living*
2. *Satisfiers – People who only try to keep their jobs*
3. *Trade-off-ers – People who appreciate not just money but leisure time too*
4. *Goal oriented – People who appreciate recognition by their employers and that are more sales target oriented*
5. *Money oriented – People who try to maximize their earnings*

After understanding these above mentioned different types of salespeople it is easier for the management to create effective compensation plans. In general, there are three types of financial compensation plans that can be used; fixed salary, commission only or salary plus commission. The compensation plan should be implemented after the evaluation of the types of the salespeople in the company. This way the employees can be motivated the most. (Bergström & Leppänen 2003, 378-382. Jobber & Lancaster 2009, 387-429. Rope 2005, 409-411.)

5.4 Monitoring

Very often the problem with sales management is that the planning and organizing are well implemented, but the monitoring and measuring of the activities are not properly executed. The results of key sales activities can be significantly improved when these activities are measured and monitored systematically and well. In general, everything can be measured. It is good to keep in mind that the figures do not tell the whole truth and the behavior and activities should be monitored too.

In general the goal of the sales department is to increase the profits of the company and to build a strong customer base. An effective sales plan is quantifiable, which means that the sales activities and results can be measured. There are many tools to use to measure the success of the sales department such as sales benchmarks, sales metrics and sales scorecards. Also the sales performance of individuals can be measured and monitored.

Sales benchmarks are comparing the real results of the company either to its earlier results or to its competitor's results. This way the managers can see into which direction the sales of the company are going and the need to revise for example the financial goals can be noticed. Sales metrics are counting the amounts of certain actions made by the sales people. For example the amounts of phone calls or e-mails can be viewed. One of the main measurements used is the tracking of phone calls per day, week, month or a year. Nevertheless, should be remembered that these metrics will not work alone, in order to get reliable outcomes other things should be monitored too. In addition to sales metrics, sales scorecards are widely preferred measurement tools. Usually scorecards include the metrics and the real results such as the number of new customers and number of orders, revenue amount, profitability rate and so on. By this scorecard the actual rates can be compared to the goals set. Usually this scorecard system is measured once or twice a month.

Some sales managers find it hard to measure the sales performances of individuals, but the fact is that there is no such job in the world that cannot be measured. There are four key measures to use to see the successfulness of a salesperson:

- *Quantity – Sales volume, revenue and customers gained*
- *Quality – Customer relationship satisfaction, margin achieved*
- *Timeliness – Results and reports on time*
- *Cost effectiveness – Performance within agreed expense budgets*

It is important to monitor the successfulness of the sales team and it is important that the sales people are aware of the fact that their actions and activities are measured. This might be already one motivating factor in their work. The sales people should know what are the things measured as well as the reason why the measurements are done. These monitoring systems should not be done only to find out what is done wrong but more likely to see which activities are efficient and could be utilized more.

Part of the monitoring of the results of the sales department is sales reporting. These reports are mainly made for internal use of the company but the reports might be needed to show for the investors and partners too. From these reports the top management of the organization can see the key performance indicators that show the facts of the sales performance; whether the sales team has been operating efficiently and this way achieved the objectives or whether the objectives are not met and some other actions are needed to be taken. (Jobber & Lancaster 2009, 494-503. Bergström & Leppänen 2003, 381-382. Website of RM Consulting International 2013. Website of Demand Media 2013.)

6 PURPOSE OF THE THESIS AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The purpose of this thesis was to study the whole sales process including the customer acquisition and a Rauma based company Satatuote Oy has been used as a case company. This topic was chosen since the author found it personally interesting and useful in the future. Also there has been so little information available of customer acquisition that this topic felt natural to write about. The case company was a natural choice since the author did her second internship of three months there. This way she was already familiar with the company and the way it operates. This knowledge was very useful during the thesis writing process.

This thesis was made by qualitative research and the research questions were as follows:

- *What are customer relationship management (CRM) and selling in general?*
- *What are the different phases of a selling process?*
- *What customer acquisition is and how it can be implemented?*
- *How is the customer acquisition process implemented in Satatuote?*
    - *What are the bases for this process?*
    - *How is this process monitored?*

The objective of this thesis was to open up the different phases of the whole sales process, from the very beginning of defining the potential customers all the way to closing a deal. Also the sales management issues were wanted to be studied. Satatuote Oy offered a practical example of these issues.

