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# BLOG MARKETING IN TOURISM

Case Study: Outdoors Finland for Bloggers 2014

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ABSTRACT

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The past decade has witnessed a digital age surge in which marketing is universally shifting online and content is the future of reality. The revolution occurred because the audience is now in charge and the days of “interruption marketing” are over, instead “invitation marketing” is leading the game. In tourism practices, social media boom has had a major impact on how tourists and travelers search for information, produce information as well as make decisions; and passive consumers are transforming to active prosumers (producers and consumers). Among dozens of content marketing tactics, blogs have emerged to become the channel capable of delivering valuable content that readers would spend their precious time on thanks to its storytelling nature.

The campaign Outdoors Finland for Bloggers 2014 was organized to market Finnish natural landscapes and outdoors activities via international bloggers. The campaign was thriving although some problems appeared in the planning process. Thus, the aim of this thesis is first, giving a theoretical background for the case campaign; then, conducting an empirical research to assess the campaign performance and detect causes for its challenges. The findings of the research are employed to establish a development plan.

This thesis bears a deductive nature and undertakes quantitative and qualitative methods, in favour of the latter. Primary data was acquired from surveying related parties and secondary data was accumulated from publications like books, journals, previous studies and electronic databases as well as internet sources.

Findings from the research indicate that the campaign was indeed successful both in organizing and online reputation; the challenges the organizers faced mainly originated from shortage of time and weak internal communication. After the campaign, measuring its return on investment (ROI) has been difficult as well for a number of reasons. To tackle these issues, a blog for the campaign is recommended to be created and operated in the long run.

To conclude, the author has accomplished her objectives for this thesis and after examining, the research is perceived as highly valid and reliable. Alternatively, further research is necessary to discover a systematic methodology to calculate the campaign ROI, and to discuss the possibility of running a campaign blog.

Key words: blogging, blog marketing, social media, content, ROI, tourism, outdoors activities, interviews, development plan

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

DMOs	Destination Management Organizations
EWOM	Electronic word-of-mouth
FTB	The Finnish Tourist Board
LUAS	Lahti University of Applied Sciences
OF	Outdoors Finland
OFB	Outdoors Finland for Bloggers 2014
OFS	Outdoors Finland South
PR	Public Relations
ROI	Return on Investment
SEO	Search Engine Optimization
SWOT	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter is conducted to introduce the thesis topic and the author's initial motivation in establishing this thesis. First of all, a thesis background, with regard to the current nature of the topic studied, the case campaign's introduction, and the thesis's overall objective, is proposed to give the readers a general understanding of the thesis. Secondly, specific objectives of the research and research questions are listed, followed by a theoretical framework which explains, in brief, the theories adopted in the thesis. Next, research methodology and data collection process are mentioned and finally, a detailed diagram is drawn to illustrate the thesis structure.

### 1.1 Thesis Background

As a matter of fact, marketing is shifting online and the digital age revolution is offering conditions for the emergence of *“a more economically dynamic, socially equitable, and politically democratic society”* (Cooper 2006).

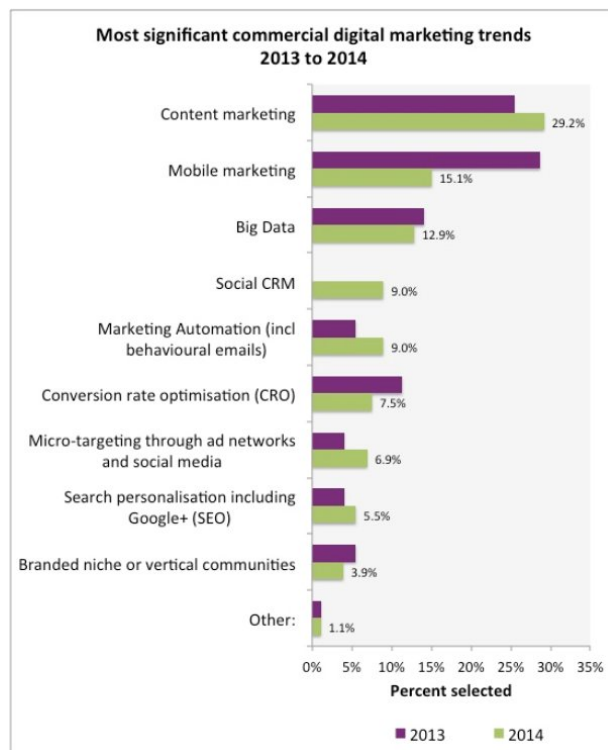


FIGURE 1. Most Significant Commercial Digital Trends 2013 to 2014 (Chaffey 2013)



As can be seen from the above figure, among the 22 digital marketing trends requiring utmost attention in 2014, content marketing comes out first on the list with 29.2%, followed by mobile marketing and big data with 15.1% and 12.9% respectively. The year 2015 is predicted to witness the on-going revolution of content marketing as it is very likely to keep its forefront in marketers' mind and become increasingly crucial to companies' success. Alvey (2014, according to Snow 2014) says, "The revolution occurred because the audience is now in charge" and having acknowledged this truth, companies are trying to catch up with the trend by becoming storytellers and publishers themselves to create and deliver valuable content to consumers through social media channels. The figure below illustrates the most common tactics which Business-to-Customer marketers have been using and which are expected to consistently be applied in content marketing for the upcoming years.

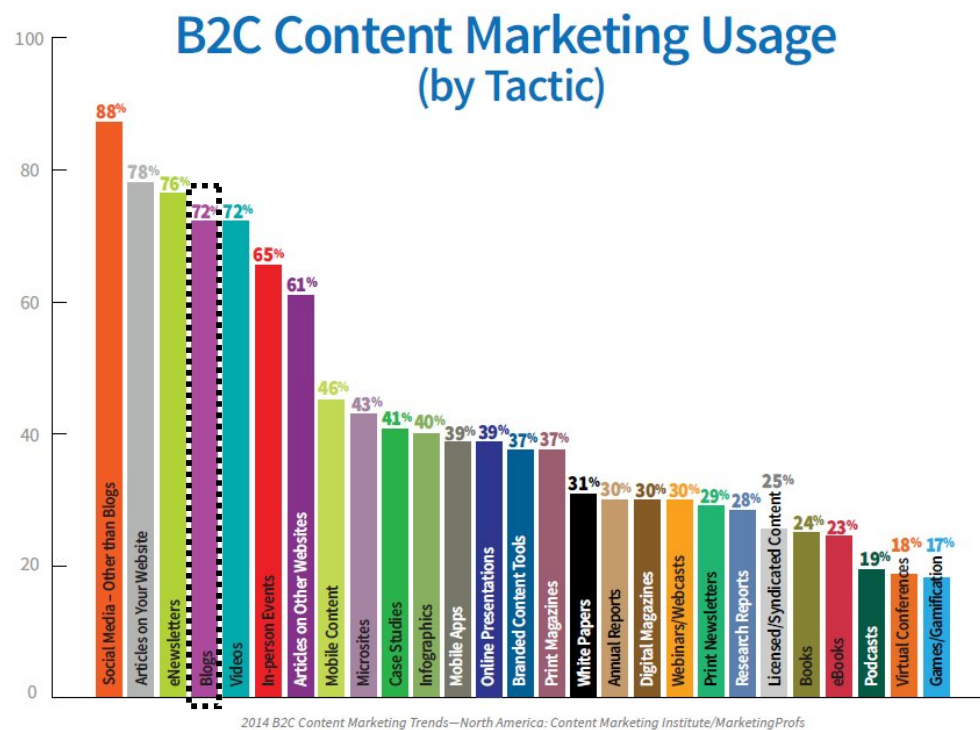


FIGURE 2. B2C Content Marketing Usage (2014 B2C Content Marketing Benchmarks, Budgets, and Trends 2013)

As can be seen from the chart, it is noticeable that 72% of North America B2C marketers are using blogs as a useful content tactic and 79% of the best-in-class B2B marketers, surprisingly, rate blogs as the most effective tactic to employ for

commercial success (2014 B2B Content Marketing Benchmarks, Budgets, and Trends 2013). Embracing the surge of content marketing and the dizzying popularity as well as effectiveness of blogging, the author decided to obtain deeper knowledge of these subjects and to practice such theories through a real campaign in the tourism field.

To provide a background for the campaign, there is a need to grasp the meaning of social media boom in tourism practices which has had a major impact on how tourists and travelers search for information and make decisions. Moreover, by sharing the information about tourism suppliers or tourism destinations and/or writing about own-travelling experiences, tourists and travelers are, either knowingly or unknowingly, producing valuable information in tourism companies' favour. (Cox et al. 2009, according to Sigala 2012 in Sigala et al. 2012.) Such information is known as user-generated content (UGC) or social intelligence, which is found to have an AIDA effect on travelers themselves by generating Attention, Interest, Desire and Action (Pan et al. 2007, according to Sigala 2012 in Sigala et al. 2012); and to contemporaneously increase the potentiality to improve business operations. Accordingly, those "writers" help the companies update demand, design tours, advertise their qualities, and attract new or returning consumers. (Sigala 2012 in Sigala et al. 2012.) Above all, thanks to social media, passive consumers are transforming to active prosumers (producers and consumers) and tourism firms' image is being perceived by a very different approach (Christou 2010, according to Sigala 2012 in Sigala et al. 2012).

Notwithstanding the rocketing adoption and usage of social media, many tourism companies and organisations appear to not yet fully exploit the power of social media as a marketing tool and completely understand the importance of managing the produced content. Outdoors Finland is a national tourism cooperating program run by the Finnish Tourist Board and Outdoors Finland South is a tourism development project run by Lahti University of Applied Sciences, both are responsible for marketing beautiful landscapes and outdoor activities in Finland and Southern Finland. The campaign *Outdoors Finland for Bloggers 2014* (OFB) is a joint venture of the two projects for the purpose of running a social media campaign via a group of 27 bloggers from different countries. The campaign comprises of four trips providing transportation, accommodation, sauna and a set

of activities for bloggers to experience free of charge and in return, they commit to write blogposts about their trips to introduce Finnish natural wonders to the world. The campaign is at its initial stage of implementation and arising problems, therefore, are inevitable. (Räsänen 2014a.) So as to assist the case campaign in evaluating its performance and investigating its difficulties, an empirical research was conducted and, as a result, a development plan for OFB was established based on the findings. If the next campaign, given support from necessary resources and participants' effort, can improve its performance and become even more successful as a pioneer in utilizing blog marketing, it would be a step ahead of competitors and open new prospects for Finnish tourism marketing.

## 1.2 Research Objectives, Research Questions and Limitations

The utmost importance of defining clear research questions at the beginning of the process cannot be overemphasized to ensure the success of the research (Saunders et al. 2012). The objectives of this study are to define what blog marketing is in a most possibly correct and understandable approach; to evaluate the case campaign's outcome via an empirical research; and to apply such findings into its improvement plan. Hence, the main research question is: *How can the campaign OFB improve its performance in marketing Finnish outdoors activities by blogging?*

Followings are a number of sub-questions produced for the purpose of facilitating answering the principal question:

- What is blogging?
- How can it be utilized as a marketing tool in tourism?
- How to measure blog marketing ROI.
- What are the OFB's objectives, participants, and their responsibilities?
- What is the OFB's actual outcome (campaign's performance and public reaction)?
- How to measure the ROI of the campaign's outcome to prove whether it is successful.

- What are the OFB's challenges looking from different participants' aspects?
- What can be done from the organizers' side, bloggers' side and co-companies' side to enhance the campaign's success?

With respect to the evaluation of the research, its limitations are to be taken into account. Owing to the numerous involvements of the campaign, the author decided to exclude the financial aspect, assuming that the campaign has its capability to handle all the activities regarding money. Another thing to put into consideration is that the author neither was involved in the campaign from the beginning nor participated in any of the trips; any information or data related to the campaign, therefore, is acquired from existing reports and interview records of the campaign organizers. Accordingly, the author does not have any personal experience in the campaign and shall not discuss it. The last limitation which needs to be stated is that the author did not conduct the two surveys for the bloggers and for the companies participating in the campaign; instead they were done beforehand by Innastus Oy – the coordinator of the campaign. The responsibility of the author, therefore, lies in collecting the results and analyzing them to evaluate the campaign performance. However, there is one kind of qualitative survey for the organizers and the coordinator of the campaign conducted in form of face-to-face and email interviews. As a consequence, the author is not responsible for the reliability and validity of the surveys for the bloggers and the co-companies and shall trust the given results, only those of the survey for organizing participants are examined.

### 1.3 Theoretical Framework

The aims of this thesis are to assist the case campaign in evaluating its strategy and performance and to develop a plan to enhance its outcome. The campaign OFB is about planning and organizing trips for famous bloggers around the world to experience free of charge and the bloggers are to return the favour by writing and sharing their blogposts on social media to market outdoors activities and natural wonders in Finland. Thus, in chapter 2 of this thesis, the knowledge about blogging and blog marketing are introduced in order to help the readers obtain

first understanding of the campaign-related theories which are adopted in the research presented in chapter 4 of this thesis. Firstly, it is essential that the readers know what blogs are and why they matter to businesses, in terms of their content as well as their marketing function. Secondly, the author provides the knowledge of how a corporate blog could optimize its marketing power by looking deeply into detailed aspects of blog marketing such as effective communication, customers' feedback, blog advertisement, blog marketing ROI, and some thoughts of where blogging is heading in the future. Finally, since the campaign OFB is about bloggers' tourism experiences, it is important to place the theory under the tourism industry circumstances. Hence, in the last part of chapter 2, the author studies the impact of blogging on consumers' behaviors in the industry and concludes the chapter with a SWOT analysis of blog marketing in tourism.

As per Quincy, Lu and Huang's study (2012), SWOT is an analysis model used in strategic business planning, competitor evaluation, marketing development and so on to identify the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats of a project, an organization or in a business venture:

- Strengths are a business or a project's characteristics that give it advantages over others.
- Weaknesses are characteristics which place an organization in a relatively disadvantage position to others.
- Opportunities are the prospects that an organization could exploit to improve its performance.
- Threats are influencing factors that could cause troubles for a project or an organization.

Strengths and weaknesses often refer to internal factors of an organization such as finance, personnel, product innovation and so on; whilst opportunities and threats are external factors from the environment, namely economic climate, competition, technological or legislation changes, and social influences. Fundamentally, SWOT analysis could help organizations concentrate on and utilize their advantages, detect and minimize their drawbacks, discover and exploit the opportunities, and acknowledge and prepare for possible risks. (Quincy et al. 2012.)

#### 1.4 Research Methodology and Data Collection

The research methodology of this thesis is shortly described in the following figure.

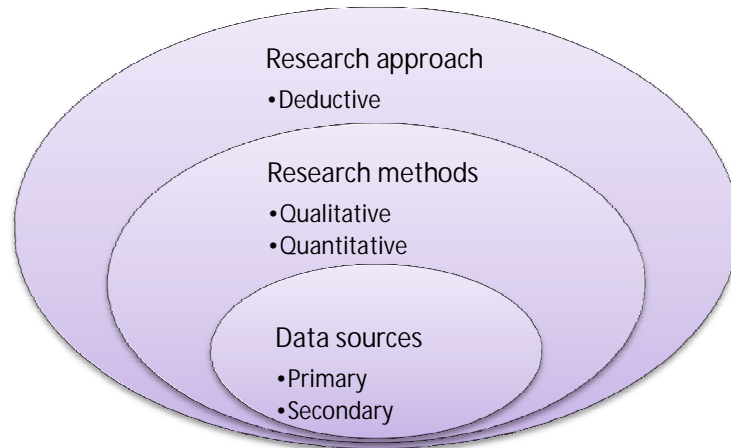


FIGURE 3. Research Methodology

According to Davies (2007), research is a process to gather data in an organized manner in order to investigate an issue, explore or discover a pattern, or test a hypothesis by systematically describing, reflecting, and interpreting the collected facts and figures. Most people, after producing the reasonable research questions, start to brainstorm what data they need and what techniques they should use to collect them to answer the questions or solve the problems. However, there are essential “*outer layers of the onion*” that need to be considered beforehand, namely research approach and research method.

In respect of research approach, the extent to which the theory is clear at the commencement of the process places an important role in the project and is usually portrayed as two approaches: deductive or inductive. If the research starts with theory from one’s knowledge or reading of academic literature, and is designed to test the theory, it is adopting a deductive approach. Conversely, if the research initiates with data collection to explore a phenomenon to build a theory, it is applying an inductive approach. (Saunders et al. 2012.) This thesis is of no interest to create a new theory but aims at detecting the reasons and tendencies of OFB-related parties’ behaviors via observations from the research combining with

the theory of blog marketing. The deductive approach, thus, is what the author opted for.

After making a decision on the right research approach, a research method is to be chosen from the two most common paths which are usually referred to as qualitative and quantitative methods. Any data collection technique or data analysis procedure that generates or uses numerical data is referred to quantitative method. By contrast, for qualitative method mainly non-numerical data is collected and analyzed. (Saunders et al. 2012.) The two routes, however, are not mutually exclusive so that mixed methods can be employed and such methodology is often more tempting and popular (Tashakkori et al. 1998). Considering all the characteristics of the research, the author decided to implement both quantitative and qualitative methods, in favour of the latter. The fact that this study bears an exploratory nature to identify the roots of OFB's challenges and that the timescale is limited induce the author to embrace qualitative techniques to understand the insights. On the other hand, quantitative method has its portion in the research to assess the outcome of the campaign as well.

The next step following the decision of a research method is to collect data. In this thesis, primary data was collected via surveying related parties. It is noticeable that there are two surveys which had already been conducted by a third party which is the coordinator of the campaign – Innastus Oy. In those surveys, questionnaires with both open-ended and close-ended questions were delivered to the bloggers and the co-companies to gather their opinions on the OFB's performance as well as their expectations and suggestions for the future campaign. The author collected and analyzed the available results to draw conclusions to answer the research questions. Additionally, the author conducted semi-structured and in-depth interviews with the campaign organizers, the coordinator and one of the Destination Management Organizations to obtain more insights into the OFB's effectiveness and challenges. The author's own observation and personal knowledge were vastly utilized in the research process as well. As for secondary data which is also a major resource for this thesis, publications such as books, book reviews, previous theses and dissertations; together with electronic databases and internet sources were accumulated to complement primary data.

## 1.5 Thesis Structure

This thesis is divided into two main themes which are theoretical and empirical, and allocated into 7 chapters which are as follow:

Chapter 1 presents the background of the thesis, the research objectives, research questions and limitations, the theoretical framework as well as the research methodology applied.

Chapter 2 introduces blogging and explains how it can work as a marketing tool in tourism to attract more readers and, of course, consumers and drive profits, tangible or intangible. A set of metrics to calculate blog marketing ROI is included as well.

Chapter 3 studies the case campaign Outdoors Finland for Bloggers 2014 regarding its processes of planning, organizing and marketing outdoors activities in Finland.

Chapter 4 reports an empirical research conducted to evaluate the campaign's success and investigate the reasons of its difficulties as well as gives some of the author's thoughts into that.

Chapter 5 thoroughly recommends how the campaign can be improved in the future according to findings from the research.

Chapter 6 concisely answers the research questions and comments about the reliability as well as validity of the research, followed by some ideas for further research's necessity.

Chapter 7 summarizes the thesis content and concludes the thesis.



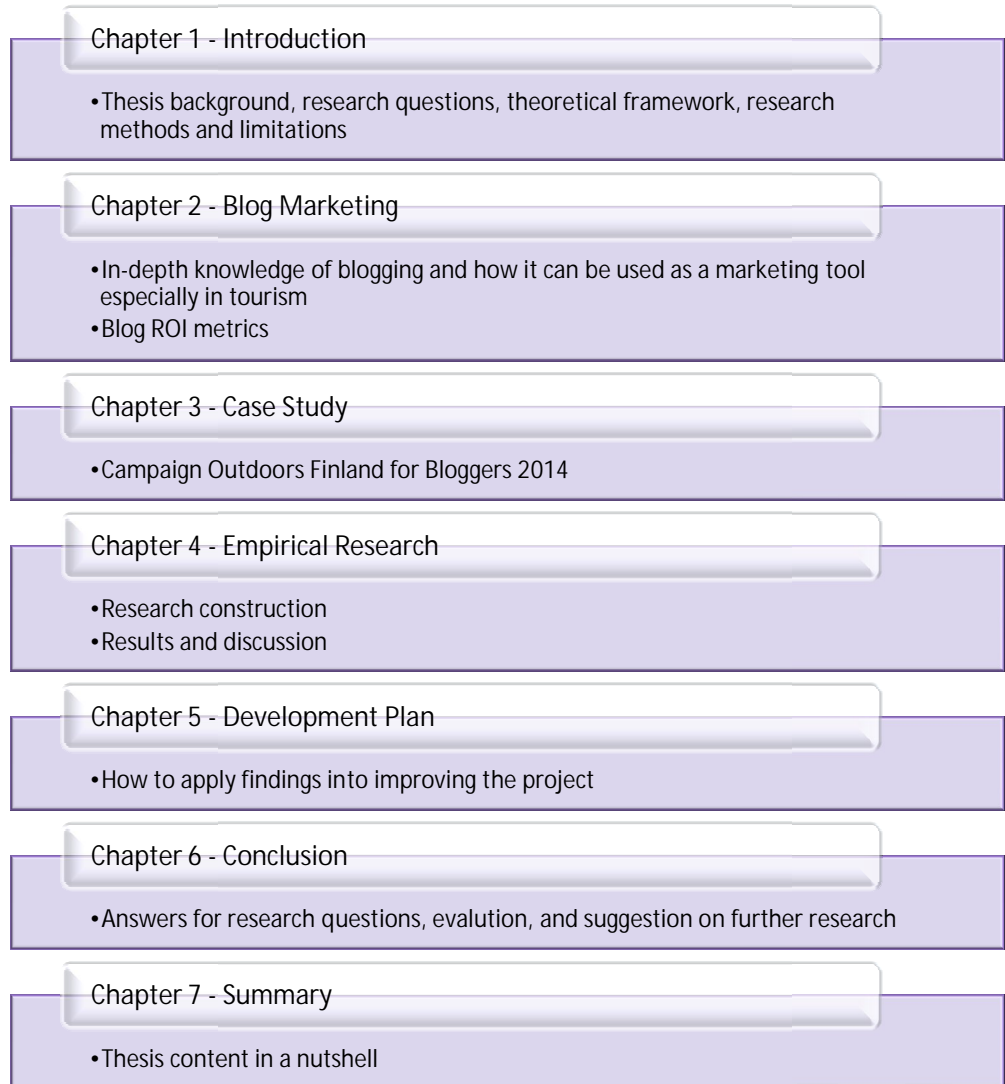


FIGURE 4. Thesis Structure

## 2. BLOG MARKETING

This chapter is conducted to review the literature regarding blogging and blog marketing in order to support the empirical research for the case campaign. First of all, understandings about general blogging activities are presented. Second of all, the marketing usage of blog is explained in details, including controlling and promoting the content of the blog as well as a set of metrics to evaluate the outcome of blog marketing. In this part of the chapter, blogging and its marketing exploitability are placed under the context of tourism.

