MARKETING A WEDDING PHOTOGRAPHY BUSINESS

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HÄME UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES

International Business-koulutus   Tiivistelmä

Kirjoittanut	Tuomas Mikkolainen	Vuosi 2022
Työn nimi	Marketing a Wedding Photography Business	
Ohjaaja	Sajal Kabiraj	

Tiivistelmä

Opinnäytetyön aihe on "häävalokuvausyrityksen markkinointi". Opinnäytetyön tavoitteena on tutkia mitkä tekijät vaikuttavat häävalokuvaajan valintaan ja jäsentää markkinointisuunnitelma T. Mikkolainen Photography -yritykselle.

Opinnäytetyön teoriaosuus koostuu STP-markkinointistrategiasta ja aiheeseen nähden relevanteista ja ajantasaisista näkökulmista yritysten rooleista osana eri sosiaalisen median alustoja. Tietolähteinä on käytetty laajasti kirjallisuutta sekä suomeksi että englanniksi. Tutkimusosuus on toteutettu yhdistäen kvalitatiivisia ja kvantitatiivisia menetelmiä. Kvalitatiiviseksi menetelmäksi valikoitui teemahaastattelu, joka toteutettiin kahdelle alalla työskentelevälle valokuvausyrittäjälle. Kvantitatiiviseksi menetelmäksi valikoitui kyselylomake, jonka vastaajina toimi hääaiheisten Facebook-ryhmien jäsenet. Kyselylomake keräsi 228 vastausta.

Tutkimus osoitti, että kuluttajien ostopäätöksiin vaikuttavat voimakkaasti hinta, persoonallisuus, tyyli, kokemus ja laadukas portfolio. Markkinointi on kohdennettu sosiaalisen median alustoihin, missä tavoiteltava asiakassegmenttikin on. Haastattelut sen sijaan näyttivät, ettei todellisuus ole niin mustavalkoinen mitä kyselylomakkeen tulokset antavat ymmärtää. Yrityksen ei tarvitse kohdentaa markkinointiaan vain sosiaaliseen mediaan ollakseen kannattava ja menestynyt. Suosittelut ja asiakaskokemukset ovat aivan yhtä tärkeitä. Yrityksen markkinointi erityisesti yksittäisiin henkilöihin kohdistuvissa yrityksissä rakentuu huomattavasti yrittäjän oman persoonallisuuden ympärille. Erottuakseen kilpailijoistaan yrityksen onkin korostettava markkinoinnissaan kilpailijoista erottavia tekijöitä kuten asiantuntijuus, ammattimaisuus, verkostot ja tyyli.

Avainsanat	Markkinointi, häävalokuvaus, Nappari, henkilöbrändi
Sivumäärä	33 sivua ja liitteitä 3 sivua

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International Business   Abstract

Author	Tuomas Mikkolainen	Year 2022
Subject	Marketing a Wedding Photography Business	
Supervisors	Sajal Kabiraj	

Abstract

The subject of this thesis is marketing a wedding photography business. The aim of the thesis is to investigate what attributes affect how wedding photographer is chosen by the consumers and conduct a marketing plan for the company T. Mikkolainen Photography.

The theoretical framework of the thesis consists of theory of STP-marketing strategy, relative and up to date views on social media and companies' role in those platforms. The author has used broadly different sources of English and Finnish literature. The research was conducted by mixing qualitative and quantitative methods. For the qualitative method the author conducted an interview of two photography business owners in the wedding industry and for the quantitative method the author chose to arrange a survey questionnaire for the targeted wedding themed Facebook groups. The survey was answered 228 times.

The research showed that the affecting attributes in consumer´s decision making focuses heavily on price, personality, style, experience and a quality portfolio. Marketing is aimed towards social media platforms, where the targeted segment is. Interviews on the other hand showed that the real-life experience is not as black and white as it seems. Having a profitable and successful business does not require the business to only target its marketing towards social media. Testimonials and referrals are as important as any other. With single entrepreneur businesses, marketing focuses on highlighting the personal characteristics of the entrepreneur. To differentiate from the competition, the marketing should lean on what is different. Characteristics like professionalism, skillset, networks and style.

Keywords	Marketing, social media, Wedding photography, Wedding industry
Pages	33 pages and appendices 3 pages

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Appendices

1   Introduction

The wedding industry in Finland has been a constantly growing business. The wedding industry is now days seen as being influenced by America and Europe and through social media the influences are spreading faster than ever. Historically Finnish weddings have been influenced greatly by other northern countries like Norway and Sweden and even though weddings now days may feel a bit too much with all the decorations and expensive investments made towards "only one day", the wedding has always been something that people have made an effort for and invested a lot. Already in the 1800´s weddings were by their looks much like today. Amazing dresses, good food, beautiful settings were not lacking. Only the resent past has changed the atmosphere towards more minimalistic due to the recession and war in the 1900s but the 21st century may be changing that trend. (Amoriini.com, 2019)

The wedding industry has also grown to be bigger and bigger and by so more businesses have entered the market. Due to social media the world is more connected than ever and large platforms are "the melting pot" of influence where everything is coming together and businesses are finding creative ways to separate themselves from the competition and stand out. The thesis aims to investigate and arrange a marketing plan for the company T. Mikkolainen Photography. T. Mikkolainen Photography focuses providing photography services for businesses and consumers. The company is heavily focused on wedding photography. The research focuses on researching the company´s market segment and providing answers to where the company should focus its marketing.

The research question for this thesis is: "What factors affect the decision process of how a wedding photographer is chosen?" and due to focusing also on marketing aspect of the business, sub-questions were also needed:

- Is social media marketing as important as it seems?
- Does the company have any competitive advantages?

The research and its marketing theory focuses on STP-marketing strategy. The research is gathered through a mixed methods approach combining both qualitative and quantitative research methods. For the quantitative research a survey was used that was aimed towards Finland´s largest wedding themed groups in Facebook. For the qualitative research the author interviewed some entrepreneurs in the wedding industry whose business is focused also on wedding photography. The aim of the interviews was to find if there was any real-life correlation with the survey results and business actions.

At the end of the thesis the author applies the VRIO framework by Barney (1991). The VRIO-framework aims to highlight the business's skills and assets that create a competitive advantage in the correspondent market segment.

2   Theoretical methods

2.1   Marketing

Without competition marketing would not be in such a high role and seen as valuable as it is. Through business activities money has a high role also in marketing but in the end of the day marketing is not competition about money rather than competition of people's time and attention. Marketing as a word was invented in 1960 was not including same activities and characteristics as now days. (Rope, 2000, pp.17-18)

American Marketing Association defines marketing as follows:

"Marketing is the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large" (AMA, 2022)

As defined, marketing sets the customers in the focus in every marketing action. Marketing focuses to solve the needs and demands of the customers, creating a demand and

willingness to consume and same time fulfilling the needs, wants and demands of the customers by offering new products and promoting the existing products. Marketing has also a role of regulating the demand of the markets and direct them to the wanted direction so that is beneficial to the customers and the company. (Bergström & Leppänen, 2009, pp.23-25)

2.2   STP marketing Strategy

Segmentation, targeting and positioning. -strategy is something that can be seen as one of the most common and successful marketing strategies. Lynn (2011) states: "STP marketers attempt to identify those market segments, direct marketing activities at the segments which the marketers believe that their company can satisfy better than their competitors". As the name hints, the strategy is divided into three sections. Segmentations being perhaps the most fundamental. Who are your customers and what are their main characteristics? Segmentation in STP begins from the premiss that market consist number of mostly homogenous groups. Each with different needs and desires. (Lynn, 2011)

The focus in STP is to target the whole investigation and marketing actions just to that specific market segment. Segment commitment. By focusing on just one segment has its benefits but may leave out some other valuable customer segments out of the occasion. Still this segment commitment is important as the segment groups can be opposed to each other and may exclude themselves by their needs. (Lynn, 2011)

Figure 1 STP Marketing: Segmentation, Targeting, Positioning (Skirmantas, 2021).