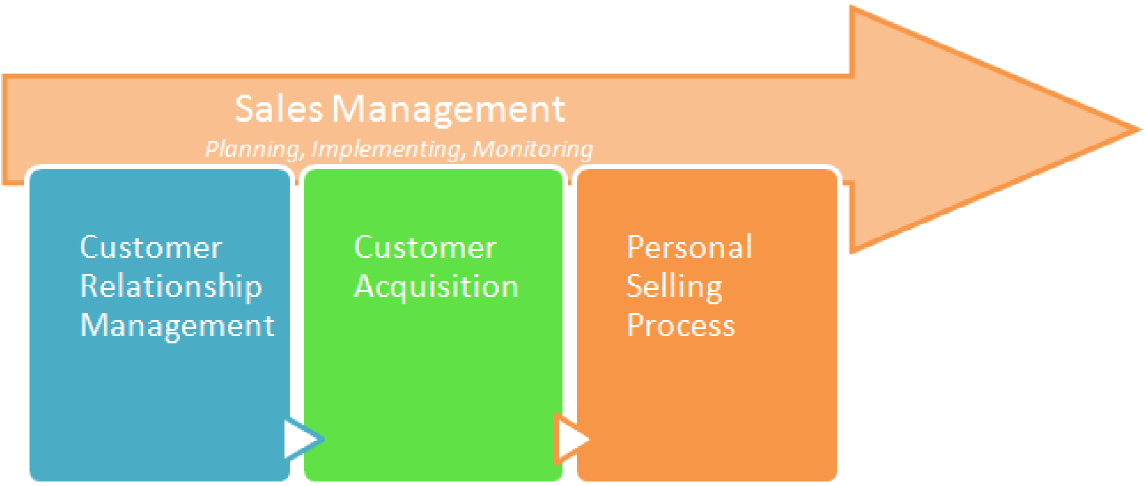

Figure 2. Conceptual framework of the study: Customer acquisition as part of the sales. (Adapted from the following book: Leppänen E. 2007. Asiakaslähtöinen myynti. Jyväskylä: Gummerus Kirjapaino Oy.)

This conceptual framework of the thesis shows the different phases of a sales process that are studied. The emphasis is in proper management and CRM. The work of sales team starts with customer acquisition and continues to a sales process. In practice this whole process is continuous and when situations change, new approaches might be needed.

7 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

7.1 Basic Paradigm

There are two different parts when doing research; theoretical part and empirical part. The data for the theoretical part is usually collected by using already existing material and the empirical instead is more observing and practical research. For example the empirical part of the research can study whether some specific hypothesis, an assumption, is actually coming true in practice. The empirical research can be divided into many different categories, for example by the meaning of the study or by the methods used. However, the most common forms used are quantitative and qualitative research.

As can be already understood from the name of quantitative research, it is a research that studies questions concerning numbers, amounts and percentages as well as for example the dependence relationships between specific matters. Usually quantitative research is implemented by questionnaires which can be sent for example by mail or e-mail or the questions can be asked via phone calls. While implementing quantitative research, it should be remembered that it requires quite large and fair sample. By this method the numbers and the current situation can be studied but the actual reasons behind are not found out. Due to this, wrong conclusions are easily made.

Qualitative research instead is a research made to find the actual factors and reasons behind the problems studied. When using this method the data is often gathered by personal interviews, and in contrast to quantitative research, qualitative study is made by using small sample. The meaning of qualitative research is to help to understand the object of the research and the reasons to its behavior and decisions. After all, the main purpose of qualitative research is to understand the matter studied. Qualitative research is usually used when operations are wanted to be developed or when different options are searched for. In this thesis, the research method used is qualitative. Since this thesis describes the customer acquisition process of a company, the natural way of studying it was personal interviews inside the organization. (Website of Finnish Social Science Data Archive)

7.2 Data Gathering

There are different ways to gather information when doing research. These basic methods of data gathering are questionnaires, interviews, observing and already existing materials. The questionnaire method is commonly used, since it enables collecting wide research material. This method is found efficient because of the fact that many people can be involved as well as many questions can be asked. This saves time and effort of the researcher. Even though questionnaires have advantages, those have some disadvantages too. Questionnaire method is often seen shallow and also the reliability is not always convincing. The reason for this is that not always the respondents are serious with their answers or the respondents are not very familiar with the topic or if many of the participants of the survey are not answering.

Interviews are usually implemented as qualitative research. An advantage of interviewing method is that when interviewing the researcher is in a straight interaction with the respondent. This makes the interviewing situation flexible and the answers can be interpreted better. During the interview the researcher can see the facial expressions and other gestures of the respondent and some additional information can be asked. The disadvantages of interviews are that those are consuming a lot of time and sometimes the reliability can be weak, if the respondent gives “politically correct” answers and the truthful opinions of the respondents are not found out.

The observation method is used to find out whether people are acting as they say they do. This method is very time consuming and otherwise it requires lot of work too, but commonly it is seen as an essential part of research. The advantage of observation is that it gives straight information of individuals, groups or organizations operations and actions. Usually this method is used when doing qualitative research. Observation is criticized because it might interrupt the situations studied and therefore change the whole course of it.