### 2.1 Understanding Blogging

A **blog** is a website of blogposts written by bloggers which are organized into categories and sorted in reverse chronological order, meaning the most recent post appears on top. **Bloggers** are the people, either an individual or various authors, who administer the blog and write blogposts. The community of blogs, bloggers and blogposts is called **blogosphere**, an environment in which “the conversation” keeps circling. (Wright 2006.)

**Blogpost** content is formal or informal – depending on its type, conversational, informative, often subjective and sometimes humorous, which is the “human” part of the blog that keeps drawing people. **Readers** can join in and even help spread the conversation by commenting on and/or sharing the blogpost, praising and/or criticizing the blogpost content in their own blog or social media channel. (Gehl 2006.) There are many types of blogs, from personal, private blogs to business blogs, schools, political, and non-profits blogs (Types of Blogs 2011).

Where blogging is concerned, there are some important and popular terms which any blogger needs to grasp. The first in the list is **archive**, which represents a blog’s ability to organize and present articles, to enable the author(s) and readers to keep track of them. Archives could be featured based on dates (monthly, yearly or even daily), categories, authors or sometimes alphabetical order. Blog archive is the heart and history of a blog as it gives the blog depth and credibility. (Gunelius 2014a.) Next in the list is **feed**, a blog’s function to keep pace with latest and hottest content or blogposts. There are sites (feedreaders) designed by a

special software which automatically look for new content and post updates on other websites, such updates are the feeds. If a blogger wants to get new feeds from particular blogs, he could enable the *syndication* function by adding the links of the blogs he is interested in to feedreaders, and they shall display feeds on his blog whenever there are updates. (Introduction to Blogging 2014.)

Almost all blogposts have a *blogroll*, a list comprising links to other webpages which are worth reading or have the similar interest to the blogpost, in other words a list of recommendations. In blogposts there are sometimes *permalinks*, attached for different purposes, which remain valid permanently. A permalink is the online address to a blog, to a category in the blog, a blogpost or other parts of a blog; and it never changes. In most cases, a permalink is cited to refer to another article if the blogpost is using that article's information, in other words it works as a source of reference. Besides, using permalink is the fastest way to share the blog via emails or messages composing on social media. (Introduction to Blogging 2014.)

*Trackbacks* are also common within the blogosphere and are originally designed to function as notifications between websites. To be more specific, if a blogger writes something on his own blog which is related to or for the purpose of commenting on another blogpost, he sends a trackback to that blogpost's owner. By doing this, the referred blogpost's owner shall be noticed by email that someone has used his content; in this case a trackback works as a reference source as well. However, there are a lot of other benefits here. On the one hand, sending trackbacks is a way to share blogs, as readers of blogger A (the person sending the trackback) and readers of blogger B (the person receiving the trackback) both are noticed about and could leave comments on the two blogs thanks to the fact that trackbacks appear on both sides, meaning more people are introduced to the conversation. On the other hand, although this method could also provide a certain level of authenticity because it refers to the original author, there is no guarantee that the incoming trackback is real and necessary. In some occasions, and usually for private benefits, blogger A could send trackbacks to blogger B, and even to bloggers C, D, E so as to create a link from those "so-called referred" blogs back to blogger A's blog like a tactic to introduce his blog to as many people as possible. (Trackbacks and Pingbacks 2014.)

Fortunately, to solve these problems, *pingbacks* (known as remote comments) are introduced to the table. Fundamentally, pingbacks are working like trackbacks but the communication technology pingbacks are using is able to activate the automatic verification process anytime a pingback is created, and this ensures a certain level of authenticity from the original content. Trackbacks do not have such verifying ability and, therefore, are easy to be faked. Nevertheless, many readers prefer trackbacks because it is easier to preview the information and decide whether it is worthwhile before clicking it as a trackback always comes with an excerpt (a summary of content from the blog sending it); whereas very few themes display pingbacks' excerpts. (Introduction to Blogging 2014.)

Currently, the three most well-known blogging platforms are Wordpress, Blogger, Tumblr and a new-born but on an uptrend named Medium (Narayan 2013).

Wordpress is the most well-known platform for bloggers which is offering them absolute control and high customization over their blogs. Blogger belongs to Google and is available for anyone owning a google account or gmail address. Unlike Wordpress, Blogger is extremely easy to use but lately it has been using for advertising purposes and sometimes distracts the readers. Tumblr of Yahoo! is easy to use as well and has the mobile blogging function but it is quite simple compared to the previous two. Medium is founded by Twitter and one needs a Twitter account to use it, which is one of the reasons why it is not as popular as others. The outstanding feature of Medium is that it is extremely simple, or merely plain; thus readers shall not be distracted by ads or complicated operating system; on the other hand bloggers do not actually have any control or customizing power over it and have to accept what it has to offer. (Bachu 2014.)

The appealing nature of blogging is that it is either very inexpensive or free, and easy to operate. Moreover, how accessible blog is also explains for its easiness to be promoted via several tools and resources which lately are invented especially for blogs. (Gehl 2006.) This is the advantage of blog that most companies try to optimize in their business for marketing purposes. To answer for the typical question "how to develop a popular and successful blog", and ultimately a profit-driven one – which is actually a challenge for many companies – Wright (2006) suggested the following ten tips:

- *Be real* and do not blog about everything. A blogger should clearly define who he wants to be, his niche content and his target audience.
- *Be passionate* and enjoy blogging. A blogger should choose a voice to represent and stick with it.
- *Write often* is not just a good thing to do, it is a must. Readers love fresh content, by updating regularly, they shall revisit the blog more often and the more a blog is searched, the more weight it carries with the search engines.
- *Link lots* because there is an inherent value in the action. Linking shows the readers what a blogger is interested in and if the blogs linked to are of high quality, the blogger and his blog shall receive more respect and trust. Furthermore, as the bloggers who are linked to could find the blogger who links, this is a great way to show the world the blogger's identity and that he exists, especially for new bloggers.
- *Leave comments on other blogs* to create a community of same interests. By commenting on blogs in the mutual interest community, one is introducing his blog to the society and encouraging others to find him. Getting involved shall increase his blog's traffic and as a result, build more relationships with other bloggers and their readers as well.
- *Have fun* and try new things. Although blogging could be serious and vital to a business success by heavily affecting the way the company is presented online and simultaneously changing the way customers perceive the company's image, blogging is meant to be enjoyable.
- *Push the envelope*. Blog content should always be fresh and inviting so that one needs to try something unusual and even if it is "wrong", it shall draw some public attention ultimately. A blogger should not only keep up with new trends, but also create one (or some) by continuously changing and asking questions.
- *Ping*. A blogger pings to notice several online services that he has posted something new and they shall visit his blog to check it. Generally, pinging is a way to ensure that the blogosphere stays connected.
- *Use feeds* to encourage people to read and follow one's blog as they lower the barriers between bloggers and readers, and provide up-to-date qualified information.

- *Create meaningful titles* to enhance the potentiality of search engines finding one's blog and sending it more traffic. A good title should give readers a reason to want to read more. (Wright 2006.)

## 2.2 Blog Content

*“Content is the raison de’etre (reason to exist) for any website.”*  
(Introduction to Blogging 2014)

Above all, blogging matters because it is capable of providing readers with useful information, the information that they would be willing to spend time on reading, or else it makes no difference with other social media channels out there. Consequently, in this part of the chapter the author shall take a deep look into the content aspect of blogs before discussing any further of blogging's advantages.

### 2.2.1 Content Marketing

Today, conventional marketing is being rejected by people and some carefully created message bouncing on a digital wall is considered more or less annoying. Instead, consumers are choosing which message to listen to and which marketers can come in the door; the days of “*interruption marketing*”, therefore, are over and “*invitation marketing*” is the future of reality. (Pulizzi et al. 2009.)

As per Pulizzi's (2013, 5) definition,

*“Content marketing is the marketing and business process for creating and distributing valuable and compelling content to attract, acquire, and engage a clearly defined and understood target audience – with the objective of driving profitable customer action.”*

If traditional marketing is about companies *telling* who they are and what benefits their products could offer, content marketing is about companies *being* who they are and telling stories about their products – the stories which are relevant and valuable to customers so that they actually want to pay attention. Customers care first about their own wants and needs so that instead of telling them how great a

product or service is, the point lies in providing them the right information they are seeking. To make it possible, one should first understand what customers are looking for by showing them that there is a mutual interest between the business and the target audience and that company is listening to their wishes; as a result they shall reveal the precious insights. What is more, content marketing could make customers intelligent by educating them about what they need before they even realize it without letting them know it is intentional. All in all, it is believed that “*content is the art of communicating with customers and prospects without selling.*” (Pulizzi 2013, 6.)

There are several reasons why content marketing is becoming crucial to companies’ success, mostly because it seeds many benefits, tangible or intangible. However, so as to reap those rewards, one’s content should first be able to simultaneously inform, educate, entertain and inspire customers (Bullas 2011); and to achieve such content marketing mastery, there are six principles to be strictly followed. Firstly, a good content should be *useful* and able to answer questions from or fulfil some unmet need for customers. Secondly, one should deliver content *consistently*, meaning always ontime (daily or monthly) and at expected quality. The next in the list is to stand out by possessing a *unique characteristic* and sticking to one voice. *Having a point of view* is also important since this is not encyclopedia content, an expert should take sides on matters and represent his own opinion. One of the arts of content marketing is *avoiding “sales speak”* because talking about oneself too much only draws less attention. The last but not, in anyway, least principle is to be “*best of breed*”, meaning the content distributed should be the very best of what could be found and contain amazing value to induce customers to spend their precious time on it. (Pulizzi 2013.)

Since this thesis primarily focuses on just one of many content channels (or types) that is the usage of blogs, the value of content marketing, hence, shall be studied only from the aspect of blogs and presented in the 2.3.1 part of this chapter to avoid duplicated information.

## 2.2.2 Blog Content Optimization

*“Do not focus on having a great blog. Focus on producing a blog that is great for your readers.”* (Brian Clark – Founder and CEO of Copyblogger)

Thus, successful bloggers should be able to write compelling and engaging content on a consistent basis over time and following is a recommended blog composing process which might not guarantee a perfect blogpost but shall take bloggers much closer to one.

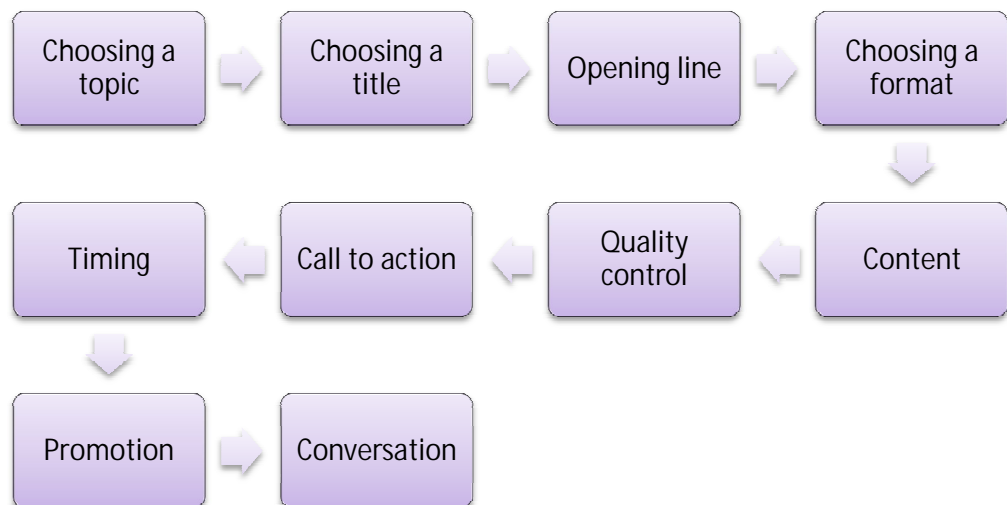


FIGURE 5. Blog Composing Steps (Rowse 2008)

### Topic, Title and Opening Line

A blogging journey begins with topic selection – the leading and hardest part in establishing a successful blog. A wrong or irrelevant topic, which the blogger might be passionate about but very few others are or the blogger does not have enough knowledge and practical experience in, might lead the blogger down to the wrong path which takes months to realize and even more time to change to the right direction. (Starak 2014.) Rowse (2006a) suggested that an appealing topic should be wide enough to generate ideas but manageable enough not to overwhelm the writer and that a blogger needs to define a clear target audience



and an ultimate goal of building a blog or writing a post even before making decision on the topic.

If bloggers choose a topic first then write, readers read the title first and decide whether to scroll down. There is no right or wrong title as the meaning of good title is rather subjective, however, generally an effective title should be short and focused with at least two key words to maximize Search Engine Optimization's rich. Moreover, the title's wording should be formed grammatically correctly and in a way that would grab readers' first attention as well as give them a reason to keep reading. (Nwachukwu 2013.) The same "first impression matters" rule is applied to the opening line, it either draws the readers deeper into the post just second to the title, or chases them away and fails the title's initial effort (Rowse 2008).

### **Format**

The fact that most readers would scan through a blogpost before actually reading it makes a post's scannability a necessity of a readable content. Readers are very busy and would not spend their precious minutes to read a post unless they could learn that it is extremely useful just by the first look. The best way to make that possible is to make lists with numbers or bullets points or short paragraphs. Furthermore, one could utilize headings, subheadings and line break to separate between main points but it is wise not to have so many different points as it would distract the readers. Good formatting could be helpful, for example, one could bold, italicize or underline important text as well as change its size, font or color to emphasize the main ideas and make them stand out for readers to scan. The last but not least tool is the usage of images, as one image worths a thousand words, they are capable to tell readers almost everything about a blogpost and also interesting enough to catch readers' eyes. (How to Make Your Blog Content Scannable 2014.)

### **Content**

What makes good content could be hard to define as the concept itself bears a subjective meaning. It depends on the blogger's writing style and knowledge as well as how well he makes use of techniques or understands his audience.

Generally speaking, an acceptable piece of content should have two elements which are *usefulness* and *uniqueness* (Rowse 2006b). With respect to usefulness, a blog needs a reason for being and in order to identify that reason, a blogger should always start with his target customers or readers, learn what they want and give them the right thing. Every piece of content produced must satisfy a need or add something to readers' lives, in other words it has to be useful. Whether the content is to entertain, educate, inform customers or raise a debate, it should be relevant and target the right audience since what might suit the need and taste of one person might not do the same to others. Therefore, bloggers have to do thorough research about their readership or potential readership to find the niche then to proceed to the right path. (Rowse 2006b.)

As for uniqueness, it needs to be understood that relevance only gets bloggers to be accepted but differentiation is what makes one stand out from the crowd. Good content is composed by a blogger who could give his audience what they want that others could not or at least deliver the same information in a creative way. Additionally, he ought to have his own voice, own point of view and own blogging personality, which could be distinguished from others and remembered. (Rowse 2006b.) However, a good motive, a right choice of niche audience and an original voice are not all there is to produce good content. It is also worth pointing out that visual effect never fails to catch attention that bloggers should employ so as to optimize every aspect of a piece of content. The use of pictures, infographics, PowerPoint slides or even videos and podcast could be of great value to make the text look more interesting and thus, stay longer in readers' mind. (Pisello 2011.)

### **Quality Control, Call to Action and Timing**

A blogpost is ready to be published only after it has been carefully checked in terms of grammar and/or typing mistakes. Even small errors could be great barriers to engagement for some readers and thus, bloggers must make sure their posts are error-free and well-structured to take the content to the next level – according to Rowse (2008). He also claimed that useful content should be able to encourage readers to take further steps – either to read more related information or to perform an action that would benefit both the blogger and the reader. As a

result, a “Call to Action” usually appears at the end of most blogposts as a tactic to maintain relationships even when the readers finish reading. Besides, timing of the post needs to be taken into consideration as well because smart strategic timing could ensure that the right people would see the post at the right time.

### **Promotion**

After publishing the finally crystalized blogpost, bloggers – instead of passively awaiting readers to come – should already put the content in motion. Pisello (2011) listed some of the ways that marketers could use to leverage and promote content below:

- Linking to other websites
- Sending e-newsletters to subscribers
- Posting key excerpts on Facebook, Twitter, Linked In and so on
- Uploading the content on Slideshare or Youtube (depending on the type of content)
- Ensuring the content or the title has important key words to be visible to search engines

### **Conversation**

To initiate conversations is a must of any successful blogging strategy because as long as the conversation goes on, the relationship is maintained; otherwise bloggers ought to start another conversation, which explains why blogging is a never-ending journey. Hence, a good blogpost should be able to invite readers’ feedback and bloggers are to listen and respond as soon as possible to persuade readers that they are respected and valued. (Rowse 2008.)

## **2.3 Blog Marketing**

With respect to blogging, beside the ability to build relationships between bloggers and readers it could act as an effective marketing tool, which is not a new thing and in fact, should have been mastered by businesses already. In this part of chapter 2 the author aims at discovering why blogging plays such an

important role in most marketing strategies and studying how to profoundly utilize it to maximize profits from what has been invested.

### 2.3.1 Reasons for Blog Marketing

Content marketing is the heart of online success and blogging is acclaimed as one of the most valuable content types (or channels) for business firms (Webber 2013). The power of the blog lies in the fact that one could listen to millions of people, “*like a fly on the wall*”, as they talk about some business marketing process, advertising and products. What is more, those up-to-the-minute voices could be exploited to identify what customers want, why and how they want it and what they are willing to pay for it. Blogging enables companies to avoid focus groups, feedback forms, emails and other time-consuming and boring methods to gain customers opinions. On the other hand, like it or not, competitors are also using blogs to get information of companies businesses and what customers think about their products. Consequently, the question now is no longer should or should not, but how one could use blogs and leverage them to maximize their profitability. (Wright 2006.)

The figure below defines the utmost importance of blogging by listing what it could offer a business, which explains why one should blog.

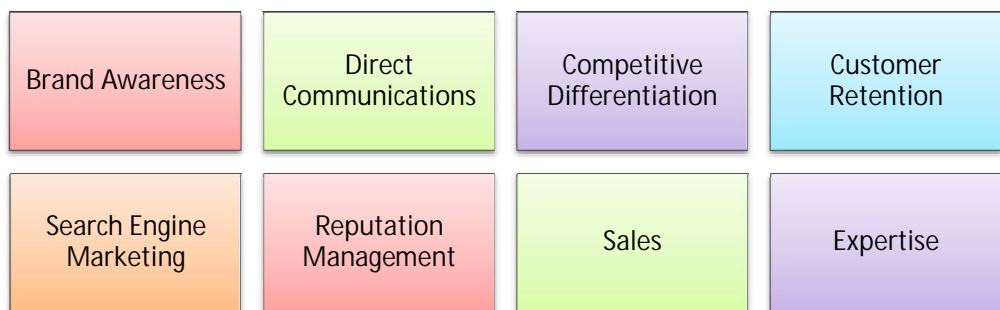


FIGURE 6. Reasons for Blogging (Wright 2006, 5 Reasons SMBs Need Content Marketing 2012, Aaron 2014)

First of all, a blog is a channel to *put one's brand in front of customers' eyes*. Each time new content is produced on a blog is a chance to introduce the brand to customers and to let them find or associate with the company. The more regularly content is created, the more attention is paid. One could also use blog to drive traffic back to company's official website by the usage of links and the *call for action* (encouraging readers to take other actions such as follow links for more information, subscribe a channel, email for inquiries, call for consultancy and so on). (5 Reasons SMBs Need Content Marketing 2012.) Secondly, as one could *directly and honestly speak with customers* via blogposts, he could gain customers' trust and engagement; and by inviting customers to a two-way conversation one could learn more about their interests and show them that they are respected. Blog is a great place to answer customers' frequently asked questions collected from emails or phonecalls; and as prospects are also likely to ask those questions, with blog one could help prospects better prepare to complete a transaction. (Wright 2006, Aaron 2014.)

Next in the line is that even if the product or service is relatively common, by blogging relevant and valuable content a company could still *set its image apart from the competition*. Blogs also allow companies to *build personal, long-lasting relationships with customers*. That is because if customers could find on-going value from a blog, they are likely to remain loyal to it; the same is applied for prospects, if they could gain more and more valuable information from a blog they are very likely to become customers. (Wright 2006.)

What is more, *search engines always love fresh and high-quality content* which is why one should focus his content around key words related to his business to increase its online presence and ultimately drive qualified blog's traffic. Additionally, blogs enable one to *manage his company's online reputation and position himself as an expert* by showing that he understands the market and the customers. By writing about current events or hottest topics, sharing and analyzing an issue one could become a reliable source with thoughtful and professional analysis; and customers shall return to the blog whenever they need trustworthy or expert information. When a blog could provide informative, educational and helpful content, it could build customers' confidence in one's company and create significant goodwill towards buying action. (Aaron 2014.)

However, the ultimate goal of any organization is, of course, to *drive sales* and blogging could definitely guarantee return on investment for companies. Thanks to the fact that blog not only is rather cost-effective itself, but also has the ability to educate customers about products or services, it could positively fasten customers' decision-making process and shorten the sales cycle. Furthermore, one could highlight and "advertise without selling" a new product or service as well as announce a special promotion on blog, which is an ideal spot for such information compared to an official website. Last but not least, the effort of creating valuable content on a regular basis also causes one to keep doing research, stay in-tune with latest news and seriously reflect on the issues written about. Consequently, blogging could help one obtain in-depth knowledge of the industry and ensure that he is on the cutting edge of the space, in other words *the leader in the industry*. (Wright 2006, Aaron 2014.)

