Marketing Plan for DigiPoni Oy

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Abstract:

This research aimed to create a marketing plan for DigiPoni Oy (Dipo) which is a fairly new company selling tailored marketing and digitalization services for small and mid-sized businesses. The research question focused on finding out the most suitable digital marketing channels for the case company. The marketing plan was created after interviewing people representing the target audience of the case company and after doing theoretical research including the elements of the marketing mix, a SWOT analysis and the framework for creating a marketing plan by John Westwood (2022). The biggest limitations of the study were the limited amount of time and the small sample size due to the lack of availability of possible interviewees. Regardless of the small number of participants the answers of the semi-structured interview gave the researcher a lot of valuable points to take into consideration when creating the marketing plan. Based on the results of the interview Instagram and Facebook seemed to be the best channels for Dipo to focus on. During the interview, it was also discovered that the target audience finds the price of the offered services and references of the quality of the work also as critical aspects to be presented in possible ads or at least on the company's webpage or social media. A marketing plan was created based on all the collected information during the research process.

Keywords:

Marketing plan, digital marketing, social media marketing, DigiPoni, Dipo

Opinnäyte

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Tiivistelmä:

Tämän tutkimuksen tavoitteena oli luoda markkinointisuunnitelma DigiPoni Oy:lle (Dipo), joka on melko tuore yritys, joka myy räätälöityjä markkinointi- ja digitalisointipalveluita pienille ja keskisuurille yrityksille. Tutkimuskysymys keskittyi selvittämään sopivimmat digitaaliset markkinointikanavat kyseiselle yritykselle. Markkinointisuunnitelma laadittiin haastattelemalla kyseisen yrityksen kohdeyleisöä edustavia ihmisiä sekä tekemällä teoreettista tutkimusta, mukaan lukien markkinointimixin (4P:tä) elementit, SWOT-analyysin ja John Westwoodin (2022) pohjan markkinointisuunnitelman luomiseen. Tutkimuksen suurimmat rajoitteet olivat kiireinen aikataulu sekä pieni otoksen koko mahdollisten haastateltavien vähäisyyden ja hankalan tavoitettavuuden vuoksi. Valmiiksi jäsennellyn (puolistrukturoidun) haastattelun vastaukset antoivat tutkijalle paljon arvokkaita näkökohtia otettavaksi huomioon markkinointisuunnitelmaa luotaessa huolimatta osallistujien vähäisestä määrästä. Haastattelun tulosten perusteella Instagram ja Facebook näyttivät olevan parhaat kanavat, joihin Dipon tulisi keskittyä. Haastattelun aikana havaittiin myös, että kohdeyleisö pitää tarjottujen palveluiden hintaa sekä todisteita työn laadusta myös kriittisinä asioina mahdollisissa mainoksissa tai vähintäänkin yrityksen verkkosivustolla tai sosiaalisessa mediassa. Markkinointisuunnitelma laadittiin kaiken tutkimusprosessin aikana kerätyn tiedon perusteella.

Avainsanat:

Markkinointisuunnitelma, digitaalinen markkinointi, sosiaalisen median markkinointi

Contents

1 INTRODUCTION

A marketing plan for DigiPoni Oy was chosen for the subject of this research because DigiPoni is owned by a friend of the researcher, who said they could make a use of a functioning and well-structured marketing plan. This topic interests the researcher because it works as good practice in learning how to do a proper marketing plan which could be useful in the future. Marketing knowledge in general can be really useful in many jobs and in personal life and knowing how to create a plan for a company to achieve their goals makes those skills useful. By doing this thesis the researcher is not only helping out a friend but also preparing themselves for what's to come after their graduation.

1.1 Problem statement

It is essential for every company to have clear plan of how to operate and to achieve their goals. DigiPoni Oy is a fairly new company and has not been operating for a long time yet. Therefore, they have not had a decent marketing plan thus far and could make use of a detailed and professionally made marketing plan. That is why there is serious need for this research. This is the perfect time to take a deeper look into their needs and goals and plan for their future.

Dipo's current marketing has been quite minimal and nearly non-existent. They have an Instagram page where they have a few posts but there has been quite a long break since they have last updated it. They have also run a few Instagram and Facebook campaigns but there has also been a long break. In conclusion they have not put effort in their marketing recently. When making this marketing plan the goal is to take into consideration Dipo's current situation, budget and their goals for keeping the growth moderate yet continuous.

Research question:
- Which marketing methods and channels are the most effective for the case company?

1.2 Aim of the study

The aim of this study is to create a simple, yet functional marketing plan for DigiPoni Oy that they can use to improve their current marketing strategies and continue to grow. This study aims to research which marketing channels and methods work best for Dipo and are most effective to reach their target audience. It also aims to research the current market situation and eventually provide a list of recommended actions for the company to continue improving their marketing processes.

1.3 Demarcation

Since Dipo is still a small company with a limited budget run by two people they don't have resources for rapid growth and therefore only seek to maintain constant moderate growth and more visibility for their company. That is why this marketing plan doesn't include more costly marketing communication channels, such as television, radio, billboards and telephone marketing. Considering the field of operation and limited resources, this thesis focuses mainly on digital marketing channels such as different social media platforms.

1.4 Definitions

Here are some definitions of words and topics that will be used in this thesis.

Prospect: Prospect is short for prospective customer and refers to a potential future customer. The difference between customer and consumer is that consumer refers to all people who consume products while customer usually refers to a person who has already purchased and / or will keep purchasing from a particular company. (Yadin, 2002. p. 314).