Data can also be gathered from already existing material, but the researcher should remember that since nowadays there is a lot of information available that the reliability of those should be analyzed. While doing research, the existing material that can be used are for example books and articles, websites, statistics, annual reports and materials from earlier studies. The data for the theoretical part of this thesis is gathered from already existing material, such as different literature and websites. The empirical part instead is collected mainly by interviews, but also some already existing material gotten from the case company is used. Even though there was not one particular list of all the questions asked, it was made sure that the questions asked gave enough information to answer the research questions that were set. The interviews were made in the office premises of Satatuote and interviewed was the C.E.O of the company and the production manager. (Website of Finnish Social Science Data Archive)

7.3 Data Analysis and Display

The analyzing process of the research findings requires usually a lot of work and it consumes a lot of time. The reason for this is that going through all the material that was gathered and then finding common features and patterns from them as well as differences so that the results are still reliable is easier said than done. When starting to gather the data for the study, it should be known how all the information is going to be analyzed. When this is clarified it can help planning the interviews and the work after. Usually the problem for the researchers is to interpret the answers of the questionnaires or interviews and find a common pattern. In this thesis the problem was solved by modifying the interview questions so clearly that there was no space for misunderstandings. Also the great advantage of interviews is that if either the researcher or the respondent does not understand something, it can be asked and solved right away in the interview situation.

The basis for this thesis was the research plan that was carefully thought before the actual implementation of the study. The objectives of this study were described already in the plan; to open up the different aspects of the sales of companies and the whole sales process, from defining the customers all the way to the follow-up made after closing the deal. In the research plan the framework of the study was drawn and the author already started to create the list of the references. The clear objectives that were set in the research plan helped in the data gathering as well as in analyzing the information collected. The main aim in the analyzing process was to report the results of the interviews as the persons interviewed had stated. The customer acquisition process was wanted to be reported truthfully, so that nothing would be hidden and nothing added.

7.4 Quality Assessment of the Study

There is no use for a research that is not reliable. Therefore also the reliability has to be measured. Usually there are two different terms used when measuring the quality of a study; validity and reliability. The term validity means whether the information given is useful. On the other words, validity measures whether the research is measuring what was originally supposed to. Reliability instead means the persistency of the outcomes. Shortly said, the less the coincidence is affecting the results the better.

This thesis was made by theme interviews and since the right people were interviewed and the right questions were asked, the validity of this study is good. The issues studied were clearly determined in the interview situations and those are the same as were the research problems and objectives. During the personal interviews the customer acquisition process of Satatuote Oy was studied; how are they describing their process and how it has been implemented. The near history of the whole sales department of Satatuote was discussed; what has the department been like before and what kind of it is now as well as what kind of changes has been made in the organization. Also questions such as “What are the bases for the customer acquisition process of Satatuote” and “How is this process monitored” were asked.

8 CUSTOMER ACQUISITION PROCESS IN SATATUOTE OY

8.1 Satatuote Oy

Satatuote Oy is a family owned company which was established in 1945. Nowadays it is part of Marvagroup Oy, which is located in Rauma, Finland. Satatuote is a company that is specialized in thermoformed packaging and its core business areas are food, drink and medical industries. The company has many well-known customers in Finland, such as Fazer, Saarioinen, Bayer HealthCare, Olvi and Sinebrychoff. During the year 2012 Satatuote started a co-operation with a Finnish dairy product producer Valio and it has opened its markets in Germany also the drink sector. A German juice and drink producer Albi ordered drink trays from Satatuote and those trays are used for example in the local Lidl-stores. At the end of the year 2012 Satatuote also made a contract of designing and manufacturing drink trays for a Swiss beverage producer. (Website of Satatuote)

As mentioned above, Satatuote is focusing its business into three sectors: Food, drink and pharmacy. In food industry Satatuote is manufacturing for example packages for convenience foods such as salads and baguettes. Drink trays of Satatuote offer both, logistics solutions for bottles and cans as well as proper displays at the stores. The trays for medical industry are mainly focusing on logistic solutions for medical instruments such as inhalators and insulin pens. The raw materials used in the products of Satatuote are polyethyleneterephtalate (PET), polystyrene (PS), polypropene (PP) and Biodegradable plastics. (Niininen, personal communication on 8.2.2013)

All in all Satatuote has approximately twenty employees. Sometimes there is a need for temporary workers, and then Satatuote hires them through a local recruitment agency. In 2011 the revenue of Satatuote was about 4.3 million euros, which was the lowest result in years. Satatuote was a subcontractor for Nokia, which for many years was the biggest and most important customer of Satatuote. When Nokia decided to give up most of its production in Europe it also gave up its European subcontractors, including Satatuote. This is when the revenue of the company started to decrease. A new business strategy was made and slowly the revenue of the company is going up again. (Heinonen, personal communication on 19.11.2012)

8.2 Gate Model

The customer acquisition process of Satatuote has been under massive changes after Nokia decided not to continue making business with any of its subcontractors in Europe anymore. The problem was that during 2000-2008 the portion Nokia purchased from Satatuote grew all the time but at the same time the other sales of the company decreased. Even though Satatuote had many projects with its other customers and different products were designed, actual orders did not take place. At its highest 63 per cent of the revenue of Satatuote came from Nokia during the years 2007 and 2008.