### 2.3.2 Effective Communication

Coming to this point when "why one should blog" is accepted and understood, the next question is "how one should blog effectively and profitably." Many companies are acknowledging the importance of blog marketing and following the trend but not all of them could master it and actually drive sales from it. The reason, surprisingly, originates from the two-edged nature of blog – it is viral. Surely a well-managed with valuable-content blog shall travel with high speed and draw more readers, which eventually shall become prospects and customers. However, the situation might reverse if the blog could not offer readers any value or is misused for obvious selling purposes. Such bad reputation could also become viral with the same speed and cause blog traffic's decrease or blog content's distrust after a while. Tracking for the root, it all started from companies trying to be storytellers but being too scared to listen. Customers' feedback could be frightening sometimes, but rather than ignoring and suffering the consequences, it would be better for companies to have unhappy customers than no customers at all. Customers should not be perceived only as an income stream, they are companies' assets and their feedback bears invaluable insights which need utmost care to be optimized. (Wright 2006.) There are generally five categories of customers:

- ***Evangelists*** are those who have had a lot of good experiences with a company and its products or services and as a result, they shall share information with everyone when there is news or anything related to the company and the blog. Companies appreciate this type of customer because they are doing marketing jobs voluntarily and effectively.
- ***Regular customers*** are those who have been enjoying a company's products or services because of their value even though they might have other choices. These customers have had enough positive experiences that negative ones seem paltry in comparison.
- ***Reluctant customers*** are those who have had enough negative experiences with a company that they simply expect a negative one every time but they accept that they have to buy from the company and just move on. These customers are living a balance.
- ***Occasional sufferers*** are those who do not enjoy a company's product or service but for some reason they have to buy from it and only when absolutely necessary. These customers never talk good about companies but are still a source of income.
- ***Saboteurs*** are those who have suffered so much negative experiences or only one and unbelievably bad experience that they shall do whatever and whenever possible to harm companies' reputation. (Wright 2006.)

Obviously, all companies prefer evangelists or at least quiet customers but complaints do not happen to come from nowhere and companies are to be responsible for their products, services and actions. Customers do not look for reasons to be unhappy, most are expecting positive experiences and if one company could do the job, it transforms the perceived image of every single provider in the entire industry. Positivity could be produced not only from excellent products or services but also by the way companies deal with feedback and tackle customers' problems. Customers' feedback is valuable ideas for or a reflection of one's business and most importantly, competitors are certainly listening as well. (Wright 2006.) To receive feedback is just the first challenge, to correctly process them is another story and the following five steps could be of great help for companies to have meaningful conversations with customers.

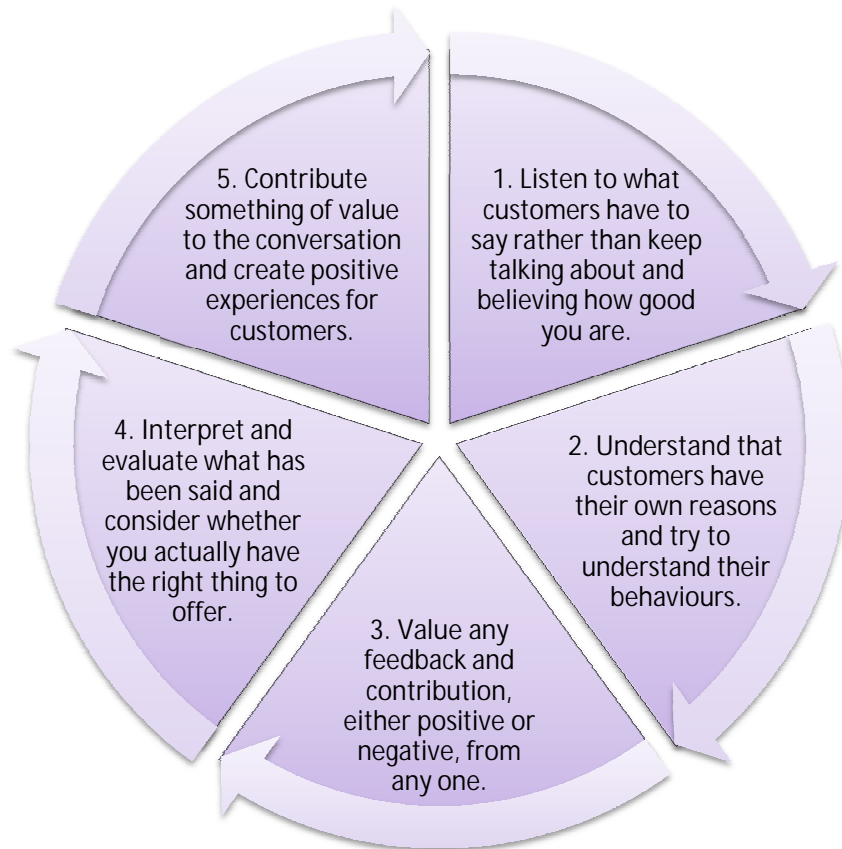


FIGURE 7. Effective Communication (Wright 2006)

However, mastering the arts of willingly receiving and properly perceiving feedback is not enough, what contribution could be brought to the conversation is what scores in customers mind. After getting the feedback, one should, of course, respond to them. To say “should” is because not every comment is worth responding. Only a portion of customers or prospects is truly interested in a blogpost and desires for further information or wants to express their opinions via comments. The rest might be those who just want to promote their own blogs by commenting anywhere they see potentials; who leave generic comments that are suitable in any situation such as “Interesting topic!”, “Good thoughts!” or “Thanks for writing!”; or who might just have a lot of free time to spend on spamming one’s blog. Those people do not actually read the content and only comment on the title of the blogpost that for those types of feedback, one had better thank them or reply to them shortly but politely enough or if necessary, ignore them. (Myers 2011.)



As for those who either express true interest in the content or are willing to interact with the blogger by adding ideas, stating opinions, asking thoughtful questions or even complaining, one should respond with full attention and caring attitude as another successful conversation is another customer waiting to happen. Nevertheless, there are still positive and negative comments. According to Wright (2006), positive comments could be difficult to answer since they are tempting to be acknowledged but one should keep in mind that by creating yet another positive experience for the customer, the existing relationship could be strengthened and the customer might become the next evangelist for his blog. Likewise, a negative comment should be respected and responded to with a good will. A customer complaining is granting one the chance to interact with him and is saying that he needs help rather than a sole answer. Therefore, one should not pass such feedback and should try to reverse the situation by creating a positive experience for the complainer. Responding to feedback could be done on one own blog or on other blogs where his blog/company-related information is mentioned; either way there are several useful tips to build customers relationships with blog comments as follow:

- *Respond quickly* within an hour to create a conversation – the best vehicle for positive experiences. 8 hours is also a good amount of time and 24 hours is acceptable. If one needs more than a day to answer a customer, he has a problem.
- *Thank for the feedback* and appreciate it regardless of however it might be. After all it takes both time and effort for one to find a blog and leave comments.
- *Acknowledge the issue* and show empathy to the customer; promise to investigate into it, and investigate into it.
- *Answer any question* to create positive experiences, to start a conversation, or to build relationships; and ask for further questions and invite other readers to share their solutions if possible.
- *Admit where it has failed* even though it might seem difficult and apologize if necessary, it shall ease further anger and calm people down.

- *Take ownership* of customers problems and treat it with care as if it were one own, and it might be, to show customers that the company is on their side and is available to assist them.
- *Solve any problem* after acknowledging it rather than merely say sorry to not be able to do anything about “the inconvenience it may have caused.” But if the problem could not be tackled from company’s side alone, then one should truthfully tell customers what he could do or ask for their suggestions. Doing this might not solve the matter but it might still make customers happier with the fact that company cares and listens to their stories.
- *Be friendly and courteous* to treat customers with respect no matter how bad the situation might appear.
- *Avoid form letters and automatic responses.* Being human is very important as once a customer has come with an issue or a question, he requires direct communication and personal response believing his time is no less precious than the blogger’s. If appropriate one should address customers by their names and if necessary, one should express his personal care by asking customers to email or call him in person to discuss further.
- *Follow-up on any issue or question* after solving them since extra problems might arise and this is to show customers that one did not do it simply because he has to but because he cares. If the fault actually originates from the blogger’s side, he could come back to customers to inform them of what has been done to fix the problem with an explanation of why it happened. (Wright 2006, Sheridan 2012.)

### 2.3.3 Customers Feedback

Market is moving fast and what is believed to be of value of today might turn into something out-of-date tomorrow. Customers do not just follow trends, instead they are granting insights that companies must catch up with to create trends to keep their loyal customers. Hence, companies need to be adaptive and stay up-to-date with market movements; and one of the best ways to collect information is studying customers’ feedback. Customers are the only people – not the companies’ employees, not the competitors or the market research agencies – who

would tell the utter truth about companies' products or services, about their experiences and their wishes which are valuable insights and opportunities for companies to move on. (Wright 2006.) There are a number of reasons why customers' feedback is extremely crucial to companies' live-or-die.

### **Gather a Brain Trust**

When a business has a great idea which is potential to turn into a new product, it is essential to ask for customers' opinions as they are the one to decide ultimately. There is no point making the best product in the world that, however, could not be sold. One good idea could come from one person, but it takes a hundred to support and implement the idea to bring it into life and consequently, it is very important to choose the right one. In order to do the job, companies need to directly talk to customers to know whether the new product would suit their needs and tastes. With blogs, companies could ask the entire readership, if not the whole world, for their opinions on what product features, functions or styles they might want without spending time, money and resources on customers' surveys, focus-group discussion or market research. Companies, especially giants with lots of experts and professionals, tend to think whatever they do is great – and it is most of the times – but there are several cases of failure in market place when customers reject the product or service not because it is not good but simply because they do not find it desirable themselves. Thus, companies had better listen well as two heads are always better than one. (Drell 2013.)

### **Business Identification and Reflection**

Customers' feedback offers companies the understandings of their positions in the industry versus competitors as well as the effectiveness of their current marketing strategies. It is vital to identify whether a company's products or services excel or fall short compared to alternatives; and to detect where and what must be improved. Via feedback companies could also be aware of what kind of experiences customers are having and how they feel or evaluate front-line employees' performance. In large enterprises with high level of hierarchy, it is hard for customers to be heard by top managers – who could actually do something to make a change – and thus companies could not realize the actual

situation and keep suffering the consequences. Blogs, on the other hand, allow direct communications with customers through comments; and act as an effective market research tool for companies as a result. (Drell 2013, Suttle 2014.)

### **Make Changes When There is Enough Data**

After acknowledging the problems, companies obviously need to decide what to do with them. However, it still depends. If one or some people do not like a company's product or service, it could be because the product or service is not suitable for them. The situation is serious enough when a lot of people do not like it and company is hearing the same feedback from multiple sources; now that is the time when it has to reconsider to make a turn. *"If you have enough feedback or behavioral trends telling you that the customers are using your product in another way you designed or if they are asking for more features, then you have to think about making the changes they require"*, says Emir Turan – founder and CEO of Giggem, a matchmaker in the music industry (according to Drell 2013). (Drell 2013.)

### **Dig for Insights**

Companies could derive key insights from either asking for customers' ideas and opinions or observing their behaviors and attitudes while they are interacting and communicating on blogs. The challenge for companies when making a decision to invest in an idea is that they do not have access to the best one. A great idea could increase a company's revenue and marketing power, but could increase costs and need for human resources as well. If the best idea does not get the chance to rise to the top, to be reviewed or even considered, companies are losing potentials. So as to tackle this, a blog is an ideal place where best ideas could float on the surface and be discovered. (Drell 2013, Suttle 2014.)

### **Adapt to New Trends**

Customers' feedback is also an informative channel for companies to update new trends in the market. As the author has mentioned earlier, marketplace is moving with a dizzy speed and there might already be an improved technology, a new innovation or a new designing trend which is threatening old and current products

or services a company is selling. Recognizing the reality as soon as possible plays a critical role in companies' on-going success as they must catch up with customers demand, otherwise they would be distant themselves further from the competition. (Drell 2013, Suttle 2014.)

#### 2.3.4 Negativity

Negativity happens even to the giants who have had many years of experiences in the field of expertise and with the advent of blogs it is happening wider and influencing businesses stronger than ever. Jeremy Pepper – the president of POP! Public Relations – explains this phenomenon with the anonymity of blog comments lending readers the bravado to be their truer-selves and say whatever they feel like. Whether the negativity or attack on blogs is legitimate or not, companies must react as silence usually means conceding and confirming the complaint and the false allegation shall spread like wildfire. With the new nature of blogs, more and more negativity shall be coming and companies need to have an apparent and reasoning viewpoint towards the real value of it before making any move. The weight of complaints lies in the fact that it gives a company an opportunity to reverse a negative experience into a positive one and create the next potential customer evangelist from an unhappy customer. On the other hand, if the problem has not been solved properly, customers now, thanks to the visibility of blogs, could broadcast the bad experience to hundreds or thousands of readers and those readers shall share the story, if it is bad enough, and that could severely damage a business. (Wright 2006.)

Negativity could appear under the forms of emails, comments, or blogposts and generally falls into four types.

Lapse in Product Quality	Poor Service or Support	Lapse in Process	Abusive or Criminal Activity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sometimes a product does not function as well as it usually does and is supposed to.</li> <li>• Customers understand these kind of problems unless they have to experience even worse whilst waiting for things to be right.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This happens because of poor employees' attitude and support.</li> <li>• Customers are likely to report this to companies and even more likely to tell this to their acquaintances.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This happens because of lack of employees' preparation and experience or error in technology system.</li> <li>• Customers leave unhappy and build a boycott against companies.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This happens due to lack of employees' morality or lack of operation's transparency.</li> <li>• This is the worst type of negative experience a customer could ever have and it hurt companies gravely.</li> </ul>

FIGURE 8. Types of Negativity (Wright 2006)

As the author has mentioned earlier there are five categories of customers from evangelists to saboteurs and as a result, their ways of reacting to negative experiences also vary. What companies should do is to treat all of them as evangelists regardless of their level of attack because there is a chance that a saboteur might become an evangelist if a company makes up for his bad experience with another extremely good one; and there is also a chance that an evangelist – who has always had his expectations met exceedingly by the company – to become a saboteur if the experience is bad enough and there has been no attempt to fix it. It is recommended to respond to all of customers' feedback as if they are evangelists or potential evangelists because one never knows. (Wright 2006.)

When a company finally has the right mindset towards the negativity, the next step is to tackle it, including responding to it as well as fixing the problem. There are principles to follow so as to communicate effectively, which has been presented in the previous part and the most important ones are, again, respecting and valuing customers' feedback however it might be. Furthermore, the first response is not necessarily the last as after the promise there need to be solution and result as well. Wright (2006) has suggested the following process to deal with negativity from customers.

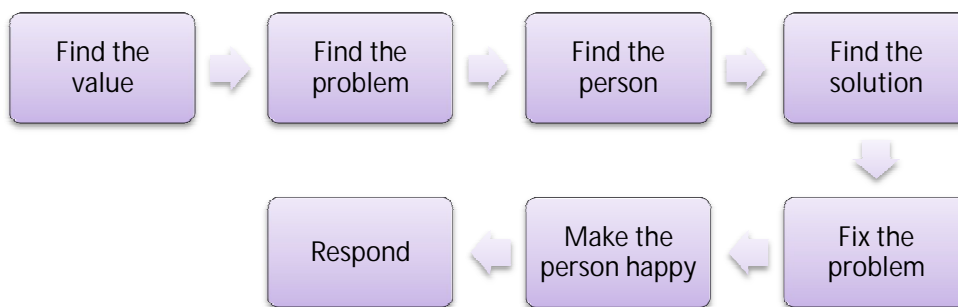


FIGURE 9. Dealing with Negativity (Wright 2006)

Customers' feedback is all valuable and should receive proper respect from companies; however, identifying the true value leading to the right solution could be troublesome. The value of a comment sometimes could be buried deep and impossible to be recognized, especially in generic comments such as "Your product is junk!" or "Your service is poor." In cases like those one has to personally find the real problem behind the text and find the person to directly talk to. Afterwards when everything is clear about what happened, what went wrong and why, companies need to draw a solution and implement it to make customers happy. If the fix is not possible for some reason, like the problem is not on the company's side or a third party is involved, company should still tell customers what it could do and what is recommended in order to express goodwill and stay positive in customers' mind. It is essential, after fixing the problem, to respond to customers once again as a way to inform customers of what has been done and to show that one cares. To wrap up, it all comes down to one word: respect; it is still better to have an unhappy customer than no customers at all since each negative feedback is a chance to create a positive experience and change the story's ending. (Wright 2006.)

### 2.3.5 Advertising on Blog

There are two ways to advertise a company's product or service, either via its own blog or via other blogs. In case of advertising on other blogs, there are generally four types of offers companies could make for bloggers:

- *Pay-per-click*: a company or an advertiser pays the blogger for each time someone clicks the advertisement.

- *Pay-per-impression*: the advertiser pays the blogger for each time the advertisement appears on the blog's page.
- *Pay-per-action*: the blogger gets paid for each time someone clicks an advertisement and performs an action such as contacting the company or make a purchase.
- *Pay-per-post*: the blogger is paid to write posts about the company's product or service or website. (Gunelius 2014b, Filimon et al. 2010.)

Online advertising has several forms but owing to the nature of blog – a place for conversations and building relationships – where content is the main emphasis, only the followings are claimed to be the most suitable and popular types of blog advertisements:

- *Contextual ad*: this advertisement is displayed based on the content of the page, meaning the ad should be related to the information of the blogpost to ensure readers actually want to click it.
- *Text-link ad*: this type of ad does not need to have any relation with the content and is placed in specific text of the blogpost.
- *Impression-based ad*: this is typically a pay-per-impression advertisement.
- *Affiliate ad*: bloggers provide the link to a product and is paid for each transaction readers make by following the link.
- *Direct ad*: this type of advertisement appears in the forms of banners or display ad and an advertiser has to purchase a space in a blog to put his advertisement. Direct advertisers on blogs are also called sponsors of the blogs and pricing of the space or payment method differs among bloggers, mostly depending on blog's traffic.
- *Review*: a company might contact a blogger and ask him to write a post to review the company's product, service or website and the blogger is paid for each post published. This is also called indirect advertisement. (Gunelius 2014b, Filimon et al. 2010.)

It has to be noticed that the above mentioned advertisements could only be delivered on other, often personal, blogs and not on the company's own blog as it is so obvious and it could disturb the readers. Advertising on one's own blog could be tricky as it has to be done via a subtle approach, meaning advertising



without letting people notice that one is deliberately doing so. Traditional marketing of *talking at* customers is no longer valid and likely to be rejected as customers of today are far more intelligent; they know everything and research everything before they actually contact companies and this stage is already close to final decision. It is the modern marketing of *talking with* customers that is the reality companies need to adopt. Consequently, what companies could do before customers come knocking at their doors is to educate customers with the right information, to arm them with confidence and to build relationships with them via relevant, valuable and compelling content – the content that they are seeking, whether they are aware or not. (Wright 2006.)

As long as content is involved, there are some rules for blog advertising that could not be underestimated. First and foremost, advertisements on blogs must not disturb readers and make them distracted from the core content. Overlaying ads on blog surface, showing a page of ad that people have to see before the main content or other kinds of techniques to increase ads' display to readers' faces are all not recommended. Critical readers would not appreciate a blog that is hidden behind advertisements and are not likely to be interested enough to read the post regardless of the value of the content. Secondly, companies should not use ads in their feeds even though readers are reading feeds before and more than going to official websites to read full text. The chance of readers noticing advertisements in feeds is bigger than that in blogposts but companies should resist such temptation as advertising is not the ultimate goal of blogging; the inherent value of blogs is to build relationships and trust and that could not be compromised for any reason. (Wright 2006.)

Still, companies are advertising on blogs as beside customers trust and loyalty, sales is no less important and when companies have to, they should place the ad well. An advertisement could appear at the top of the blog, along the side or at the bottom; there are many options as long as it does not interrupt the content. Moreover, instead of only display an ad, a company could write a post about it to express the passion about the product or service, to give readers reasons to click the ad and to leave room for discussion. By doing this, readers could have access to more detailed information and thus, they shall have more confidence to perform further action. To announce a new product or service in a blogpost it is not

necessary to present only by text, one could make the information look more trustworthy and sound more exciting by including the voice of an expert, for instance, a production manager or a technology specialist. This could be done by citing an interview's script or podcasting a video of the interview as visual content is always appealing. (Wright 2006.)

Another point which has to be taken into consideration is that not advertising at all is actually the best way to advertise. Readers love secrets and love exploring things that they are willing to find the truth behind the content even without one telling them to do so. This technique of hiding the advertisement in the content is extremely effective because curiosity is human's nature. To take an example, if a company wants to inform its blog's readers of a new high-tech product, instead of directly telling about it, the company could write a post reviewing the advanced features of the technology itself and sensitively note that it has been applied in the latest product of the company; and readers shall do the rest to find what the company wants them to find. To wrap up, blogs are inherent advertising and marketing tools that enable companies to increase visibility, build relationships, increase interactivity with customers and drive sales. One should not only use blogs smartly but also be absolutely passionate about blogging to be able to both respect the audience and at the same time bring value to his company. (Wright 2006.)

### 2.3.6 Internal Communication

Blogs are effective communication tools and beside the external use for marketing purposes, blogs could be utilized as internal communication platform for corporates. There are a number of reasons why companies should blog internally and listen to their employees:

#### **Knowledge and Expertise Archive**

Sharing information with others is a way of learning and sharing by writing helps people build up expertise and knowledge in the field. By raising a topic to be discussed, one never knows there might be another employee in the company who masters the subject and could share his professional experience with others. An

internal blog could also act as a permanent archive of the collective intelligence from former employees which is an inherently valuable source of information passing down for generations. (Coy 2014, Chacos 2012.)

### **Idea Generation**

A blog is a great place for ideas to float around as employees are generally more relaxed to talk online than face-to-face. Innovation nowadays has become a necessity for many companies rather than just a recommendation and it is crucial that companies encourage employees to contribute ideas and also let everyone else comment on the idea. It is hard to have a great idea and even harder to turn it into something that works, employees' opinions are, thus, important since they are the one who would directly implement any strategy or execution plan from the top management board that they could have a more practical viewpoint. It is also essential that everyone is heard equally and is rewarded for any good idea. By having an idea blog, companies could communicate to employees that their ideas are valued and they are valued as well. (Chacos 2012.)