Lead: Lead is very close to prospect but differentiates from it by actually showing interest towards the product or service while prospect is only a potential customer that have not yet done anything towards a possible sale themselves. (Yadin, 2002. p. 209).

SWOT analysis: SWOT stands for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats and its purpose is to analyse your company or product within these aspects. This helps

you to have a better understanding where your company or product currently stands. (Namugenyi et al., 2019).

KPI: KPI stands for Key Performance Indicator which is used to measure important objectives of the business and gives vital information about the development of those objectives. (Twin, 2023).

1.5 Presentation of the company

DigiPoni Oy is a marketing and media agency founded by two friends who decided to utilize their skills by starting their own business. It was founded in 2020 by Toni Mustikka and Rudolf Ringbom. Both have skills in photography and Mustikka is good with IT-management and coding while Ringbom studies economics and theoretical mathematics. Besides Mustikka and Ringbom DigiPoni Oy has a team of around twenty freelancers who work for them. DigiPoni Oy, shortly Dipo, offers its customers ways to improve their business's digital wellbeing and to make everyday tasks run smoother. They differentiate themselves from other marketing companies by customizing their services to best match their customers' needs and to always put their customers first. Their target group is mainly small and consists of new businesses who need help finding ways to get their business started. Dipo's services vary from all kinds of content creation to creating their customers web pages, email signatures, and digitalizing their operating systems. Their brand is fresh and youthful, and their core values are to be customer oriented and personal. (T. Mustikka, personal communication, January 29, 2023).

2 THEORY

This part focuses on the theory of marketing and the process behind an efficient marketing plan.

2.1 Marketing

Christian Grönroos defined marketing such as: "*Marketing is to establish, maintain and enhance relationships with customers and other partners, at a profit, so that the obejctives of the parties involved are met. This is achieved by mutual exchange and fulfillment of*

promises", in 1997 (Brassington & Pettitt, 2003). Marketing is a process to build awareness of a product or service, a brand or organization, a campaign or an idea. According to Brassington and Pettitt (2003) marketing is management process that requires planning, analyzing and resourcing as well as it requires money and resources. The purpose of marketing is to support sales by satisfying customers and creating awareness. John Westwood (2022) also states that marketing should help the company to meet the requirements of customers by adjusting the offered goods or services accordingly. He also states that marketing is all about "being in the right place at the right time" by having your product or service fulfill the customers' needs when you detect them. To stay relevant and on top of the topic companies must constantly keep up with new trends and follow the change.

Brassington and Pettitt (2003) highlight the importance of meeting the customer requirements since if they are not satisfactorily fulfilled, then marketing has failed both the costumer and the organization which then leads to poor results and loss. For this reason, the company or organization should carry out elaborate market research to know exactly what the customers want before starting the planning process (Brassington & Pettit, 2003).

2.2 Market research

It is important for a company or organization to adjust to the quickly changing market environment around them to keep their business profitable and successful. If one does not follow the changes around them, they will quickly lack behind and be soon out of business. John Westwood (2022) states that market research is used to:

- give a description of the market;
- monitor how the market changes;
- decide on actions to be taken by a company and evaluate the results of these actions.

According to Paul Hague (2021) marketing research can be as simple as a stallholder compering their prices and products to the other sellers in the street. They might increase or decrease their prices or add new items or products to their selection trying to

overshadow their competition. They might also pay attention to their marketing such as signs or the presentation of their product selection and also quickly copy what others might have done while constantly figuring out new ways to get their customers' attention and to please them (Hague, 2021). One crucial way of gathering information is to collect and listen to your customers' feedback because that is the most valuable information that you need for your market research.

Market researching obviously requires a lot more than that for any average sized or bigger company because they simply cannot adjust to changes as quickly as a stallholder possibly could. Therefore, market research requires a lot of planning. As Hague mentions: "A problem well defined is a problem half solved", one should always start market research by defining which problem or opportunity they want to tackle (Hague, 2021). The planning process can begin only when the objectives of the research are clear. Figure 1.1 shows the process of the market research summarized.
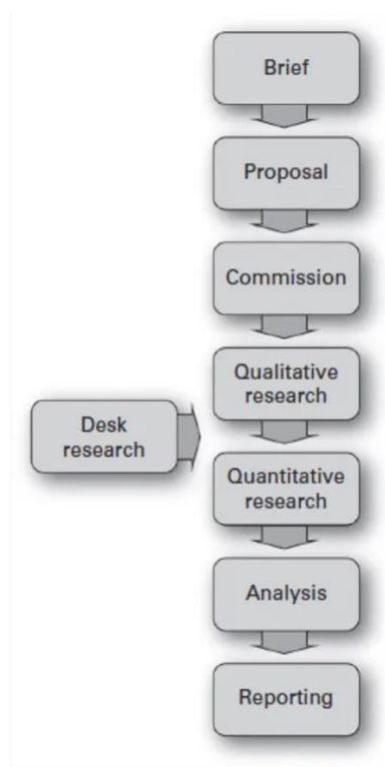
Figure 1.1 The process of market reserch (Hague, 2021)

The market can be researched by using plenty of different methods and tools such as "desk research, telephone interviews, face-to-face interviews, self-completion

questionnaires (mainly online), focus groups and observation", says Hague (2021). There are also plenty of different frameworks that are being used in market researching. Most notorious being SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats), PEST analysis (political, economical, social and technological), USP (unique selling proposition), 4Ps (product, price, place and promotion), AIDA (awareness, interest, desire and action) and Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Hague, 2021). These frameworks can be used as guides to get from the current position to the goal that has been set.