After the announcement from Nokia, Satatuote needed to re-evaluate its business. It needed a new business strategy and the first meter viewed was the revenue of the company. In 2008 the revenue of Satatuote was 10.8 million euros, and the fall was hard since in 2011 the revenue was not even half of that. The revenue of 4.3 million euros came mainly from its Finnish customers. Satatuote re-evaluated its sales activities, including its customer acquisition and the Finnish packaging industry markets were analyzed.

The market research required a lot of work. The competitors of Satatuote in the Finnish markets were carefully studied, the products they were producing and the materials they used. When the markets were investigated, it was easier for Satatuote to evaluate its own goals and potential. It became clear, that the Finnish market was not big enough for Satatuote, since the value of the whole Finnish market was approximately 30 to 40 million euros, and from that the biggest Finnish competitor of Satatuote, Huhtamäki, already had the biggest portion.

Satatuote started to evaluate its own practices; their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and their threats (SWOT-analysis). Analyzed was their sales activities too, what they had done wrong and what they had done right. Since Satatuote is a rather small player in its field and since it has its plant in a country with high labor costs, it is hard for it to compete with price. Also, Satatuote cannot count on branding, since it requires a lot of time and since the sales had decreased significantly it is not exactly a right time for branding. Satatuote realized its strength was its products. It decided to specialize in trays for medical, food and drink industries.

Satatuote made a new action plan and set itself an ambitious but realistic goal for the next five years. It wanted to find a good partner in the international field. The first problem to be solved was choosing the market to focus on. The markets were surely in Europe, but also those needed to be somewhere where it was logistically easy to go too. Different options were analyzed; Scandinavia, France, Benelux, Turkey and Germany.

The next problem to be focused on was the question: Who sells and what? Satatuote wanted to develop its organization to fulfill today's requirements of doing business; it wanted to develop the knowhow and competence of its employees as well as its products to suit the customers' needs better. Also the customer promises were carefully thought. What are the things Satatuote can promise and that are important for customers? With the promises Satatuote wanted to differentiate itself from its competitors. After careful thinking and planning, the promises given were as follows; high requirements, high volumes and high accuracy.

The stereotypical picture of sales people has been that they go from door to door selling over priced products and trying to force people to buy them. That is not very realistic picture of sales work anymore. Satatuote is looking for honest and reliable partners and that is why the sales people of the company need to be very committed and skilled. The normal sales process of the company lasts from six months to two years. This is because of the product. First of all, usually the trays of Satatuote are tailor made for each of its customers and this designing process takes time. Also when purchasing the products of Satatuote, it might require some investments in the customers facilities too. This makes the purchase decision more difficult.

According to Mika Niininen, the C.E.O of Satatuote, the traditional sales model is more of managing the people than managing the actual sales. The traditional sales model consists of three main decisions; direction, quantity and quality. By direction is meant the decision of how the potential customers are divided, who is selling to this customer segment and who is selling to the other segment. The quantity refers to visits and phone calls, for example, how many customers one sales person needs to visit and how many to call to. Quality instead refers to the selling skills of the sales person. The sales person needs to know what invokes the customers' interest, for example whether she/he offers some special prices or campaigns for the customers.

The problem with this traditional sales model is that it does not bring that much strategic advantage. It does work in the traditional business, such as in the newspaper or journal business, when selling spaces for advertisements, but this does not work when selling something more complex, like Satatuote does. Satatuote has been focusing in the strategic advantage they can offer to their customers. They made the decision to differentiate itself from its competitors and that way offer something special, accurate and well manufactured.

After these decisions mentioned above (skills, knowledge, arguments, products, promises, partner findings, goal settings), big changes took place in the organization structure. Earlier the sales manager of Satatuote created a sales plan together with the board of directors. This way they set the sales objectives of the company and then the opinions of the sales people were asked. This was the first thing to be changed. The new C.E.O made significant changes in the sales organization and only few sales people were kept in the company.

The markets were divided so that one person took care of the Finnish markets and two persons had the rest. After the changes the domestic sales started to grow for the first time in many years. This was because the product development management was appointed to the sales and this way was ensured that the customers get accurate and clear information of the products. Since the Finnish markets are so small, there was no need for a bigger market research than what Satatuote was able to do itself.

When Satatuote realized that it needed to go international, it made the decision that it wanted to get into contact with big enough organizations, 10 to 100 times bigger than Satatuote itself. The question was; how do we get into these companies? In Finland, where Satatuote is located in, there are different kinds of organizations that help local companies to go abroad. From these operators Satatuote chose Finpro to co-operate with.