### **Internal Communication**

For global enterprises and companies with high level of hierarchy, internal communication between branches or departments could be challenging. By blogging companies could decrease the troubles of traditional emails such as spam, scams or general information overload; and narrow the distance among offices. Consistence is extremely important for international companies and with the help of blogs, announcing new projects, informing of new marketing strategy, recruiting or passing information from the executives shall take less time and be performed smoothly. Information transparency and accountability are also advantages of blogging since employees could ask whatever unclear to them and should be able to get proper answers, which could not be denied later. Furthermore, an internal blog is a fantastic way to help employees stay in-tune with current happenings in the industry as well as update their company's latest status as well as where it is heading. (Wright 2006, Chacos 2012.)

## **Project Management**

In project management it is crucial for the manager and his team to communicate back and forth to ensure that everyone stay informed and motivated. Via blog companies could update the project's progress, archive important documents, raise discussion and keep team members on track to meet deadlines. One of the most difficult aspects of project management is to manage individuals' responsibilities. It could be hard to track who is working on what, who has the latest version of a document or who each document has to go to; but a project management blog could allow people to contribute information and documents in an organized manner. (Wright 2006, Chacos 2012.)

## **Employee Connection**

People are connected to each other not necessarily because they are doing the same job but because they have similarities in personality and through a common corporate blog, employees could find and engage with others even from different departments. The best employee blogs are those allowing people to brainstorm openly, solve problems together, share experiences and connect interpersonally with each other; and therefore, creating a friendly and enjoyable working environment. Moreover, because employees could freely discuss and reveal their personalities as well as abilities without hesitation, managers could discover their potentials and make wise decisions on who is perfect for what job. (Wright 2006, Chacos 2012.)

Nevertheless, getting employees to blog is not an easy mission. Many employees think that they are already too busy to waste time on writing and also do not understand the benefits of blogging. However, instead of coercing employees to blog, companies should encourage them and educate them about the importance of mutual sharing and understanding within a corporate towards the unity and the success of it. Employees should be able to make a choice and before that, whoever starts a company internal blog is to be truly passionate about the job and persistent to achieve the goal he has set. The end result of a successfully implemented internal blogging strategy is happier, more motivated, and more efficient employees, which is the desire of any company. (Wright 2006.)

### 2.3.7 Know or Die

Blogs are conversational and informative platforms for companies but sometimes the blogosphere could be too noisy to find the truly relevant information which companies could apply in a meaningful way. The importance is not only to hear from the crowd, but also from the individuals in the crowd and find the value of their voices. Therefore, most companies now have some kind of blogging and reporting package installed – also called *web stats* to keep track of “the conversation” and learn what is being said about them. (Wright 2006.)

#### **How To Watch Blogs**

There are several blog search engines available for companies to track what other blogs are saying as well as their own blogs’ performance. The most popular active blog tracking service is ***Technorati*** (Technorati.com) which provides up-to-the-minute results of what is happening in blogging. Its main purpose and most effective feature is tracking what blogs are saying about a specific topic via key words and what blogs are linking to other blogs by showing the latest news or stories. It also presents to users: the number of links back to a website (or backlinks), the rank of the blog searched, number of links last week and watchlists notifying users of new links to a blog. (Boswell 2014, Wright 2006.)

Among several search engines, ***Google*** is still the king in terms of simplicity, ease of use and fast delivery offering companies various ways to determine visibility and importance to Google. Three key measurements one could draw from Google are: number of backlinks, number of pages indexed and page ranking. For example, to see Google backlinks, one could enter “link:domain.com”; and to check a page rank, one could download Google Toolbar then PageRank shall be automatically displayed in his website as a green bar. (Boswell 2014, Smarty 2008, Wright 2006.)

The information that has been presented so far does not, of course, cover all of the effective search engines but the most popular ones (according to number of users and reviews) and most searched types of information; and one could already utilize such information in a number of ways. An example can be seen in the “point in time” feature of most search engines which enables companies to

response to new links in a timely manner. Take backlinks as another example, by identifying the most influential bloggers who are regularly linking to one's site, he could contact them in person and ask for their detailed feedback on his company's product or service; or even give them free samples to demo and review. (Wright 2006.) Additionally, companies could also build relationships with famous bloggers as a part of blogging strategy for the following reasons:

- *Let blogger be the expert voice of one's company:* many companies allow famous bloggers to get involved in their business and interview their staff to write posts reviewing their products or services. These blog experts are powerful because they not only are frequently linking to companies' websites but also could write posts comparing how well a company blogs to other competitors and point out the differences. One could read those blogs to learn how to improve his blogging.
- *Ask for feedback on how well a company is blogging:* one could establish relationships with bloggers then have them read his company's blog and ask for advices on how the company is blogging and what could be done to improve blog performance.
- *Build positive public image through bloggers' influence:* most bloggers believe that any company willing to establish real relationships and to ask for help is worth talking about. Therefore, if they could have positive experiences from companies, they shall use their public influence to help companies. (Wright 2006.)

### **Spying on the Competition**

Knowing about the competition is just as important as learning about companies' business or customers in order to make one's products, services, or marketing stand out and blogs shall help companies in that like no other tool. Understanding competitors' strengths and weaknesses is critical to business survival and success; and with blogs companies could watch the competition like a hawk such as finding what the blogging world is saying about them, searching how desirable a company's product or service is compared to competitors' via customers' reviews and feedback, and updating what kind of new technology or innovative feature customers are expecting out of the competition. (Wright 2006.) By doing this a

company could comprehend what it is up against in the marketplace and reduce the risk of the unknown, access any threat posed by new entrants, and respond to rivals' marketing campaigns (Understand Your Competitors 2009).

### **The State of the Industry**

Blogs could be of great use for companies to stay up-to-date with the happenings in their industry. Bloggers in this case could be analysts, industry experts, prominent figures or leaders in the industry and of course, customers. Companies could search for their blogs, subscribe to them and follow what they are saying about the market to keep up with new trends, new technologies or predict new demand. (Wright 2006.)

#### 2.3.8 Return on Investment (ROI)

*“And I think the one mistake that most companies make, even mature companies in the social marketing world right now, the one mistake they make is they do not plan to measure.”* (Jason Falls – CEO of Social Media Explorer)

Most giants are spending hundreds of millions of dollars on promoting their brands just as much as they are earning from that and therefore, they should be very concerned over whether the spend is worth it. Calculating the cost versus payback from marketing is generally called measuring marketing return on investment (or ROI); and it is being challenging across the globe because of the vast amount of data involved and the long-term nature of its benefits that do not directly transform into sales. That explains why many marketers are well-skilled in demonstrating marketing effect yet fail miserably to prove the actual cost-effectiveness. (Young & Aitken 2007.)

Basically, the equation to calculate ROI looks like this (Blanchard 2011):

$$ROI = (gain\ from\ investment - cost\ of\ investment) / cost\ of\ investment$$

In spite of the equation simplicity, measuring marketing ROI – especially social media marketing ROI and in this case, blogs – could indeed vary from companies

to companies. The difference exists because each and every company has its own business goals when blogging and has its own expectation of results, as a consequence. (Cohen 2011.) According to Blanchard (2011), a fundamental sequence of events happening from an initial investment to the gain on that investment comprises of the following stages.

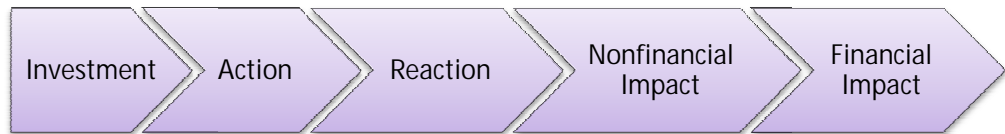


FIGURE 10. Sequence of Events between Investment and Gain (Blanchard 2011)

Often in measuring social media marketing ROI, nonfinancial impact has to be taken into account as there are some types of results that could not be calculated in currency. First and foremost, companies have to define what they actually want to gain from blogs – whether they need to build their brands and customers loyalty on a long-term basis or they want to drive sales for a temporarily particular project – and set appropriate Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to track their blogging return. Jay Baer (2012a) – the founder and CEO of Convince and Convert (the best content marketing blog in the world, according to Content Marketing Institute 2014) – created the four types of content metrics that marketers should focus on when measuring social media ROI.





FIGURE 11. The 4 Content Metrics (Baer 2012a)

### **Consumption Metrics**

When a blogpost is produced, it is important to know the value of its content efforts and consumption metrics provide ways to collect data regarding how many people read or consumed a piece of content. These metrics are directly tied to the value of one's investment (Kuenn 2014). Generally, it is easy to derive from Google Analytics, Youtube insights, other social platforms or web analytics software the following data:

- Page views
- Video views
- Document views
- Downloads
- Social conversations (Pulizzi 2013)

Unfortunately, this is the phase of measurement where some marketers both start and end when it is actually just the beginning. Consumption metrics are important but they are not everything; it is essential to also find the social impact of the content and that turns the attention to sharing metrics. (Baer 2012a.)

## **Sharing Metrics**

According to Pulizzi (2013), these metrics typically answer the question: “Is the content working and how often is it shared with others?” and may include:

- Likes, shares, tweets, +1s, and pins
- Forwards
- Inbound links

Sharing metrics are important to every organization as one could quickly tell if there is something wrong with the content. For instance, if a Content Marketing Institute daily blogpost does not have at least 100 tweets in the first 24 hours, its writer had better dig into the content to find whether it is not appropriate or too sales focused. (Pulizzi 2013.) Furthermore, social profiles could provide value for customer relationship management, customer service and customer engagement among other purposes (Kuenn 2014).

## **Lead Generation Metrics**

This is the phase to discover whether a piece of content could attract, nurture and convert leads (Clerck 2014) and to determine whether the content marketing effort is making financial sense (Baer 2012a). The followings are a few crucial metrics in this category:

- Form completions and downloads
- Email subscriptions
- Blog subscriptions
- Blog comments
- Conversion rate (How often visitors who consume content become leads) (Pulizzi 2013)

The conversion rate is the key data to view lead generation from the highest level, especially to compare the overall conversion rate of a website to that of an individual piece of content. For example, if an overall conversion rate is 2% but a post is converting at only 1%, it might not be working as well as one might think. (Pulizzi 2013.)

## **Sales Metrics**

It is admitted that the true and ultimate goal of any content marketing strategy has always meant for business growth. To answer the question: “Did we actually make any money because of this content?” Pulizzi (2013) suggested the metrics marketers need to measure below:

- Online sales
- Offline sales
- Manual reporting and anecdotes (it is advised to make sure that one knows where leads originated so he could track this although it is hard in some cases)

It is worth noticing that in order to calculate leads and sales, one has to do something trackable (Pulizzi 2013). In blogging, bloggers usually have a Call to Action which is unique to a piece of content at the end of each post that when a customer performs a purchasing action via that link bloggers could track which gain is returned from which content (Collier 2012).

All in all, if one knows the answers for those four questions he would have a holistic content marketing measurement system which helps him efficiently and effectively judge content pieces and archetypes (Baer 2012a). Alternatively, it has to be reminded that the C-level does not indeed care about the number of page views, shares or subscriptions; instead they care about hot leads, revenue and actual profit (Clerck 2014). To prove that blogging is worth the money, Baer (2012b) has done a great deed by establishing the following steps to measure blog marketing ROI on a monthly basis.

## **Blogging Expense Calculation**

- How many hours per month are needed to write, edit, track and manage a blog?
- How much is the hourly pay rate of the employees or contractors hired to do that?
- What is the overhead factor (rent, insurance, utilities and other benefits – decided by the company) percentage?

- How much does the blog cost in design fees, hosting fees, maintenance, subscriptions, and software?

<i>Example:</i>	Hours per month	\$30
	Hourly pay rate	\$40
	Overhead factor	50%
	Designing, hosting, miscellaneous fees	\$1,000

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Monthly investment} &= (30 * 40) + (30 * 40 * 50\%) + 1,000 \\ &= 1,200 + 600 + 1,000 \\ &= 2,800 \end{aligned}$$

=> Assuming each month the exemplified company spends \$2,800 on blogging.

### **Blogging Revenue Calculation**

- How many leads per month does the blog generate?
- What is the lead conversion rate?
- How much is the average lifetime customer value? (monthly true revenue from a customer – after subtracting other expenses to remain the customer – multiply by 12 months)
- How much is the average profit margin?

<i>Example:</i>	Leads per month	40
	Conversion rate	10%
	Average lifetime customer value	\$6,000
	Average profit margin	30%

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Monthly return} &= 40 * 10\% * 6,000 * 30\% \\ &= 4 * 1,800 \\ &= 7,200 \end{aligned}$$

=> Assuming each month this company gains \$7,200 from blogging.

### **Blogging ROI Calculation**

- Subtract the investment from the return, then, divide by the investment.

Example:

$$\text{Blogging ROI} = (7,200 - 2,800) / 2,800 = 4,400 / 2,800 = 1.57$$

=> Monthly blogging ROI of this company is 157%.

Sometimes, companies might not have all the data required to perform the above formulas; so as to optimize this measurement system effectiveness, Pulizzi (2013) suggested that companies should:

- Track everything over a long period of time (this is usually easier for large companies with long history)
- Take note of every change (PR coverage, website updates and so on)
- Track multiple revenue data points (total leads, new customers, average order size, total revenue)
- Look for patterns proving that the content is working (content consumption and sharing metrics increase when sales increase, for instance)

### 2.3.9 Future of Blogging

Several predictions are being made about the future of blogging and whether the revolution shall keep its significant influence on business survival for long from now or fall behind to make way for other future changes. Anyway, it is forecasted that blogging would change in terms of features or technologies but despite what happens, blogging would continue to be more accessible, accepted and influential towards corporate or human life; and would even replace most of corporates' official websites in the near future. However, it is said that there would be debates on the legality of content ownership. (Hudson 2014.) Nonetheless, even if blogging could be out of style someday, as long as companies keep

communicating with customers, blogs could still bring value to them that there might never be a reason to stop blogging (Wright 2006).

## 2.4 Tourism Blogs

Tourism activities are becoming popular in modern life and the industry itself has significantly contributed to many countries' economic development; however, tourism industry has recently been characterized by ever-increasing competition, causing destination organizations and tourist service providers difficulties to acquire and retain customers. Therefore, seeking new methods to attract tourists has received great attention from researchers and marketers. (Chen et al. 2013.) Tourists, before choosing any destination to visit, would probably search for information to support their decision-making (Grant et al. 2008) and recently, personal and tourism corporates' blogs are becoming important sources to find travel information (Yoo & Gretzel 2012, in Sigala et al. 2012). By understanding the relationships between interpersonal blogs' characteristics and destination choice and utilizing the marketing power of blogs, tourist companies could have competitive edges over others in this industry (Litvin et al. 2008). In this part of chapter 2, the author shall study how the digital age has reshaped the way tourists search for information as well as how the electric word-of-mouth has affected travelers' decision- making.

### 2.4.1 Online Information Search and Communication

Owing to the fact that hospitality and tourism industries offer intangible and experiential products, tourists have to rely on the information which delivered to them for the alternatives' identification and evaluation. Moreover, the development of the digital age has made contributing information online easier as well as users' reviews and comments more trustable. As a result, it is acclaimed that social media is becoming crucial to hospitality and tourism businesses. (Pan & Crotts 2012 in Sigala et al. 2012.)

In today's fast-growing cyberspace, interpersonal influence has been incredibly widespread that more and more tourism marketers are seeking strategies to

harness and manage online interpersonal influence to their own advantages because of the following reasons:

- Tourism offerings, mostly intangible products, cannot be evaluated prior to their consumption, which elevates the critical importance of interpersonal influence.
- Tourism products are often considered high-risk purchases, and the emotional risk of evaluation from reference sources is an important factor in decision-making process.
- Tourism products are seasonal and perishable, which imposes marketing stress on providers.
- Hospitality and tourism industry is intensely competitive that the usage of interpersonal influence management is an advantage to compete in the battle. (Litvin et al. 2008.)

Online interpersonal influence is received and given via electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), which has the power to reach and engage more audiences than traditional WOM communication thanks to its timeless and borderless nature (Volo 2012, in Sigala et al. 2012). EWOM is basically a form of informal communications directed at consumers through Internet-based technology including conversations between producers and consumers or those among consumers themselves. EWOM is offering marketers potentials to create new large-scale dynamics in the market via its low-cost information access and exchange as well as control over its types and formats. However, at the same time, given the anonymity of its communicators, problems like intentional misleading or out-of-context messages might arise. (Litvin et al. 2008.)

Nevertheless, consumers are becoming both creators and communicators of content and are interacting with producers, media and other consumers or potential consumers via eWOM. (Volo 2012, in Sigala et al. 2012.) Sigala (2009, 221) also stated: “*Web 2.0 tools have tremendously changed the way people search, find, read, gather, share, develop, and consume information, as well as on the way people communicate with each other and collaborately create new knowledge.*”

TABLE 1. Influence of Social Media on Travel Information Search (Yoo & Gretzel 2012, in Sigala et al. 2012)

<b>Travel Information Search Behavior</b>	<b>% of Social Media Users in 2008</b>	<b>% of Social Media Users in 2010</b>
Number of destinations considered	44	45.9
Amount of time spent on advance planning	49.5	55.8
Number of information sources used	55.3	56.5
Use of ads (TV, radio, press) for travel ideas	41.5	45.9
Stops at visitor information centres	43.6	47.2
Likelihood to buy travel guidebooks/maps	45.9	48.4
Number of travel brochures ordered	45.3	48.6
Amount of print-outs taken on trips	52.2	52.1

The table presented above indicates the percentage of social media users whose online information searching behaviors are influenced by the use of social media. The greatest impacts perceived by users are the number of information sources used, the amount of time spent on advance planning and the amount of print-outs taken on trips. In other words, it can be said that social media expands information search and use but the efficiencies provided need to be reconsidered (Yoo & Gretzel 2012, in Sigala et al. 2012).

With regard to blogging, previous studies have revealed that in 2008, 21.8% of social media users used blogs as their channel to review and search for input information for their travel planning process and in 2010 the percentage remained approximately the same (appendix number 1). Travel blogs seem to be an ideal mean to foster information exchange in the tourism industry because travel and tourism products require intensive information updates and are difficult to be evaluated before consumption (Holloway 2004). Furthermore, travel blogs have



the narrative and storytelling nature through which the user-generated content shared could be non-commercial, experiential and up-to-date, and certainly, is ready to be consumed (Yoo & Gretzel 2011).

Schmallegger and Carson (2008) concluded that there are four major types of tourism blogs which have evolved from individual online diaries:

- Consumer-to-consumer (C2C): bloggers share tourism experiences and communicate with their friends, families and eventually create eWOM.
- Business-to-business (B2B): stakeholders view this as a networking opportunity to communicate about industry trends, technological developments, research findings or marketing tips.
- Business-to-consumer (B2C): corporates communicate with consumers about new offerings and build mutual relationships. These blogs' content could be created in-house or by professional bloggers/contractors.
- Government-to-consumer (G2C): destination marketing organizations create these blogs to communicate with their target markets.

It is noticeable that there is a gap between use and creation of content where passive users are identified as those who consume (browse, watch and read) blogs and participate in the conversation; whilst active users are those who produce blog entries, upload pictures, videos, and add links (Shao 2009). Yoo & Gretzel (2011) discovered that people's use and creation of content behaviors are differentiated by socio-demographic characteristics and the influence of personalities; lack of time and interest is considered one of the causes as well.

For all those facts, blogs published on virtual travel communities are still proliferating in popularity because of its highly perceived credibility of consumers' authentic opinions and time-saving effect in decision-making process (Schmallegger and Carson 2008). Specifically, there is a substantial difference between information conveyed through consumer-to-consumer travel blogs and tourism marketing information manoeuvred by companies and destinations. The spontaneity of individual bloggers' observations and commentaries allow them to report both positive and negative experiences, whereas communications from marketers are biased towards positive attributes. Although bloggers are self-

designated authorities and cannot represent the general consumers or travelers, they are indeed an important and fairly authoritative voice in the market place. (Volo 2010.)

#### 2.4.2 Influence on Travel Decisions

Tourism products are experiential and characterized by intangibility and uncertainty at the time of purchase as well as consumption. Hence, destination selection contains higher risk and this triggers consumers to rely on a certain mode of communication, namely personal sources or WOM. Positive WOM was found to increase purchasing intentions as it creates a favourable brand image and reduces risk perception. (Jeong & Jang 2011.)

As can be seen in the following table, there is a considerable percentage of online travelers who use social media that perceives some influence on their decision-making.

TABLE 2. Influence of Social Media Use on Travel Decisions (Yoo & Gretzel 2012, in Sigala et al. 2012)

<b>Travel Decision</b>	<b>% of Social Media Users in 2008</b>	<b>% of Social Media Users in 2010</b>
Where to go	57.2	68.8
How to get there	52.5	59.5
When to go	51.5	61.4
What to do	75.2	76.6
Where to stay overnight	81.0	81.8
Where to eat	68.3	76.6
Where to shop	56.2	65.1

According to the above table, the greatest impact is felt with respect to where to stay overnight, in other words hotels with 81.8% in 2010, and choosing activities and restaurants are also influenced both with 76.6% in 2010. Furthermore, it can be interpreted that in 2010 respondents generally are influenced by social media usage more than those of 2008, meaning social media has proved its increasingly critical role in influencing travelers' decision-making in recent years. (Yoo & Gretzel 2012, in Sigala et al. 2012.)



FIGURE 12. Influencers of Online Purchase Decisions (Redsicker 2013)

From the above figure, it is easy to point out that blogs rank third among the most influential digital services regarding general online purchases. This could be explained by the fact that bloggers are more honest and sincere in their reviews of products or services since they would talk about both positive and negative sides, thus considered a trusted source of information. (Redsicker 2013.)

However, empirical evidence indicates that the degree of interpersonal influence varies among different blogs, and that there are certain characteristics of travel

blogs which attract tourists' attention and influence their travel decisions, in which the quality, quantity and relevance of blogs' content are considered most important (Chen et al. 2013). Information quality is the usefulness of available information that helps tourists evaluate the products or services; but it also depends on personal preferences or decision characteristics, in other words contextual factors (Watts et al. 2009). Watts and co-writers (2009) proposed that relevance is one of the most noticeable contextual qualities and it is perceived according to the decision it is being applied to; for example, one who is considering visiting destination X would likely to find travel experiences to that destination more relevant and useful. As for information quantity, the advancement of Internet technologies allows eWOM to spread more widely and rapidly than traditional face-to-face WOM (Litvin et al. 2008), resulting in information overload (Grant et al. 2008) and thus, produces adverse effects on tourists destination selection (Frías et al. 2008). To tackle this problem, internal filtering mechanisms such as knowledge and experience should be used to eradicate irrelevant information. As a result, it is concluded that information relevance, before heading to information quality and quantity, is the most important characteristic of an influential travel-blog's content. (Chen et al. 2013.)

