DIGITAL ADVERTISING STRATEGY FOR A LOCAL B2C FITNESS COMPANY IN FINLAND. CASE COMPANY: MyEMS Oy

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Bachelor's thesis

Valkeakoski, International Business

Spring 2022

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International Business   Abstract

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Subject	Digital Advertising Strategy for a Local B2C Fitness Company in Finland. Case Company: MyEMS Oy	
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Digital marketing has created new opportunities for companies to advertise themselves. Depending on the size and characteristics of the companies, they face various challenges when marketing and advertising. Finding the right advertising strategy to leverage the opportunity that digital advertising provides is a crucial step for companies' success in the digital environment.

This thesis aims to discuss the different advertising options that businesses have when looking to implement social media in their paid advertising strategy for lead generation purposes. It is done for the commissioning company MyEMS Oy, which is based in Tampere, Finland. The objective of the research is to explore the optimal practices of digital advertising and strategy together with improvements that MyEMS Oy could use to attract potential clients with their advertisements.

Based on the marketing and advertising literature review and website data analytics, a test campaign for the commissioning company was created and launched for 14 days. The campaign tested theories based on the findings in the review and analytics, combined with theoretical views from marketing literature.

The findings of the test campaign suggested that the theories and assumptions, based on the available data, were correct. Due to the restricted time, the author recommends further testing to make concrete conclusions. The results of this test showed promising potential for MyEMS to increase the effectiveness of their digital advertising strategy by using well-thought-out advertising principles and collected data.

The author made recommendations for improved advertisement performance and advertising strategy development. The findings and recommendations can be used as supplemental guidelines for creating and improving advertising strategies in a local B2C business. The results of this research and recommendations were delivered to the commissioning company.

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1   INTRODUCTION

The digital marketing sector has quickly evolved around the world in the past years. In addition to the already ongoing digitalization of businesses, opening stores online and reaching customers online, 2020 brought a surprise in the form of the Covid-19 virus, which accelerated this move towards digital even more. People are consuming content online on their favorite social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, or Youtube. (Amankwah-Amoah et al. 2021, p. 1)

Buying things online is also an increasingly popular alternative to traditional shopping mall visits. The flexible returns options, advanced e-commerce shops, and continuously improved customer experience when shopping online. Most of the products or services one could need are available to buy or rent online, starting from apartments, cars to groceries and flower deliveries on birthdays. Unless the action requires a physical presence, there is a good chance it can be done online.

The advertising industry experienced many challenges connected with the changing marketing situation. The digital advertising industry has adapted to this switch to a digital environment too. The popular social media sites offer ad spaces, business accounts, and custom audience targeting options that have never been there. Nowadays it is possible to reach people based on what they have looked at online, pages they have browsed, or what they are interested in. Social media sites collect and leverage extreme amounts of information about the users.

Search engines like Google offer ad spaces on specific key phrases a user types in. A fitness company could pay for their ads to show up on queries such as "Personal trainer [city]" or "how to lose weight". Digital advertising provides more precise targeting, making it easier to reach the exact people a company is looking for, and social media advertising requires relatively lower costs to advertise, making it a more appealing choice for small and medium businesses (Korenkova, 2020, p. 20).

Changes in marketing and advertising have affected how the fitness industry and businesses like gyms and personal training studios operate. While the training itself has not changed drastically, the actions that lead to one finding their personal trainer or gym are vastly different. The marketing and

advertising switch to digital has enabled fitness businesses to reach their clients during their social media browsing sessions or when they are searching for something related to fitness. As physical appearance is judged visually, the digital environment and fitness work well together because most of the content is visual – long or short-form videos, photos, or animations. Also, people on social media tend to compare themselves to others, which can lead to negative effects, such as body image issues, and also positive ones, for example, increased motivation and willingness to improve a person's physical fitness to look better in real life and also on social media. (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2016)

To use this opportunity, fitness businesses need to learn and adapt the available digital marketing tools and strategies for their individual case. With the right strategy, a company can attract potential clients, nurture them, and also work on the existing clients to increase their brand loyalty and word-of-mouth marketing on social media. The marketing has expanded from marketing a gym-only strategy to a bigger strategy, reaching people on their social networks and engaging with them, essentially becoming a part of their lives.

MyEMS Oy recognized the previously mentioned challenges and acquired this research to better understand their digital marketing opportunities for a local business in Finland. The company was looking to use them to improve the number of new website visitors and potential client sign-ups. MyEMS is a personal training studio based in Tampere, Finland. It is a subscription-based business, that offers a free trial for potential clients when first visiting the studio. This offer is used as in the fitness business the sales process during the first introduction visit has a big impact on the decision-making process of the individual (Abbot, 2018, p. 31) The company's main advertising goal is to generate potential clients so that the sales representatives have people to work with on their introductory visit. The main advertising goal is lead generation.

The following question covers the objective of the thesis:
What digital marketing strategies should be implemented to increase the number of leads so MyEMS Oy sales representatives would have more sales opportunities?

This study aims to explore the practices of digital advertising and strategy that MyEMS Oy could use to attract potential clients interested in personal training services and find the most optimal ones

that provide the best potential return on the advertising costs. The research on different digital advertising channels and how these channels could help the company reach potential clients should offer the company insight on the available options in the advertising space that could reach their target audience online. The author will use a quantitative research methodology. The author will analyze historical data and create a test campaign based on the findings. After the test campaign, the results will be compared to the historical results to evaluate the impact of changes. This data could be used to make decisions on which advertising type and strategy could be the most beneficial for the case company of the thesis. It is the aim of the researcher that the findings in this thesis will aid in the creation of an updated advertising strategy that would improve the results of the digital advertisement for MyEMS Oy.

2   COMPANY INTRODUCTION

MyEMS Oy was established in 2018 to provide affordable personal training services to people looking to improve their shape and wellbeing. Client memberships include EMS (electro-muscle stimulated) workouts with personal trainers and personalized guidance for nutrition, healthy habit creation, and overall wellness of the individual. The company is based in Tampere, Finland.

MyEMS prides itself in creating a fully personalized approach to fitness and a healthy lifestyle. All memberships include nutritional resources, calculations done for the members, individual training programs, and regular measurements to track progress. The first introduction to MyEMS is usually a free trial visit, which is guided by a sales representative. After the visit, an opportunity to sign up with different memberships options is presented. (MyEMS Oy, n.d.)

2.1   MyEMS Oy Case: challenges and current marketing efforts

The case company has its website and business accounts on Facebook and Google advertisement management platforms. Current advertising includes advertisements on Facebook, Instagram, and Google platforms. Google Analytics is the platform used to analyze website visitor data, including visitors from advertising campaigns.

Figure 1. MyEMS Google Display brand awareness advertisement (MyEMS, 2021)

Figure 2. MyEMS Facebook lead generation advertisement (MyEMS, 2021)

The digital marketing strategy in the past few years has been focused on Facebook advertisements and was successful in 2020 and 2021, but the performance has recently declined, as can be seen in Figure 3. Advertisement costs have increased and the advertisement effectiveness has decreased, leading to higher amounts spent on attracting an individual to sign up for the company's offer.
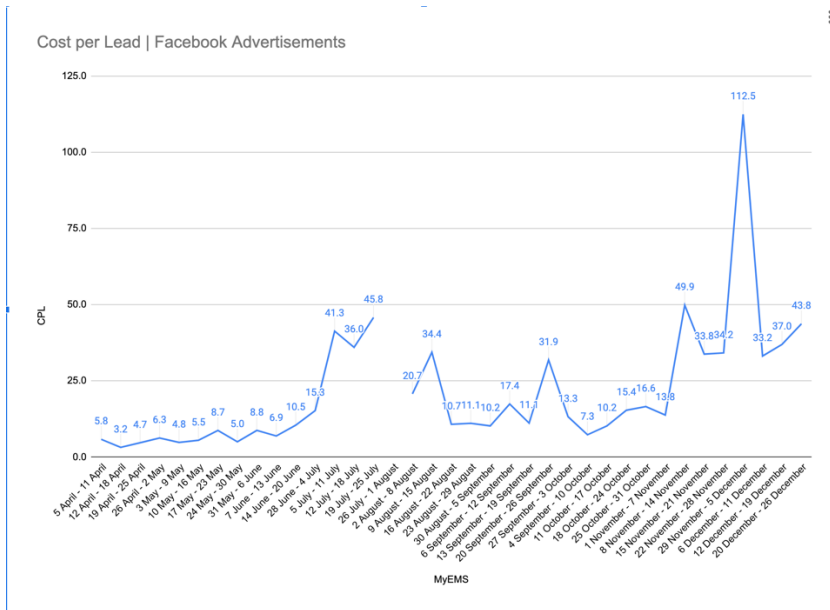
Figure 3. MyEMS Facebook advertisement cost per lead. (MyEMS, 2021)