2.3 SWOT analysis

As previously mentioned, SWOT stands for strengths and weaknesses, and opportunities and threats. These four objectives are also categorized as internal and external factors. Strengths and weaknesses are considered internal factors, meaning you can analyze and affect them internally inside your organization (Westwood, 2022). Opportunities and threats are external factors instead, because the company or organization has very little control over these and might require collecting information outside the organization (Hague, 2021). SWOT analysis is very simple to conduct and offers a very easy-to-understand way of presenting the results (Speth, 2015).

SWOT analysis is a very effective way of figuring out the current position of your company. It is important to understand and analyze the current strengths and weaknesses compared to the competitors to be able to find out where to stand out and what could be compensated. It is also important to see what opportunities and threats are around to know which way to thrive and what to avoid. SWOT analysis can be used for other objectives than just analyzing the current position and situation of a company or organization. It can be also used to analyze a product, a geographical sales area, a market segment and even competitors (Westwood, 2022). These analyses are all very important part of the market research.

2.4 Marketing mix

Marketing mix is a concept which includes tools to help businesses in their decision-making process. Marketing mix is often used by companies and organizations when introducing new products to the market or when testing the effectiveness of marketing strategies. Morgane Kubicki (2015) describes the definition of the marketing mix as

follows: "The marketing mix is a marketing concept that includes all of the tools available to marketers to develop efficient actions and achieve their sales penetration targets within a target market".

The marketing mix was first introduced to public by a Harvard Business School professor Neil H. Borden in 1948 in his book *The Concept of the Marketing Mix* (Kubicki, 2015). Borden's marketing mix originally included twelve elements which later decreased to four by Professor Jarome McCarthy in 1960 (Kubicki, 2015). These four elements are commonly known as the 4 Ps which stand for product, price, place, and promotion. Kubicki (2015) summarizes the 4 Ps marketing mix theory as having "the right product, in the right place, at the right price, at the right time". To do this, he claims it is necessary to:

- Create a product or service that a particular group of people wants;
- Sell it in a place regularly visited by these individuals;
- Market it at a price that corresponds to customer expectations;
- Make it available when these customers want it (Kubicki, 2015).

Kubicki (2015) also states that it is important to first conduct a proper market analysis to fully understand the target market and the positioning of the brand in the market before focusing on the marketing mix process.

According to Kubicki (2015) the product element in the marketing mix focuses on the product's characteristics such as the nature of the product, the product's size, quality, and design as well as decisions about the brand such as packaging, label or the product range (Kubicki, 2015). All these characteristics define the product or service the company is offering, and they must please the customers' needs and desires.

The price element in the mix is the price the customer must pay for the goods or services the company is offering. The price is constructed of several influencing and changing factors which include the cost of producing the product or service, marketing and advertising the product, logistical costs (such as distribution of the product), price elasticity (i.e. the impact of a price change on consumer demand) and competition

conditions (Kubicki, 2015). Other factors affecting the price are discounts, payment terms, recovery conditions and credit conditions (Kubicki, 2015). Calculating an appropriate price for the offered goods and services is not a simple process and must take customer satisfaction into consideration as well.

The third element of the 4 Ps is place, which stands for the distribution of the product. This means the place where the product is sold at whether it is in stores or online and the location of the stores as well as the product placement and presentation in the stores. The distribution part also includes assortment, transport, logistics and product availability (Kubicki, 2015).

Promotion also stands for communication. According to Kubicki (2015) it includes advertising, direct marketing or sales outlets, public relations and sponsoring. These all four elements (the 4 Ps) are separate from each other and should be evaluated individually but they may still influence each other such as promotion or distribution of the product may affect its' price.

In 1990 Robert F. Lauterborn introduced the 4 Cs to replace the 4 Ps by McCarthy (Kubicki, 2015). The 4 Cs regards the 4 Ps from the customer's point of view. Therefore, Lauterborn's four Cs stand for consumer, cost, communication, and convenience. Instead of the product itself, the first C focuses on learning customer behavior and studying consumers' needs so the company can offer their customers what they desire (Kubicki, 2015). Cost replaces price by focusing on the cost of the product or service for the consumer or end user during the product's entire life cycle (Kubicki, 2015). Lauterborn has a more modern approach to communication by focusing on interaction with the customers. He emphasizes that communication should not only come from the company or organization to the customers but rather be a dialogue between these two (Kubicki, 2015). The 4 Cs have not replaced the 4 Ps but rather offer a different approach to complement the 4 Ps model.

2.5 Marketing plan

Marketing plan has several benefits which Westwood (2022) lists achieving the company's goals, having "a solid base of information for present and future projects", helping to define the company identity, discover marketing opportunities and to "make better use of company resources" as some. Creating a marketing plan is a time consuming an thorough process which involves several steps:

Introduction

Every marketing plan should have a short introduction of which becomes apparent its' purpose and aim (Westwood, 2022). This part should not be too long. It should summarize the key reasons behind the marketing plan's creation (Westwood, 2022).

Executive summary

After the introduction comes executive summary which should point out the key points of the marketing plan. As it is only a summary of the whole marketing plan it should also be kept short and simple. According to Westwood (2022) the executive summary should include "the underlying assumptions on which the plan is based, the objectives of the plan and the timescale over which the plan will be implemented".