2.2.1   Segmentation

There are numerous ways to do a market segmentation. There is hardly any given answers in which customer segment to aim at. This means that businesses must perform their own studies and investigations to find their respected customers. Market segmenting can be done dividing markets by their geographical, demographical, psychographic or behaviour characteristics. (Martin, 2011, pp.16)

Geographical segmentations are done based on location. This segmentation is based on the belief that people´s consumer behaviour will be different based on their location and cultural differences in their area. Geographical differences may vary greatly and so brans may have different troubles in different areas (Martin, 2011, pp. 16). One example of this would be Starbuck entering Australian market which ended up being unsuccessful due to geographical differences (Sinha, 2021)

Demographical segmentations are based on gender, age, ethnicity, occupation etc. By this companies can tailor their brand voice and marketing strategies towards certain customers. This can be a great advantage for a company to have deeper knowledge of their segmentations as the competition has gotten stronger and stronger due to markets being

globalized (Martin, 2011, pp.16). Great example would be when youthful clothing brand wants to target their marketing towards satisfying the needs of 18-25 -year-olds.

Psychographic segmentation divides groups based on their social class, lifestyle or personality characteristics. Psychographic segmentations are regarded as psychology of a prospect consumer. One great example of a add utilising personality characteristics can be seen in car company Honda´s add whereby strong emotional image the company tries to evoke certain emotions what are seen as their targeted customer personality characteristics. (Armstrong & Kotler, 2007, pp.169-170)

Armstrong and Kotler (2007, pp. 170-173) introduce behaviour segmentation as one the customer segmentation tools. Armstrong and Kotler state that the behaviour segmentations investigate to divide customers into groups by their knowledge, attitude, uses or responses to a product. The two also mentions examples of how customers can be divided by the occasion (when the customer gets the idea to by certain product or when they use it), benefits sought (what benefits does the customer get when choosing the product), users status (nonusers, ex-users, regulars, potential users and first timers), usage rate (light, medium & heavy use of the product) and loyalty status (how much or how often the customer buys the products of certain brand). (Armstrong & Kotler, 2007, pp.170-173)

So, what are the requirements for effective segmentation? Segmentation to be efficient the market segment must be measurable, accessible, substantial, differentiable, actionable. The measurable so that the segment is big enough in size so there is enough data to be measured. The segment should be accessible so that it can be reached and served. The segment should also be large enough that there is "point" to serve it. So, the segment should be largest homogenous groups as possible. The segment must also be differentiable so that there is specific character differentiations to be see so that the response is different to marketing mixes and programs. The segment should also be actionable so that effective programs can be designed to attract and serve it. (Armstrong & Kotler, 2007, pp.170-173)

2.2.2 Targeting

After the market segment or segments are determined the company must decide which and how many of them, they would like to target. These segments should be in line of the company´s own goals and long-run objectives. The company must evaluate in which segments it can produce the highest value and competitive advantage.

Bergström and Leppänen (2009, pp.158) determine marketing strategy where segments are targeted using concentrated or differentiated marketing strategies. Using concentrated marketing strategy, the company focuses its efforts into targeting specific type of segment. This kind of strategy is used commonly by smaller businesses as the resources may be more limited than bigger companies. Businesses using concentrated marketing strategy can success and gain large market share in that specific segment and thrive. Globalization has open doors to smaller businesses attract and reach even larger masses and by so manage to "pull through" even if the local market segment shrinks. (Bergström & Leppänen, 2009, pp.158)

On the other hand, differentiated marketing strategy aims to attract and serve multiple segments specifically. This strategy is used mostly by bigger companies where there are resources to tailor their products and marketing programs to that specific segment. Bergström and Leppänen (2009, pp.158-159) call this strategy "the perfect segmentation". The risk using differentiated strategy is that the company fails to gather enough data of their segments to determine if the segments are worth of the investment and how their product compares with the competition. (Bergström & Leppänen, 2009, pp.158-159)

Figure 2 Different marketing strategies (Langford, 2022).

Armstrong and Kotler (2007, pp.178-179) wider the strategies even further introducing micromarketing and undifferentiated marketing strategies. These two strategies are places on the two extremes. In undifferentiated marketing strategy the company aims to serve the whole market through commonality. Attracting the whole mass is somewhat difficult as the competition may be more focused on smaller segments and by that are serving their customers better and offering better products. (Armstrong & Kotler, 2007, pp.178-179)

Micromarketing strategy is used when company wants to serve and tailor their product for individuals on the segment. Micromarketing can be divided into two separate approaches: local marketing and individual marketing. In local marketing the marketing strategy approach is to offer services and promotions to specific area, neighbourhood, cities or even single stores. Using this companies can target specific demographics. Micromarketing from a brand point of view can be challenging as the brand voice and image may become too altered from the original and marketing can be very costly when trying to reach specific are or demographic. Still the efforts are usually outweighing the drawbacks as the company can serve their retailer better who are the "first line" customers. Individual marketing strategy aims to serve - as the name states – individual. Companies can offer tailored and custom

products to fulfil the individual needs people have. Examples of individual marketing would be car companies offering full customization of their cars specifications and shoe companies offering to stylize and tailor their shoes. Individual marketing can also be referred as "one-to-one marketing" or "customized marketing". In this one-to-one marketing having a relationship with the individual customer is very important unlike in marketing for masses. (Armstrong & Kotler, 2007, pp.181, 183)

2.2.3   Positioning

Third part of this STP-strategy is positioning. It includes perhaps the most important factor: product´s positioning. Companies must decide what kind of position they want to have in their market and that is something companies do not want to leave into the hands (minds) of their customers. Even if the final image and position is determined by them. Positioning process begins from:

- Identifying the competitive advantages
- Choosing the right competitive advantages
- selecting a position strategy

(Armstrong & Kotler, 2007, pp.185-186)

Bergström and Leppänen (2009, pp.166) refer to Marketing mix which is the result of this positioning process where company has determined their key advantages and chosen the strategy, they would like to inform their segment. Company´s so called "basic competitive advantages are product offering, pricing and delivering (Bergström & Leppänen, 2009, pp.166). From there the key is to differentiate your company from the competition and these can be done through analysing the service, product, channels and people or image. Is the product better due to its design, price, quality, safety? Is the service best there is? Are the people working in the company highly trained professionals or does the company train their employees well? Are the delivery channels sufficient and fast? Does the company have unique and distinctive brand image? (Armstrong & Kotler, 2007, pp.186-187).