Finpro is a Finnish organization that helps Finnish companies to internationalize themselves. It is a national trade, internationalization and investment development organization that was established in 1919 by Finnish companies. Nowadays it has approximately 550 member organizations, including the Confederation of Finnish

Industries, the Federation of Finnish Enterprises and the Federation of Finnish Technology Industries. Finpro is closely co-operating with other parties in Finnish innovation ecosystem too. These are for example ELY-centers, Tekes and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. The organization has 370 experts in 69 offices in 50 different countries all over the world. (Website of Finpro)

Finpro implements many different projects and programmes to help Finnish companies to internationalize themselves. These projects and programmes are done in co-operation with the different partner organizations that Finpro has. These projects and programmes can be for example different kinds of market analyses, media contacts, meetings with potential partners and clients, communication and marketing under a common brand or studying the different possibilities to enter new markets. In addition to these, Finpro also offers comprehensive consulting services. (Website of Finpro)

The whole meaning of this internationalizing project together with Finpro was to look for big manufacturers mainly in the drink and medical industries. The first step was to train the consultants of Finpro to understand the business of Satatuote, what the whole concept of the company is and what is promised for the customers. After this, the employees of Finpro who were located in the target market countries and who spoke the local language started to implement the project by market research. They searched for potential customers from beverage and medical industry. They also searched for competitors and they made a very comprehensive list of them and rated them by their yearly revenues. In the competitor analysis Finpro studied for example the markets the competitors are in, industry areas they are operating in, the country they are located in, the number of employees, the raw materials they use, the number of production lines they have in their facilities and whether they have a clean room where to manufacture some specific products.

The work Finpro did was very valuable for Satatuote. The main markets they studied were Germany and Turkey and it was a big work to do. If Satatuote would have done the research by itself it would have been more time consuming and more expensive, because of the lack of the local knowledge and language skills. When the basis was studied, Finpro contacted the companies chosen and arranged meetings with those for Satatuote. Since for a small company it is not easy to get an appointment with a big organization, this was also a great and appreciated opportunity. When a small company is visiting a big one, Mika Niininen does not believe in the traditional sales management model. Instead, he finds it important that the management of the company is part of the sales activities. This shows that the company really believes in its own products and that they are dedicated.

The services of Finpro are not free, but it is a service that a company can ask a financial support from the Finnish ELY-center. This center pays half of the whole project, but only after the project is done. Satatuote has a positive image from the appointments Finpro arranged. Not a single company has shown to be not interested about the products Satatuote has been offering. One big deal in the German drink industry is made and also a smaller one, but still an important deal, is made in Switzerland.

As an example of the market researches Finpro did for Satatuote, can be viewed the one they did about Turkey. The objectives Satatuote set to Finpro was to indentify five to ten biggest juice manufacturers in Turkey. Satatuote also wanted to get a view of the Turkish retail markets; who are the biggest food retailers and what kind of store types (discounters, hypermarkets, supermarkets, etc.) there are. Also Satatuote was interested in the type of pallets and displays that are used at stores or whether the bottles and cans and such products were placed straight to shelves. Satatuote also wanted to get in contact with selected juice and beverage producers and visit them. The persons in these companies that Satatuote wanted to meet were the marketing or purchasing directors. Finpro collected the data mainly by interviews and by desk study and if the drink manufacturers were interested of the products of Satatuote then Finpro arranged meetings with them.

The material Finpro offered to Satatuote included at first the basic information concerning the Turkish retail sector. There was more detailed information about the food distributors, for example how much they sell food and how much they gain by selling other consumer goods. The report included also important statistics about the consumption of beverages and juices in the country and estimations how this consuming is going to grow during the next five years. Also the key players of the retail markets were identified.

Retail sales										
	2005ª	2006ª	2007ᵇ	2008ᵇ	2009ᵇ	2010ᶜ	2011ᶜ	2012ᶜ	2013ᶜ	2014ᶜ
Retail sales (TL bn)	170.0ᵇ	193.7ᵇ	216.1	234.7	240.1	265.7	292.0	316.5	341.4	364.6
Retail sales (US$ bn)	**126.5**	**135.6**	**165.9**	**180.3**	**154.9**	**169.1**	**181.1**	**198.4**	**214.5**	**230.2**
Retail sales, volume growth (%)	6.9	4.0	2.6	-1.7	-3.7	0.5	2.1	2.1	2.7	2.6
Retail sales, US$ value growth (%)	22.7	7.2	22.3	8.7	-14.1	9.2	7.1	9.5	8.1	7.3
Non-food retail sales (US$ bn)	51.8	56.2	69.4	75.8	63.5	69.7	74.8	82.5	90.0	97.3
Food retail sales (US$ bn)	**74.8**	**79.4**	**96.4ª**	**104.6ª**	**91.4**	**99.4**	**106.3**	**115.9**	**124.5**	**132.8**
Consumer price inflation (av; %)	8.2	9.6	8.8ª	10.4ª	6.3ª	10.2	7.6	6.1	5.0	4.1

ª Actual. ᵇ Economist Intelligence Unit estimates. ᶜ Economist Intelligence Unit forecasts.
Source: Economist Intelligence Unit.