The company has not done a deep dive analysis on the rising costs per lead issue, but the lower amounts of signups correlate well with spikes in Covid-19 cases in Finland. An assumption could be made that the fear of getting sick with the virus was a factor that scared people away from signing up to try the personal training services at MyEMS Oy. Another factor could be the rising cost of advertising, the CPM (the average cost per 1000 impressions) in the chart in Figure 4 was noticeably higher during the holiday season, starting from the end of November (Black Friday) until the end of December (Christmas & New Years). This, however, does not explain the overall higher costs before and after the holiday season.
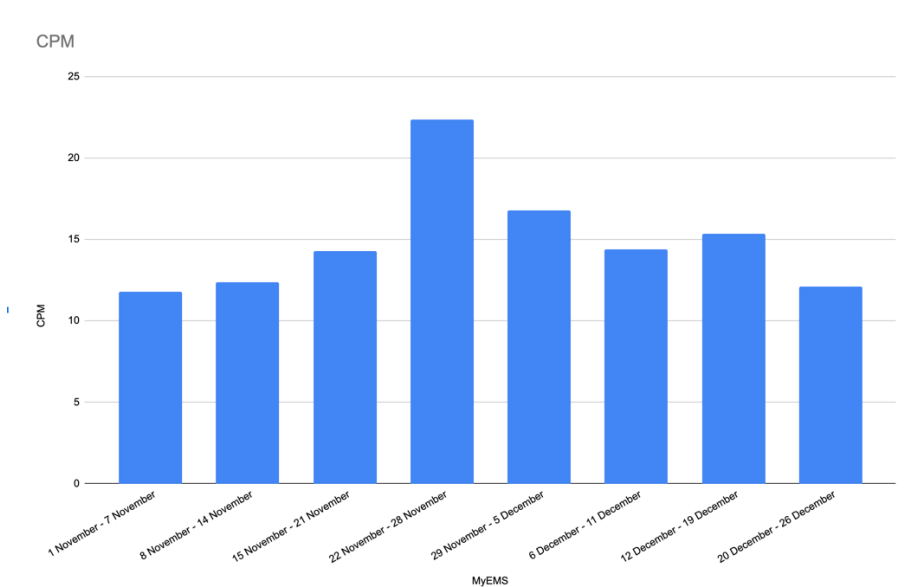
Figure 4. MyEMS Facebook CPM (MyEMS, 2021)

The current advertisement offer is a free week pass at the studio. The pass includes 2 EMS workouts, a body measurement test, and a personal trainer consultation. The main advertising goal is to generate lead (potential client) sign-ups so that there is a steady flow of new potential clients coming to the studio for sales representatives to work with.

The sign-up process for someone who clicks on an advertisement is the following:

1. A click on the advertisement,

2. The website with the information and sign-up form loads,

3. The potential client fills out the sign-up form,

4. The potential client submits the sign-up form.

In a fitness business the sales representatives, often acting also as trainers, play an important role, as each client has individual needs. A fitness club has to align with an individual's fitness goals, personal values, and beliefs. According to Andrey Nazarenko (2021, p. 29), people tend to terminate their relationships with a brand very quickly, if a brand violates a promise or acts unethically. This quick decision-making and focus on the company's values poses more challenges to overcome for the sales representative during the trial visit up until the individual signs a membership contract. Once the contract is signed, the person is usually tied up to a 12-month subscription.

The fitness industry operates mainly on month-to-month subscriptions with contracts for 12 months. The customer gets charged every month regardless of the use of services. It is the most popular model due to the promise of recurring revenue and high value for the business. (Miasnikova, 2020, p. 35) MyEMS, however, operates slightly differently. While the company uses 12-month contracts, customers purchase a set number of visits. If the customer has leftover visits due to lower activity, those visits are not lost, but instead rolled over to the next month. For example, visiting MyEMS 3 times a month on 4 times a month contract would leave the customer with 1 extra time. Next month the customer could go and train 5 times, as the extra time from the previous month would be added to the new 4 times. The sales representatives of the company formulate it as a "the customer never loses money" approach.

2.2   Competitors of the case company

Despite EMS technology being used for decades, EMS personal training studio is a new concept in Finland (Fitin20, 2019.). Currently, there are 2 EMS personal training studios in Finland, one in Tampere (MyEMS), and another one in Helsinki. Even though the direct competition is almost non-existent, the studio competes with regular personal training services and big commercial gyms that offer personal training services. MyEMS personal training is an alternative option for people who are looking for personal training services.

The competing personal trainers do not spend money on Facebook advertising, according to information available on Facebook's public advertisement library, so there is no direct advertising competition with individual personal trainers. The main commercial gym competitors in the Tampere region are Elixia, Fressi, Fitness24Seven, and GoGo. It has to be noted that none of these are direct competitors, as they do not offer personal training services with EMS technology.

The advertising strategy of competing gyms is focused on acquiring new customers by enticing them with low-cost memberships. Commercial gyms compete with each other by cutting the membership costs as low as possible, reducing margins, and making a profit on the volume of customers. This is contrary to MyEMS's approach, where the cheapest membership is 199 euros per month. Those are different approaches that each focuses on acquiring different customers. Commercial gyms work on people who want to have access to gyms for the cheapest price possible. MyEMS is focused on people who want personalized training, advice, and guidance throughout their fitness journey. Those people are typically willing to pay more for a membership, as they eliminate the need to figure out things like workout plans, nutrition plans, schedules, lifestyle changes, and habits themselves.
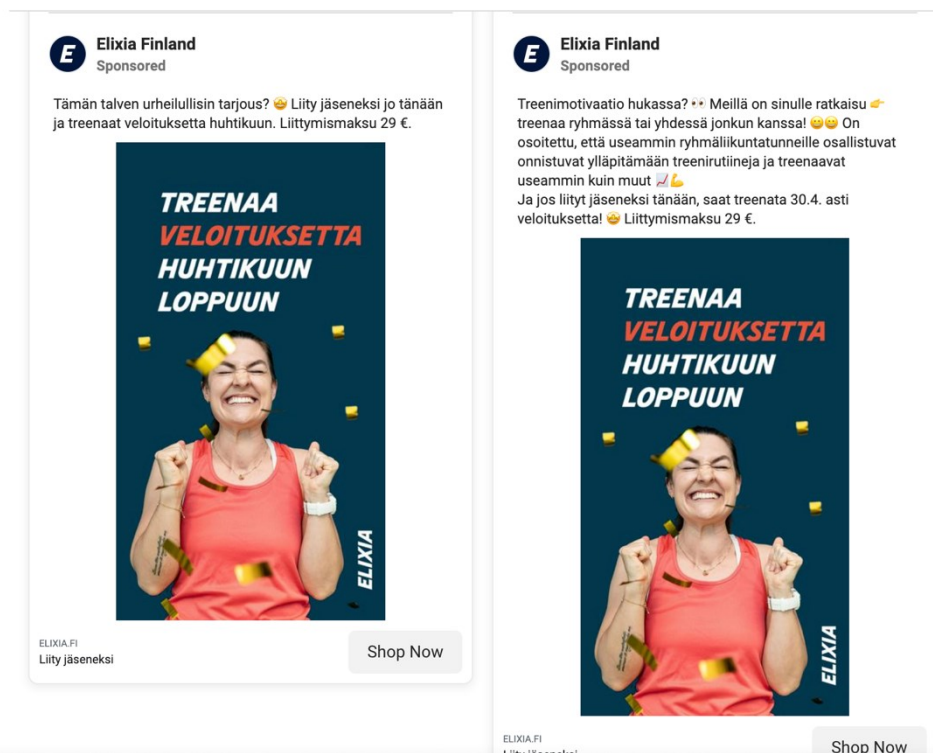
Figure 5. Elixia Finland Facebook Advertisements (Facebook, 2021)

2.3 The demand for well-performing digital advertisements for the case company

Digital advertising is the main lead generation tool for MyEMS Oy, which brings in most of the potential clients. The performance of paid digital marketing efforts is crucial for the business success and continued growth of the company. The company does not rely on any traditional advertising

methods like TV, radio, or print ads, the only activities that bring new customers to the company are word-of-mouth and digital advertisements on social media platforms and search engines.

Advertising on social media platforms and search engines offer more targeted possibilities, reaching people who are more likely to be interested in the services of MyEMS. According to Statista (2022), it was possible to reach 89% of the people in Finland with online media. It is comparatively cheaper to reach potential clients online, on social media platforms, or search engines than on traditional advertising platforms. According to Reunanen (2015), already then, in 2015, almost 46% of people named online media as their main news source, which points to the broad adoption of social media networks in Finland.

2.4   Digital marketing

The Internet and digital media have transformed marketing and business since the launch of the first website in 1991. Currently, according to Statista (2021), the active internet user count has reached 4.66 billion as of January 2021. With more than 4 billion active users regularly using the web to find products, services, and entertainment, consumer behavior, and the way companies market themselves have substantially shifted. To succeed in this rapidly evolving environment, marketers and companies need to have up-to-date knowledge of how to use digital marketing to reach their marketing goals. (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2016, p. 7)

Digital marketing can be often referred to as online marketing or internet marketing. The development of digital marketing has changed the ways that brands and businesses use technology for their marketing activities. (Sathya, 2017, p. 866) Digital marketing is a type of marketing that is widely used to promote services or products and reach customers with various digital channels. The digital marketing term refers to various tools and techniques that can be used to reach customers via digital technologies. This type of marketing includes internet marketing channels and extends also to channels beyond the ones that require the use of the Internet. It includes SMS marketing, social media advertising, display advertising, search engine marketing, influencer marketing, and other forms of digital media. (Yasmin et al., 2015, pp. 69–70) According to Chaffey & Ellis (2016), the interaction and integration between digital marketing channels and traditional channels is a key part to develop a sound digital marketing strategy.