Chen and co-authors (2013) numerically tested 5 hypotheses regarding criteria of information relevance of travel blogs that potentially lead to behavioral intention to visit a destination.

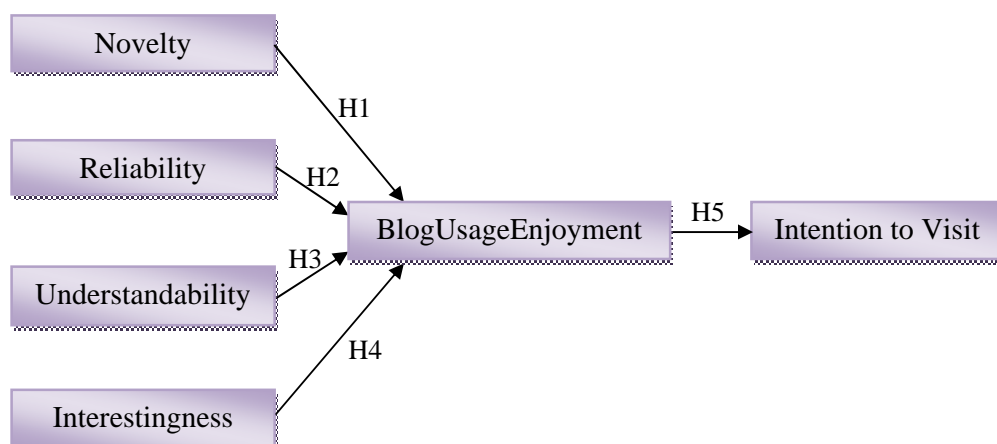


FIGURE 13. Research Framework (Chen et al. 2013) (appendix number 2)

According to the findings, novelty of content has a more powerful influence than the others, meaning tourists are more excited about new content or information of a destination they have not come across before; whilst reliability of information, unexpectedly, was found to have no impact on blog usage enjoyment. This can be explained by the nature of personal blogs which are often perceived to be more reliable than corporate's blogs and the readership's varied approaches to perceive a content as reliable which are source credibility, readers' own knowledge and experience and so on. Understandability of content was numerically proved to support blog usage enjoyment and so does interestingness of content. Finally, the more the enjoyment when tourists use or read blogs is provided, the higher the probability that they would visit the destination mentioned in the blog. (Chen et al. 2013.)

These results have produced some practical insights for businesses as well. Companies and destinations should encourage and support travelers to build their blogs as well as establish their own tourism blogs to communicate with target consumers. (Chen et al. 2013.) Furthermore, tourism marketers should consider identifying the popular bloggers that attract their target demographics and inviting them to a destination visit or a complementary meal; just like they have been organizing trips for travel agents, writers and journalists (Litvin et al. 2008).

Schmallegger and Carson (2008) also reported in their study that the strategy of sponsoring professional bloggers to write about their trips either on companies or destinations' blogs or on their private blogs has already been proven to be successful in many countries' tourism marketing. The VISIT Milwaukee and the Pennsylvania Tourism Office as well as many other state and regional tourism organizations in the USA started to use this blogging approach since 2005. European destinations followed shortly by inviting renowned bloggers to tours around Europe such as Amsterdam tours for US bloggers hosted by Holland destination organizations. In 2009, Taiwanese government invited and subsidized young travelers around the world to a trip to Taiwan under the conditions that they would produce articles about their experiences and post some images of their trips (Chen et al. 2013).

Most of the time tourism organizations cover all the travel expenses for bloggers, namely airfares, accommodation, local transportation, meals and related-facilities; sometimes bloggers even get travel allowances. Likewise, hotels and restaurants have recently encouraged bloggers to write positive comments about them and the rewards vary from vouchers to special treatment; some even organize contests where the best blog could win a prize. (Schmallegger and Carson 2008.) These travelers are referred to as thought leaders and an important source of knowledge which could make them co-producers of products or services; and marketers are urged to support their blogs and maintain relationships with these people to update current trends, novel experiences and valuable insights (Singh et al. 2008).

In Volo (2010) research about tourist experiences posted on blogs, there are also indicators proving that blogposts with personally emotional expressions are more likely to influence future travel intentions of the readership. The same level of influence could be seen in posts with the blogger's recommendations or their own declaration of future intentions to travel to mentioned destinations. This happens when the blogger is truly passionate about the destination, to begin with; therefore, close consideration should be imposed on blogposts having a certain degree of companies or destinations' interference as those are sometimes written according the judges' direction rather than with bloggers' authentic descriptions and feelings. Volo's study (2010) also suggested that bloggers should start writing about a journey by narratively describing how they gather information before departure; and end their stories by writing about their return home. By doing this, readers or other travelers could obtain some insights on how to collect information in the first place, thus makes the planning process seem easier, and ultimately have some influence on their future travel-related decisions.

#### 2.4.3 SWOT Analysis of Blog Marketing in Tourism

Blogs in tourism industry are extremely powerful marketing tools for destination organizations and tourist service providers as they have a huge impact on consumers' behaviors in searching for travel information, planning and making decisions for their trips, telling stories about their experiences after the trips and becoming yet another source of trusted information for other travelers. This circle

of information is getting bigger and spreading faster than ever thanks to social media boom and thus, it is crucial that companies must keep up with its pace to survive or even be able to control it to lead the competition. Conversely, if companies fail in any aspect of customers' services, the likelihood of their suffering from severe consequences is of no doubt. Customers complaints sent to companies are bad enough, but customers' stories about their negative experiences written on their blogs are much worse because bad news travel just as fast as good news and the amplification in digital world is known as beyond control. (Guse 2009.) So as to completely understand the power of bloggers, a SWOT analysis of blog marketing in tourism is summarized and presented in the figure below.



FIGURE 14. Tourism Blog Marketing's SWOT Analysis (Guse 2009)

Notwithstanding blogging's weaknesses and threats, the benefits and opportunities it is offering destinations and tourism service providers

are enormous and unlimited. A lot of businesses are depending on tourism and it is also what keeps a region alive and increases its purchasing power, meaning an important economic factor (Guse 2009). In today's dramatic rocketing of online activity, it is a must for companies and destination organizations to adapt themselves to the digital age and fully exploit the marketing power of social media in general, and blogs in particular. Companies thoroughly comprehending and employing the potentials of blogs are certainly standing on the advantageous side of the game.



### 3. CASE STUDY: OUTDOORS FINLAND FOR BLOGGERS 2014

The purpose of building this chapter is to study a case campaign to fully comprehend its mission, the responsibilities of the parties involved, the planning and organizing processes as well as the outputs produced from the campaign. Afterwards, the understanding shall be adopted in an empirical research to investigate the campaign's effectiveness and causes of difficulties.

The following diagram illustrates the overall structure of the organizing parties of Outdoors Finland for Bloggers 2014 campaign, which has been checked and approved by Mrs. Pirjo Räsänen – project manager of Outdoors Finland South and co-campaign manager of OFB.

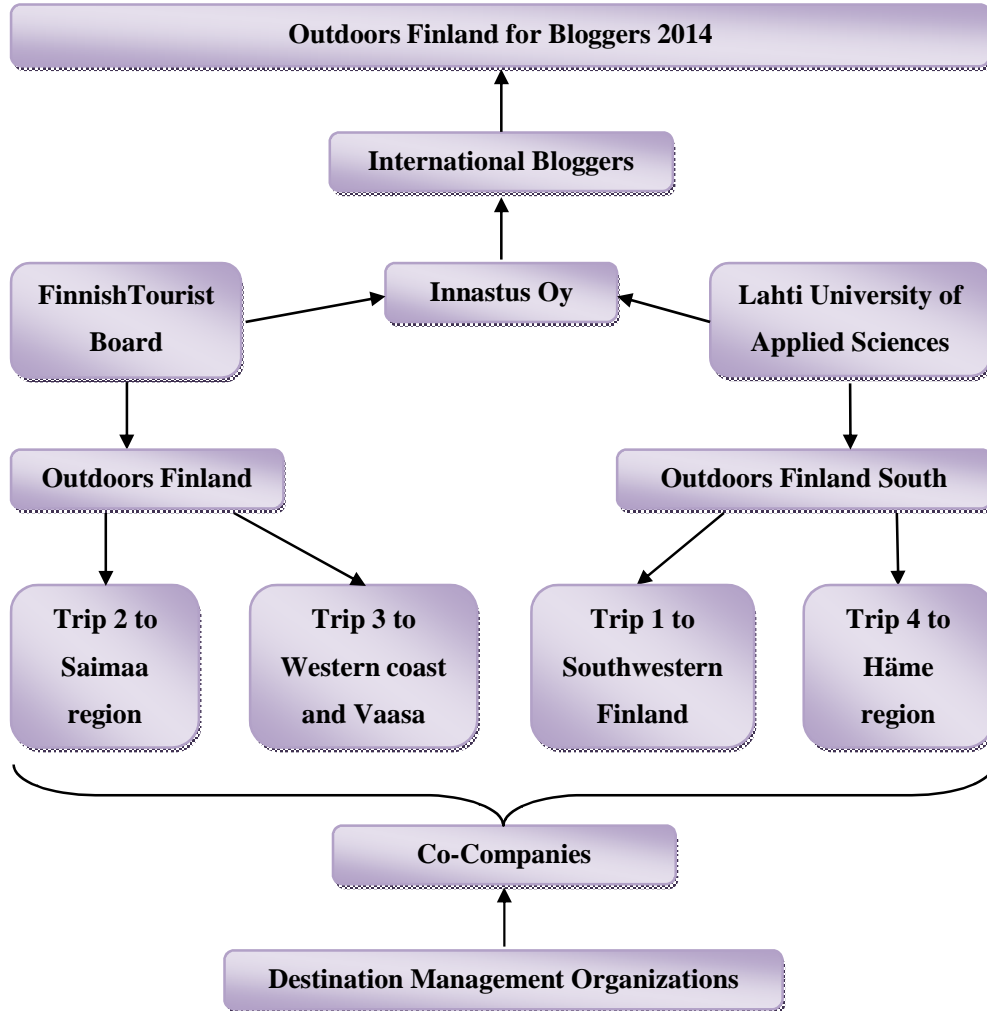


FIGURE 15. Campaign Overview (Räsänen 2014b)

### **Campaign Outdoors Finland for Bloggers 2014**

This social media campaign was planned and organized via a joint venture of Outdoors Finland (OF) and Outdoors Finland South (OFS) aiming at promoting outdoors activities and natural wonders in Finland. The campaign comprises of four trips to four different areas of Finland which are Southwestern, Saimaa, Western coast and Häme regions; which were happening during August of 2014. The trips consist of on land and on water activities as well as, obviously, sauna for 23 internationally popular bloggers together with four Finnish bloggers. (Outdoors Finland for Bloggers 2014.)

### **The Finnish Tourist Board**

The Finnish Tourist Board is an agency of the Ministry of Employment and the Economy and is acting as a national expert in actively promoting Finnish tourism. The Board has close relationships with ministries, travel businesses, transport companies and other Finnish regions to cooperate in research, product development and especially marketing of leisure tourism in Finland. The Finnish Tourist Board appears to the world under the name Visit Finland and is represented in many key target countries, namely China, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, Russia, Spain and USA. (About Us – VisitFinland.com 2014.)

### **Lahti University of Applied Sciences**

Lahti UAS is located in Southern Finland and is a higher education provider across many disciplines. LUAS is known as an innovative and internationally respected actor in the education field and has close relationships with local businesses and well as international partners. Moreover, LUAS is also a member of the largest Federation of Universities of Applied Sciences alliance in Finland, which enables its students to access a wider range of excellent and professional opportunities. (About Us – Lahti University of Applied Sciences 2014.)

### 3.1 Pre-campaign: Planning

This campaign was sponsored by the money from the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and before it was practically run, an abundance of planning and preparation had been done to facilitate the campaign's performance. First and foremost, the Finnish Tourist Board (FTB) needed to find an expert who specializes in international bloggers' networking as well as strategies relating to blogging and blog marketing. Around May 20<sup>th</sup> 2014, FTB sent out many invitations to service providers and organized a competition to find the best offer for the campaign from the applicants; in the end there was, unfortunately, only one offer from Innastus Oy. After that, FTB had to find the Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) for the campaign so as to get their help on running the campaign because they are professionals in their areas. Many DMOs in the four chosen areas (Southwestern, Saimaa, Western coast and Häme) had been contacted and negotiated with about the campaign. (Laaksonen 2014.)

The deal was that they would sponsor for everything involved in the trips in their own areas, including accommodation and daily meals for the bloggers; whilst FTB would pay for the flight tickets and transportation from Helsinki to the locations of the trips as well as local transportation in the four regions. The bloggers were asked to handle the transportation fee from the airport to the hotel in Helsinki. In this case, the opportunity to get more online and worldwide visibility via the international bloggers to market their destinations could be the most important reason to explain why lots of DMOs agreed to the deal. Selected DMOs then contacted local tourism companies and service providers and invited them to participate in organizing the campaign. (Saari 2014.)

The DMOs that had been involved in organizing the campaign are listed in the table below; there were many other local companies in each trip as well (appendix number 3).

TABLE 3. List of Campaign's DMOs (Saari 2014)

<b>Trip 1 - Southwestern</b>	<b>Trip 2 - Saimaa</b>	<b>Trip 3 – Western coast</b>	<b>Trip 4 - Häme</b>
-The Official Visitor's Guide for Kimito Islands  -Hanko Tourist Office	-MisetOy	-Vaasan Seudun Matkailu Oy  -Merenkurkku World Heritage Association  -LiminkaOy  -FemEmareOy	-VierumäkiOy  -Linna Hotel

Before the campaign's kickoff, the DMOs and co-companies were advised to fulfil the following instructions in order to make a success of the campaign:

- All facilities provided must have good internet connection for the bloggers convenience as well as encourage them to post updates on their social media channels
- Each blogger should have his or her own room to guarantee their privacy
- As for the trips' activities, it is important to design them in such a manner that each and every blogger could have personal experience and none of them would only watch things happening.
- Companies could also ask for the bloggers' opinions about what they would like to try during the trips and consider if their suggestions are applicable.
- The trips' schedules should not be so tight that bloggers could have time in between to share their up-to-the-minute experiences on social media.
- Companies should have plans to use the content, photos or videos created by the bloggers in advance as well as discuss with the bloggers during the trips about whether those materials could be freely used for companies' marketing purposes or have to be purchased. (Moisio 2014b.)

Beside the offline preparation, Inna-Pirjetta Lahti from Innastus Oy had created a Facebook page named *#OutdoorsFinland for Bloggers* as a place for organizing

companies and bloggers to communicate with each other before, during and after the trips. This Facebook group also acts as a channel for destination organizations and companies to share information of the industry, to advertise their own tourist areas as well as for bloggers to post links of their blogs and other content created for the campaign. Specifically, before the trips' commencement, DMOs and local companies had been encouraged to:

- Post links regarding the destinations' information, weather, outdooractivities as well as express a welcome attitude towards bloggers.
- Communicate with bloggers in a way that would motivate them even more to actively join the programs.
- Post photos or videos related to activities in the trips to inspire the bloggers beforehand. (Moisio 2014b.)

### **Innastus Oy**

Innastus Oy is a service company offering communication skills training, strategic blogging planning and other communication services such as marketing, public relations, event management, and customer service consultancy. Innastus has a wide international travel blogging network and its representative – Inna-Pirjetta Lahti – has more than ten years of experience in this field of expertise. She is able to assist clients in building a strategy to work with bloggers and/or establishing a successful corporate blog, which was why FTB and LUAS had entrusted Innastus Oy to contact and recruit international travel bloggers to participate in the campaign Outdoors Finland for Bloggers 2014. (Lahti 2014a.)

### **Pieni Idea-Puoti Oy**

Pieni Idea-Puoti is a service companies providing ideas for its clients about communications planning and implementation; mostly concerning copy writingand strategies for social media marketing as well as consulting for customer services and communications (Holmberg 2014). From the beginning of June 2014, Pieni Idea-Puoti Oy was hired by Innastus Oy to produce ideas to plan the detailed programs for the four trips (Laaksonen 2014).

## **Bloggers' Recruitment**

As per Inna-Pirjetta Lahti's information (2014b), the recruitment phase started from mid June and finished at the end of June 2014. Lahti selected 30 international bloggers within her network and sent them invitations by emails. The announcement about the campaign was also widely spreaded on many social media channels of Innastus Oy and the bloggers who were personally invited shared the information on their blogs and other association channels as well. Furthermore, there was an application website which had been created by Lyyti and appeared on VisitFinland.com. There were approximately 180 applicants applying for the trips to four regions of Finland and among them, 23 bloggers with appropriate criteria were selected by Lahti and Eva Kiviranta (Campaign Public Relations coordinator from FTB) to participate in the campaign OFB in their chosen areas.

One of the criteria was geographical origin of the bloggers in which Germany, the United Kingdom, Benelux countries and other English speaking countries were prioritized. Moreover, when finalizing the list of winning bloggers, the organizers also tried to have bloggers speaking different languages in each trip, in other words they tried to avoid the situation that the bloggers in one trip were all Germans, or French or Dutch people. (Lahti 2014b.) As agreed, all of the bloggers' expenses were sponsored by FTB, LUAS and DMOs; they also got their daily fees during the programs invoiced from FTB, which varied from €80 to €350 depending on the popularity of their blogs. In return, they were expected to compose one pre-tour post and at least three post-tour blogposts as well as actively share them via their social media channels. (Saari 2014.)

Regarding the application form, the bloggers were required to provide their contact information as well as their blogs' features such as the niche, the audience, the popularity of their blogs, other social media channels they are using, and the quantity and quality of the content they could offer. As the author has mentioned earlier, the campaign comprises of 4 trips and according to the organizers, it was essential that each trip had one Finnish blogger as a host and a team leader, sometimes an interpreter if necessary. There were, as a result, totally 27 bloggers who participated in the trips. (Moisio 2014b.) Another point worth mentioning is

that the organizers of the campaign wanted to market Finnish tourism not only to the world but also to Finnish consumers; it was, therefore, a wise decision to have Finnish bloggers in the trips and to give them a chance to contribute to their own country tourism industry (Saari 2014).

Generally, the applications of the 27 chosen bloggers provided the following consolidated information:

- Most blogs use English, either as a major or second language; there are two blogs in Dutch only, four blogs in French only and one blog in German only.
- All of the blogs have a niche focusing on traveling, adventure, food and culture, nature discovery, and outdoors sports.
- The blogs' readership originates from many countries, is aged mostly from 20 to 40 years old, and has an approximately same gender distribution.
- Besides their blogs, they also have Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, Google Plus and Youtube accounts; one male blogger from Australia uses LinkedIn and lots of other social media channels.
- Their blogs monthly pageviews mostly range from about 20,000 to more than 150,000.
- About half of the bloggers have been to Finland and the other half have not.
- Most bloggers offer to write blogposts and share photos or videos during the trips on their blogs as well as other social media channels they are using with the agreed hashtag *#Outdoors Finland*. Josh Bender from Australia also suggested to check-in for each place he would visit, to include in his posts permalinks to the campaign website or social pages and other service providers' official sites (restaurants, hotels and so on).
- All of the bloggers confirmed that they would take a lot of photos, but could only freely offer some of them to the organizers for marketing purposes, any number of photos exceeding the limit would be charged a negotiable fee. (Moisio 2014a.)

### 3.2 During-campaign: Organizing

On August 6<sup>th</sup> 2014, right before the campaign Outdoors Finland for Bloggers' kickoff, there was a Get Together between six international bloggers and one Finnish blogger who participated in the first trip organized as a chance for bloggers to introduce themselves and make friends. On August 7<sup>th</sup> 2014, an information ceremony was held as an official start of the journey, which included all the co-companies and seven travel bloggers of the first trip. The purpose of the meeting was to briefly introduce the program and to motivate the bloggers with a touching and inspiring speech from Mr. Pata Degerman – a passionate explorer and a famous public speaker. (Moisio 2014b.) There was no pre-tour meeting for the other trips since the time of the campaign execution was duplicated with summer vacation, many companies were too busy and could not afford to come (Saari 2014).

From August 7<sup>th</sup> to August 11<sup>th</sup> 2014, the first trip of the campaign to **Southwestern Finland** took place, including:

- Borders of Adventure
- Finding the Universe
- Backpacker.org
- That Backpacker
- Nomadic Samuel
- Around the Globe
- Lapsiperheen Matkat (Finn)

This trip was designed for bloggers to enjoy the natural beauty and cultural leisure of Finland as well as to experience Finnish authentic wilderness with outstanding landscapes via outdoor activities like kayaking, cycling, swimming and sauna, obviously. One of the highlights of the trip was the sight seeing in Helsinki where the bloggers could explore its beautiful parks, forests, lakes and phenomenal architecture. During the trip, seven bloggers also had a chance to visit the Bengtskär lighthouse – the tallest lighthouse of the Nordic countries – which is positioned 52 meters above sea level, to learn about one of the important landmarks of Finnish history. Furthermore, the bloggers could visit the town of



Hanko with many historical sights, versatile restaurants, beautiful landscapes, brilliant beaches and explore its noteworthy nature. Last but not least, the bloggers were invited to a sauna – one of the fundamental philosophies of Finnish culture – to experience a true Finnish way of relaxation and well-being. (Outdoors Finland for Bloggers 2014.)

From August 21<sup>st</sup> to August 24<sup>th</sup> 2014, eight bloggers participated in the second trip to **Saimaa region**, they were:

- Off-the-Path
- Dream Euro Trip
- We12travel
- Globalhelpswap
- Travel with Bender
- Life is a Trip
- Instinct Voyageur
- Kaukokaipuu (Finn)

In this eco-friendly trip, the bloggers went trekking, fishing and kayaking on the pristine lakes of the area. The highlight of this trip was the chance to observe the gravely endangered Saimaa ringed seal (currently protected by the World Wildlife Fund) in its peacefully natural habitat – the lake Saimaa, the largest lake of Finland. Additionally, the bloggers also visited the Linnasaari national park embracing a treasured archipelago and the green surroundings, which is perfect for water trekkers. The city of Mikkeli was also included in the program for the bloggers to discover as well. (Outdoors Finland for Bloggers 2014.)