Figure 3. The sales of Turkish retail market, 2005-2014 (Source: Finpro)

Sales Channels	2008 share %	2009 share %	changes %
Small Market – Bakkal (50 m^2)	%40,2	%35,9	%-10,7
Independent Market (50-200 m^2)	%15,33	%15,3	%-0,2
Local chains (200-1000 m^2)	%8,17	%9,6	%17,5
Total traditional	%57,0	%52,7	%-7,5
Organized Retailers (200 - >2500 m^2)	%41,6	%41,7	%0,2

Figure 4. Turkish retail market, sales channels (Source: Finpro)

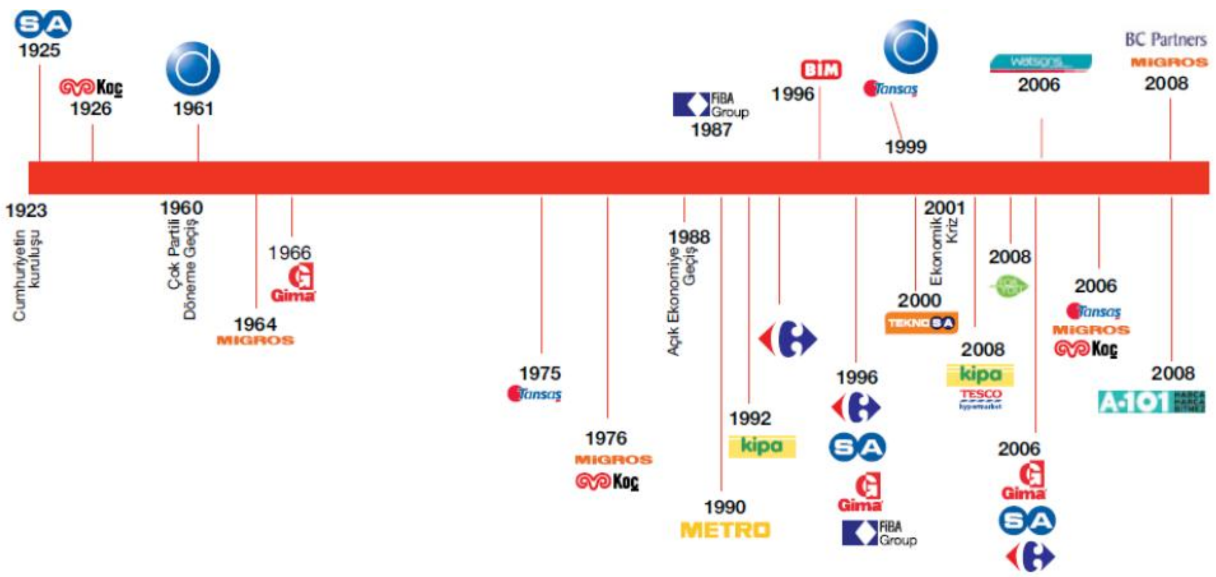

Figure 5. Development of modern trade in Turkey. (Source: Finpro)

The market research Finpro made was very useful and practical since it did not point out only the history and the key numbers, but it also explained a little bit of the Turkish consumption culture and it had pictures clarifying different types of retailers in the country. When retailers were studied, the second part of the research took a closer insight on the beverage product displays in the supermarkets. This was very important part of the research when considering the business of Satatuote. In the material given for Satatuote there were plenty of pictures about the product displays in the Turkish stores.

The next thing studied was the juice, nectar and soft drink markets in Turkey and their biggest manufacturers. The consumption of juices and other beverages was analyzed and comparison of the drink consumption between Turkey and some European countries was made. This pointed out that the juice and beverage consumption in Turkey is not yet in the same level than in the other countries and this is why increase is expected. Also the packaging types of the bottles and cans were studied and a SWOT-analysis of the Turkish drink market was made. The main players in the markets were studied and their facilities were located. Finpro gave some conclusions and recommendations of what steps could be taken and what should be done next. They also arranged meetings for Satatuote with big juice and beverage companies in Turkey, such as with the Coca-Cola Company.