The amount of digital marketing platforms and tools grows continuously as the marketing industry evolves, bringing new opportunities for businesses to reach the end-users with their message. The prominent shift towards Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok in recent years has raised an entire industry of influencer marketing and new advertising opportunities that previously did not exist. TikTok was initially released in 2016 and according to Revive Digital (2021), it was the fastest-growing network in 2020, reaching more than 1 billion users in 2021. This network, which was created just 5 years ago, has become a platform for businesses to reach more than 1 billion users with their offers and messages. (Haenlein et al., 2020, p. 6)

2.5   Digital marketing environment for a B2C business

Business to consumer (B2C) marketing is the most common type of marketing, and sales with B2C marketing are generated every day all around the world. It includes activities of business serving end consumers with products or services (Kumar, 2012). Filling up the fuel tank, buying groceries, ordering a new vacuum cleaner on Amazon, scrolling Facebook feed, and engaging with company posts – these actions are examples of B2C marketing results.

In traditional marketing, businesses would send posters in the mail or set up a billboard on a busy street. Digital marketing provides new ways for businesses to communicate throughout the customer journey, it opens up a two-sided connection. Since the conditions of digital marketing are different, brands that usually would not be rivals under normal conditions can end up competing with each other for digital real estate or ad placement. (Efendioglu, 2016, p. 36) For example, a car dealership can compete with a grocery store for an opportunity to show an individual an advertisement on Facebook, brands compete with each other for the first post to show up on Youtube or the first article on Google search. Being the first or at the top of something pays off in digital marketing with attention from the target audience, which in turn leads to more opportunities to sell and generate revenue for a business.

The main aim of B2C digital marketing is to serve customers as quickly as possible and get guidance from the consumers instead of trying to change their perspectives or perception. Consumers avoiding a certain advertisement would lead to it getting reduced exposure to others, creating a negative effect on future posts or advertisements by the company. It would work similarly, just

inversed, with positive engagement, the more positive engagement a post would get, the more exposed to a wider community it would be. The social media algorithms feed people the content that they assume individuals would want to see, based on their past actions and reactions, it answers their needs. (Agung, 2019, p. 744)

2.6   Digital marketing in the fitness industry

There has been a continuous trend for consumers to gravitate towards lifestyles grounded in fitness, wellness, and health. According to Statista (2020), the fitness industry is worth nearly $100 billion globally and growing. With that, the number of commercial gyms, studios, personal training boutiques, and other fitness businesses keeps growing each year. Competition in the fitness industry is aggressive with large all-inclusive commercial gym chains against smaller independent gyms (South University, 2016). With the continuously growing competition between fitness clubs and studios, it is more crucial now than ever before to put any effort into efficient marketing to be in front of the potential customers for any fitness business. Digitalization has brought many opportunities to market a fitness business, including social media marketing, content marketing, digital advertising, email marketing, and others. Most of those marketing avenues are less expensive than the traditional marketing approaches, making them more approachable for small and medium-sized fitness businesses. Those businesses can still compete in the digital environment with the bigger fitness chains, because the marketing can be more precise and targeted locally, significantly decreasing the costs associated with running advertisement campaigns. (Olekhnik, 2019, p. 151)

Digital marketing has changed the way most fitness businesses operate, attract new clients and provide customer service. Various digital marketing tools like online sign-up forms, automated notifications, and email marketing have changed the fitness industry for good. With easily accessible network connections on-demand fitness platforms have become more and more popular, especially with the spread of Covid and local restrictions that required gyms to close. On-demand platforms allow people to work out from wherever and whenever they wish to with little to no equipment required (LessMills, n.d.). Another opportunity that the digital environment has brought is signing up online. Previously people needed to go to a gym, fill out the sign-up form, and then they would get the gym card and access to the premises. With the help of digital marketing, now it is possible to sign up from an advertisement seen online, fill out the form online, and sign the contract online

too. The access is provided through an application on a member's phone, allowing for the businesses to not have any people in the reception, because the customer acquisition and service is done fully digitally without any interaction between the fitness business and individual in real life. (GymLatvija,

n.d.)

Figure 6. Gym Latvija Member Application (GymLatvija, n.d.)

Digital advertising for a fitness studio provides the opportunity to reach the people that are most likely to be interested in visiting the studio. Facebook and Google platforms offer targeting options to make sure that businesses ads are shown only to people who are interested in losing weight or gaining muscle. Facebook in particular offers opportunities to reach everyone on Facebook or just a few people, using various targeting options. It allows to target advertisements to user groups on factors like location, age, gender, ethnicity, the language they speak, engagement with the business, and more. (Wozney et al., 2019, p. 2) This advertising opportunity reduces costs compared to regular advertising without any specific targeting and increases the advertisement efficiency for a fitness business.

These digital advertising tools provide opportunities to serve large groups of people with a business's message at the time and place it chooses. Using this specific targeting with persuasion

techniques can be an effective combination to achieve mass persuasion. Fitness marketers can use it to acquire and retain consumers. A study done by Matz et al. (2017) demonstrated how psychological persuasion affects purchasing behavior. By using persuasion techniques and tailoring the advertising messages to the target audience, businesses can increase the likelihood of the target audience taking their desired action. While the previously mentioned study was done only on Facebook, Instagram, and Audience Networks, it can be assumed that similar effects would be noticed on the other advertising platforms too.

2.7   Customer journey

To understand and create an effective digital advertising strategy, it is crucial to understand the customer journey. According to Dolčić (n.d., p. 1), the initial theories of tracking customers' journey in marketing began in the 1960s. At that time, integrated marketing models were developed, showing buyers' journeys, in which customers move from recognizing their needs to evaluation of the purchased product.

Følstad & Kvale, (2018) characterize the customer journey as repeated interactions between the service provider and the customer. Viewing a business's interactions from the perspective of the customer journey is key to creating customer-oriented solutions that perform the necessary functions in a customer-oriented manner. Each customer's journey is a process that the customer has to go through to get to know the business, become aware of the products and services, consider and evaluate them, and make the final decision to purchase the product or service. When starting the buyer's journey, potential clients search for more information about the topics they are interested in or a problem they are trying to solve. The solution can be either a product or a service offered by the company, but the potential customer does not know it yet. For a marketing strategy to be successful, the seller or company must be able to target the right audience with the right message at the right stage of buying journey. Understanding what the buyers are doing can help marketers to analyze their buyers and move them from one decision-making stage to another with better efficiency. (Gajanova, 2021, p. 7)

According to Kotler et al. (2005), there are five total steps in the buyer's decision process: buyers need recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision, and post-

purchase behavior. The consumer can skip or reverse some of those steps, and they also differ for first-time buyers and repeat buyers. Also, the online duration of each step is shorter. (Moustakas, 2015, p. 6) Due to the shorter buyers' journey online, marketers in recent years have condensed this approach into 3 stages: awareness, consideration, and conversion. Awareness is the first stage of the buyer's journey. At this stage, the buyer realizes the problem and is looking to identify it. Buyers are trying to identify the challenge or opportunity they are currently facing. A decision if reaching the goal is a priority has to be made at this stage. For now, they are unaware of what product or service could solve their problem. (Sellers, 2021) If the customer decides to make reaching the goal a priority, it leads to the next stage. According to Gajanova (2021), digital marketing tools like blogs, articles, newsletters, and e-books are the best performing to achieve the goal of improved awareness.

At the consideration stage, potential buyers are already aware of the needs and are actively looking for solutions that can solve the problems. At this point, buyers are looking for information online, asking advice from their friends, looking around, and gathering information that helps them evaluate different approaches or methods that are available to reach their goal. (Sellers, 2021) Useful marketing tools for the consideration stage include case studies, videos, reviews, and testimonials Gajanova (2021). Those tools are focused on building trust between the potential buyer and the brand. Telling the success stories of existing and previous buyers, clearly painting the benefits of choosing that specific company over any other company provides a more trustworthy image in the eyes of the buyer.

At the decision stage, the potential buyer has become aware of their problem and has compared different options that are available in the market. They have gathered enough information to make an informed decision. After comparing and evaluating all the options available to the buyer, a decision can be made in favor of the one that meets the buyer's needs the best. (Sellers, 2021) To promote a decision in favor of a company, marketing tools such as sales conversations, free trials, free consultations, and demonstration sessions can be used Gajanova (2021, p. 7).