Marketing mix by Bergström and Leppänen (2009, pp.168) are referring to 5 Ps which shares a lot of similarities to Armstrong´s and Kotler´s (Armstrong & Kotler, 2007, pp.186) (see figure 3) with the exception of adding fifth P to the list. People. Bergström and Leppänen

highlight the importance of employee wellbeing and great customer service in achieving competitive advantages (Bergström & Leppänen, 2009, pp.166).
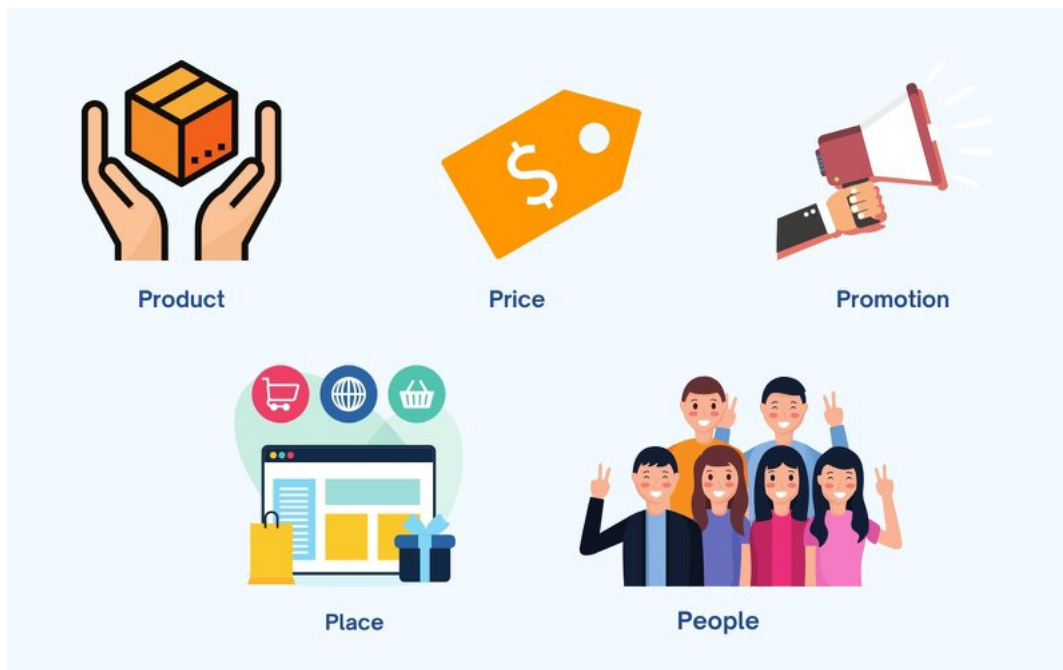

Figure 3 5 Ps of marketing (Totempool, N.d.).

When the company has investigated and researched and eventually found out they key competitive advantages, they are able to make the decision which of them they want to focus on with their marketing. Some say it is more beneficial to focus on just one key differentiator rather than trying to promote every one of them. Armstrong and Kotler (2007, pp.188) present that company´s competitive difference is relevant if it satisfies the following:

- Important: it has high value to the customer
- Distinctive: It has something that others do not.
- Superior: The difference is superior compared to alternatives
- Communicable: It is communicable and visible to the customer
- Preemptive: the difference is not easily copiable
- Affordable: Customers can pay the price difference
- Profitable: The introduction of the difference is profitable

(Armstrong & Kotler, 2007, pp.188)

When individual customer asks, "why should I buy you brand?", should the company have its answer ready. In order to answer this question, companies should have their value proposition figured. For example, Volvo´s value proposition is safety, reliability, roominess and styling for the price higher than average. The positioning strategies vary from "more for more", "more for the same", "The same for less", "less for much less" and "more for less". Easiest way to visualise these strategies is to base them on the actual price of the product. Every company offers different levels of products and for example luxury usually cost more and the assumption is that the customer will get more. Winning concept is of course "more for less" as it is the most beneficial from the customers point of view. Companies may find it hard to stay on that proposition though. Offering more for less may not be beneficial in long run as it is hard to maintain and stay competitive in. Therefore, companies should choose their positioning strategy regarding their market segment and communicate their message as thoroughly as possible to that segment. (Armstrong & Kotler, 2007, pp.188-192)
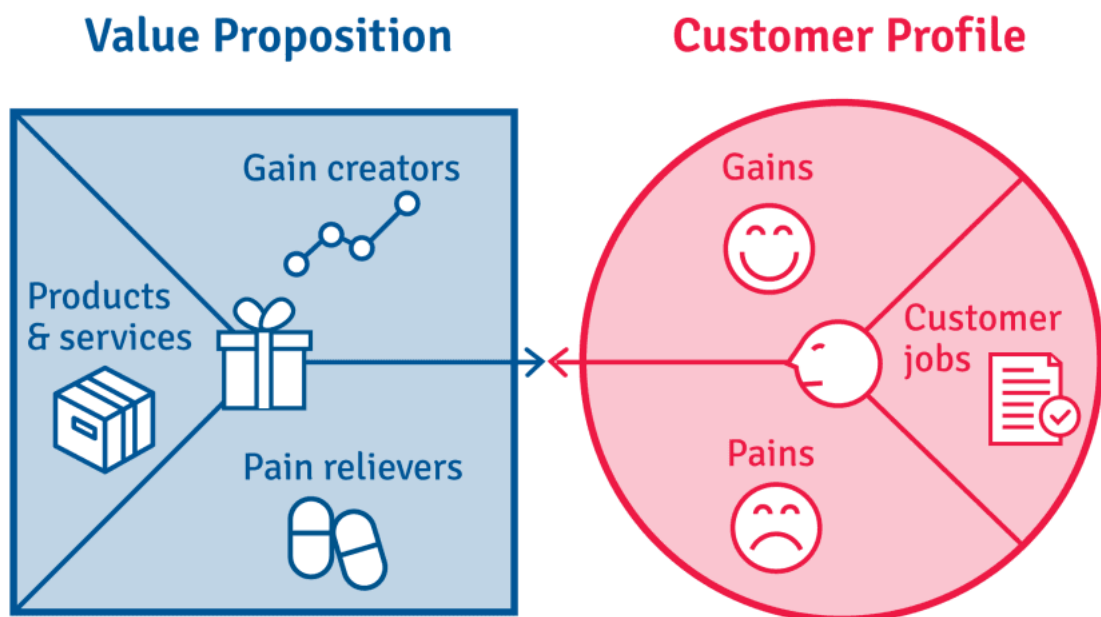

Figure 4 Value proposition figure (B2B International, 2022).

2.3   Social media

2.3.1   Definition of social media

Social media is, as mentioned, social by its character. Social media is formed by platform where people can interact and create media into it together. Without people and without content, there is so social media. The content must be created by platform users and is providing some kind of value to other users. The interaction between people in those platforms. happen through the functions platform provides. The functions may be commenting, "liking" (thumbs, hearts etc.) or other various ways what are characteristic to that specific platform. (Korpi, 2010, pp. 10-11)

Social media has opened a lot of possibilities for the consumers and for the businesses. Social media has changed the communication and interaction and it has changed from businesses' monologue towards dialog with the customers. Through social media (Instagram, conversation forums, Facebook etc.) businesses can communicate their message and brand values to the customers and highlight the value provided. Same time customers can take part in the product management and development and so give businesses valuable information that can be considered unaltered and non-corrupted. (Ahonen & Luoto, 2015, pp.26-27)

2.3.2   Businesses in social media

So, what are the benefits for business of being in social media? That depends greatly on the business itself and if the segmentation process has showed that the customers are using the chosen social media. Being in the social media just for the sake of being there is not beneficial business wise at all and can take resources from some other much more beneficial marketing platform. Still being in social media can be beneficial for you and your customers as you may find important characteristics and advantages that separate you from the competitors or you may get the most valuable feedback that could not to be find in

anywhere else (Korpi, 2010, pp.12-13). To interact and establish relationship with the segment is something that social media is a great tool for. Company can introduce products and answer some important questions users and possible customers may have and by doing so push the purchase decision towards their direction (Korpi, 2010, pp.145-149).

One example which may speak towards being part in social media is the number of users the platform has. In December 2020 Instagram had over 2 million users in Finland (NapoleonCat, 2022). This fact would argue that having an online presence is important. Still as social media presence should not be treated as one- and only-way place to do marketing. Including it as part of other marketing activities is much more beneficial. Social media presence should be seen as a horizontal (acting together with other activities) and vertical (support other business processes) (Korpi, 2010, pp. 212-213).