Situation analysis

Next in the plan comes situation analysis which includes a SWOT analysis and summaries of the external and internal market researches (Westwood, 2022). This includes assumptions of the operating market such as inflation and exchange rates. The situation analysis should also include a section with past sales and a forecast of future sales and a presentation of the key market areas (Westwood, 2022). Similarly with the key market areas, the situation analysis also includes key sales areas, which present the main geographical areas of operating (Westwood, 2022).

Marketing objectives

This part lists the objectives of the marketing plan. It should only have the main objectives the plan aims to achieve within the given time period. These objectives can be related to sales, market shares and areas, profit or order intake according to Westwood (2022). The purpose of these objectives is to clearly state to the reader what the plan's goals are.

Marketing strategies

Westwood (2022) explains that marketing strategies should be divided into the categories of the marketing mix: product, price, promotion and place. This part of the marketing plan should explain the strategies used regarding each of the before-mentioned objectives. It should shortly explain what is simply done about the product, is there going to be changes in prices, what is done in regards of advertising and what distribution strategies take place. This section should also explain the type of strategy or strategies used, whether it is defensive, developing or attacking (Westwood, 2022).

Schedule of what / where / how

This section of the marketing plan explains the time frames for executing the plan. It should show the main goals and strategies of the plan and when does each action take place (Westwood, 2022). It should also clearly show who and / or which department takes the responsibility of executing each individual action in the plan (Westwood, 2022).

Sales promotion

The sales promotion part shows the actions that will be made regarding sales and advertising. This part should include what marketing channels will be used and which promotion campaigns will be executed and when. There should also be a list of the current sales personnel and a statement of the possible changes in the sales department.

Budget

The marketing plan should include a budget with the costs of executing the plan (Westwood, 2022). It should become clear that the actions that will be implemented will positively affect the profits and surpass the expenses (Westwood, 2022).

Controls and update procedures

Westwood (2022) reminds that the marketing plan should not be followed blindly. Even when the marketing plan is aimed for two or more years in advance Westwood (2022) advices to revise the marketing plan annually. This should also be mentioned in the marketing plan itself. External factors can also affect the plan unexpectedly which may require different actions to be made (Westwood, 2022). The planned actions of the marketing plan should also be monitored throughout the implementation of the plan to see if they are giving the expected results or not (Westwood, 2022). In case the results vary from the expectation, immediate changes should be made to the plan (Westwood,

2022). This section of the marketing plan should explain how the implementation of the marketing plan is followed and what concrete actions are made to monitor and operate it (Westwood, 2022).

3 METHOD

This chapter focuses on the collection and analysation of the data used for the research. There are plenty of different methods that can be used to collect data, and it is extremely important to choose one that best suits the research topic. Research methods can be separated into two categories: quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitative methods can include surveys, experiments, structured observations and secondary data from open databases. Qualitative methods can include semi-structured interviews or focus groups or secondary qualitative data research from existing literature.

3.1 Choice of method

This research used in-depth semi-structured interviews as the data collecting method. The method was chosen because of its ability to provide deeper views, opinions and thoughts about the topic. A qualitative interview is flexible and allows the interviewees to continue the topic and their answers. It can also allow the interviewer to ask additional questions regarding the interviewees' responses. The goal of qualitative interview is to get rich and detailed answers (Bryman, 2012). Therefore "rambling" is often encouraged when it comes to qualitative interviews (Bryman, 2012). In-depth interviews can also offer more wider and detailed responses than focus groups and allows the interviewer to better engage with the respondents.

3.2 Respondents

Bryman (2012) states that purposive sampling of some kind is most often used in qualitative research. The goal of purposive sampling is to collect participants that are relevant for the study and the research questions (Bryman, 2012).

With that in mind the researcher selected the participants based on who are the target audience of Dipo. Since Dipo's main services include consultancy and marketing advice

for small and new businesses, the participants vary from small business owners to relatively new business owners from different industry fields. This gave the researcher a wide range of responses and helps to understand the needs of customers better. All participants were male and fall under the same age category between 24 to 32. For the privacy of the participants, the participants are kept anonymous and only referred to as participants A, B, C and D. Questions about the participants' business were asked in the beginning of the interview to better understand their background and is shortly presented below:

Participant A has a business in the field of technology.

Participant B has two businesses. One in the field of media including photographing and video-shooting services and another one in retail reselling vintage clothes.

Participant C was also working in retail / wholesale.

Participant D has a business in real estate industry focusing on "analysing the condition of housing companies and offering valuable insights to potential homebuyers".

3.3 Interview guide

A semi-structured interview has an interview guide that is meant to help guide the interview. The interviewer should ask all of the prepared questions in the interview guide from all of the participants but has a freedom to ask extra questions outside of the interview guide as well (Bryman, 2012). This makes semi-structured interview very flexible and can therefore courage for more conversation and more in-depht responses.

The interviewer started the interviews by asking questions relating to the respondent's business. This way the interviewer can better identify the differences and fields of each participant. The interview continues with questions about respondents relationship with social media marketing to better understand their wants and needs. Lastly, the interviewer asks questions about the participants' opinions of the best channels for Dipo to market their business and reach the target audience. The original interview guide was written in

English but translated to Finnish for the convenience of executing the interviews. The English version of the interview quide can be found in appendix 1.

3.4 Research approach

The participants were interviewed in two ways: with face-to-face interviews and with online interviews via Zoom or FaceTime. The researcher preferred the face-to-face method but with the busy schedule of both the researcher and some participants the online interview offered a more flexible alternative. The interviews were recorded using a voice / screen recording feature on a mobile phone and later transcribed into a text form. The interviews were held in Finnish and later translated into English because both the participants and interviewer were more fluent in that language. After the recordings were fully transcribed into written form, the recordings were deleted.