The understanding of different stages in a buyer's journey allows for more educated decision-making on the marketing strategy to successfully acquire new and returning customers. This understanding eases the choice of digital marketing channels and tools that a business should use

to promote buyers to take action in a specific stage of the buyer's journey. The use of a customer journey map helps marketers to analyze the behavior of customers while they move through the sales process. The major benefits of a customer journey map include allowing marketers to stay focused on customers and improving the buying experience for potential clients. (Hogan, 2021)

3   DIGITAL ADVERTISING

According to Greenwood (2021) advertising has been around for ages. Starting from Babylonian merchants who used advertising by shouting to Romans using signage outside of the stores to promote product or service sales. With the arrival of printing, advertising options such as newspapers and magazines appeared. Advertising became an industry at the beginning of the 19th century. (Greenwood et al., 2021, p. 2) An industry that was once viewed as a gamble was able to become one of the safest business ventures (Hopkins, 1966, p. 213). By the 20th century, new technologies brought new advertising avenues, such as radio and television. Later in the 70s, the first email campaign was sent by Digital Equipment Corporation to 400 users. In 1990 online or digital advertising was first introduced. The first advertisement was a part of AT&T's (a communications company based in the United States) campaign "You will". (Greenwood et al., 2021, p. 3) After Facebook and Google advertising platforms experienced massive success since the launch, digital advertising has become the most popular type of advertising. According to Statista (2021), digital advertisements account for 54% of total advertisement spending in the United States.

Digital advertising is the complex of methods to share information to provide effective promotion of goods and services. For the most part, is promoted through the Internet space. A competitive analysis done by Girchenko & Ovsiannikova (2016) shows that to provide the most efficient marketing for a business, it is needed to keep up with the times, with new advertising methods, tools and actively use digital marketing for promotions. (Girchenko & Ovsiannikova, 2016, p. 25) As the advertising industry evolves, more and more advertising platforms have appeared. Some of the most popular advertising options in last years include Google ads, Facebook ads, Instagram ads, Twitter ads, LinkedIn ads, and TikTok ads. (Gibbons, 2020)

According to Schomer (2021), most consumers have started to proactively avoid advertising, whether that is done with the use of ad blocking systems or paying for ad-free digital media

experiences. Internet users have become less comfortable with how companies collect and use data online. Temporary solutions include the introduction of ad-free subscriptions or tracking consent prompts on websites, which are currently required by law in certain regions of the world. (Schomer, 2021) This situation with new regulations and restrictions reinforces the need for marketers to follow the latest regulations and rules to comply with the terms and conditions of advertising platforms. While this has hurt some advertising platforms like Facebook, based on data available on Statista, the monthly user count has not declined and shown any negative effects on the overall user activity.

3.1   Lead generation

According to Cox (2021), a lead is any person indicating interest in a company's products or services in some way shape, or form. Typically leads will be reached out to by a business after they have opened a line of communication. This line could be a submission of contact information for an offer or a trial or registering to get some sort of resource for free. (Cox, 2021) The types of offers marketers can use include informational value, entertainment value, monetary value, and privileged access to information (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2016, p. 314). For the business, this provides a free line of communication and for the lead, this provides the opportunity to get what they are looking for. Businesses and sales representatives have the opportunity to avoid cold calling and prospecting to find interested people. Instead, they have the contact information of people who are interested in the company's products. The beauty of digital marketing offers is that they can be tested for multiple different audiences and refined to improve their performance. (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2016, p. 314)

Lead generation is the process of generating consumer interest to turn that consumer into a buyer. This is a core part of the sales funnel for many companies since the products often cost thousands of euros and people are less willing to buy the product directly from the website without any previous interactions with the product. According to Stolz et al. (2021), lead generation usually is a two-part process.

The first step of this process is deciding on and finding a cost-effective way to attract potential clients to the company's website (Stolz et al., 2021). Depending on the available budget and the

company's goals, there are many ways to start the process of attracting website visitors. Businesses need to carefully evaluate and select the lead generation platform that suits the company's interest the best. Some examples of attracting customers to a website include search engine marketing, content marketing, digital advertising, and search engine optimization. (Paxton, 2021)

Once visitors arrive at the website, the next step is a conversion into a lead via online form. This has a two-fold purpose of stimulating interest and acquiring contact information from the users. At this step, users fill out a form providing some sort of contact information that is valuable to the marketers, for example, a phone number or email address. (Stolz et al., 2021, p. 4) In return for the submission, users also get something back, this incentive is also called a "lead magnet". Companies create this content, which is called gated content (material only available for users once they fill out a form) to encourage potential customers to fill the form out and leave their details. Some of the most used options are white papers, guides, e-books, free trials, or consultation calls. (Kosaka, 2021)

Leads are a part of the broader business customer journey that buyers follow when they transition from the awareness to the consideration stage (Sellers, 2021). However, not every single lead is equal. Different types of leads exist based on how they are qualified and in which part of the buyer's journey they are in. There are marketing qualified leads, sales qualified leads, and products qualified leads. (Cox, 2021)

Marketing qualified leads (MQL) are prospects that have engaged with the company's marketing efforts but are yet to be ready to receive a sales call. A business can determine a marketing qualified lead with a combination of actions like filling out a form, visiting frequency, and subscription. (Getonga, 2014, p. 45)

Sales qualified leads (SQL) are prospects that have taken actions that indicate a willingness to become a paying customer of the company. This is a qualified and presumably valuable prospective customer that the sales representatives can work with. (Gebert et al., 2002, p. 6) An example of sales qualified lead is someone who fills out a form to ask a question about the company's product or service.

Product qualified leads (PQL) are prospects that have taken actions that indicate interest in becoming paying customers. PQL usually exists for companies that offer their products or services

for a free trial or limited version of it with an option to upgrade. (Cox, 2021) An example of PQL would be a customer that has booked a free trial visit to a fitness club.

3.2   Lead generation funnel

A marketing funnel defines a customer journey from discovering a brand to purchasing its product or service. The marketing funnel helps to organize and track the customer throughout the purchasing journey explained in section 3.4. A lead generation funnel is a systematic approach to generating potential customers (leads). The complexity of a lead generation funnel can vary from simple to very complicated. (Buttler, 2021)

There are three stages of a lead generation funnel: the top of the funnel (TOFU), the middle of the funnel (MOFU), and the bottom of the funnel (BOFU) (Butler, 2021). These stages are also sometimes called awareness, consideration, and decision stages. As customers move through the stages of the lead generation funnel, they face different questions and experience behavior changes. Although this funnel is important to businesses driving purchases, it is critically important for businesses that rely on lead generation for business growth. (Sickler, 2021)

The top of the funnel is the visitor's awareness stage. At this stage, customers are not aware of the company or products. In this phase, customers are looking for information and answers. (Sickler, 2021) The top of the funnel is the company's first contact with a potential lead. It is the opportunity to introduce the company to a potential buyer. Content during this can consist of blog posts and video material that provides valuable information to the potential buyer. (Butler, 2021)

At the middle of the lead generation funnel, the visitor has a clearly defined problem and narrowed down solutions. The potential buyer is evaluating companies and possible options and comparing the products or services. Because of the natural user drop-off at the TOFU stage, this stage represents a smaller and more qualified part of the audience. (Sickler, 2021) At this stage the company needs to nurture the potential buyer with information that moves them toward a decision. Content during this stage can be ebooks, testimonials, and case studies. (Butler, 2021)

The bottom of the funnel encompasses the highly qualified leads that are on their way to making a purchasing decision. These potential buyers have committed by sticking with the company throughout the previous stages, which makes those the most lucrative potential clients. (Sickler, 2021) The potential buyers at the bottom of the funnel stage trust the company and need the final push to become buyers. The optimal BOFU content types are trials, consultations, and discount offers. (Butler, 2021)

Lead generation websites rely on lead generation forms to capture user information. The lead generation forms should be quick and easy to fill, with the least amount of information to fill out. The less time a user spends on the forms, the less time a user will have to change his decision. It is essential to focus on capturing only the necessary information. (Saleh & Shukairy, 2010, p. 207) According to Taylor (2021), it does not matter how well put together a lead generation strategy is, if the forms used to collect potential client information are losing prospects because of intimidation or high difficulty to complete. Some on-page lead generation strategies that promote increase the lead generation efficiency (conversion rates) include pop-ups and prominent calls-to-action (CTA). Prominent CTA will motivate the customer to complete the desired action. (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2016, p. 314) Strategies for improving conversion rate are explored more in chapter 4.5.

3.3   Digital advertising platforms and delivery

Advertisement networks are based on aggregating advertising space from publishers and matching it to the demands from advertisers. Advertisement networks interact as intermediaries with advertisers and publishers. (Fourberg et al. 2021, p. 22) Media buying consists of the process of contacting the owner of the advertisement space and purchasing it, most commonly as banner placement on the website. The businesses that purchase this advertising space rely on the owners to provide accurate information about the performance of the advertisement. Based on this data, assumptions about the potential to reach their target audience can be made. (Curran et al. 2021, p. 26) When planning the advertising campaigns, advertisers choose the advertising networks by the targeting and advertisement options that platforms provide. Targeting can be based on location, keywords, context, time, and other options. (Fourberg et al. 2021, p. 22) According to Greenwood (2021), the online advertising space is dominated by Facebook and Google. An overview and the benefits of each will be covered in the following sections.