Purchase process has also changed through social media and the reasoning, research before the decision has become more and more social media based. Testimonials and referrals have become more important than ever, and social media is something where the information is spreading faster than through more conservative routes (local newspaper, tv and radio). You could say that because of social media there is no lack of data. The challenge is to filter all the data into beneficial business actions and deep understanding of the chosen segment. Researcher have been able to investigate social media interactions to find real-life user cases and causal consequences between the reasons leading to purchase decision. (Ahonen & Luoto, 2015, pp. 27-30)

3 Methodology

3.1 Overall aims and approach

The aim of this thesis was to organize a marketing plan and perform a simple marketing research to find out important key factors that affect how the segment bases the purchase decision. T. Mikkolainen Photography is a one-man company that is focused on Photography services. Company´s main field of expertise is documentary wedding photography. The

wedding industry is constantly crowing business and the wedding industry has changed majorly in the last 20-years as the amount of money put into single wedding day has increased drastically (Yle Uutiset, 2015).

Same time as the industry itself has grown, the number of companies and businesses in the industry has increased. The circumstances have changed and so is the differentiation from the competition has become even harder. As a new player in the wedding industry and among the photographers, investigating the customer segment is something that will determine a lot of the provided services and characteristics. Researching the market is something that helps you modify the services and create more value to your customers (Buzzbee, 2017).

3.2 Marketing plan

When the career is just getting started and the entrepreneur is taking their first steps, the common question is "where I can find my clients?". 10 Business Tips for New Entrepreneurs in 2021 article Nicole Martins Ferreira points out something that is important to take notice before rushing into those customer attraction actions. Something that really resonates is their first tip: Build like the romans. The Romans build something that has lasted ages and ages and what some of us still admire and travel to witness first hand. Of course, when talking about businesses and especially when being a single person business, we should place this tip to actual context. What are the things I want to do for a long run and build my business around? These questions might be to core question you have to answer before any actions. Then becomes the questions of finding the niche and what are the question you want to answer with your provided service. (Ferreira, 2020)

After investigating what is the core value and core business model, comes the marketing plan. Marketing plan is the core ingredient in the company and for any entrepreneur. Marketing plan determines the key aspects how the marketing strategy and goals are achieved. There are no certain requirements for it, and it may vary greatly among different size of companies and businesses.

When arranging your marketing plan, the process should give answers to these questions:

- Details about your business' current situation
- Who is your target market?
- What are your goals for the time period of the plan?
- What marketing tactics will you use to reach your market and goals?
- How much will it cost?
- How will you execute your marketing plan?

(DUERMYER.2019)

These are not simple questions and sometimes it takes research, time, money and try an error to find the correct answers to these questions. The marketing plan goals were to find out what are the highest valued key aspects for wedding photographer and is there a need for other kinds of photography services in field of wedding photography. One important question to get answered is what marketing platforms to use when wanting to reach the correspondent customer segment.

Questions	Your business' current situation	Who is your target market?	What are your goals for the time period of the plan?	What marketing tactics will you use to reach your market and goals?	How much will it cost?	How will you execute your marketing plan?
Answers	The Business has had steady growth and every year the amount of customers have increased. The business has been seen and aknowledged within the competition and old customers have generated good repitaion and the word of mouth- has generated more customers.	Target market has been and is men and women at the age of 20-35.	Prepare for the 2020 season and increase the "personality" in social media platforms.	Personal and genuine content inside Instagram and Facebook. utilizing the tools inside apps and Facebook´s marketing tools.	30$/month.	During sommertime utilizing weddings as a behind the cenes material and invest some time to create meaningfull and informational targeted adds.

Figure 5 Marketing Plan

4   Research methods and subjects

4.1   Subjects

The subjects for the survey were chosen by focusing on large groups with similar characteristics and focuses. Ease of use and shareability were major factors that determined social media platform Facebook to be the chosen tool to reach the wanted segment. From Facebook the researcher chose two of the most popular industry-based groups: "Häät 2018" and "Häät 2019" – Facebook groups. Together these groups combine over 10 000 members.

The subjects for the interviews were chosen by focusing on seasoned professionals in wedding industry and who are all sharing the market.

The researcher contacted both group members and interviewees to introduce the topic and openly informed the subjects about how the data was to be used and why this kind of data were collected. As the researcher is also in the industry, the interviews the subjects were given every possibility to withhold from saying anything they kept as a "business secrets" and did not want to share.

4.2   Mixed methods

The data for this thesis were collected by mixing quantitative and qualitative methods. Even though qualitative and quantitative research methods are seen separate from each other by their research questions and premisses, they still provide important material to given subject and are complementing each other´s data. Still, they should be treated as separate methods. (Katainen, 2009, pp. 47)

Using both qualitative and quantitative research methods, the higher priority in this study is given to quantitative method as it focuses on the chosen segment and highlights the factors that eventually determine what tools are applied when gathering the marketing mix. The qualitative research method is still extremely valuable as it highlights the real-life experiences from other business owners and their chosen marketing mix in relation to the survey results. The interviews also give great insight of new business owners how to enter the market and what practical and "easy" steps to take. The strength in qualitative research is the ability to turn phenomena into understandable form. (Katainen, 2009, pp.47)

4.2.1   Qualitative & quantitative research

Quantitative research method highly focuses on numeric data. Quantitative research considers numeric data to be value free, reliable and by so truthful and accurate. Quantitative research method is kept as systematic, precise and analyses the causal relationships between variables. (Brennen, 2013, pp. 3.)

The results from quantitative research are gathered by giving every variable a numeric value. To investigate the results even further the values are arranged into numeric tables and figures where causalities and phenomenon are to be seen in a way that is easier to understand and interpret. (Vilkka. 2021. Määrällinen tutkimusmenetelmä käytännössä chapter. Kyselylomakkeen taulukointi paragraph)

Qualitative research method investigates chosen research questions through interviews, writings and every other way people are free to express their thoughts and emotions on. Qualitative research method focuses to find meanings and explain them through communicating with others. When quantitative research focuses on denotative definitions of words, but qualitative research focuses rather those connotative meanings of chosen "keyword". For example, word mother is defined as a female parent in quantitative methods and in qualitative methods the word mother is often in relation to care, tenderness, compassion and love. (Brennen, 2013, pp. 13-15.)

4.3   Survey

A survey is perhaps the most common way to utilize quantitative research. Survey as a word implies it to be standardized as it is uniform, homogenous by its nature as every person who answers fills the survey are asked the questions in very same way as everyone else. Surveys are also great way to gather information when the focus group is scattered. Some disadvantages using surveys is the possibility for lack of respondents and due to delay and

postponed replies to the timetable for the research may be affected. (Vilkka. 2021. Määrällinen tutkimusmenetelmä käytännössä chapter. Tutkimusaineiston keräämisen tavat paragraph)

A survey was used for quantitative method and for qualitative method the researcher used face-to-face interviews. The survey was made using Likert-scale where there are 5 options from "irrelevant to relevant" in every question (McLeod. 2019). The 11 questions were chosen based on the business owner´s own observations and by interviewing the other business owners and their observations of the industry and the customer segment.

The survey´s goal was to find out what aspects have the highest value of importance. Survey conducted 11 questions and 7 of them was about the important attributes and 4 of them were about the platforms to reach the client base. The questions were planned to be simple, yet informative and there was only 1 to 5 option to answer. 1 being the least meaningful and 5 being the most meaningful. The lack of in advance made options gave the respondent freedom to choose without any guiding or steering to wanted direction (Vanette.2015). From the survey the gotten data was translated into tables and means and averages to get the understanding how to results were divided across the questions.