3.5 Analysis of the data

Although there are a few different ways to analyse qualitative data, Bryman (2012) focuses on analytic induction and grounded theory. This research uses the grounded theory as a method to analyse the data because it provides more useful guidelines than analytic induction and doesn't require the redefinition or reformulation of the hypothesis to confirm its validity (Bryman, 2012).

The grounded theory analysing process involved coding. Coding the data means breaking it down into component parts which are then named (Bryman, 2012). So after the transcription the data was added into an Excel sheet and categorized into sections. This helped to clarify and understand the collected data.

3.6 Validity and reliability

It is important for the research data to be valid. This means that it should be valid regarding the research aim and purpose. Cohen et al. (2017) remind that invalid data is simply worthless because it cannot be used to create hypothesis. Therefore, the research is simply unusable. Validity in qualitative data is difficult to measure but it can still be

evaluated. Though it is never possible to claim a research to be 100% valid, one should still aim to be as valid as possible.

Reliability is also important in research and especially when doing a quantitative research. The most important quality of reliable research is that it can be repeated and the results would be similar or even exact when executed in the exact same conditions (Cohen et al., 2017). However, reliability is a little bit harder to measure or evaluate in qualitative research. It doesn't mean it is not still important in qualitative research. Cohen et al. (2017) mention that Further, Denzin and Lincoln (1994) have suggested it could be measured by stability of the observations, parallel forms and by inter-rater reliability (another observer interpreting the research similarly). Cohen et al. (2017) still states that another researcher studying the same topic could come up with different findings while both researches are being reliable.

This research aims to be as valid as possible by assuming the interview and its responses are sincere, honest and accurate. This means assuming all participants' responses have been authentic and trustworthy. It also requires the research and interview questions to be as valid as possible regarding the aim of the research. The interview questions were planned to give the researcher feedback and ideas about how to target and aim Dipo's services and communication better for the target audience. While the study may not be exactly replicable, it can be assumed it is still reliable because it can be repeated with similar research questions and the results can be assumed to be similar.

3.7 Ethics

It is important to take the ethical issues into consideration when doing interviews and collecting data and personal information from the participants. The interviewer should be as transparent as possible about the research topic and data collection and analysis (Cohen et al., 2017). This means the interviewer should properly introduce themselves and briefly but clearly explain the research topic and the purpose of the research (Cohen et al., 2017). The interviewees should also be made clear how their responses and personal data will be stored and handled (Cohen et al., 2017). The participants must also be made clear the interview is voluntary and they may stop it at any given time.

The researcher introduced themselves in the beginning of each interview and explained the purpose of the study to the interviewees. The researcher also explained the interviewees their rights and asked them to sign a consent form which can be found in appendix 2. No personal data or details other than participants' name and contact information was collected. The interviewer also made sure the interview questions didn't require detailed information of the participants' businesses (such as company name or information) but only asked about the field of operation. All of the personal data (name and contact information) and the recordings will be deleted after the study has been completed and published. The participants and their responses will be kept anonymous and their names or any personal information won't be made public at any point of the study. The collected data has been stored in the researcher's personal devices and not shared at any point.

4   RESULTS

This part of the research presents the results of the conducted research method, in this case the responses of the interview. The detailed interview questions can be found in the interview guide from the appendices. Besides the questions presented in the interview guide, the interviewer may have asked additional questions from some of the participants. Most interview answers have been translated in English from Finnish. The elements of the marketing plan created for the case company is also briefly presented in this chapter.

4.1   Presenting the results of the interviews

4.1.1   Presence and activity in social media

After learning the background of the participants' businesses, the interviewer wanted to know in which social media channels the participant's businesses were active, if any. The interviewer also asked questions of the participants' goals they try to achieve through their social media presence and what kind of challenges they may have faced relating to the use of social media.

All participants' businesses had social media accounts. All participants said they have Instagram and Facebook accounts. Most participants also used LinkedIn and participant B mentioned their clothing business was also present on TikTok.

The participants' goals to be achieved by their social media presence included branding themselves to potential customers, keeping up the brand, creating trust and credibility of their services, gaining new customers, building brand awareness, growing brand's image and sales, becoming familiar to the customer, and driving users to their platforms.

Participant A also mentioned "*consolidation of customer acquisition*" and proving their customers the company is still actively operating and is not a so-called "table drawer company".

Participant D stated that his company thrives to establish themselves as experts in their field as well as educate their audience about their industry such as "*housing company maintenance and its financial implications*" besides driving people to their page.

Biggest challenges with digital branding and content creation in social media for the participants were scheduling challenges, lack of knowledge or skills, and remaining active.

Participant D stated that their main challenge has been creating engaging content that simplifies their concept and the need of it to their audience because their field can be technical.

Participant B therefore mentioned creating most of their content by himself and found the logistical issues of storing the data the biggest challenge. He explained they need to have all pictures and videos in various image sizes, types, and ratios. He also stated it is difficult to keep all these files organized and available for all employees to use and find whenever they need them. He also pointed out having right templates for all platforms to make sure the quality of the images or videos does not decrease when uploaded.

4.1.2 Qualities of ads and the service provider's expertise

Next the interviewer asked the participants what aspects or qualities in an ad (for digital marketing and branding agency) would make them interested of finding out more and what would they want to know about the service provider's expertise before making the decision of purchase.