3.3.1 Facebook advertising

According to Curran et al. (2016), social networking sites account for 20% of the ads people view online. These sites can be used to gain new customers, promote products or keep in touch with existing customers. Facebook offers a low-cost advertising opportunity to the target segments with high reach and frequency. (Curran et al., 2016, p. 26) Ertugan (2017, p. 135) explains that Facebook has created an advertising medium that initiated a new era of advertising. The platform allows faster communication between businesses and individual customers. Facebook offers a competitive advertising system that charges advertisers for a click or impression, based on the settings that have been chosen (Fowdar, 2013, p. 76).

Facebook allows companies to connect with more people more often than a traditional approach like a phone call, email or meetings would allow (Fowdar, 2013, p. 76). Advertising on Facebook can be done through a business version of their site, which lets users create their advertisements that will be posted on the social network. Facebook allows advertisers to target users by location, gender, age, relationship status, workplace, job title, interests, and more. It will provide an approximate number of people that will be reached based on the advertising targeting that the advertiser has chosen.

The advertising options on Facebook include Facebook, Instagram, Messenger, Audience Networks, and Whatsapp platforms, these are called placements on Facebook. Facebook offers multiple ad formats when creating an advertisement. Advertisers can use photos, videos, stories, messenger advertisements, and more to reach the target audience with the desired message. (Facebook, n.d.)

The users that see the advertisements can reshare them on their profiles, creating an opportunity for more people to see those advertisements, which generates additional reach for the advertiser for free. (Curran et al., 2016, p. 28) Polls are available in advertisements to obtain valuable information and feedback from users that can be used for improved customer service and improved products or services (Fowdar, 2013, p. 75). Electronic word of mouth on social media provides a notable amount of information for new products, where buyers can share information that will directly affect their purchasing decisions (Ertugan, 2017, p. 135).

Facebook provides information on advertisement performance, including statistics like the number of clicks received and cost per click (CPC). CPC is the average amount user will pay for each click their advertisement receives. (Curran et al., 2016, p. 28) This and other valuable data about the audience, and product sales help advertisers make more informed decisions when building or optimizing advertising campaigns for better and improved results (Facebook, n.d.)

3.3.2   Google advertising

Google offers paid advertisements that appear in search results on their website with the use of Search ads or advertisements that appear on other websites through the Display advertisements on the Display Network (Wordstream, n.d.). In 2019, according to Greenwood et al. (2021, p. 5), Google handled more than 5 billion search requests per day. Advertisers pay to show up at the top of this search network. Display Network is a collection of third-party websites that have partnerships with Google and agree to serve ads from Google. (Wordstream, n.d.)

Google search ads appear when a user types a keyword or phrase on Google search. This is where Google will display relevant results as advertisements at the top or right part of the search results. Google Ads users pay for the advertisement only if a user clicks the advertisement. (Za & Tricahyadinata, 2017, p. 62) Every time user searches on Google, an auction occurs. This auction balances the amount of money bid against an automated quality score given by Google. In the situation of low-quality scores or irrelevant advertisements, Google can also decide to not show any advertisements in the search results. (Graham, 2017, p. 4) The main difference between organic and paid search results is that organic results are placed according to the relevance to the search term. The algorithm chooses the results that could be the most useful for the user and places those results first on the page, there is no payment involved in the organic search result case. (Claesson & Gedda, 2018) Online search is the dominant vehicle for digital advertising says Greenwood et al. (2021, p. 5).

Google Display advertisements are based on Google Display Network. This is a network of sites and apps that Google has an agreement with, where the site or app receives revenue for allowing Google to advertise on it. Display ads offer the opportunity to control the branding of a company as they are not limited to only text. Display ads use a combination of logo, text, videos, and photos. (Baum,

2019) Not only do the Google Display advertisements offer access to a wide variety of site, but it is also specifically built to target the exact target audience on all these sites. When the user performs a Google search, in less than a second Google can tell which of the billions of pages are the most relevant to whatever was typed. Google uses the same system to match advertisers with web pages across the Internet for placing Display advertisements. It can put the most relevant ads in front of the target audience. (Booth & Koberg, 2012, p. 21) The advertisement targeting can be very broad or very specific. Some of the targeting options which are available to advertisers are targeting a geographic location, users who are looking for a product or service (custom intent audiences), users who have specific interests, and also users who have visited specific websites. (Baum, 2019)

By combining search and display advertisements businesses get the best of both worlds. This way it is possible to target the users who are searching for something specific with search advertising, but also reach those people when they are browsing their favorite websites like blogs and daily news with display advertising. While display advertising is harder to measure, it can help in achieving the branding and positioning goals for the company and increase the likelihood of users clicking on the search advertisement. (Booth & Koberg, 2012, p. 10)

3.3.3   Youtube advertising

In 2005 Youtube shared the first video on the platform. In 2019 users were sharing more than 5 billion videos per day on Youtube. (Firat, 2019, p. 142) According to Cooper (2020), one of the main reasons brands advertise on Youtube is because it is the world's second most popular website, with 2 billion visitors per month. The ever-evolving interface of Youtube has brought out many different features like paid subscriptions, live streams, and monetization. It is identified as being more distinguished from other, more traditional broadcasters with the social experience contributing to the high popularity of the platform. With other technological advancements, there has been an increase in product promotions through social media platforms like Youtube. (Sebastian et al., 2020) Youtube offers a vast reach and effective targeting options that make it a valuable platform to reach the customer at any point across the buyers' journey. (Cooper, 2020) While the advertising opportunities are enormous, Youtube offers businesses a way to educate, communicate and entertain their customers and target audience. Businesses can create their own Youtube channels and create content that they wish to put out.

Youtube and certain brand channels are good sources of news updates. The increasingly growing popularity of Youtube has allowed Youtube users to educate themselves with the videos available on Youtube, before making a purchase decision. Consumers find value when they look into a product and company's page, making the customization of advertisements on Youtube enhance the impact of advertising. Positive purchasing behavior, engagement, and time-saving opportunities determine customers' perception of the product or service shown in the advertisements favorably, while intrusive advertising would lead to the opposite effect. (Sebastian et al., 2020)

Youtube offers four types of ads: skippable in-stream ads, non-skippable in-stream ads, video discovery ads, and non-video ads. Skippable in-stream ads play before or during a video, with a defining feature that those ads can be skipped after watching them for 5 seconds. In turn, non-skippable ads are ads that do not have a skip button at all. These ads last up to 15 or 20 seconds, depending on the region of the advertiser. Discovery ads function similarly to Google search ads. These ads show up alongside organic search results, so if the advertisement video looks more relevant than the organic results, the user can opt to watch the advertisement video instead. Non-video ads appear on the right-hand sidebar of the Youtube website, those ads include an image and a text with call-to-action. (Cooper, 2020)

In a 2012 study Pashkevich, Dorai-Raj, Kellar, and Zigmond analyzed the performance of different Youtube advertisement types. The effectiveness of in-stream ads with skippable ads was compared. The study found that the in-stream advertisements gathered more impressions, while the skippable ads likely improved the viewing experience for the users and the efficiency for the advertising company. Giving users the choice to watch or skip the advertisement had a positive effect on the advertisement returns. (Rodriguez, 2017, p. 15) According to Sebastian et al. (2020), the performance of advertising depends on attention, interest, desire, and action model, in this model action is the desire leading to the purchase. This is a similar model to the one covered in the customer's journey section. The number of views helps to understand the amount of attention a video has got. The number of likes on an advertisement validates the interest and appeal in the messaging, video, or audio of the advertisement. (Sebastian et al., 2020)

2015 study compared the effects of video length, position, and context on brand recognition. Authors found that different positions of the ads have different performance and brand recognition

results. This could lead to a conclusion that some placements are superior to others, but due to the small size of the study such a conclusion can not be made with certainty. (Arantes et al., 2018, p. 3) Individuals tend to engage with videos and channels that provide more cues, as it eliminates the chance of misinterpretation. People are seeking channels that satisfy the need for communication and their needs, therefore advertisers need to determine those needs and base the advertisement materials on clues provided by users to increase the likelihood of an effective advertisement. (Rodriguez, 2017, p. 34)

3.4   Conversion rate optimization

Conversion rate optimization (CRO) is a heuristic and optimal manner to increase sales or improve conversions (Groskops, 2019). The conversion rate can be calculated by dividing the number of conversions by the total number of visitors and multiplying it by 100. (Hotjar, n.d.) Optimization is the process of increasing the percentage of conversions, typically involving new ideas or elements on the site that can be improved and then validating the changes with testing. This process allows a business to lower the cost of acquiring a customer by getting more value from the visitors and users a business already has. CRO can increase the revenue per visitor, leading to acquiring more customers and growing the business.