From August 28<sup>th</sup> to August 31<sup>st</sup> 2014, the third trip to **Western Coast** happened including:

- Monkeys and Mountains
- Time Travel Turtle
- StefaniaBlogt
- The Crowded Planet
- Points and Travel
- Wanderlust Expert

In this trip to Vaasa, the bloggers were able to experience many exciting recreational activities like biking, kayaking and visiting the Terranova nature center where they could see and hear the most common birds of the area, pet a seal or take a peak at the virtual aquarium. The bloggers also could visit a growing archipelago village called Raippaluoto to see a beautiful boat dock, to swim in its large beach or to enjoy a cruise through the archipelago and observe the natural charm of this area. Among the Mustasaari islands system, beside Raippaluoto there is a destination named Björköby – formed by 350 islands – where its livelihood is established based on fishing and seal hunting. This area also offers a unique experience for any visitor who wants to learn how island living has made a distinctive impact on its everyday life. The highlight of this trip was the Liminka bay – the largest bay in the northernmost parts of the Gulf of Bothnia. The place is well-known for its cherished bird habitat and wetlands around which over 160 species of birds come to build their nests. During their migration time (Spring and Autumn) visitors could experience a symphony of trilling, honking and cackling accompanied by the hum of thousands of wings. (Outdoors Finland for Bloggers 2014.)

At the same time of the third trip's happening, the final trip in the program took place in **Häme region** with six bloggers:

- Snoopsmaus
- Team Givres
- Chasing the Unexpected
- Blog Voyage Bien Voyager
- Nomad is Beautiful
- Jungle and the City (Finn)

This trip was a soft and ecological nature adventure for the bloggers together with berry picking, Finnish sauna and sauna whisks making activities. Furthermore, yoga, hiking, kayaking and trekking through the nature adventure park were included as well. The bloggers participated in those activities mostly in two areas: Vierumäki and the lake Päijänne. Vierumäki is known as a unique services provider of wellness and sports-related leisure activities for individuals and organizations; and as a versatile centre for the development of sports and

education in the fitness field on a European level. The place is surrounded by 10,000 hectares of wilderness and has a beautiful lake-scenery attracting more than 400,000 visitors annually. As for the lake Päijänne, it is the second largest lake in Finland and is famous for boating, canoeing and sailing. (Outdoors Finland for Bloggers 2014.)

### 3.3 Post-campaign: Outputs and Relationship Management

#### **Outputs**

According to what the author has been accumulating from the Facebook group #Outdoors Finland for Bloggers so far, there are totally **24 pre-tour blogposts** out of 27 bloggers, most of them are in English and a few are in Dutch, German, French and Finnish. As for post-tour, there have been totally **81 blogposts** from 26 bloggers in which:

- Trip 1 to Southwestern Finland has had 21 posts
- Trip 2 to Saimaa has had 18 posts
- Trip 3 to Western coast of Finland has had 21 posts
- Trip 4 to Häme has had 21 posts

Six bloggers have published more than three posts, which exceeds the requirement of the campaign's organizer. Unlike in the pre-tour posts where the bloggers listed all activities from their trips, in the post-tour posts they choose those which are indeed interesting to them and have a lot of information to write about.

(#Outdoors Finland for Bloggers 2014.) With reference to the content of the posts, their quality and the reaction of the readership towards them, the author would study each and every post and give detailed description in the next chapter.

According to Lahti (2014b), there are over 1,000 photos and approximately 20 vlogs (video blogs – mostly Youtube videos), which are impressive numbers, that have been produced and shared on social media channels as well.

#### **Relationship Management**

As for bloggers' relationship retention after the campaign, Inna-Pirjetta Lahti has been joining in many discussions either on their blogs or on other social media

channels where they have been sharing materials produced from the campaign. Alternatively, she has invited the bloggers to different campaigns and events and has personally met some bloggers there. Lahti is also actively sharing the blogposts, the photos and other materials on her own blog and so are the co-companies. From the survey for DMOs and companies, it can be seen that they are also sharing bloggers' materials on their own channels as well as are maintaining connections with the bloggers via the Facebook group and other social media platforms although communication is not as active as during the campaign. However, up to the moment all the outputs of the campaign have only been shared online; there is one company saying that they did use some materials in their own events whilst the others mainly have plans to utilize the materials in their future marketing campaigns. (Lahti 2014b.)

## 4. EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

In this chapter an empirical research is reported in terms of how it was conducted including survey designation and data collection methods, and what could be concluded from its results. The findings in this chapter shall be applied in the development plan for the next campaign proposed in the next chapter.

### 4.1 Survey Designation and Data Acquisition

*“Survey is a research style that involves systematic observation or systematic interviewing to describe a natural population and, generally draw inferences about causation or patterns of influence from systematic covariation in the resulting data.”*

(Sapsford 2007, 12)

As the author has mentioned in chapter 1, the two most common research survey styles are quantitative and qualitative surveys. By the time the author participated in the process of studying and evaluating the campaign OFB’s performance, the coordinator company of the campaign – Innastus Oy – had already done two quantitative surveys in which the respondents are the bloggers and the co-companies. Thus, what the author did was to collect and analyse available results from those surveys. Alternatively, the author decided to conduct qualitative surveys in form of interviews so as to thoroughly investigate the insights into the challenges that the campaign organizers had faced.

With respect to interviews, there are different levels of formality and structure of questions or conversations. An interview may be highly formalized and structured, or informal and unstructured, or may be a mixture of both styles. One common typology categorizes interviews as either:

- structured interviews;
- semi-structured interviews;
- unstructured or in-depth interviews. (Saunders et al. 2012.)

Structured interviews use standardized questionnaires or identical set of questions that the interviewer should read out exactly as written in the same tone of voice to

avoid any bias. Structured interviews are sometimes referred to as quantitative research interviews. By contrast, semi-structured and in-depth interviews are non-standardized and often referred to as qualitative research interviews. In semi-structured interviews, the interviewer has a list of possible key questions that may vary in interviews with different people. Depending on the flow of the conversation, some questions may be omitted, their order may change and additional questions may be required. What is more, the interviewer could also give some comments or possible prompts to encourage further discussion. Lastly, unstructured or in-depth interviews are informal conversations in which the interviewee could freely discuss about anything provided that it is related to the topic area; the interviewer, however, should have a clear idea about what he or she wants to explore and give an understandable explanation of the topic to the interviewee. (Saunders et al. 2012.)

Because this research bears an exploratory nature, the author chose to conduct semi-structured and in-depth interviews with the organizers, the coordinator company and one of the Destination Management Organizations of the campaign OFB. There are face-to-face interviews, one Skype interview with Mrs. Heli Saari, and two email interviews with Mrs. Inna-Pirjetta Lahti and a DMO's representative. As for the face-to-face and Skype interviews, the answers were documented by taking notes during the interviews; and regarding the email interviews, the ideas of the interviewees were summarized and rewritten according to the author's understanding. The history of the interviews conducted could be found in the following table (appendix number 4).

TABLE 4. Interviews' History

<b>Date</b>	<b>Interviewee</b>	<b>Description</b>
08.09.2014	Pirjo Räsänen (project manager – OFS and campaign organizer – OFB)	In-depth interview – to receive an introduction of the campaign and instructions on what needs to be done
09.09.2014	Peter Moisio (campaign organizer – OFB)	In-depth interview – to obtain reports and other information of the campaign

03.10.2014	Peter Moisio (campaign organizer – OFB)	In-depth interview – to clarify everything unclear about the campaign and collect updated reports
08.10.2014	Pirjo Räsänen (project manager – OFS and campaign organizer – OFB)	In-depth interview – to get the thesis checked and keep the commissioner updated of the thesis progress
13.10.2014	Heli Saari (project manager – OF and campaign organizer – OFB)	Semi-structured interview – to hear comments about the campaign’s performance and opinions about its challenges as well as suggestions for improvement
15.10.2014	Kirsi Laaksonen (campaign organizer – OFB)	In-depth interview – same objectives as above
15.10.2014	Johannes Sipponen (campaign organizer – OFB)	In-depth interview – same objectives as above
23.10.2014	Inna-Pirjetta Lahti (campaign coordinator – OFB)	Semi-structured email interview – to collect all the information, comments and data regarding the bloggers and the public reaction towards their posts
24.10.2014	Company Interview	In-depth email interview – to understand how to measure the campaign’s effectiveness
27.10.2014	Peter Moisio (campaign organizer – OFB)	In-depth interview – to clarify everything confusing in the survey for companies as it is in Finnish

The findings of the interviews conducted by the author and the surveys done by Innastus Oy would be discussed in the next part of this chapter. It is worth mentioning that apart from the data and information derived from the two

quantitative surveys and the qualitative interviews, the author also applies her own knowledge and way of reasoning to the coming discussions.

## 4.2 Results and Discussion

After obtaining all the necessary data and information from the surveys, it is essential to interpret the results and to draw insightful findings from them. In this part of chapter 4, the author shall study the acquired information and give conclusions based on her own understanding and observation.

### 4.2.1 Campaign Outcome Evaluation

In this part, the author shall analyze and discuss the results regarding the campaign's outcome considering two aspects: the general performance of the trips and the effectiveness of the materials resulting from the campaign.

#### 4.2.1.1 Campaign Performance

##### **Survey for Bloggers**

The organizers wanted to know different motivations of the bloggers when they decided to apply for the trips in order to confirm the strengths of the campaign as well as opportunities for the next campaign. Thus, the first question in the survey asks for the main reasons why the bloggers participated in the campaign at the first place; and most bloggers stated that they wanted to experience new things, either because they had not yet been to Finland or because they had not try outdoors activities in Finland. Some bloggers expressed extreme interest in adventurous outdoors sports under the wild nature and that is the main theme of their blogs as well, which explains why they were excited about the trips and the number of applicants was unexpectedly overwhelming. The others said that they are interested in UNESCO World Heritage Sites included in the trips or that they just wanted to explore Finnish natural wonders and culture and see if Finland could be a nice destination in winter as well. (Lahti 2014b.)



According to the bloggers' experiences and preferences during the trips, the top activities are kayaking, Finnish sauna, biking, hiking and fishing. Generally, all of the activities are said to be interesting and well-organized; some bloggers of the first trip, however, suggested that the Viking Center was not exciting enough to write about and not suitable for the outdoors theme either. Alternatively, it might not be the right season that the bird watching activity in the third trip was not as spectacular as expected from what was promised by the organizers. In the last trip, the forest yoga also did not satisfy the bloggers for many reasons such as unsuitable location and atmosphere, insufficient duration and unprofessional exercises. Besides, a majority of bloggers admitted that the schedule was mildly tight; although they had enough time to experience all the planned activities, they wanted to have one or two more days after the trips during which they could have explored and enjoyed things that are well-oriented to their blogs' content theme. Irrespective of the negative comments, the bloggers all thanked the organizers for a wonderfully organized campaign that has brought about a lot of fun as well as unforgettable memories. (Lahti 2014b.)

TABLE 5. Distribution of Bloggers' Satisfaction with the Campaign OFB (Lahti 2014b)

	Very poor	Poor	Average	Good	Great	Total	Mean
The invitation process	0	0	0	8	15	23	<b>4,65</b>
Communication about the program and other details	0	0	0	6	17	23	<b>4,74</b>
Organizing the flights and accommodation in Helsinki	0	1	1	2	19	23	<b>4,7</b>
Hosting the trips (the Outdoors Finland hosts)	0	0	0	2	21	23	<b>4,91</b>
Hosting the trips (The Finnish host bloggers)	0	0	0	3	20	23	<b>4,87</b>
Communication during the trips	0	0	0	4	19	23	<b>4,83</b>
Accommodation during your trip	0	0	0	7	16	23	<b>4,7</b>
Meals during your trip	0	0	1	3	19	23	<b>4,78</b>
Program during your trip	0	0	1	6	16	23	<b>4,65</b>
WIFI connection during your trip	0	0	2	7	14	23	<b>4,52</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>176</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>4,73</b>

The above table illustrates the evaluation of the bloggers towards the campaign's performance from invitation stage to activities and accommodation during the trips. As can be seen from the table, most of the bloggers rated the campaign "great" and "good"; and the overall result lands at 4.73 out of 5 which is very near from perfection. Some bloggers, however, were not pleased with their flights arrangement, the meals and even the general program as well as WIFI connection, which cannot be overlooked and it is essential for the next campaign that the organizers avoid leaving room for improvement and find ways to enhance what they did well as well as fix what they did not. (Lahti 2014b.)

### **Survey for Companies**

As for the companies' survey, it is also important for the organizers to know their reasons to participate in the campaign in order to be able to better modify the companies' recruitment process for the next campaign. Most of the companies answered in the survey that they would like to gain more international visibility and increase their online reputation via the bloggers' channels since the readership of their blogs is also the key segment of target customers companies are aiming at. Moreover, some companies believe that through this campaign they would find business partnerships as well as broaden their public relation network in which Yle is one of their priorities. Interest or curiosity was one of the reason as well for those companies who had not known about blog marketing; they wanted to test whether this channel is effective and beneficial. Some companies just wanted to contribute something for the tourism industry of Finland as well as the Finns as they are a part of that, obviously. After the campaign, all of the companies who took the survey expressed their satisfaction with praises and offerings for the next campaign because for them, the costs they paid – which varied from approximately €300 to 5,500€– were minimally visible compared to the benefits they earned including the bloggers' produced content and materials. (Lahti 2014b.)

TABLE 6. Distribution of Companies' Satisfaction with the Campaign OFB  
(Lahti 2014b)

	A lot of improvement is needed	Some improvement is needed	OK	Everything went well	We were very satisfied	Total	Mean
Information before the campaign	1	3	0	4	0	8	<b>2,88</b>
Timing of the campaign	0	3	2	1	2	8	<b>3,25</b>
Communication during planning process	1	4	0	3	0	8	<b>2,63</b>
Communication during the trips	0	2	1	4	1	8	<b>3,5</b>
The selection of bloggers	0	1	1	3	3	8	<b>4</b>
The bloggers generated content and materials	0	1	2	3	2	8	<b>3,75</b>
The campaign's media coverage	0	2	2	1	3	8	<b>3,63</b>
Facebook group activity	0	0	2	4	2	8	<b>4</b>
Finnish hosts performance during the trips	0	1	0	2	5	8	<b>4,38</b>
Finnish bloggers' activities during the trips	1	0	1	0	6	8	<b>4,25</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>3,63</b>

The above table illustrates the companies' satisfaction level and their evaluation of the campaign, which is quite good as can be seen. It is noticeable that the number of companies taking the survey was only eight, hence this result might not be final. Although the result is not as great as that of the bloggers' survey, it is far above average but of course, there are several reasons why companies think that there is still room for the organizers to improve their performance, which would be mentioned later in this chapter. (Lahti 2014b.)

Similar to the bloggers' opinions, the companies think that the program was slightly tight and that there should be more time for each activity to be enjoyed by the bloggers to the fullest. The program was also too long and stuffed with lots of activities, which made the bloggers quite tired after the trips; hence, less in number but more in quality was suggested for the next campaign's program. All in all, the campaign was successful for the fact that companies have achieved their initial goals. (Lahti 2014b.)

## **Survey for Organizers**

Chronologically, the recruitment phase should be mentioned first and according to Inna-Pirjetta Lahti, who was directly in charge of inviting bloggers, it was a rapid and impressive process as there were nearly 200 applicants interested in participating the campaign applied within only two weeks. This is said to be overwhelming as the number of applicants was far more than what had been expected. The bloggers were also those who belong to the right target group of the organizers; it is, however, admitted that there should have been a clearer instruction of eligibility to apply because there were even applicants from South America and unfortunately, the coordinator had to refuse them. (Lahti 2014b.)

Regarding the planning phase in general, there was a lack of time and the process had to be hurried but it was followed accordingly and strictly with the organizers always updated information and professionally proceeded as what had been planned (Saari 2014). Therefore, the campaign was a success and because this is the first time outdoors activities have been involved and promoted, it has brought a fresh image of Finland to the world. Accordingly, this kind of campaign is very likely to be repeated in the future with different destinations and other types of outdoor activities. At the end of the year 2014, a final conference would be organized for all the related parties, except for the international bloggers, to discuss and evaluate the campaign's performance as well as to produce ideas for the next campaign in the future. (Moisio 2014b.) Good news is that the success of this campaign has become well known throughout Finnish tourism industry and many DMOs have been contacting and offering to sponsor the next campaign to have the bloggers write about their destinations, which is very encouraging for the organizers (Saari 2014).

### 4.2.1.2 Content Quality and Campaign ROI

#### **Pre-tour Blogposts**

In pre-tour blog posts the bloggers:

- Introduced about Finnish tourism and famous destinations in Finland
- Introduced about the campaign Outdoors Finland for Bloggers 2014

- Briefly explained their motivations to visit or come back to Finland for their summer vacation
- Introduced the location of the trip they would participate in with some pictures
- Listed the activities including in their trips
- Stated their personal goals for the trip such as taking a lot of photos, exploring Finnish nature and culture, experiencing outdoors activities in Finland's natural landscapes, and even producing a Travelling to Finland's manual with survival skills or useful tips as well as recommended food and activities.
- One blogger shared a webpage that could translate a foreign name into a Finnish name.
- Another blogger had had previous experience in visiting Finland before the campaign and shared that in his pre-tour post with lot of travel tips such as how much a trip would cost, how to survive the winter, what to do in where, how Finns are like and so on.

Impressive posts are those from:

- Borders of Adventure: 31 shares, 9 comments
- That Backpacker: 52 tweets, 40 Google Plus shares, 412 Facebook likes, 22 comments
- Nomadic Samuel: 87 tweets, 29 Google Plus shares, 2600 Facebook likes, 61 comments
- The Crowded Planet: 45 tweets, 56 Facebook shares, 28 comments
- Points and Travel: 14 tweets, 35 Facebook shares, 16 comments
- Monkeys and Mountains: 31 tweets, 21 Google Plus shares
- Nomad is Beautiful: 75 shares, 8 comments
- Snoopmaus: 10 tweets, 4 Facebook shares, 3 Linked In shares
- Chasing the Unexpected: 15 tweets, 8 Google Plus shares

In the commenting section, readers generally said that they would like to visit Finland soon and look forward to reading about the trips. They are also impressed by the photos some bloggers post to decorate their articles and prove what they are telling about Finland because those readers did not expect Finnish summer to

be so wonderful and lively. When they think about Finland only Helsinki and Lapland come across their mind and some readers even said that Finland has never been their destination and that, luckily, they have just changed their mind after reading the pre-tour posts with such inspiring pictures. The readers are also impressed by the Everyman's Rights mentioned in some blogposts and ask about how traveling in Finland is like; for instance, how much a typical tour in Finland would cost, where to go, where to stay, what to eat and what to do. Furthermore, there are comments sharing previous experiences in Finland and recommending some famous tourist locations. Especially, in Finding The Universe's pre-tour post, he shares a website that could generate a foreign name into a Finnish name and it has turned out to be attracting to people that many readers follow the link and then share their Finnish names as well as expressing how excited they are to know what the real trip would be like. In short, it can be concluded that the pre-tour posts have drawn a lot of attention and somewhat motivated the crowd to keep following up on the coming post-tour blog posts, which was the first success before the campaign even started.

### **Post-tour Materials**

As the author has mentioned in the previous chapter, there have been 81 post-tour blogposts so far that it is a difficult job to read and study each and every post. Therefore, the author shall use the information given by Innastus Oy about the content of those posts. Generally, in post-tour blog posts the bloggers write about:

- The experiences they have had during their trips in the four regions with 38 posts
- How Finland is like in general with 21 posts
- Their tours in Helsinki with 9 posts
- Travelling tips in Finland with 7 posts
- Finnish sauna with 4 posts
- Finnish food with 2 posts (Lahti 2014b.)

All of the blog posts have photos attached and some bloggers include links to the official websites of the DMOs and/or other local tourist service providers of their trips. The posts have had hundreds of comments and the produced photos

collected and displayed in Instagram have received thousands of likes and lots of shares. According to the statistics, That Backpacker and Nomadic Samuel are the two blogs receiving the highest numbers of comments which are 113 and 239 comments in total, respectively. (Lahti 2014b.)

In the comment section, the readers:

- Express their surprise and extreme interest in the experiences described by the bloggers, especially the Everyman's Right or the "*Outdoors Revolution*" which is about how much freedom travelers can have within Finland natural landscapes (Enright 2014)
- Say that what they see from the blogs has changed their mind about Finland and that they would like to visit Finland in the near future
- Share their knowledge about or previous experiences in Finland, although there are both positive and negative things, most readers say they would like to go back to Finland to explore new places either to be even more in love with Finland or to have a different point of view about Finnish tourism.
- Recommend good tourist places in Finland and in other countries for the bloggers as well as foods and beverages the bloggers should try next time they return to Finland
- The bloggers also actively interacting with their readers in the comment section.

From the numbers of likes and shares and what the comments say about the trips, it can be concluded that the campaign was a huge success in terms of online reputation and of how it has triggered international readers and travelers to visit Finland. Although some of the blogposts are too focused on Helsinki, sauna and Finland natural wonders but not on outdoors activities, which is not what the organizers really wanted to deliver; the bloggers have done a good job marketing Finnish tourism in general (Sipponen 2014). Some improvements which could be made to enhance the next campaign's online content shall be discussed in the next part of this chapter.

### **Campaign ROI – Online Reputation**

As long as the campaign ROI is concerned, there are two types of return to be measured: monetary gain and online reputation. Regarding monetary return of the campaign, there has not been any visible gain because of several reasons. Firstly, traveling planning is generally time-consuming and with only more than a month from when the campaign ended it is hard for companies to yet acquire new customers or new orders resulting from OFB. Besides, for travelers especially ones who are interested in outdoors activities, Finland is not an appealing destination in winter time. Therefore, it is too early now to discover how much and in what way the campaign is beneficial, but there might be something emerging in the next spring. (Company interview 2014.)

Secondly, it is extremely difficult to know which customer actually comes to the companies as a result of the campaign's success. This could be done by softwares that could track the root of an online ordering or purchasing action provided that the original place has a Call to Action link or any link that the software could record. However, not all the campaign blogposts are linking to companies' websites and even if they are, the links are just for further information about the companies products or services or the tourist areas without any possibility for readers or potential customers to perform certain actions. Another method to track initial triggers is to survey the customers, either before any order or purchase, or occasionally after potentials have become customers. Nonetheless, using links or surveys, companies need to plan the tracking in advance and consistently implement it as a way to ensure their blogging strategy is actually effective and beneficial, or else to improve its performance in time. (Company interview 2014.)