Participant A said he thinks an ad should target their existing problems, which for them is simply not having time to update their social medias. He would want the service to solve this problem for them cost-efficiently.

Participant B found visual aspects very important and said the ad should look impressive. He continued the content should be visually creative. He also mentioned the ad should focus on solving problems the customers might have and show a preliminary price for the promoted service. He said he could immediately make a decision if he would see some price estimate directly on the ad.

Participant C said he the ad should have a message for him that explains how it would make the job [of creating social media content] easier for him.

And Participant D said he would be interested of clicking an ad from a digital marketing and branding agency if it promises to "*improve their online visibility, provide actionable tips, or showcases successful case studies*".

Participant B also added about the skills of the service providers and previous work stating the skills of the creators should show. He said he would like to see what kind of knowledge there is in the house and see what kind of work has been done for previous clients. He also pointed out bringing up the creators themselves because he thinks it also matters what kind of people they are. As he said: "*people want to work with nice people*".

When it comes to the expertise of the service provider, participant A said he'd like to also see some previous work done for other clients before purchasing. He also stated he does not care about customer logos but thinks the previous client works should be presented as case studies also explaining the benefits the customers gained from the collaboration.

Participant B also added he would want to see the service provider has done something similar before since he would find it hard to trust someone who has never done something similar before. He thinks there should be different portfolios for each customer segment showcasing the previous work.

Participants C and D also joined in the same thought of seeing previous client works. Participant D also added they would like to see the service provider also having knowledge or expertise in their field of real estate.

4.1.3 Defining successful content creation and digital marketing

Next the interviewer wanted to know how the participants would define successful content creation and digital marketing.

Participant C would find content creation successful if it brings them new customers. Participant B also felt that good content creation and visibility in social media should eventually positively affect the sales in the long run. He also stated good content should arouse interest and create conversation and reactions such as comments and direct messages.

Participant D stated that successful content creation and digital marketing would mean increasing their online presence, attracting more users to their platform, and receiving positive feedback from satisfied customers.

4.1.4 Reaching the target audience and final thoughts of the topic

Lastly the interviewer asked the participants which platforms and channels they use the most and where do they think they can best be reached. The interviewer also asked if the participants remember which ad they last clicked in business purposes and why and where. And if they had any additional thoughts or ideas to add to the topic at the end of the interview.

All of the participants included Instagram in their answer of in which platforms they could best be reached. Most participants also replied Facebook and LinkedIn, but participants

A and B mentioned they would not be interested of seeing ads in LinkedIn. Participant B said they could also be reached through TikTok and YouTube ads.

Participant A didn't recall clicking any ads in business purposes recently.

Participant B remembered clicking an ad from Ukko.fi advertising accounting services in Facebook or an ad for a camera backpack just because "*it looked good*". When asked what attracted him about the Ukko.fi ad he said it was the cheap price of the advertised service. He said he thinks one can save a lot of money by following the markets for cheaper services and options. He highlighted seeing the initial price of the service already in the ad aroused his curiosity.

Participant C replied he remembers clicking an ad for an ad stand or similar (such as a roll-up for example). He said he clicked the ad because he had a need for what was offered and the product seemed attractive to him.

At the end of the interview, participant A added he feels the marketing should be quite targeted and purposeful and that companies don't have time to focus or be interested of something that is not useful for them.

Participant B also suggested an idea of building good relationships with other creators and professionals and then sell those professionals additional work as "gigs" when they need a helping hand.

4.2 Presenting the marketing plan

The marketing plan for Dipo has been created based on the answers of the interview and Westwood's (2022) framework. The marketing plan starts with a short introduction of the company and the aim of the marketing plan which is to create awareness and visibility for the brand. An executive summary which summarizes the key points and objectives of the plan follows the introduction.

4.2.1 Situation analysis

The situation analysis consists of analysis of the current market situation, an internal analysis (SWOT), the competitor analysis and a summary of the current situation of the case companies social media channels.

The global economy has recently taken a hit by multiple challenges over the recent years and continuing today. This has had its effects on the economy in Finland as well slowing down growth and success of companies. However, the European Commission (2023) forecasts a slow revival of the economy in the coming years.

The SWOT analysis of the company is presented below:

Strengths	Weaknesses
- Flexibility – tailored services - The understanding of limitations - Young and fresh perspective - Skilled and talented creators - Good base for networking - Competitive prices	- Limited funds - Limited experience - Young founders - Lack of trust in the market - Lack of education
Opportunities	Threats
- People are more ready for the digital transformation nowadays - Possibilities of specializing and selecting projects when building customer relationships - The target customers aren't strictly demanding	- Current economy - Uneven income - Bigger competitors - The number of competitors

Table 1 SWOT analysis

The competitor list is extremely long since there are multiple companies providing similar services than Dipo under several industries. It is nearly impossible to select any main competitors among all of them. Therefore, it is important for Dipo to focus on a small target audience instead of trying to offer their services for everyone.

The starting points of Dipo's current social media presence is nearly nonexistent. They currently have Instagram, Facebook, and LinkedIn accounts but barely any followers and very little content.

4.2.2 Marketing objectives

With the goal of building a stronger brand image and gaining visibility for the case company, the objectives of the marketing plan focused on refreshing the brand image, growing the follower count on all platforms, increasing engagement, and paying attention to the SEO on the company webpage.

4.2.3 Marketing strategies

The chosen strategy is both defensing and attacking since the goals of the plan is to gain new leads by growing awareness of the company and attracting people's interest towards the webpage as well as staying loyal to existing customers and improving customer relationships by engaging with the audience through social media. There are several tactics to be prosecuted regarding each platform in order to achieve the goals. These are separated and listed in the marketing plan.