Saleh & Shukairy (2010) define conversion rate as the percentage of visitors that take the desired action. Since there are several strategies like lead generation, e-commerce, and others, this definition encompasses most of those strategies and their goals that are measured as conversions and is general enough to use with different media and advertising goals. While there are other goals that companies pursue, for example, brand awareness, conversion rate optimization focuses primarily on campaigns with conversions as purchases or lead sign-ups. (Saleh & Shukairy, 2010, p. 10).

The conversion rate optimization process starts with determining the conversion goals for a web page or app. The conversion metrics depend on the type of business and business goals. (Optimizely, n.d.) Website conversions are based on two categories, micro, and macro actions. Micro actions consist of page views, the number of pages visited, button clicks, and similar actions. Macro actions consist of purchasing a product, signing up for an appointment, or paying for a membership. A set

of micro-actions leads to one macro action. (Soonsawad, 2013, p. 42) The conversion rate improvement process should be more sophisticated than testing different website pages side by side on their performance. A good conversion rate optimization process involves optimization in every area of the sales process and follows a repeatable process to optimize these areas. (Saleh & Shukairy, 2010, p. 21)

The conversion rate optimization process starts by pinpointing the conversion goals for the company. The next step includes identifying a value for each of the conversions. This encompasses purchases, sign-ups, and also e-mail newsletter sign-ups, for the most effective optimization process a company needs to discover the value for all the actions a user could take on the website. (Saleh & Shukairy, 2010, p. 22) An effective practice for conversion rate optimization that should be taken into consideration when optimizing the website or app is understanding the questions visitors have in mind when clicking a website. Other usability components that impact conversion rates are convenience, site navigation, site speed, accessibility, and ordering/paying process. (Soonsawad, 2013, p. 43)

3.5   Measuring success

The effectiveness of advertisements portrays how well a company's advertising accomplishes its goals. Ad effectiveness evaluation by nature is a research activity, balancing the cause and effect relationship between the efforts and the results. (Kaur, 2019, p. 104) Measuring advertising campaign effectiveness is one of the greatest challenges marketers and marketing agencies face. Advertising is usually a large part of a company's marketing budget. New platforms and advertising formats without clear measurements and tracking opportunities complicate this matter even further. (Estevez & Fabrizio, 2014, p, 1) Much effort has been devoted to evaluating advertising effectiveness in the past and still today by specialists in sciences connected to advertising like psychologists, sociologists, scientists, and others. This research has led to different models that explain how advertising works. (Beriain, 2013, p. 1017)

A definition of advertising effectiveness can be described as the extent to which advertising ends in the desired effect. Measurement of advertising effectiveness is difficult as advertising interacts with multiple parts of the business such as marketing, financial, environmental, and others. Some

advertising has effects that are not measurable with quantitative measures. (Ertugan, 2017, p. 134) Advertising can be measured on recall and recognition measures. Measurement metrics can be as simple as seeing the advertisement and reading it, from which a researcher can calculate the market share and the attention to a specific advertisement over others. A study based only on those two metrics, seeing the advertisement and reading the advertisement was done by Starch in 1932. However, this was challenged later by Gallup, since, from his perspective, the subjects of this study could have lied about seeing or hearing the advertisement to please the interviewer or through confusion with a similar brand, or previous ad of the same brand. Therefore, assuming only those two metrics puts trust in the truthfulness of interviewees and their answers. (Beriain, 2013, p. 1018) Thorough measurement of advertisements includes measuring the effectiveness of advertising campaigns, advertising copy, and the effectiveness of individual media. (Kaur, 2019, p. 105)

Characterization of digital advertising platforms suggests two main advertising goal types. One type involves increasing brand awareness and building the long-term brand equity of the company. The other one is focused on generating a short-term direct response in form of a purchase, lead submission, or coupon. (Choi et al., 2019, p. 6) Analytics tools like Google Analytics and the reporting section of Facebook ads manager allow advertisers to measure different types of data points that happen after an advertisement is launched. Those analytics tools can be connected with other tracking providers to enable tracking offline events like phone calls. (Booth & Koberg, 2012, p. 23)

The essentials of effective testing, according to Kaur, include establishing communication objectives, using a consumer response model, using pre-tests & post-tests, and using multiple measures. Pre-tests are tests that are concluded at the beginning of the creation and measurement process, and post-tests are conducted at the end of the creation and improvement process or production stage. (Kaur, 2019, p. 105)

4   STEPS TO CREATE AN ADVERTISING STRATEGY

Developing an advertising strategy depends on the nature of the company and its business goals. In small and medium companies, sales or marketing departments can handle advertising, while larger companies set up separate advertising departments to handle all the advertising tasks. Advertising strategy is important to help the team with the creation and communication during the advertising

process. (Samson, 2019, p. 4) Advertising strategy helps with the understanding of consumer decision-making and can guide the advertising manager's decisions about the advertising process. (Reynolds & Olson, 2001, p. 3) A great advertising strategy can help a small business with limited capital develop highly effective advertising campaigns. The advertiser has to turn the idea and plan into an actual advertising campaign that will capture the desired objectives, audience's interest, and attention. The results depend on the advertisement content and also how the advertisement campaign is presented and said. (Kotler, et al., 2005, p. 769)

Setting clear objectives is the first step to creating an advertising strategy. Advertising objectives are specific tasks that have to be accomplished within a specific audience in a set period. Advertising objectives can be informative, persuasive, or reminding by their nature. (Samson, 2019, p. 4) Objectives can help with deciding the advertising platform, as some platforms are better optimized for certain objectives. One could be geared more towards driving traffic, while another to driving conversions. (Responsival, 2021)

The next step in creating an advertising strategy is setting a budget for each product or advertising goal. The advertising budget is the company's estimate of promotional expenditures over a certain period. This budget has to be in line with promotional and marketing goals and budgets. It could vary from spending as much as possible to setting a % of sales as the budget or setting a fixed amount for every period the company chooses. (Samson, 2019, p. 5) Before advertisers get excited about an advertisement idea, it is important to understand if the advertising budget allows the creation and launch of such an advertising campaign. Simple effects and creative material can be surprisingly expensive, some are even hard to make without budget limitations, for example, advertisements involving children and animals. (Sullivan, 2008, p. 119)

Creating a message is a crucial step in advertising strategy. The message ensures that the company can communicate well with its target audience. It is important to keep in mind message strategy (the aim of the message) and execution (tone, style, words). (Samson, 2019, p. 6) Advertisers must study the products they advertise, the more they know about a product, the more likely it is for them to come up with a big idea for selling it. Being lazy in finding the right message can be detrimental to the success of the campaign. (Ogilvy, 1985, p. 12-13)

After crafting an advertising message, the advertisers must decide which advertising platforms will carry the message. Advertising platforms are selected based on reach, media types, and timing. (Samson, 2019, p. 7) Choosing an advertising platform also depends on the demographics. Posting a job advertisement ad on a platform filled with teenagers looking for entertainment has a low likelihood of being a great investment. (Responsival, 2021)

The final step of advertising strategy is evaluating the effectiveness of advertising campaigns. This is where companies evaluate advertising efforts and returns. Advertising results can then be compared to previous results, making conclusions about the effectiveness of advertising. (Samson, 2019, p. 8)

5   RESEARCH METHODOLOGY TOWARD DEVELOPING A DIGITAL ADVERTISING STRATEGY

This chapter aims to apply the theoretical findings and concepts discussed in the earlier chapters, combined with takeaways from MyEMS Google Analytics and Facebook Ads Manager accounts, to create an improved test lead generation campaign. Then the test campaign results will be analyzed. Further testing and advertising strategy recommendations will be made, based on the test results.

This chapter aims to apply the theoretical findings and concepts discussed in the earlier chapters to a real-world situation and generate improved results when compared to the previous advertising efforts. This process will consist of multiple steps, a preparation phase where the company's Google Analytics and Facebook Ads Manager data will be analyzed to pinpoint the potential areas of improvement and disadvantages of the current strategies, a test campaign done on the Facebook Ads platform, and data comparison, to compare the performance of the test campaign to previous campaigns the company was using. After the data comparison, further recommendations on tests, potential improvement areas, and opportunities will be made.

Controlled experiments, such as test advertising campaigns, on digital platforms online have become a common practice done by digital marketers and advertisers. It allows specialists to find more effective strategies or elements based on real-world data from the advertisement or analytics platforms. The conclusions from tests are often guiding the development of the company's products

or services, as well as strategies for acquiring potential clients if tests are done for lead generation campaigns. This is a data-based approach to providing more value from the existing efforts and improving them. (Dmitriev, et al., 2019, p. 1)

The author hypothesizes that adjusting the advertisement strategy based on the data analysis and website analytics leads to increased lead generation results and more sales opportunities for the sales representatives of MyEMS Oy.

5.1   Data analysis on Google Analytics and Facebook Ads Manager

The researcher analyzed data available on MyEMS's Google Analytics account, which collects information from website visitors and their behavior, and Facebook Ads Manager, where information about the advertisement performance is collected. It must be mentioned that the researcher was looking for big-picture opportunities for changes in the advertisements, not the website itself, as the researcher had the opportunity to only test the advertisement process, not the website development and improvement process.