The survey was sent through Facebook. Facebook was chosen for a platform purely because of the easiness of it and as there was seen an active community of photographers and wedding couples. The survey was posted in two of the biggest wedding groups in Finland at the time. The Groups were chosen by the size and year. The groups were "Häät 2018" (over 6 000 members) and "Häät 2019" (over 4 000 members) to get the most up to date information. The respondents did not have the possibility to alter they answers afterwards.

The survey respondents answered anonymously, and no contact information were collected. Two out of the eleven questions were literal, and the respondents could write their answer at their own words. Survey was arranged to be anonymous and the there was no information collected in the process. Survey was open for responds from 9.4. to 23.4.2019 and in that time the survey was filled 228 times.

The Survey questions were:

A) What attributes affect how the wedding photographer is chosen?

1.   Photographers' personality

2.   It is important that photographer is local

3.   Pricing

4.   Style

5.   Experience

6.   Added services (f.ex. prints, albums, Save-the-date -session, drone photography, videography)

7.   Is there something to be added?

B) Where do I search photographer?

1.   Instagram

2.   Facebook

3.   Google/internet/ other search engines

4.   Some other?

4.4 Interview

To investigate if the actual survey results are seen relatable by the professionals in the wedding industry, the interviews were aimed towards wedding photographers in Finland. One interview brought insight how the industry differs in Australia and highlighted some important factors that may help photographer to gain some footing in wedding industry in general.

Brennen (Qualitative research methods for media studies, 2013, pp. 32) highlights the researcher's ethical responsibility to be careful to make fully clear to each person interviewed that they understand why the interviews are held and how the results are to be used (Brennen, 2013, pp.32). Before the interview began the interviewer introduced also the

survey results so the person had a point of reference and may - if wanting so – reflect their experience and knowledge to those results.

The interviews are constructed using semi-constructed method where the theme and questions are predetermined but the answers where not districted or guided in any way. In semi-constructed interview method was chosen because its ease of use and as it provides natural approach to the actual interview. Semi-constructed method is giving space for the interviewee to freedom to highlight things he or she found important at the time. (Qu & Dumay. 2011. pp. 246)

Qu and Dumay (2011, pp. 248). point out a interesting and meaningful point using Semi-constructed interview model. The Semi-constructed interview provides a possibility to approach interview from the interviewees perspective and so the interviewer can approach the situation with respect, sensitive and encourage the interviewee to share his or her opinion and knowledge. (Qu & Dumay, 2011, pp. 248).

Schensul & LeCompte (2013, pp.163-166) give three extremely important points to maintain the quality when having a interview:

1. maintaining the flow of the interviewee's story.
2. maintaining a positive relationship with the interviewee; and
3. avoiding interviewer bias.

The researcher outlined the questions as broadly as possible but keeping the focus on the marketing aspects and customer reachability. By doing so the interviewer tried not to narrow down the possible answers and succeed in giving enough room for the interviewees to form their answers. The questions were:

1. Talk about your journey to become a wedding photographer.
2. What were the key factors that helped getting clients then and now?
3. How do they see the wedding industry? Has there been any changes during their career? Any future predictions?
4. How has covid 19 affected their business.

From the interviews the researcher gathered mind maps where the interview was themed into categories and groups. and from there the interviews were afterwards translated into mind maps and word clouds to highlight the keywords of every given answer and theme.

5   Research results

5.1   Survey Results

The results gotten from the survey proved to be in line with the research premises and assumptions made by the researcher and the business owner. Real life experience has proven that the major social media platforms are in the centre of the marketing mix when reaching the targeted customer segment. The results show somewhat clearly that Facebook, Instagram and Google or other search engines are almost head-to-head in the competition. Instagram had the most deviation in the answers (1,20) and Facebook and Google had much lower values (0,95 & 0,80). The average deviation number shows that most of the answers are sat on one option. Facebook being in the key role reaching the market segment is understandable as the survey was sent using their services and definitely affected the result.

Even though the high deviation number and the upper hand Facebook having as a platform for the survey, Instagram still managed to score the most answers options 4 and 5 (figure 6). This would argue in the favour of Instagram being part in the marketing mix. Of course, Google and other search engines have huge role also and together with others it is stating the fact that the customer segment uses multiple different tools when researching for services. Webpage design, Google AdSense, YOAST and other search engine optimizers are sure well in order when wanting to increase the presence in search results.
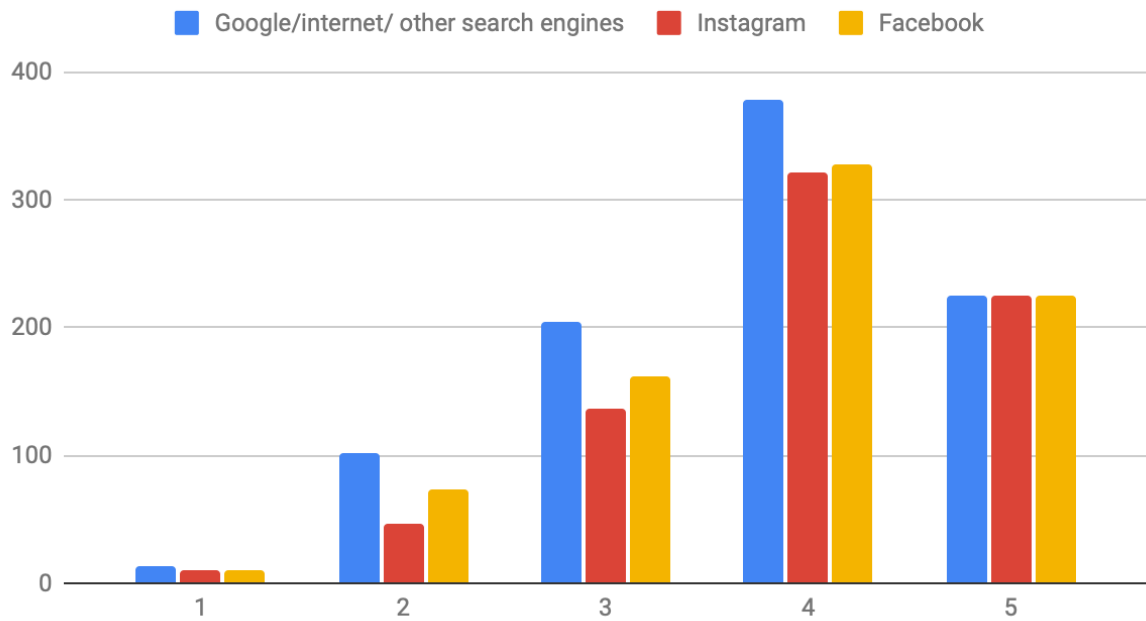
Figure 6 Where do I search a photographer?