4.2.4 Action plan

The execution of the plan starts with sitting down and dividing the work tasks among the staff. Next step is to continue with refreshing the brand image to a new style which is already in the process. This should be finalized as soon as possible. The creation of new content for the social media channels should start after the new brand style has been defined.

4.2.5 Budget

Approximate costs for advertising in Instagram was calculated and is detailed in the actual marketing plan.

4.2.6 Controls

The number of followers and the performance of ads and content should be followed through the provided insights of the platforms itself. Immediate action should be made to adjust the content when it's not performing well and example of well-performing content should be followed when creating new content.

5 DISCUSSION

This chapter consists of the discussion of the results in connection to the previously discussed theory and the suitability of the chosen method.

5.1 Market research

As Kubicki (2015) stated, a proper market research is required before focusing on the marketing mix. Hague (2021) stated there are various different ways to conduct market research. An analysis of the current market situation and competitor analysis were conducted together with an internal SWOT analysis and an interview with the target audience. The interview was conducted based on Hague's (2021) statements about the importance of listening of customer feedback and understanding the customers' needs.

After researching the current situation of the market and the competitor analysis it was clear the journey to success will be rocky. The economy has experienced a downfall in the recent years and has not fully recovered yet. Besides the difficult and uncertain economical situation there are plenty of other companies offering similar services as Dipo which include marketing services such as content creation and graphic design as well as other digital and digitalization services including building websites and webstores, IT-support, automation services and maintaining the websites among other services. The long list of offered services creates a wider spectrum of competitors from various industries. To better compete with the challenging markets, it could be more convenient to focus or specialize on certain group of services. However, with the current product selection, it is good that Dipo offers tailored services for each customer's needs.

5.2 SWOT analysis

A SWOT analysis was conducted to get a better view of where the company stands now and what is the current situation. Both Hague (2021) and Westwood (2022) highlighted the benefits of doing a SWOT analysis because it is simple way of conducting and presenting the results. After doing the research it was clear the current state of the economy and the number of competitors on this highly competitive field among with Dipo being such a new and small company with very young and unexperienced founders were the biggest threats and weaknesses. Luckily, the founders are very talented and seem

to know very well what they are doing considering their lack of experience or education in the specific field. Their competitive prices and flexible services together with good networks can help them to continue to build their business even better in the future. The opportunities lie in the customer satisfaction and people's willingness to change to digital services as well as considering to specialize in certain services in the future.

5.3 Marketing mix

After conducting the market research, the aspects of the marketing mix can be evaluated. Elements from both theories, the 4 Ps and the 4Cs can be investigated in this research. The conducted interview with the target audience provides valuable information which help to evaluate the elements of the marketing mix.

Dipo's products are their various services in marketing and digitalization. Their target audience consists of small and mid-size business owners as well as new companies that are only starting their business. Based on the answers of the interview, we can assume many businesses have challenges in keeping their social media pages updated and have lack of time, resources, or the knowledge to create content. Therefore, it is obvious there is a need for these types of services.

Based on the interview some participants would prefer to immediately see the price or at least an estimate of the price in the very beginning, preferably already on an ad. Dipo does have starting prices available for their packages on their website, but the cost of the provided services is uniquely calculated for each customer based on the services specifically tailored for their needs. However, we can conclude from the interviews that examples of the costs of services could be brought up more for example in a form of case studies.

Since Dipo's products are services and in digital form, they are also sold online. Therefore, there are no physical place such as a store to sell them but instead the selling place is their website and social media pages. As the interview answers stated customers want to see references of previous work and see the talents of the service provider. That is why it is extremely important for the these selling platforms to look presentable and highlight the quality of the results. Promotion goes very much hand-in-hand with the

selling platforms in this case, since they are also the place to promote the brand and its services. By upgrading the brand image and refreshing the webpage, it can give the customers a better idea of Dipo's brand identity and their work. As Kubicki (2015) states in his book Lauterborn emphasizes the communication between the brand and the customers. The interview conducted for this study was the first step to get feedback from the target audience and better understand their needs and requirements. It is important to keep doing that in different ways in the future as well. The company can communicate with their audience through social media by creating content that inspires people and arouses interest. It is also important to engage in conversation when people comment on the posts.

5.4 Discussion of method

The method for conducting the research was face-to-face semi-structured interviews. The method was fairly easy to conduct although some scheduling issues occurred. The chosen method was also very time consuming. Conducting the interviews went according to the plan and no other issues besides some minor technical issues regarding the digital signatures of participants were faced. The researcher eventually found a way to collect the participants' signatures by using the mobile phones' built-in features.

The respondents were very cooperative and gave the researcher valuable answers. Some respondents' answers were longer and more thorough than others, but all answers gave useful information and opinions. The respondents could answers most of the questions quite well but had to sometimes take some time to think. Overall the interviews went well the answers provided good information.

The chosen method worked very well and was a good way of conducting the research. By interviewing people who represent the target audience the researcher got valuable insights of the point of view of the target customers which helps to see things from a different angle. The interview also gave voice for the audience to speak their mind and opinions provided possible more information than for example an online survey could have provided. By physically facing the respondents and having an authentic conversation with them may have helped them to open up more. As mentioned, a qualitative online

survey could have also been a valid option for gathering information from the target audience, but the answers would have most likely been shorter and way less thorough.