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Size of the Fruit Juice Industry over years Turnover (Million TL)	1,20	1,35	1,40	1,55	1,7
The average annual per capita consumption of fruit juices and similar beverages (liters)	8,0	10,1	10,9	11,3	12,1
Total domestic production of fruit juices and similar beverages (000 tons)	596,3	709,6	776,0	817,2	894,4

Figure 6. Overview of the Turkish juice, nectars and soft drinks markets (Source: Finpro)

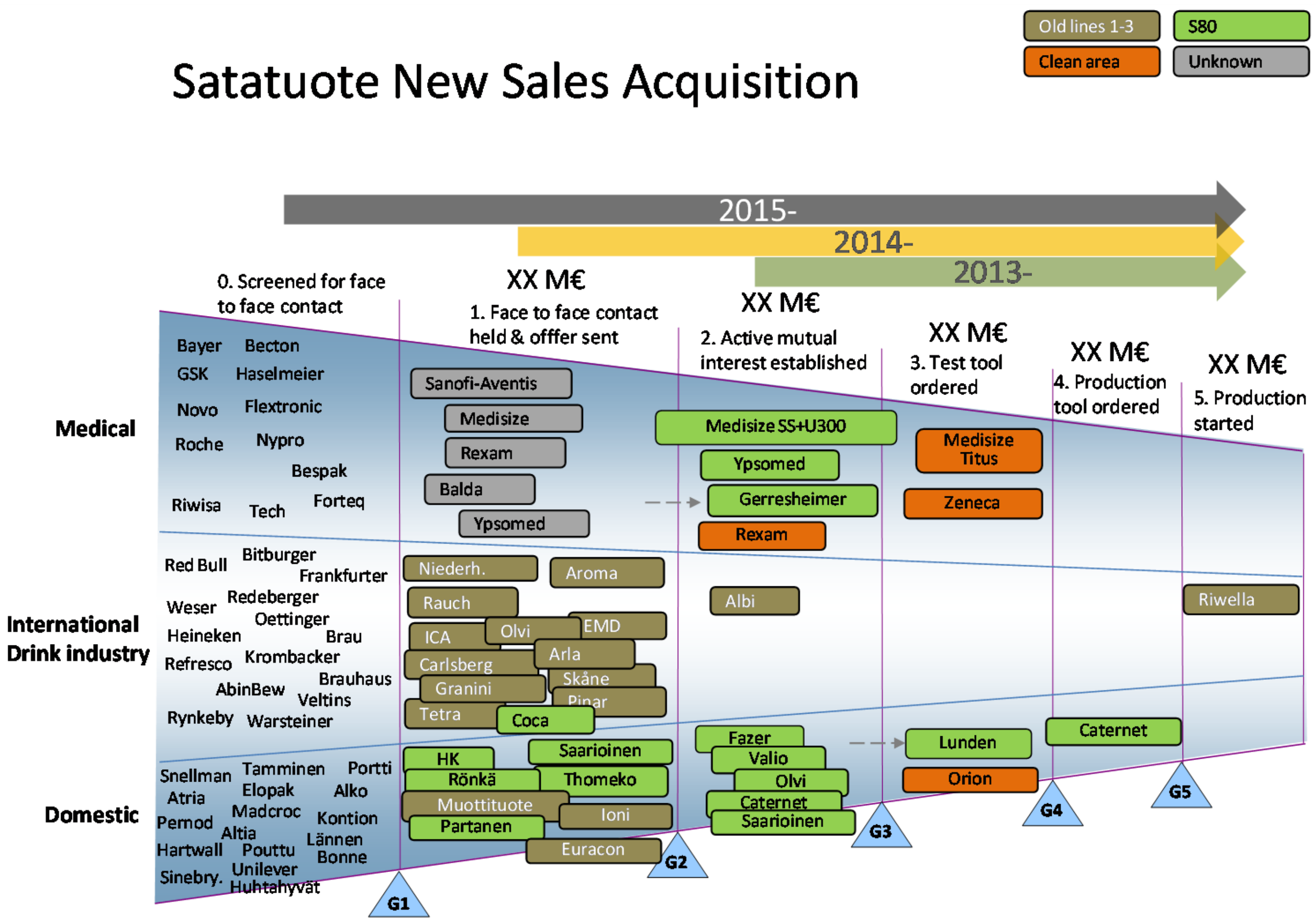

Figure 7. Gate-model, the model of Satatuote to follow up its sales.

The figure above is the pattern which is used in Satatuote to follow-up their sales and more specifically their customer acquisition and the progress of it. In the left side of the picture can be seen how the sales are divided; medical industry, international drink industry and the domestic, in this case Finnish, market. In the first box on the left there are listed potential customers in the specific markets. There is not used any kind of filter to limit the companies, those are the companies Satatuote finds interesting. The second box includes companies that Satatuote has already met and to whom an offer is sent. The companies mentioned in the third box are the customers that have significant potential. Those are the customers that have already started a common project with Satatuote and are really interested about their products. In the fourth box are customers that have been satisfied with the first sample products so that the test tool has been ordered. When the project has reached this stage, usually the deal is closed soon. The fifth box includes customers that have made the decision to purchase and the deal is closed. The last box shows the customers that have already started to purchase.