The survey highlighted also the importance of planned and well executed market positioning. Pricing, geological placement, character and personality and photographic style are something that are extremely important, and the survey highlighted those factors sufficiently. As the figure 7 shows, the answers are leaning towards values 4 and 5 which highlight the importance of well-balanced pricing. Bergström and Leppänen (Yrityksen asiakasmarkkinointi. 2009. pp.257) advice to be caesious when setting the price of the service. The price of the product has role in setting the value also from the customer´s perspective and it has a huge impact when positioning the business in the market (Bergström & Leppänen. 2009. pp.257). Photographic style, character and personality are also having great impact on the decision making.
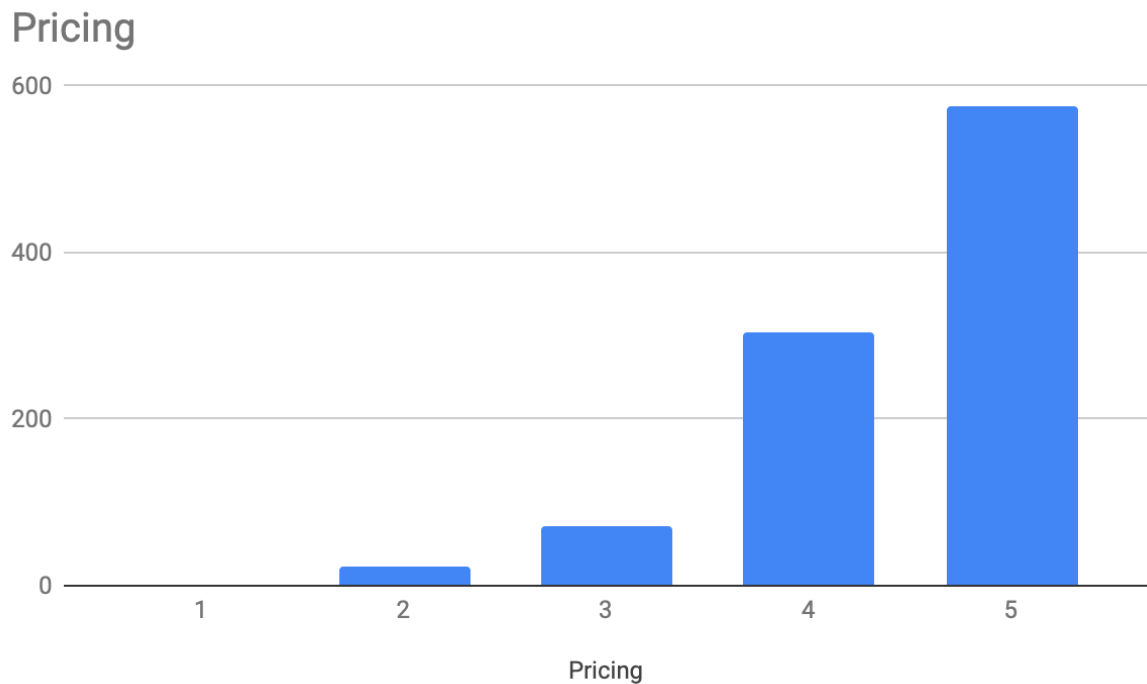
Pricing

Figure 7 Pricing

Photographic style and the artistic characters are commonly in the centre of the business. When working in artistic and creative field the business is highly focused on personality and the abilities of a single person who represents everything in the company. These factors are also very important to the survey focus group. As expected, over 80% of the respondents value the style very highly (figure 8). Photographer´s personality and character can also to be seen major factor as the businesses brand image can be seen being hand in hand with the entrepreneur's personality and character (Timothy, 2009). Mean value being 3,9 it can be seen having impact on the decision making but the number is still surprisingly low.
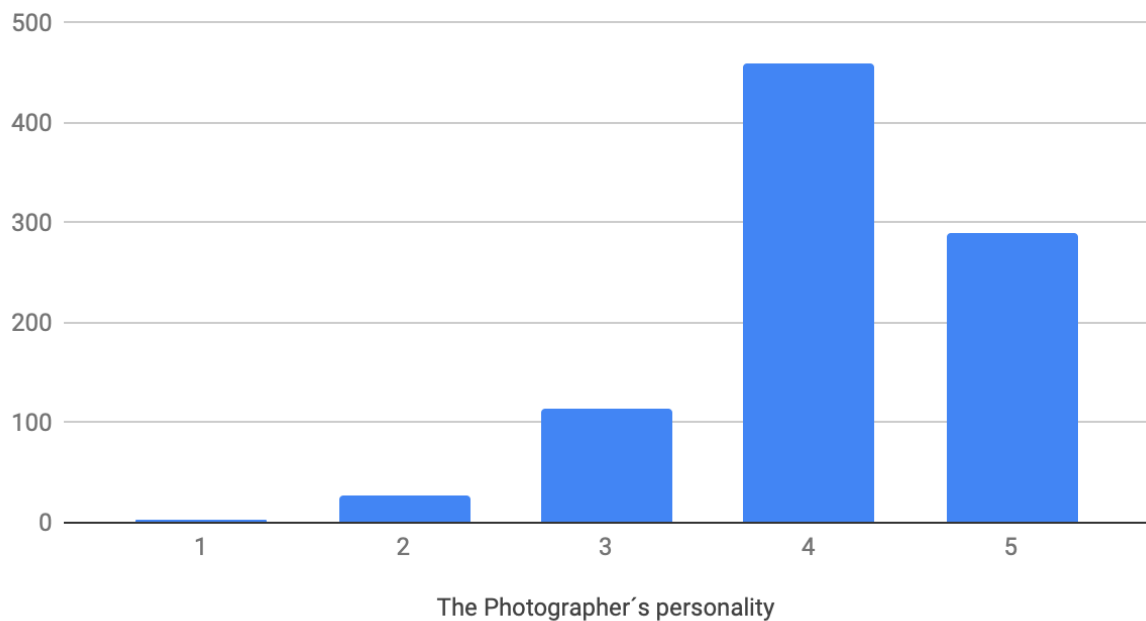
The Photographer´s personality

Figure 8 The Photographer´s personality

One thing that stands out from the survey results is the question about photographer being from the local area and the question about photographer's experience. You would argue that people want the photographer to be local as he or she may know the area best and to have the most expertise. The mean being 2,7 and average deviation value being 1,12 one of the highest values in the survey results, proves that locality is something that cannot argued being an advantage. Regarding the experience and "professionalism", the survey results showed also to be is considerably lower than expected. In the figure 9 the mean is 3,5 which could be interpreted signalling market having room for new upcomers and entering the market could be made easy. The market is open nationwide and there is no need to target only locally.

Experience

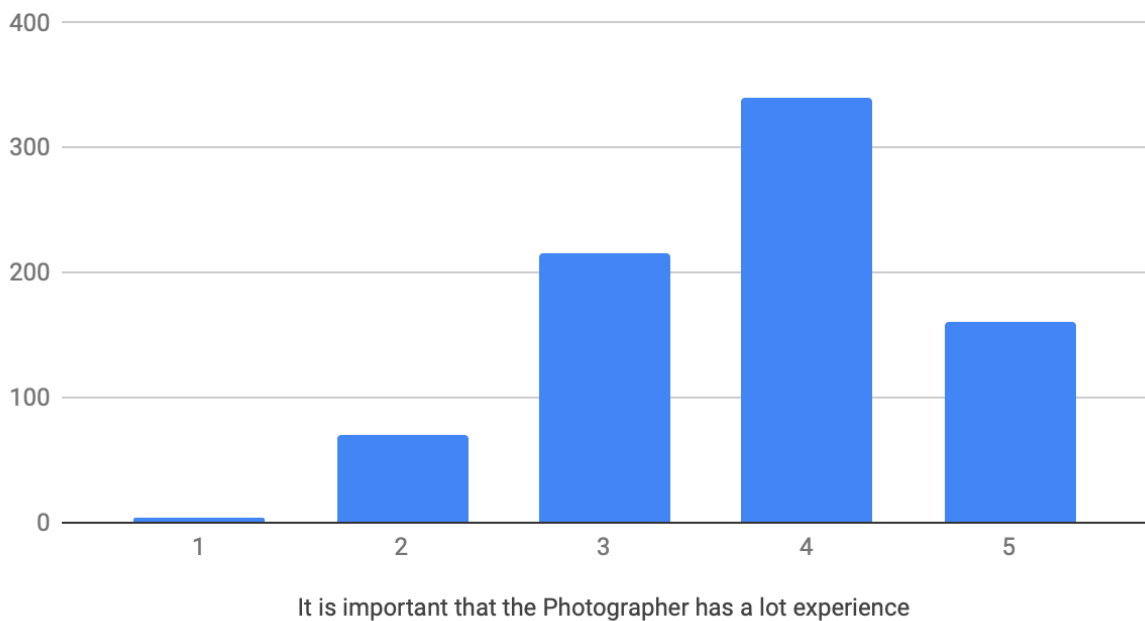It is important that the Photographer has a lot experience