Thirdly, since the company representative whom the author interviewed is working in a DMO and for a whole region benefit, in other words to market the tourism industry in the area and not to sell actual products or services; it is hard for the company to calculate actual profits partly because local companies are not always updating how they are doing their own marketing and selling and partly because there are too many levels involved here. For a DMO, evaluating the benefits of such campaign is a large scale performance and requires a lot of effort from many parties. However, before real profit there are other benefits that DMOs



could and should take into consideration. The DMOs, via this campaign, first could establish relationship with the Finnish Tourist Board – an agency of the Ministry of Employment and the Economy and a nationally official Finnish tourism marketer which has close connections with ministries and other tourism businesses; then could possibly have returning customers or bloggers coming to their regions and writing about them. Furthermore, publications about the municipality would also make the inhabitants aware of their area's attraction as an ideal tourism destination, which is what they might have not known before the campaign. The local residents usually perceive their region as nothing special since they have lived there for their entire lives and do not understand why there would be people who want to visit the place and pay for that. This campaign and blogposts about it have somewhat opened their eyes and thus, they might be more confident to tell others about their place, which is the positive word-of-mouth the DMOs wanted from this campaign. All in all, the campaign is claimed to be beneficial for DMOs as well as local tourist service providers but its real profit is obviously much easier for individual companies to measure than for large DMOs. (Company interview 2014.)

Finally, as for local companies, being able to calculate the ROI of this campaign is one thing, developing their own marketing strategies based on the campaign success to drive profits by themselves is another thing. It is suggested that companies should promote the blogposts on their own social media channels and understand how to utilize them as a marketing tool; and turn the marketing into active selling. Although the campaign was thriving and effective in many ways, its influence would not last for a very long time if companies do not take further actions to optimize their own marketing. It is not the job of a single municipality or of the campaign organizers, it is companies' responsibility to conduct their own marketing campaigns for their own benefits. (Company interview 2014.)

As a consequence, it can be concluded that calculating the campaign ROI in monetary value at this stage is nearly impossible since there are so many levels involved. Thus, the ROI of this campaign at the moment shall only be measured in term of online reputation. According to Lahti's research (Lahti 2014b), the blogposts have generated approximately 250 Facebook shares and about 3,700

tweets from over a thousand Twitters users which have reached nearly three millions other Twitters users in less than two months.

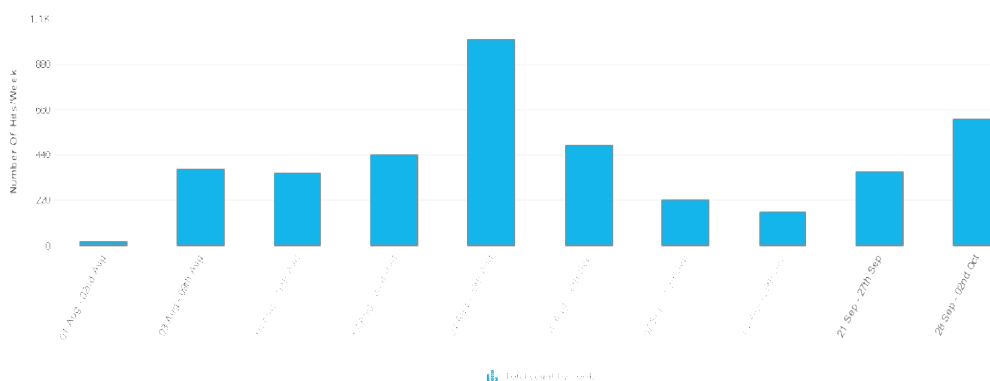


FIGURE 16. Weekly Social Media Hits from August 1<sup>st</sup> to October 2<sup>nd</sup> 2014 (Lahti 2014b)

The figure above reports online influence of the campaign on social media channels by weekly hits which was followed and recorded from August 1<sup>st</sup> to October 2<sup>nd</sup> of 2014. It can be seen from the chart that the last week of August – which was the week that bloggers of trip 1 and 2 had finished their trips and bloggers of trip 3 and 4 was enjoying their trips – has the highest number of hits generated and the first two days of August is the period with the least hits, which is understandable. After that, in September the number of hits dramatically decreased and gradually rose again towards the end of the month. This could be explained by the fact that all bloggers had completed their trips and returned to their home which was why they did not update their activities as actively as during the campaign. It seems that during the latter fortnight of September the bloggers started to write posts and were sharing their content with the organizers as well as their readers, therefore, the number of social media hits were climbing again. The campaign has also gained extensive media coverage during and after the trips with lots of headlines on popular newspapers, namely Yle Uutiset, Yle Itä Suomi, Yle Lahti, Yle Puhe, Markkinointi ja Mainonta, Kalajoenseutu, Iltalehti, and Rantapallo.fi. (Lahti 2014b.)

## #outdoorsfinland ▾

08.01.14 - 10.02.14



By Location

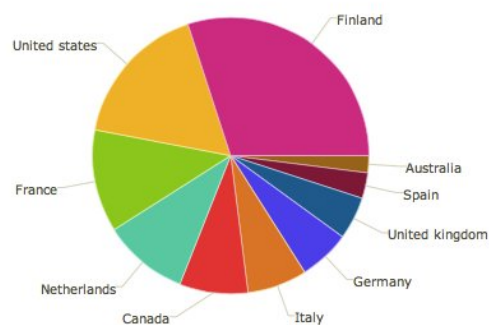


FIGURE 17. Geographical Distribution of Social Media Hits (Lahti 2014b)

The figure above demonstrates the international online reputation of the campaign by social media hits from August 1<sup>st</sup> to October 2<sup>nd</sup> of 2014. Of course most of the hits come from Finland, followed by the United States, France, the Netherlands, Canada, Italy, Germany and other countries. It has to be admitted that the campaign is spreading its influence on a global scale and has brought a new image of Finland tourism to the world. (Lahti 2014b.)

There is no doubt that the campaign OFB is a triumph both in organizing performance and in online reputation not only in Finland but also around the globe as can be seen from the previous figure. However, it is also important to discover where the effectiveness level of OFB positions especially in the world tourism industry as one should always know his competitors. For that reason, Lahti has decided to put the campaign Outdoors Finland for Bloggers 2014 in a comparison with a campaign called BlogVille 2014 run in Italy and the results are displayed in the following figure.

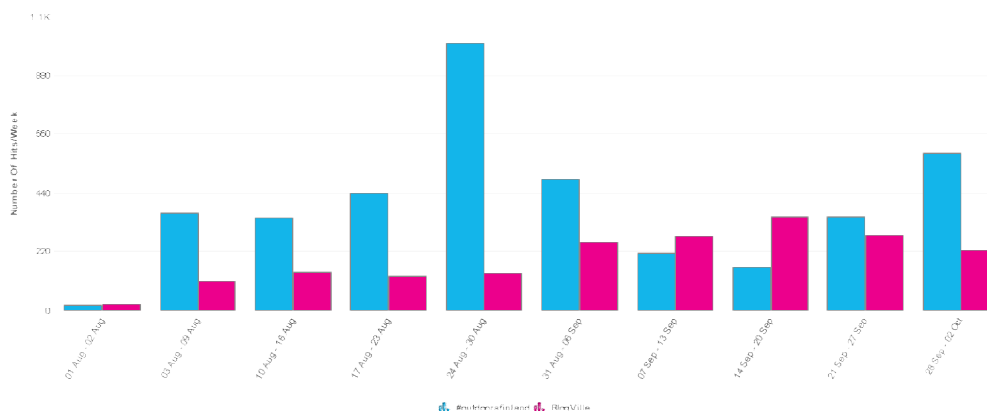


FIGURE 18. A Comparison of OFB Campaign and BlogVille 2014 Campaign (Lahti 2014b)

Blog Ville is an Italian tourism blog empowered by Emilia Romagna Region Tourist Board and together developed by the two iAmbassador travel bloggers Traveldudes and Budgettraveller. From May to October 2014, Blog Ville has run a campaign named BlogVille 2014 with several one-week tours to Bologna (Emilia Romagna) and Milan (Lombardy) for international bloggers to explore Italy and immerse themselves in the “Italian way”. (About BlogVille 2014.)

The above bar chart compares the successful levels of the two campaigns by measuring their weekly social media hits from August 1<sup>st</sup> to October 2<sup>nd</sup> of 2014. The pattern of BlogVille 2014 campaign’s hits is remarkably different from that of the OFB campaign, which fluctuated throughout the two months. Specifically, BlogVille 2014 campaign’s number of hits fairly rose during the first two weeks of August, then slightly declined until it increased again in the beginning of September to reach the peak in the third week of September and vaguely shrank towards the end of the month after that. However, compared to OFB, BlogVille 2014 performance is pretty far behind in general for several reasons. Firstly, the tours of BlogVille 2014 were not concentrated within one month like that of OFB. Secondly, BlogVille 2014 campaign only has two destinations which are Bologna and Milan whilst OFB has four destinations for the bloggers. Thirdly, the theme of OFB is outdoors activities and it was able to recruit the bloggers in the right target segment whereas BlogVille 2014 did not have a specific theme and was about exploring Italian destinations and culture in general. It could also be

because OFB is better than BlogVille 2014 at some stages in the organizing process, but to confirm anything about this issue further research is required. (Lahti 2014b.)

In conclusion, OFB campaign's organizers have done a great job to make it huge success and so have the bloggers to actively spread its reputation internationally on social media. So far, the blogposts have caught a lot of attention from international readers and people in Finland tourism industry; which is beneficial in many ways for many parties involved and is a good start for this kind of tourism marketing strategy that would make organizing the next campaign come easier to the organizers. (Saari 2014.)

#### 4.2.2 Challenges and Suggestions

Owing to the fact that the bloggers were not involved in planning and organizing the campaign as well as measuring its outcome, the challenges in those phases shall be primarily collected and discussed from the viewpoints of the organizers and the co-companies. On the other hand, suggestions for the next campaign shall be presented from all parties involved.

##### 4.2.2.1 Challenges

#### **Planning Phase**

According to both the organizers and the companies involved, the biggest challenge during the planning process of the campaign is that the timing was tricky as it was summer vacation for many people and the schedule was too tight causing the work to be very stressful. Some of the organizers were having their time off of work and everyone else had to wait for them; thus, there was a shortage in human resources and internal communication was not effective. The planning phase was supposed to start sooner with at least four to six months in duration and the invitations sent out to bloggers should have had all the details of the program, but for some reason it started in the end of May 2014 and that gave the organizers only a little more than two months to prepare everything. As a result, there are some actions that needed to be simultaneously conducted, for

example, planning ideas for the trips and inviting the bloggers at the same time, which explains why the process was not in the right order since the bloggers were invited with rough ideas and not the final program. (Saari 2014, Laaksonen 2014, Lahti 2014b.)

Moreover, as the organizers were also confused about what they had to do as this is the first time they have organized such a campaign, it was difficult to explain to the companies what they wanted from them, causing the recruitment of campaign's coordinators and DMOs to be fairly troubling. Another reason for that issue is that some companies did not have the knowledge about blog marketing in tourism and did not understand how it is worth sponsoring such campaign, hence were not interested in participating the campaign. Some other companies just did not have time and resources available for the campaign since it was peak time of the summer and most of the hotels or restaurants had been fully booked in advance. (Saari 2014, Laaksonen 2014, Sipponen 2014 and Lahti 2014b.)

### **Organizing Phase**

In organizing phase the organizers and companies faced the same problem as in the planning phase which is lack of internal communication together with the fact that there were so many people involved in the campaign without an official leader, the same actions were repeated many times by people who did not know what others were doing. Thus, companies had duplicated conversations with the organizers for the same problem and were extremely confusing. (Saari 2014, Laaksonen 2014.)

During the trips, the organizers could not guarantee WIFI connection to be available all of the time for the bloggers to update information more actively and consistently. One minor problem that needs to be taken into consideration is that some bloggers are not really the outdoor type and they would rather explore the natural landscapes, taste Finnish foods and beverages, or enjoy the Finnish sauna than participate in outdoors activities in the program. It is suggested that for the next campaign, the organizers should clarify the key target group before recruiting bloggers. (Sipponen 2014.)

### **Post-campaign Phase**

The most difficult task after the campaign is to measure its effectiveness and ROI. As the author has mentioned in previous chapters, content metrics are quite complicated and it requires a lot of data as well as effort to calculate blog marketing ROI; especially for this tourism marketing campaign of which the effects take a long time to appear and the scale of measurement is too large with many levels included. Another challenge after the campaign is that companies should get their website links posted in the blogposts but not all of the bloggers have done or are going to do so. Some bloggers put links as a source of credibility of information and as recommendations as well but there is no possibility for readers to perform any action. Whether or not a Call to Action link could be posted on the blogposts should be further discussed and for the next campaign there should be a clear content brief for blogposts as it is important that companies also get what they wanted from the campaign, in this case international visibility. (Lahti 2014b, Sipponen 2014.)

Regarding the content of the posts, many bloggers write about Helsinki, food and sauna or the regions in general but the outdoors activities they participated in, which is not very well-oriented towards the theme of the campaign. This is also a challenge for the organizers since they cannot control what the bloggers are writing, which requires clearer brief for and more negotiation with the bloggers in the future campaign. (Sipponen 2014.)

#### 4.2.2.2 Suggestions for Improvement

##### **Suggestions from Bloggers**

Because the bloggers were involved in the trips and in writing posts after the campaign, their suggestions are only for better program without concerning about the organizing process. Regarding the program of the trips, the bloggers also recognized that some people were not really interested in outdoors activities, thus they suggested that the participants of the next campaign should be selected more carefully. However, some other bloggers said that they had hoped for even more active program and the trips did not meet their expectation. Although most of the

time was spent outdoors, the activities should have been more challenging. It can be seen that the bloggers were split into two groups, one was not that excited about outdoors activities, and the other was hoping for more challenging program. Therefore, one blogger recommended that the trips could have different levels for different types of bloggers, for instance there could be groups for beginners, outdoors lovers, hikers and survivors – those who love extremely adventurous challenges. (Lahti 2014b.)

Another suggestion which has to be considered is that the bloggers wanted to have some activities for individuals and not always for groups in order for them to be able to write about different things on their blogs since it is true that many bloggers are writing about the same place and the same activities. Moreover, the organizers should have given them one or two more days after the trips to do things that are appropriate to their blogs' theme as they would have had more relevant things which are different from other bloggers to write about.

Alternatively, some other recommendations are that:

- WIFI connection should be available all the time;
- There should be more water to drink along the way;
- The payment of daily fee could be completed via Paypal or other more flexible methods instead of wire transfer;
- Since many bloggers love Helsinki and are writing about it, in the next campaign Helsinki should be one of the destinations and not just a place to gather the bloggers before moving to other areas;
- In group activities there should be a leader who would keep the members together as accidents might happened. (Lahti 2014b.)

### **Suggestions from Companies**

In the planning phase for the next campaign, companies require that there is more time to prepare everything and the planning process should start before summer season. Because the campaign occurred during the peak time of the year without early notices to the companies, many bookings and orders had already been received by the tourist service providers; furthermore, some employees were on vacations and that explains why the process was delayed until August. After that,



all the preparation had to be conducted within a limited amount of time, causing so much stress. One thing that the companies share the same point of view with the organizers is that there are too many people and parties involved in the campaign without a representative, thus communication was extraordinarily confusing. Some companies claimed that they had not heard much from the organizers and mostly communicated with Innastus Oy; the others complained that they got many conversations coming about the same problem and nobody knew what had been previously agreed. The companies suggested that next time there must be a leader who clearly knows everybody's responsibilities and controls the whole progress as well as ensures that internal communication is effective. (Lahti 2014b.)

As for the suitable period of the year to organize the next campaign, most of the companies voted for Autumn, the others said that Spring and Summer are also nice seasons to host such campaign. If the campaign is run in Spring, as social media influence generally spreads in a fast pace, its reputation would reach widely enough and its blogposts would be possibly produced before summer. As a result, the outcome of the campaign can boost summer sales for many tourism companies as summer is often the king as a tourism season. Besides, in Spring there will be more birds which will be an ideal time for bird watching activity. Summer has very nice and warm weather which is a perfect season for outdoors activities. Autumn is well-known for the leaves changing their colors and it is probably the most beautiful time in a year. Alternatively, one company thinks that the bloggers may also be interested in walking on the sea iced surface or try some Winter sports. Finally, there are other companies said that the program might be stuffed with too many things, especially group activities; hence, it would be better if the bloggers had had more time to do their own things and to have different ideas on their blogposts. Additionally, there might be too much time of transportation by bus that the bloggers could only sit or stand, which was a waste of time. The companies recommended that instead of travelling by bus, transportation could be combined with some activities such as cycling or hiking in short distances, canoeing or kayaking to cross the lakes and so on. (Lahti 2014b.)

### **Suggestions from Organizers**

For the next campaign, the organizers plan to let it occur in the beginning or middle of July when the weather is warm and sunny since it was pretty cold when the campaign OFB happened. Obviously, there must be more time for preparation and a six-month plan seems appropriate, thus the process can start at the beginning of the year or during Spring at the latest if the campaign is going to happen in the summer. (Saari2014.) Saari also raised her point that the bloggers for the next campaign could include some of the bloggers from this campaign, but not all of them since there were lots of other applicants from the recruitment who did not have a chance to participate, they should be invited next time so that the campaign could expand its international network with people from different countries. Furthermore, new people would produce new ideas and points of views for the future campaign, as the organizers want to increase the involvement of bloggers in the planning phase. However, there should be at least one blogger from each trip that would join in the next campaign because then, they would be able to feel the changes and give the organizers some valuable evaluation. For the next campaign, additionally, it is suggested that opportunities should be given to different destinations and tourist service providers as well. (Saari 2014.)

About the bloggers, Lahti (2014b) also suggested that the application should give more clarified requirements or information of the targeted market segment to obtain the right bloggers. Additionally, for the next campaign it is necessary to plan media coverage as well as social media visibility from the beginning, in other words the public relations plan should be initiated before the campaign. Likewise, after the campaign there should be a clear plan on how to take advantage of the social media and what resources to use, since for this campaign the organizers mostly let the bloggers do their job and just collect the results. (Lahti 2014b.)

Moisio (2014b) also stated from his point of view that hopefully next time, each blogger would be able to have personally different experiences that they could write about on their blogs rather than many people blog about the same destination and same activities. To be able to guarantee that, the next campaign may have different themes for each trip, for example, outdoors theme, nature exploration, adventurous theme and so on.

Another matter to consider is the content that the organizers want to deliver via the blogposts as not all of the posts from this campaign are going towards the right direction. There should be clearer guidelines for the bloggers as well as an agreement that they should put companies' links in their posts. It may be a good idea as well to have an official website or blog just for the campaign that all the posts could link to. (Lahti 2014b, Sipponen 2014.)

As long as internal communication is concerned, it is a must to have one representative of the campaign to avoid duplicated conversations and confusing order of operating steps (Laaksonen 2014). A division of human resources is the first responsibility of the representative to create a clearly organized working process, then he or she has to control the implementation progress and ensure that things are conducted according to plans (Lahti 2014b). Nevertheless, from this campaign everybody has learnt a lot that the next campaign would be much easier since now they know exactly what has to be done in what order as well as who should be in charge of what (Saari 2014).

With respect to the DMOs and local companies for the next campaign, Lahti thinks that their level of expertise should be higher; this could be possible by either selecting more professional companies or educating the companies about blog marketing before the planning phase even starts, which the latter job seems to be easier and doable. In the first place, the reason why Innastus Oy was the only company to contact FTB to participate in the campaign was because companies do not understand the value of content marketing and the power of bloggers. The companies which would participate in the next campaign need to attend a business training about blog marketing power in tourism industry to be encouraged about what they are going to do and to be able to optimize the campaign performance as well as utilize the outcome for their own marketing campaigns. (Lahti 2014b.)

## 5. DEVELOPMENT PLAN

This chapter is written after the author has completed the empirical research and reported its results in the previous chapter. This part of the thesis aims at establishing a development plan for the next campaign in the future based on the findings from the research. In the first part of the chapter, the key issues that need improvements shall be summarized from the suggestions of the bloggers, the companies and the organizers discussed in the previous chapter. Next, the author recommends that there should be a campaign blog to enhance the campaign performance and gives detailed explanations for her recommendation. In the last part of the chapter, an implementation plan to bring the suggestions into real life would be drawn, including a tentative timeline of what needs to be done.

### 5.1 Key Issues

There are a lot of suggestions which have been made about the important improvements to be prioritized and other minor things to be paid attention to. As this thesis is conducted on behalf of the organizers of the campaign Outdoors Finland for Bloggers 2014, although the suggestions of all parties are taken into account, the development plan is mostly about what the organizers could do and could encourage companies and bloggers to do. It is hard to force companies or bloggers to do anything and since the author did not study the case directly from the bloggers' and companies' points of view, there are certainly things beyond the knowledge of the author, which needs to be further studied. In the following table, the author shall list all the key issues, in other words the most important things that for the next campaign the organizers need to redeem.

TABLE 7. Key Issues for Development Plan

<b>Problem</b>	<b>Suggestion</b>
Lack of planning time	There should be 4 – 6 months to plan the campaign.
Shortage of human	All of related parties need to get notices about the campaign

resources during vacation time	earlier that they can arrange their schedules.
Companies' expertise	The companies should attend a training section about blog marketing to fully understand how to optimize it and how to make it beneficial for their own organizations.
Weak internal communication	There should be one representative for everybody to contact; a campaign blog could also tackle this problem.
Selection of bloggers	Clearer description should be made in the application for the bloggers about what key market the organizers are targeting.
Campaign theme	There can be more than one outdoors theme for different levels of outdoor lovers, for example beginners and adventurers would not enjoy the same activity.
Tight schedule of the trips	The next campaign should have few key group activities and save time for individual activities that are relevant to each blogger's interest.
Long time of transportation	The organizers could consider letting bloggers enjoy some activity whilst moving from one place to another, for example, biking, hiking, kayaking and so on.
Interrupted WIFI connection	WIFI connection should be available all the time to ensure real-time updates.
Helsinki as a destination	As the bloggers are interested in and writing a lot about Helsinki, next time the organizers could consider to cooperate with Visit Helsinki, for instance.
Blogposts content	The organizers should have a clear and detailed brief for bloggers about the content they want to deliver to target

	audience.
Companies' links	There should be an agreement that bloggers have to put companies' links in their posts, as it is important that the companies get the visibility they expect when they decide to participate in the campaign.
ROI Measurement	A campaign blog could make this happen, but the organizers have to make an agreement with companies that they provide the companies with necessary data, in return companies need to update information regarding this matter as the organizers also want to know how their campaign is effective and beneficial.
Media visibility plan	The organizers should plan the media coverage from the beginning to actively manage the campaign online reputation and plan SEO marketing.