According to Mika Niininen, this gate-model has been very useful for Satatuote. This is because at the very beginning all the potential companies are listed and from this model the real progress can be seen, whether after the contact the customer is interested or not. This model is a cruel one too. It shows where the interest of the customer usually decreases, but it does not explain the reason for this. However, this model is challenging. The companies that are mentioned in this picture are needed to be taken care of, but at the same time, when some company is dropped out of the picture new companies are needed to be found. There are also mentioned the sales that are expected from every company, starting from the second box (cannot be seen in this picture). At the beginning, as many companies as possible are needed to be put in the picture, since the more companies mentioned the more sales opportunities there are. (Niininen, personal communication on 8.2.2013)

9 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The topic of this thesis was customer acquisition and as a case company was Satatuote Oy. The purpose of this study was to find out how customer acquisition is part of the sales and what its role is in the whole sales process. In the thesis I studied how these things work in theory as well as in practice. The primary objective was to find out how the customer acquisition process is handled in Satatuote.

In the theoretical part was studied the activities of the sales department of a company, from customer relationship management and customer acquisition to personal selling and sales process and sales management. Customer acquisition is an important part of the sales practices of every company. It is rather expensive and that is why it should be implemented after careful thought and by the control of the sales management. To be able to implement a successful customer acquisition, the company needs to have skillful and motivated sales team and sales managers who can drive the sales team go beyond their comfort zone. One key matter in customer acquisition, as well as in the sales in general, is setting common goals which everyone is aware of and that are achievable but still ambitious. When the goals are set, the strategies and budgets for the implementation can be created. Monitoring of the implementation and the results should not be forgotten.

The purpose of the empirical part of this thesis was to study the customer acquisition of the case company, Satatuote Oy. This study was implemented by qualitative research, by theme interview. For this study was interviewed the C.E.O of Satatuote, Mika Niininen as well as the production manager of the company. As was found out, like the whole sales department and sales activities, the customer acquisition of Satatuote has gone through big changes, and that made the studying of the customer acquisition and reaching the sales objectives of the company interesting. When Satatuote had decided to expand its markets to other European countries, it co-operated with Finpro which made the market research as well as the competitor analysis. This co-operation was successful and lead to appointments with big organizations and to some deals too. The monitoring model used to follow up the customer acquisition of Satatuote, the gate-model, has been found very useful tool as well.

10 RECOMMENDATIONS

The sales department of Satatuote and its activities has gone through remarkable changes during the recent years and now the sales organization of the company includes only few persons. Because of the co-operation of Satatuote and Finpro and because of the expertise of the sales team of Satatuote, the revenue of the company is increasing. Finpro did significant work by studying and analyzing the markets which Satatuote was interested in. Now Satatuote is recommended to continue taking advantage of the analyses and market researches Finpro implemented. Since the analyses are now properly executed and the bases of the markets are studied it is important for Satatuote to focus on the companies Finpro contacted. Also recommended is not to forget the approach, in which the top management of the company is involved on the sales process.

The strength of Satatuote is its unique tray solutions, and in addition to the work Finpro has done, the company should search for efficient ways to market its products and this way acquire new customers. Recently Satatuote has started to participate to some special exhibitions which are well known in its industry areas. Trade shows are efficient when wishing to reach people in special industries, in this case in medical and in drink industry, and that is why this kind of activities are recommended to be continued. Satatuote has just gotten a new sales director, and later on can be considered still strengthening the sales organization.

When Satatuote started its internationalizing process it made a new action plan and set itself a goal for the following five years. It wanted to find partners from the international field and for example it has started already to co-operate with a big German juice manufacturer, Albi. This way the internationalizing process of Satatuote has had a good start, and now the company is recommended to focus strongly on continuing it. Satatuote should still try to take an advantage of the market research Finpro did concerning Turkey, since it is one of the fastest growing economies in Europe. The alcohol consumption is very limited there, but the juice and beverage industries are rather big and those are still estimated to grow remarkably. Therefore Satatuote has many potential customers, drink manufacturers, in the country.

As the C.E.O of Satatuote stated, the gate model has been found very useful tool in the customer acquisition of the company since it is challenging and it pushes the company out of its comfort zone. Therefore Satatuote is recommended to use this model in the future as well. In sales one of the most important things to do is to find new customers but very rarely the customers are acquired inside the comfort zone of the company. As the co-operation with Finpro has been successful, it can be recommended in the future as well if those kinds of services are needed.

Based on this study also further research can be implemented. Studied could be for example how the revenue of the company has developed after the co-operation with Finpro. Also the impact of the changes in the sales organization on the efficiency of the sales could be studied. However, it is important to remember, that for example the positive development of the revenue might not tell the whole truth; for example reaching for a certain amount of new customers in a certain time period might be a great achievement as well.

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