Figure 9 Experience

The survey included two questions where people could add something if there was something to add for important factors or how the photographer is found. In the question 7 was asked if there was something to be added in the attributes that matter the most in decision making. The summary of the 33 answers can be stated in three main points:

1. Quality of portfolio
2. Clear webpage design
3. Statements of credibility.

People want to see that the photographers has taken photos in variety of situations and surroundings and people want see testimonials from other couples. In the question 11 were asked about what some other sources couples use or used to find their photographer. The clear majority of 55 respondents mentioned word of mouth. This is something what only quality work will enhance as it is difficult to invest money in recommendations and end of the day ita can only be done by encouraging people to give feedback and highlight those in the corresponding social platforms.

5.2   Interview Results

The interview results where interesting. The premiss was that there would not be too much variation between the results gotten from the research, but it seems that the biggest differences are to be seen in personal level of every business owner. Even though the market is highly saturated, and the competition is high, there is room to find your customers in various routes.

Forbes lists in their article (10 Great Ways to Attract New Customers To Your Small Business. 2020) how to find and attract customers. The real-life examples seem to combine a lot of these pointers. The first and second interviewee share perhaps the most common way to get into wedding industry as a photographer: through friends and relatives. Photographing weddings is not the first field you would imagine working in. Both interviewees mentioned that they did not see themselves as wedding photographers but through determined friends they ended up taking their first job and as you say, rest is history.

After dipping the toes into wedding industry and getting hooked to the high pressure, stress, creative freedom and extremely rewarding work as wedding photographer, there comes the question of how to find those own clients. The survey answers this question from the customers perspective (p. 8) and point out the obvious. Instagram, Facebook and Google are platforms where people tend to look for their photographer. In December 2020 Instagram had over 2 million users in Finland. From those 2 million users over 50% were people age between 18-34 (NapoleonCat.2022.) This fact would argue that having an online presence in these platforms, is important.

As Henderson states in his article (The Importance of Social Media Marketing.2020), being in social media is important for every business. Social media gives businesses great platform to speak out their story and build an audience easily and cheap compared to more traditional medias. Media is also easy way to study your customer segment and their needs. Same time studying the competitors doings through their social presence is somewhat practical. (Henderson.2020)
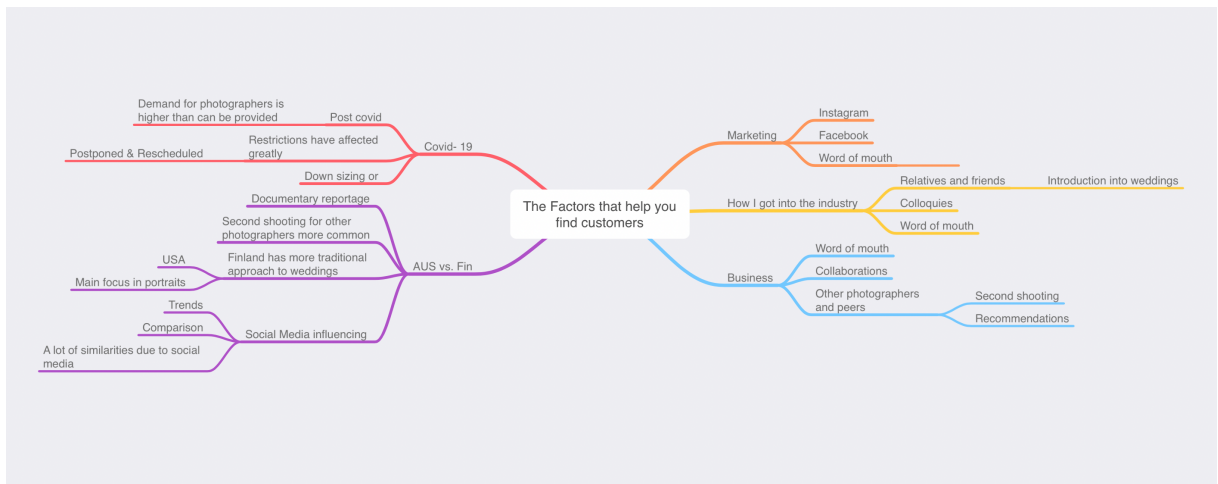
Figure 10 Interview one

In the interviews the first interviewee (Figure 11) mentioned that for her the customers find her through word of mouth and recommendations from her colleagues. Instagram and other social media platforms have less significant role. On the other hand, the second interviewee (figure 12) mentioned that for him Facebook and Instagram are the biggest customer attraction tools. Both interviewees have a strong social media presence in Instagram especially. Their view and approach to it is different and their activity in that platform has changed through their career. In the beginning it has been important tool for building an audience and make the consumers aware of their services. After building fairly impressive following it has been easier to maintain the audience and through the relationship with their followers, they have been able to build stronger and more known brand in their field of work.
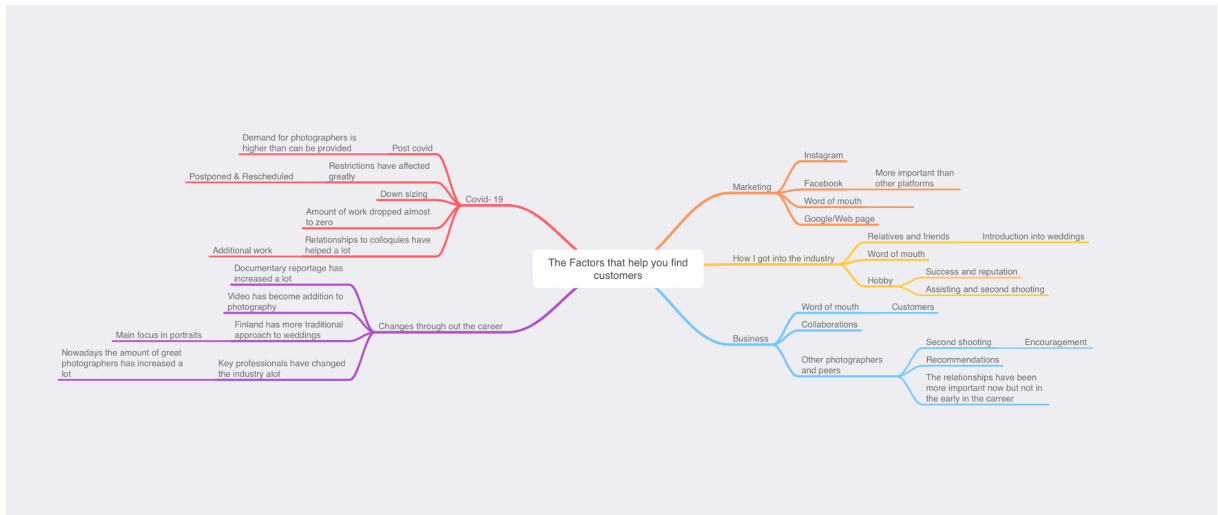
Figure 11 Interview two

Just out of pure incuriosity the author made small investigation in Facebook group made for wedding photographers in Finland. There photographers can share their experiences and share photos and find more suitable photographers for their clients. The main premiss for this little questionnaire was to find how big role Instagram or other social networks have.