Campaign	Delivery	At sett	Results	Reach	Frequency	C
MyEMS Tampere Studio | Free Week Pass 2021 …	Off	M.	— Website Lead	46,354	4.88	
MyEMS Tampere Studio | Free Week Pass 2021 …	Off	7..	48 [2] Website Leads	27,476	3.82	
MyEMS Tampere Studio | Free Week Pass 2021 …	Off	7..	25 [2] Website Leads	14,889	2.69	
Leads | FB Signups | Free Week Pass	Off	7..	11 On-Facebook Leads	8,726	3.96	F

Figure 7. MyEMS Facebook lead generation advertisements 01.2021. – 12.2021. (Facebook Ads Manager)

A noticeable indication of possible audience exhaustion, when the audience gets tired of the same advertisement promoted during a longer period, was in the Facebook ads manager campaign naming section (Figure 7). The main offer has been a free week pass throughout the past 12 months. Based on available results on Facebook, the frequency of those campaigns varies from 2.69 to 4.88. Frequency is the average number of times a person in the target audience has seen the ad. According to a study done by Facebook (2016), a weekly frequency of 2 was able to capture the biggest increase in purchase intent. In MyEMS's case, the frequency is noticeably higher than that, to be more precise, the average person saw the advertisements 3 to 4 times.

Another possible indication of audience exhaustion is the same offer throughout the period (01.2021 – 12.2021). An assumption can be made that the advertisement has reached ad fatigue. Ad fatigue is the situation when the audience becomes overly familiar with the offer and ads and gets bored of them (Wozney, et al., 2019, p. 5). As the active campaigns at the time of this research had been continuously pushed on social media platforms for 12 months, with minimal downtime and the same offer, it indicates possible audience exhaustion.

According to the data from MyEMS Google Analytics (Figure 8.), the new user count has declined. Less new users are visiting the website, making it more challenging to convert those visitors into new potential clients. A conclusion can be made that the current advertisements are reaching the same people repeatedly, instead of reaching new people that have not heard about MyEMS services yet. It could be argued that it is a normal occurrence as MyEMS is a local business, so the amount of people that could potentially train at the studio is limited to the local people in Tampere. However, the rate of decline is too rapid to be explained by the natural drop-off alone (from 1000 new users at the beginning of the year to around 550 users at the end of the year).
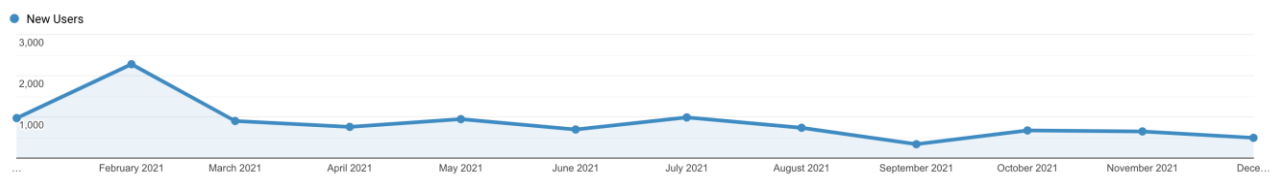

Figure 8. MyEMS Google Analytics, New Users. (Google Analytics)

Another data point that helps with adjusting the message and targeting for the advertisements, is the demographics of website visitors. According to Kaspar, Weber, & Wilbers (2019, p. 11), demographically targeted ads attracted more attention to the advertising banner, which advocates the use of more personalized advertisements. In MyEMS's case, most of the website visitors are women. And the most popular age is 25-34, with each next age group up to 65+ having slightly fewer visitors (Figure 9). This is an important takeaway from the website data, as it clearly shows what demographic groups are the most common visitors and who do the advertisements need to entice the most.
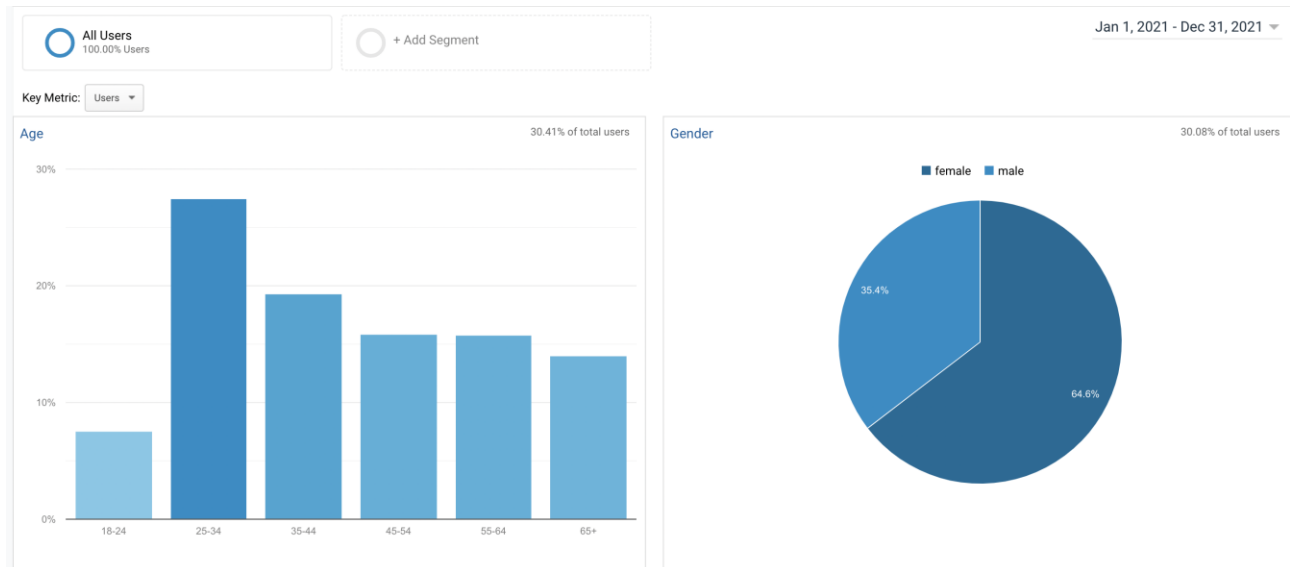
Figure 9. MyEMS Google Analytics, Demographics. (Google Analytics)

5.2   Test campaign

To put the content and ideas covered in the literature review together with the analysis from the previous chapter and test them in a real-world situation, it was decided to run a test campaign. The company agreed to a 14-day long test campaign, with changes adjusted for the most cost-effective lead generation campaigns. A budget of 375 euros for the span of two weeks was agreed upon. The main metric that would decide the success of the test advertisement campaign was the number of conversions.

The researcher's goal was to adjust and optimize the advertising campaign to maximize the results in those 14 days. To get noticeable changes in 14 days, the researcher had to focus on the main advertisement building blocks, instead of thinking about the advertising strategy long-term. This approach was focused on short-term results rather than choosing the most viable advertising strategy for the longer term. The target audience, advertising message, advertisement creative, and optimization in the Facebook Ads platform were the variables available for the researcher to change for this test campaign. The advertising campaign was launched only on Facebook and Instagram platforms.

The first change noted in the previous chapter was a change in the advertisement message to the target audience. Instead of offering a free week pass, a different approach was needed. In this test

campaign, the author opted for a limited seat fitness challenge message, to entice scarcity in potential customers. The general idea of losing something (a potential seat in a successful fitness challenge) is often a better driver of action. Prospects are more inclined to act when there is a risk of losing something instead of gaining it. (R. Cialdini, 2021, p. 244)

The advertising creative was created with the most common website visitors in mind (women 25-64), as covered in the previous chapter. A decision was made to use photos that show a variety of women, from different age groups and ethnicities to show that MyEMS has a variety of clients.
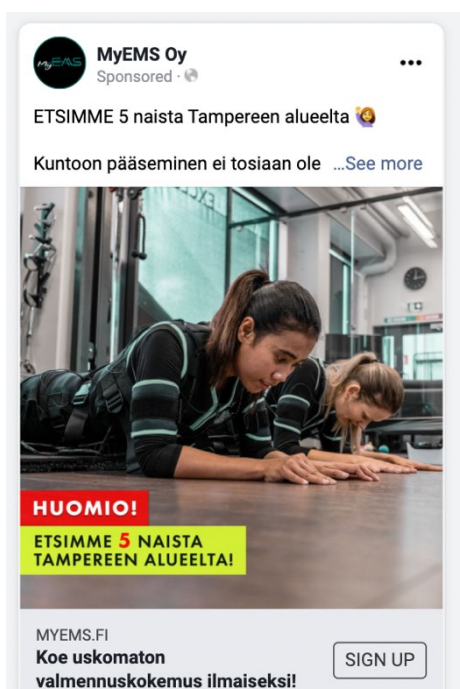

Figure 10. Test campaign preview (Facebook Ads Library)

In the Facebook ad manager, leads was chosen as the main advertising objective (Figure 11). Running a Facebook campaign using leads objective tells the platform to specifically optimize the campaign for the lead submission action, in MyEMS's case – lead form submission. Facebook will show the advertisements to more users that are like the people who are performing the desired action. Then the Facebook tracking pixel will feed data back to the database every time an action is completed. Facebook will take this data, intelligently analyze it and use it to generate more actions like it. (Krance, Marshall, & Meloche, 2017, p. 57)

Figure 11. The MyEMS test campaign advertising objective. (MyEMS Facebook Ads Manager)

Based on the research done in MyEMS's Google Analytics account, the author chose to use location targeting for 13 miles around the MyEMS location. For demographic targeting, the gender chosen for the test advertisement campaign was women, and the age range was set to 26 – 56.