When conducting a qualitative research it is impossible to be 100% valid or reliable. In this research, the researcher aimed to ask questions that could get as much valuable information regarding the research as possible. While the researcher found the interview questions meaningful and valuable, new questions arose during the research that could also have been important to be asked. However, there are endless amount of questions that could have been just as valid. While the current respondents gave a lot of good points for the researcher to benefit from, there could have been a few more people's opinions to get an even broader understanding of the answers' significance. It must also be taken into consideration that all interviewed participants were male and fairly young of age. This fact could have affected the research results making them slightly monotonous and unilateral. The gender of the participant affects more likely less than the age of the participant. For more diverse results it could have been useful to get more people representing an older age group as well.

6 CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this study was to create a marketing plan for the case company, DigiPoni Oy, by researching the best digital marketing methods and channels to use. The research question tried to answer the before mentioned issue: "Which marketing methods and channels are the most effective for the case company?". To find answers to this question, people representing possible target customers were interviewed.

Based on the interview answers the best channels to reach the target audience is through social media, specifically Instagram and Facebook. Other channels mentioned were LinkedIn, YouTube and TikTok but these were less used by the participants, or they felt that they would not be effective ways of reaching them in business purposes. The conclusion based on the answers was to mainly focus on Instagram and Facebook marketing while keeping the LinkedIn page active in this marketing plan and consider other channels as possible marketing places later in future. A marketing plan was created for Dipo based on the research of the current market situation and participants' feedback.

6.1 Limitations of the study

The finding of and the availability of possible participants for the study was a limitation. The research results could have been more thorough if the sample size would have been larger and more diverse in terms of age and gender of the participants. Another limitation for the study was the time of conducting it. Unfortunately, the researcher's time was limited when conducting the study and with more time a more thorough research could have been carried out.

6.2 Suggestions for further studies

It is suggested the that the marketing plan will be reviewed after the action plan has been executed. A new marketing plan should be conducted yearly and whenever necessary with new goals. Besides the current research the case company could also have a user / beta testing for their new website after it has been renewed and get feedback from possible customers. Regular customer feedback surveys could be conducted from time to time to stay up to date of the brand image and adjust accordingly.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Interview guide

Appendix 2: Agreement on informed consent

Appendix 1 - Interview guide

The thesis

The interviewer studies International Business in Arcada University of Applied Sciences and is majoring in marketing. This research is called "Marketing plan for a case company" (the company's name is left anonymous for privacy reasons) and focuses on searching the most suitable marketing methods and channels for the case company. The purpose of the interview questions is to understand the target customers' point of view and learn the best ways to reach the target audience.

The interview is part of the empirical study of the research. The interviews will be analyzed using the grounded theory coding method. This means the interviews will be transcribed into text and divided into categories based by the replies. The analyzed data will then be summarized, and a hypothesis will be created based on the findings.

The interviewees are asked to sign consent forms to give their consent to be interviewed. These consent forms will be stored in the interviewer's personal devises and will not be shared publicly. In case of paper versions of the consent forms are being used, they will be exterminated after the research is done. The interviews will be recorded by the inter-viewer's mobile phone and the recordings will be deleted after the transcription process. These transcriptions will also be deleted once the research is done.

The respondents

They case company offers services in marketing and consultation and its target group is small and new business owners. Since the purpose of this interview is to get a better understanding of the point of view of the target customers, the researcher wanted to interview people who already have a business, has experience of having a business or is planning or considering starting a business of their own. The respondents were selected by using the before-mentioned criteria.

The interview is completely voluntary, and the interviewees have a right to ask to stop the interview at any time during and after the interview. The interview answers will be kept

anonymous in the final thesis and no personal data or details will be published at any point of the study. Both the interviewer and the interviewees will sign a consent form where the interviewee gives their consent to be interviewed and to allow the interview answers to be used in the study while the interviewer promises to treat any information given by the interviewees by these conditions.

The questions

1. Do you have a business of your own or have you considered / planned to start a business?
2. What kind of business do you have or have planned to start?
3. Is your company active in social media? If yes, in which channels / platforms?
4. What are the most important goals you try to achieve with digital branding and content creation of your business in social media?
5. What are the biggest challenges you have faced with digital branding and content creation of your business in social media?
6. Which aspects would make you as a business owner interested to click an ad and find out more about services of digital marketing and branding agency?
7. What would you want to know about your service provider's expertise before purchasing?
8. How would you define successful content creation and digital marketing?
9. Which channels / platforms do you use the most and in which platforms do you think ads would reach you the best?
10. Whose ad did you last click for business related reasons or who reached you?
11. Is there some other thoughts or ideas regarding the topic you would like to add?

The ending

Thank You for taking part of this interview and helping the researcher to understand the target customer's thoughts better. Your input is crucial for the study.

Appendix 2 - Agreement on Informed Consent

Research: Marketing plan for a case company, researching the most suitable marketing channels and tactics for the case company.

- I have received, read and understood the information given to me about the research and its goals.
- I have received sufficient information on the gathering, processing and reporting of data.
- All answers and other divulged information will be treated as confidential and individual interviewees will not be identifiable from the final research report.
- I am aware that the interviewer is recording the interview in order to improve the reliability of the research.
- The interview recordings will be securely erased after the research report has been published.

I hereby consent to being interviewed in accordance with the above (the interviewee signs):

Signature_____

Name and contact information_____

I hereby promise to treat any information divulged by the interviewee in accordance with the above (the interviewer signs)

Signature_____

Name and contact information_____

Time and place:_____