Figure 12 Facebook questionnaire

In this questionnaire (figure 12) the main premiss was that majority of answers would state Instagram being the most important. Out of 80 answers the majority went to recommendations from previous clients and peers (34 out of 80). Secondly became Instagram and with even votes was personal web page (Google and other search engines) with 21 answers. Only 4 votes went to Facebook which is huge statement about the fact that Facebook – in this context – does not provide much value for business owner.

Google having 21 votes (figure 12), being even with Instagram, has high impact for customers reaching entrepreneur´s website and finding their business from the web. Figure 10 also points out that the segment does use search engines to find their services -regardless how social media thriven the industry is. Search engine optimization (SEO) is something that is extremely important and something that every business owner should have slight understanding about. To be successful the website does not have to have amazing SEO, but it is something that helps. Important factors to great SEO are building the right keywords to the site (Digital Marketing Institute.2021). Google gives great guide to finding those keywords (here) and there are numerous keyword tools on the web (for example Wordstream). From those places people can find some relevant keywords together with their search volumes. Other important aspects when doing great SEO is having valuable and relevant content on the website. Without great content, there is only bones without meat (Digital Marketing institute.2021)

For the interviewee´s Google did not have noticeable impact on their marketing. Focus is on the social media platforms and web page acts as portfolio and platform to showcase their work and introduce customers to their services.

6   Applying the VRIO framework

VRIO (valuable, rare, inimitable, organisational focus) analysis is great way to determine if the company´s resources are creating valuable and competitive advantages to thrive in the market (Barney, 1991). Before arranging resources to the VRIO-table, the company must determine their resources, both tangible and intangible. Tangible resources are ones that

enable the company to perform their business activities, but intangible resources are the ones that tend to separate the company from the competition and create the business advantage the business is aiming for. (Jugdev, 2005, pp. 5-6)

VRIO-framework divides resources and skills into four categories: Value (how the firm is able to react to the environment and it´s threats and opportunities. Rarity (is the resource rare, shared or controlled by only small number of competing firms), imitability (is the resource hard to get and costly to reach) and lastly organisation (is the other processes and procedures supporting the exploitation of these valuable, rare and costly to imitate – resources). (Powalla & Bresser. 2010. pp.5)

Examples of tangible resources would be land, equipment, inventory, machinery, vehicles etc. Examples of knowledge based intangible skills and resources would be customer service, brand image, reputation, artistic style, employee knowledge and so on. To achieve sustainable competitive advantage, the company must have resource or resources that are valuable, rare, inimitable and have organisational focus to maintain the status (Jugdev, 2005, pp. 7).

In the following figure (figure 13) has the company's resources and skills arranged in VRIO framework. The figure shows clearly the importance of intangible resources in "single entrepreneur"-type of business and how the whole sustainability of business advantages is heavily focused on those skills. There is still variation to be found if as every entrepreneur and business owner are individuals. Some lean more towards brand image and some more towards business processes and business model itself.

VRIO - framework

RESOURCES & SKILLS	VALUABLE	RARE	COSTLY TO IMITATE	ORGANISATIONAL FOCUS	COMPETETIVE IMPLICATIONS
CRM	X				Disadvantage
Business processes	X			X	Parity
Product	X			X	Parity
Stable business model	X			X	Temporary Advantage
Brand image	X	X		X	Temporary Advantage
Equipment	X		X	X	Temporary Advantage
Customer focus	X	X	X	X	Parity
Professionalism	X	X	X	X	Sustained Advantage
Diverse portfolio	X	X	X	X	Sustained Advantage
Networks	X	X	X	X	Sustained Advantage

Figure 13 VRIO-framework (Barney, 1991).

7   Conclusion & Recommendations

The study shows that even when there are multiple different possibilities to arrange the business functions, strategies, services and marketing, it all eds up being focusing on few simple characteristics and functions:

1. Quality of the product, its price, brand
2. Business functions must support the end goal and promises
3. Highlight core resources and lean on what resonates and is different

The survey results highlight the importance of quality product and company having reasonable and well-balanced pricing that is competitive but does not signal low quality or harm brand in that way. The survey also pointed out how important quality and experience is. People want to be sure that the experience of being photos taken is pleasurable and nice as being in the centre of attention and focus can make people feel really uncomfortable. Not

forgetting great communication and delivering the promises the business makes to the client is extremely important. Customers want to see portfolio including various photos in different circumstances and surroundings while maintaining your brands visual characteristics. This may not be factor in bigger companies where business is not focused on single person and his or her work but in single person businesses, having good reputation as true professional that delivers quality in every situation, is very important. This reputation is something that create testimonials and word of mouth recommendations both among customers to customer and business to customers.

Performed interviews and the results gotten from them are great insight and encouragement towards seasoned and new businesses. There are multiple ways to have a profitable business and there are various ways to enter the market. The entrepreneur may seek the customers through social media or rely more towards recommendations and word of mouth in their marketing. As Finland is somewhat small country compared to United States or Australia, the professionals and businesses tend to have tight connections between one another. That would argue the importance of having good connections within the industry which can be largely beneficial to businesses. The market in Finnish wedding industry is still large and vast there being plenty of room to enter as the segments are also spread into smaller groups enabling the businesses to target their marketing towards groups that still provide great income without market being too saturated from the competition.

VRIO-framework (Barney, 1991) is a great tool to dive deep into the company´s resources and skill assets that are worth investing in and maintain. VRIO-framework showed that network with other businesses and broad portfolio is something that should be kept in high value, as those are something that will create true competitive advantage in the market segment. On the other note some resources will need some investments and especially time. Building a brand image through appearance and activity in those platforms where the segment is, constantly monitoring other business activities that can be updated to be more automated and sufficient will be beneficial in a long run as those processes will give some time back to be focused on more valuable activities.

As a conclusion, the author suggests the company T. Mikkolainen Photography to concentrate on 5 key functions:

1. Stay present in social media and stay interactive towards possible customers and maintain network with other business owners.

2. Focus on highlighting those aspects that differs the business from the competition in marketing. Marketing should be kept simple and focusing on only the most important factors like style, personality and professionalism.

3. Automate and outsource some business functions to have more resources towards more beneficial actions.

4. Investigate other services the business could provide to the customer and would increase the value.

5. As a single entrepreneur, focus on having good work time balance. Quality of work rather than amount of work.

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Appendix 1: Survey

What factors affect how the wedding photographer is chosen?

This survey aims to investigate what factors affect the decision process of choosing the right wedding photographer.

The research is part of International Business -studies.

*Pakollinen

1. The Photographer´s personality *

Merkitse vain yksi soikio.

	1	2	3	4	5	
No important	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Very important

2. Locality *

Merkitse vain yksi soikio.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not important	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Very important

3. Pricing *

Merkitse vain yksi soikio.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not important	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Very important

4. The photographic style *

Merkitse vain yksi soikio.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not important	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Very important

5. It is important that the Photographer has a lot experience *

Merkitse vain yksi soikio.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not important	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Very important

6. Added services (esim. tulosteet, albumit, Save-the-date -kuvaus, ilmakuvaus, videokuvaus)

Merkitse vain yksi soikio.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not important	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Very important

7. Was something left out?

_____

Where do I search a photographer?

Finding a suitable photographer that ticks all the boxes can be hard and stressful process. The following qustions measure the value of different platforms and search engines in this process.

8. Instagram *

Merkitse vain yksi soikio.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Do not use	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Primary source

9. Facebook *

Merkitse vain yksi soikio.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Do not use	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Primary source

10. Google/internet/ other search engines *

Merkitse vain yksi soikio.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Do not use	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Primary source

11. Something else, what?

_____

Google Forms