Figure 12. Test campaign audience settings (MyEMS Oy Facebook Ads Manager)

For the test campaign, a weekly frequency cap of 2 was set, to align with the best practices from Facebook and create the most cost-effective advertisements, eliminating the risk of reaching ad fatigue and facing the same issue of too high frequency with the new advertising campaign, as covered by the researcher in the previous chapter. The frequency cap allows adjusting the number of times a person will be shown an ad in the set period. It also forces Facebook to reach more people instead of reaching the same people more times, resulting in a bigger reach for the advertisement campaign. In theory, it should help MyEMS with reaching new users and improving the decline of the new users, as discussed in the previous chapter.

5.3   Test campaign results

The test campaign was active from the 12th of February to the 26th of February. Figure 13 shows the advertising campaign results, compared to the previous period. The author analyzed the data from the advertisement metrics discussed in the previous chapter to compare the results.
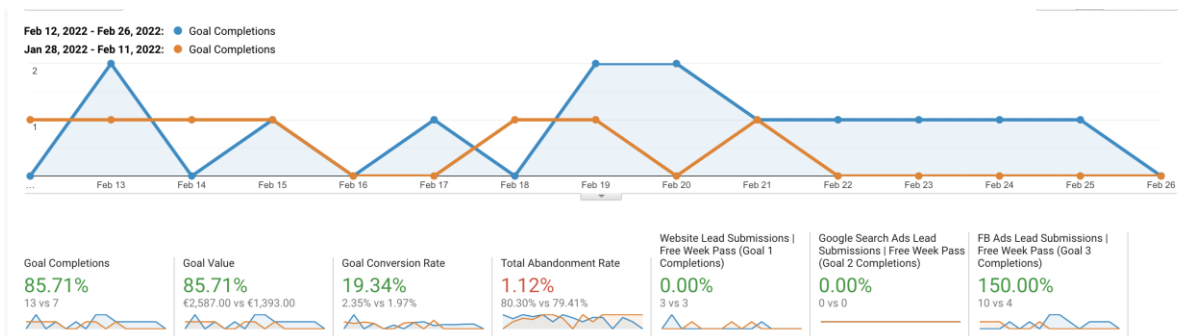

Figure 13. Test campaign conversions data comparison (MyEMS Oy Google Analytics account)

The total conversions (new potential client sign-ups) were 13 in this period. Compared to the previous period, the lead count increased by more than 85%. The lead count is the number of people signing up for an offer at MyEMS, those are sales qualified leads. Generating more of those leads is the main advertising goal of MyEMS. The lead sign-ups were manually tested and qualified as valid sign-ups to avoid the risk of counting automated or bot sign-ups and skewing the test campaign data. Figure 13 also shows that 100% of the increase was from Facebook advertisements (150% increase), while the website lead submissions that were done organically stayed at the same level during the testing period.

The conversion rate increased by 19.34%, from 1.97% to 2.35%. The conversion rate is how many of the page visitors did the desired action of filling out a lead form and submitting it. A higher conversion rate can be caused by one of two factors – an improved landing page or better-targeted ads. Better targeting in ads will lead people that are more likely to convert to the landing page. The researcher believes that it was due to better advertisement targeting in this case, as the landing page was not changed between the two campaigns. According to a report from Smithbury (2016, p. 6), the average conversion rate across 14 industries was 3.9%, with the healthcare industry at 5.6%. Compared to the industry average and overall average rate, the MyEMS conversion rate is still substantially lower, even after the test campaign improvement. The researcher believes the

company would benefit from the optimization of the landing page experience and further testing for better advertising campaign efficiency.

The results of the test campaign were promising, but one must keep in mind the relatively short period of the test campaign and possible external factors influencing this test. A better judgment on the effects of the changes done in the test campaign could be made if the campaign was left to run for a longer period and continuously optimized, while also tracking the external factors that could influence the campaign results, such as the Covid-19 case count, seasonality, other marketing campaigns, event appearances and more.

6 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the research and test results, the author recommends developing a new advertising strategy for MyEMS. A new and detailed advertising strategy will serve the company both in the short and long term, as there previously have not been complete advertising plans, only separate campaigns. The purpose of an advertising strategy is to ensure that the company's advertising efforts are up to date with the latest data and consider various external factors and the target market groups. A long-term advertising and marketing plan could be created based on the data collected with analytics and advertising platforms tools.

Based on the literature review, the analytics data review, and the test campaign results, the author suggests 3 recommendations for improved advertising and the basis of the new advertising strategy. These recommendations are suggested to test and potentially implement in the company's advertising strategy if found successful and profitable by the company.

First, to diversify the strategy and reach potential customers on more platforms. Diversifying advertising strategy to multiple different advertisement platforms will allow reaching more potential clients that could not be reached by using only digital advertising platforms and tools. This should improve the "new users" data metric covered in chapter 5.1 and provide a more consistent flow of well-diversified traffic. Traditional advertising methods are worth considering if the cost and potential client acquisition costs are profitable for the company and fit in the media budget. While online advertising media has been portrayed as more cost-effective, the literature offers mixed

insight, for example, the click-through rates have decreased drastically in social media ads, according to Eisend (2018, p. 666). If this trend continues, at a point traditional media could become a more cost-effective way to reach the target audience MyEMS is trying to reach.

Second, a recommendation to introduce new offers more often. The previous advertisements were frequently pushing the same offer repeatedly, reaching a frequency of up to 4. As soon as the offer was adjusted slightly in the test campaign, the advertisements had an improved efficiency. The researcher recommends periodically adjusting and testing different offers and customer responses to them, then optimizing based on the best working ones, and repeating testing further until a clear framework has been found. Examples of new offers would include summer special deals, Christmas deals, and family memberships.

Third, focus on the target audience more narrowly. The author suggests gathering existing client data, comparing this data with Google Analytics data, which was analyzed in chapter 5.1., and using it to the company's advantage. MyEMS could tailor the advertisements even more to this audience. If it turns out to be only women, 25-55, then, for example, some solutions could be using advertising material with women, speaking as the target audience speaks. Also, using the problems and pain points that the target audience faces could improve the advertising results. Creating personally relevant online advertisements has proven to be a more effective advertising effort, according to Kaspar (2019, p. 12).

Finally, testing has been proved as a crucial part of creating an effective advertising strategy for the long-term marketing success of a company. Every change to the advertising strategy should be tested before creating a full advertising strategy around it. This will create an opportunity for the company's marketers to make conclusions with a better-proven record of working things that will also provide a track record for future ideas, tests, and advertising implementations when new opportunities arise.

7   CONCLUSION

This thesis work aimed to identify the potential areas of improvement in the advertising strategy of MyEMS Oy, a personal training studio based in Tampere, Finland, by using the industry practices for

improved results and performing a test advertising campaign. The test campaign was conducted for 14 days and created with adjustments and takeaways from the literature review, industry specialists, and website analytics using the Google Analytics tool.

As discussed in the theoretical part of this thesis, digital marketing offers an opportunity for small and medium businesses to reach their potential customers in a more cost-effective method than using traditional media. However, the appropriate method for each situation must be found and accompanied by a correct advertising strategy. To determine the right advertising strategy, the company needs to evaluate the target audience, and understand the customer's journey and the available digital marketing tools while performing continuous testing.

In the case of MyEMS Oy, the main advertising goal is lead generation. While the company had been using digital advertising for years, the advertising results recently had been declining, until the launch of this test campaign. The company was not using a concrete advertising strategy, but rather launching separate campaigns with different messages and ideas. A test campaign with improvements based on this research was launched and generated better results than the previous advertising campaign in the same period.

The results of the test campaign and the author's recommendations include using various offers for different times of the year, leveraging seasonality in the business, diversifying the digital advertising channels, focusing more on the target audience, and tailoring the advertising strategy to the demographic group by creating more personalized advertisements.

Due to the nature of digital marketing and advertising, and the short duration of the campaign, the author suggests adopting a test and learn approach. This approach will provide more data and offer an opportunity to make better conclusions over a longer period. It will also help to determine the external factors' influence on the advertisement performance. The author recommends continuing the process of testing new advertising tweaks, strategies and continuously analyzing data to step-by-step achieve better and more consistent results over weeks and months. Also, there would be a significant benefit from creating an advertising strategy with clear advertising goals and personalized messages to reach the potential customer more efficiently.

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