Given support from necessary resources and all participants' effort to enhance the next campaign performance, it is believed that the campaign shall become even more successful as a pioneer in utilizing blogs for tourism marketing and shall open new prospects for Finnish tourism industry.

## 5.2 Campaign Blog

For the purpose of enhancing the next campaign performance compared to this campaign, the author urges that there should be a **campaign blog** because of several reasons.

### **Pre-campaign**

Before the campaign occurs, a blog could act as a channel for the organizers to announce the upcoming event to target audience in order to draw initial attention from the readership. With the blog, organizers could also involve international bloggers in the process of producing ideas for the campaign. As the bloggers know best what they would expect from an outdoor campaign and they may have

creative or challenging ideas for the activities in the program, hence, they are perfect for this job. The organizers could run a competition on the blog where bloggers would contribute their ideas and the winners could automatically get the ticket to participate the campaign.

Alternatively, by blogging consistently to update information, the organizers could indirectly inform the companies, the bloggers, the campaign's coordinator about what has been done and where the progress is heading, which is a good way to improve internal communication. It is obviously important that there is a representative to be a bridge between all parties' communication, but a campaign blog to a certain degree could lessen the pressure for that person at the center who is in charge of everybody's responsibilities. Updating latest information of the upcoming campaign could definitely help the organizers, especially the leader, avoid hundreds of emails and messages from and to dozens of companies, which could save a lot of time for other jobs.

Besides acting as a tool to enhance internal communication between related parties, the blogger of the campaign blog needs to consistently publish posts to maintain the blog itself. The topic of the posts could be about Finnish tourism, popular outdoors activities in Finland, famous landscapes, similar campaigns around the world or anything related to the campaign. To be able to blog effectively and deliver valuable content to target audience, the blogger has to search for latest information and trends in the market as well as study the competitors; and by doing this, he or she could obtain a lot of knowledge about this field of expertise, which is more or less beneficial to the planning process of the campaign since updating what is happening in the industry, what the competitors have and have not done, what the new generation of bloggers are seeking as well as where the industry is heading to could help the blogger contribute innovative ideas for the next campaign's program.

Furthermore, via the blog, the organizers could inform not only their audience but also other public relations agencies so as to find media partners for the campaign, by doing this the organizers could plan their media influence in advance as well as get the PR partners advertise the campaign on their channels. This is also a good way to manage online reputation of the campaign and to start SEO marketing.

### **During-campaign**

As the author has mentioned in the theoretical part of the thesis, direct blogging empowers the blogger to be able to control the content that he or she delivers to the readership. The organizers know best what they want their audience to pay attention to and by self-blogging about the campaign they could manage to turn their readers to the right path.

With the blog, organizers could help the blogger participants to frequently update photos and activities of the trips as well as any changing of schedule during the campaign. Real time updates are always excited to the readers thus keep them following the blog with the curiosity and interest to know what happens next. The blogger could also directly interact with the readers in the comment section to answer any question, thank the readers for their interest or simply to accumulate readers' feedback and opinions on the program of the campaign as it is essential to know not only what outdoors bloggers want but also what the target audience is expecting.

### **Post-campaign**

After the campaign OFB, more than a hundred blog posts have been published on 27 blogs but the problem is that the readership of each blog does not know about the other blogs and the other trips in the campaign as the bloggers are not linking to each other. Therefore, such a big campaign appears as only one trip in one region on every blog; although the posts are being actively sharing on social media, the amount of the content delivered in each post is apparently little compared to the entire campaign. The same situation happens with the photos and videos as well. As a result, there should be a "landing page" for all the blogposts and other materials to bring a holistic view of the campaign to the target audience; and a campaign blog is a proper tool to accumulate all the content and materials. The blogger of the campaign needs to link back to the original blog of the content as a reference source, thus those blogs also get their visibility on a nationally official blog for Finnish tourism marketing.

Self-blogging entitles one to actively blog and communicate with the audience in his or her desired way. Some of the bloggers of OFB are not being enthusiastic in



interacting with the readers and some posts do not have any comment. If a campaign blog could collect all the posts, which it could, it could collect all the readers from those blogs as well, which make every post get more views and comments as a result. Moreover, the blogger could freely have conversations with the readers and keep the interaction level as high as necessary.

Another problem a campaign blog could tackle is to ensure that companies' get their online visibility as they expected. Not all of the bloggers of OFB are linking to companies, but a campaign's own blog could do that without mistake.

Furthermore, if linking to companies is previously agreed as a responsibility of the blogger, advertising for companies on the blog is another story that could make money, but this issue needs to be further discussed with the companies and the organizers.

Tracking roots of actions and accumulating data for campaign ROI measurement has been the biggest problem so far and with a campaign blog, companies could attach links to their websites not only for the readers' further information but possibly also as Call to Action links that when a link is clicked, it leads the readers to another website where they could perform some action such as online ordering or purchasing, or registering as a potential customer to subscribe the site and receive newsletters. By doing this, companies could track which customers come from the campaign blog, which is apparently an easier job compared to tracking that from several blogs, and as a result could collect necessary data to calculate their ROI of the campaign.

The table below is inserted to summarize the benefits for all parties involved in the campaign throughout three phases.

TABLE 8. Benefits of Creating a Blog for the Next Campaign

<b>Benefits</b>	<b>Organizers</b>	<b>Companies</b>	<b>Bloggers</b>
<b>Pre-campaign</b>	Announce the campaign, run competition for ideas, obtain knowledge via market research, enhance informing process, plan media coverage	Get noticed about the campaign, update information of planning process	Compete to participate in the campaign, plan their travelling in advance
<b>During campaign</b>	Blog actively and consistently, directly interact with readers, ensure real-time updates, announce any change in the program	Get visibility on the campaign blog, update information from one source	Get visibility on the campaign blog, update information from one source
<b>Post-campaign</b>	Collect materials, gather readers of other blogs, control interaction frequency, make money from advertising for companies, post companies' links as agreed, manage campaign's online reputation	Get visibility on the campaign blog, update information from one source	Get visibility on the campaign blog, update information from one source

Being aware of all the benefits that a campaign blog could generate, in the following part of this chapter the author shall list the necessary steps to start blogging.

### 5.3 Implementation Plan

First and foremost, to revitalize the performance of the campaign, especially in planning phase, the organizers need to choose a representative from the beginning.

Then, the campaign blog has to be initiated as soon as possible; generally to start a blog there are the following steps to be considered:

- Deciding the content theme of the blog
- Defining target audience
- Finding the right person to do the job (writing and managing posts, comments and so on)
- Choosing a platform (free or self-hosted with paid domain name)
- Deciding on the blog theme designation
- Setting up the blog's front page (sidebar, header, footer and so on)
- Planning the schedule of publishing
- Publishing the first post
- Promote the blog on social media channels
- Interacting with readers (Knapp 2014.)

The expenses to maintain a blog vary from organization to organization; hence the author is unable to provide information about the cost of domain name, designation fee or salary level of the person who blogs in general. Only starting to create a blog could the organizers know the real costs.

### **Tentative Timeline**

Taking into consideration all the suggestions from the bloggers, the co-companies and the organizers, the author recommends that the next campaign should be organized in the middle of the summer, which is ideal for outdoors themes, and the planning process should start six months in advance. Assuming the next campaign will be run during July, the author has drawn a tentative timeline of all the main stages and jobs of the organizers, which can be seen in the following table (it is noticeable that the below table is subject to change since this is the author's recommendation, not the official timetable of the next campaign).



## 6. CONCLUSION

This chapter is written after the author thoroughly studied the theories regarding blog marketing in tourism and completed an empirical research to investigate whether the campaign Outdoors Finland for Bloggers 2014 was effective and in what ways as well as construct a development plan to enhance the next campaign's performance. Therefore, at this stage the author is confident that she has all the answers for the research questions stated in chapter 1. Firstly, the author shall give concise answers to all the questions and self-evaluate the work that she has done. Secondly, another evaluation would be given in terms of reliability and validity of the empirical research conducted in chapter 4. Last but not least, the author understands that this thesis has some limitations, thus she shall give some suggestions for further research.

### 6.1 Answers for Research Questions

The answers for the research questions are briefly summarized in the following table.

TABLE 10. Answers for Research Questions

<b>Question</b>	<b>Answer</b>
What is blogging?	Blogging is another form of writing online diaries or journals, which are called blogposts; and blog is a website of blogposts organized in reverse chronological order. The community of blogs, blogposts, bloggers and readers is the blogosphere.
How can it be utilized as a marketing tool in tourism?	As a marketing tool, a blog could help the blogger or the business build brand awareness, directly communicate with customers to maintain customer relationships and loyalty, create competitive differentiation, manage online reputation, strengthen SEO marketing, drive sales and enhance expertise. Because of the intangible feature of tourism products and services, eWOM via blogs become the critical condition that

	<p>influences the tourist travel-decisions and planning; thus utilizing blog marketing in tourism is a must for tourist companies to cope with the market demand and have a better chance of winning the game.</p>
<p>How to measure blog marketing ROI?</p>	<p>Blog marketing ROI could be measured using the 4 content metrics to evaluate its effectiveness and online influence; and using numerical data to calculate the expenses to run a blog, the revenue it generated and as a result, the return on investment in monetary value.</p>
<p>What are the OFB's objectives, participants, and their responsibilities?</p>	<p>The mission of the campaign is to market Finnish outdoors activities and natural landscapes via international bloggers. This is a joint venture of two projects – OF and OFS – managed by FTB and LUAS; in the campaign there are the bloggers, the coordinator and the co-companies. Everybody was involved in planning, organizing and collecting results after the campaign, except for the bloggers – they are responsible for writing posts about the campaign. To be specific, FTB took care of the bloggers' flights and daily fees; FTB and LUAS hired Innastus Oy to be the coordinator of the campaign, and contacted DMOs of the four regions to plan the campaign's program.</p>
<p>What is the OFB's actual outcome (campaign's performance and public reaction)?</p>	<p>The campaign was a big success both in terms of organizing and online reputation. The bloggers and the companies also commented that they were highly satisfied about the campaign performance. As for the blogposts, their content has high quality and has generated thousands of likes and hundreds of comments. According to Innastus Oy's research, the campaign is now well-known in many countries and when compared with a similar campaign in Italy called BlogVille 2014, OFB has turned out to be surpassing it.</p>
<p>How to measure</p>	<p>The campaign ROI has not yet been visible for several reasons.</p>

<p>the ROI of the campaign's outcome to prove whether it is successful?</p>	<p>Firstly, traveling planning takes time and it is still too early to see any return. Secondly, it is hard to track the roots of actions that might have originated from the blogposts as special software and effort to collect data are required. Thirdly, this is not one company' marketing campaign, it is a campaign with national scale and many levels involved, making it difficult to calculate exact ROI in monetary value. Finally, companies should also promote the blogposts and utilize them in their own marketing campaigns based on the success of the campaign OFB to drive real profits for themselves as OFB's reputation would last for too long without further action.</p>
<p>What are the OFB's challenges looking from different participants' aspects?</p>	<p>To summarize the ideas, the challenges of the campaign are lack of planning time, lack of personnel, limited companies' knowledge of blog marketing, weak internal communication, slightly improper choices of bloggers, unnecessary content in some posts, missing companies' links and difficulties to measure campaign ROI.</p>
<p>What can be done from the organizers' side, bloggers' side and co-companies' side to enhance the campaign's success?</p>	<p>The organizers could encourage bloggers and companies, and could themselves do the following things: save more time for planning, arrange reasonable schedule of the process, be clearer in the brief for bloggers about application eligibility and blogposts' content required, create a campaign blog, plan media coverage in advance, choose a representative, train companies about blog marketing, develop different themes for the next campaign, consider Helsinki as a destination, ensure that WIFI connection is always available, agree with companies on how to attach links, have detailed plan to accumulate data and calculate ROI.</p>
<p><b><i>How can the campaign OFB</i></b></p>	<p>Apparently, blogging is one of the emphases in this campaign; thus beside following all the suggestions from related parties</p>

<p><i>improve its performance in marketing Finnish outdoors activities by blogging?</i></p>	<p>listed above, the author recommends that the campaign should have its own blog as a landing page of all the blogposts for a number of benefits explained in chapter 5. In general, the campaign OFB was very successful that hopefully, the next campaign could be organized in a larger scale and the organizers could afford to run a blog in the long term.</p>
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### **Self-evaluation**

According to the author's thesis supervisor, the process of this thesis has been effective and the outcome is as good as expected. Regarding the theoretical part of the thesis, the author has been able to study almost all the aspects related to blogging and blog marketing in tourism. Furthermore, the author is particularly interested in the topic of this thesis and as a result, the thesis has been extremely beneficial to her own learning.

As for the empirical research, although the two surveys for the bloggers and the co-companies were not done by the author, by collecting the results and analyzing them the author was able to investigate the case and provide insightful findings. Additionally, the author successfully conducted several semi-structured and in-depth interviews with the organizers to draw useful conclusions which, together with the findings from the two quantitative surveys, was resoundingly adopted for the development plan.

Regarding the development plan, the most important recommendation of the author is to have a campaign blog. However, the plan could be subject to change based on real-life circumstances in the future. Nevertheless, the author was able to complete what she had promised in chapter 1 and even if the development plan would not be exactly implemented as the author suggested, it is still beneficial for the commissioner as now they have a holistic report and evaluation of the campaign OFB in this thesis as well as theoretical background of blog marketing, which could be used in companies' training section for the next campaign.



## 6.2 Reliability and Validity

Before using the results from any survey, the reliability and validity, in other words the consistency and accuracy, of data must be guaranteed. In brief, if a research (survey) receives consistent scores after repeated application, it is considered reliable; and if a construct measures what it is supposed to measure, it is claimed valid. (Hair 2011.) Owing to the fact that the two quantitative surveys were done by Innastus Oy, their reliability and validity are not of the author's responsibility and she will trust the results given to her.

Regarding the qualitative survey in form of semi-structured and in-depth interviews the author had conducted, its reliability and validity first need to be perceived vaguely differently from those of a quantitative survey. In qualitative research, reliability examines the trustworthiness of data (Golafshani 2003) and validity concerns the interpretation from data to conclusion (Bapir 2014).

In other words, a qualitative survey is reliable if the data accumulated is considered trustworthy or truthful. The author had interviewed the organizers of the campaign, the coordinator and a DMO's representative whom all are perceived to be upstanding and they would not have any reason for a lie; thus their answers are supposed to be trusted. Furthermore, sometimes the same question was raised in more than one interview and the author obtained approximately similar answers, hence all the data could be trusted and the interviews are reliable.

As for validity, a qualitative study is claimed to be valid if the researcher could ensure the correct correlation between data and conclusion, meaning to guarantee that he or she has precisely interpreted the data. Because most of the interviews were face-to-face, the author had had chances to reconfirm any confusing point or misunderstanding in the answers of the interviewees; and because most of the answers were easy to perceive, the author believes that she has properly understood all the ideas the interviewees were trying to transfer. Therefore, this qualitative survey is valid.

### 6.3 Suggestion on Further Research

During the process of studying and researching, there are arising issues for which the author supposes that further research is required. First and foremost, in the theoretical part of this thesis, the theory of blog marketing ROI is fundamentally meant for a business or corporate blog of which necessary data could be tracked and recorded. However, the campaign OFB is of a national scale, including many levels from DMOs to local companies; thus, gathering data is extremely difficult and without the companies also doing that themselves then reporting to the organizers, it is nearly impossible to calculate monetary ROI of this campaign. Accordingly, the author believes that research about this issue should be deepened to discover a systematic and doable method to measure monetary ROI of the campaign on a holistic scale.

Alternatively, in the part of dealing with negative comments, the level of influence of negativity produced from eWOM via blogs could differentiate when placed under the tourism context for the fact that tourism products or services are mostly intangible, cannot be tested and cannot be returned. As a result, the effect of negativity might be exaggerated. The author suggests that further research is necessary to identify specific tactics to handle this matter.

Last, but by no means least, in the empirical part, although a campaign blog is recommended for several reasons, the author understands that to manage a blog in the long run requires a lot of resources such as personnel, investments, research and development, and time. Consequently, whether or not a campaign blog is possible, when and how to start a blog would need further discussions.

## 7. SUMMARY

This thesis aims at providing a theoretical background for the case study Outdoors Finland for Bloggers 2014 campaign and assisting the case commissioner to evaluate the performance of the campaign as well as investigate the challenges faced by the organizers and apply the findings to a development plan. The author has been able to accomplish the objectives of the thesis and make it a valuable resource that the commissioner could adopt in future plans.

To begin with, chapter 2 reviews the theories of blog marketing in order to support the empirical research for the case campaign. Firstly, basic understandings about blogging and the blogosphere are presented. Secondly, the marketing power of blogs is explained in detail, including controlling and promoting the content of the blog as well as a set of metrics to measure blog marketing ROI. Lastly, blog marketing exploitability is studied under the context of tourism industry.

Chapter 3 studies the case campaign to fully comprehend its mission, and the responsibilities of each organization involved. The planning and organizing processes are reviewed as well, and the outputs of the campaign are also included.

In chapter 4, an empirical research is reported in terms of how it was conducted including survey designation and data collection methods, and what could be concluded from its results. The purpose of the research is to examine the campaign's effectiveness and detect the causes of its difficulties. The campaign effectiveness is studied in two aspects: organizing performance and online reputation. Findings of the study indicate that although there were some problems in the planning process, the campaign was indeed successful.

Chapter 5 is written after the empirical research has been completed. In this part of the thesis, the author builds a development plan for the next campaign in the future based on the findings from the research. First of all, the author summarizes the key issues to be improved from the suggestions of the bloggers, the companies and the organizers discussed in chapter 4. Then, the author recommends creating a campaign blog to enhance the campaign performance with detailed explanations. Finally, an implementation plan is established, including a tentative timeline of what needs to be done.

In chapter 6 the author concisely presents all the answers for the research questions stated in chapter 1 and evaluates her own work. Another evaluation is given next in terms of reliability and validity of the empirical research and the result confirms that this study is highly reliable and valid. To conclude, the author understands that this thesis has some limitations, hence, gives some suggestions for further research on the campaign ROI measurement, the methods to tackle a blog's negativity particularly in tourism industry, and the possibility of creating a campaign blog.

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## APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1. Types of Social Media Used (Yoo & Gretzel 2012, in Sigala et al. 2012)

<b>Type of Social Media</b>	<b>% of Users in 2008</b>	<b>% of Users in 2010</b>
Travel Reviews	80.5	71.8
Tweets	N/A	6.9
Photos	50.6	54.9
Videos	14.2	23.9
Blogs	21.8	21.7
Comments on Blogs	23.6	25.6
Postings in Discussion Forums	22.4	21.9
Audio Files/ Podcasts	3.8	4.6



APPENDIX 2. Questionnaire of Information Relevance's Criteria (Chen et al. 2013)

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<i>Novelty of content</i>	
Q1_1	There was a substantial amount of new information in this blog
Q1_2	I knew little about the destination described in the blog before I came across this blog
Q1_3	This blog has a substantial amount of unique information that I have not come across before
Q1_4	Through this blog, I discovered a new destination
Q1_5	Through this blog, I learned about the destination's culture and way of life
Q1_6	Through this blog, I satisfied my curiosity regarding this destination
<i>Reliability of content</i>	
Q1_7	I think the content of this blog is accurate
Q1_8	I think the content of this blog is consistent with facts
Q1_9	I think the content of this blog is reliable
<i>Understandability of content</i>	
Q1_10	The information in this blog was easy for me to understand
Q1_11	I was able to follow this blog's content with little effort
Q1_12	Readers like me should find this blog easy to read
<i>Interestingness of content</i>	
Q1_13	I think the content of this blog is interesting
<i>Blog usage enjoyment</i>	
Q1_14	Using this blog provides me with enjoyment
Q1_15	Using this blog makes me feel relaxed and pleasant
Q1_16	Using this blog makes me feel happy
Q1_17	Using this blog is fun
<i>Behavioral intention to visit a destination</i>	
Q2_1	If I get the chance to travel, I intend to visit the destination mentioned in this blog
Q2_2	When I go on a trip, the probability that I visit the destination mentioned in this blog is high

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APPENDIX 3. Lists of Co-companies in the Campaign (Saari 2014, Laaksonen 2014, Sipponen 2014)

<b>Trip 1 - Southwestern</b>	<b>Trip 2 - Saimaa</b>	<b>Trip 3 – Western coast</b>	<b>Trip 4 - Häme</b>
BikeToursHelsinki	Sahalahti	Best Western	Maahisen
Natura Viva	Resort	Premier	Muki ja Mela
Haltia – The Finnish Nature Centre	Best Western Premier Hotel	Hotel Katajanokka	Omakylä Vuolenkoski Oy
The Kasnäs Archipelago Spa	Katajanokka	Sokos Hotel Vaakuna	Kivasniemi
Amy Pereira’s Cottage Village	Niinipuurestaurant	Restaurant Fransmanni	Padasjoen Latu
Aavameri Archipelago Sea Kayaking	Hotel Kruunupuisto	Terranova’s Nature Centre	Järvisen Liikenne
Hotel Sea Front	Holiday ResortyJärvisydän		Kiusaniemi Villas
Best Western Premier Hotel Katajanokka	Bistro Vilee		KallioKammi Sauna
Rosala Viking Center	Scandic		Best Western Premier Hotel
Bengtškär Light House	Hotel		Katajanokka
RIB Safarit	Restaurant Resort & Kitchen		
Restaurant Bryggan			
Hanko Sattva Wellness			
Havsgårdar Farm			

Sjöberg Farm			
Brankis restaurant			
Villa Jolla			
Luontokeskus Sinisimpukka			
Sun Fun Rental			
Kola Kayaking Peter Forström			

#### APPENDIX 4. Semi-structured Interviews' Questions

Questions for Heli Saari – project manager of Outdoors Finland, one of the organizers of Outdoors Finland for Bloggers 2014:

##### **1. Planning phase:**

- What are the destination management organizations? What did they do? Who sponsored them or what did they pay for?
- What are the co-companies? What did they do/pay for?
- How did FTB persuade companies to join?
- How long was the planning phase in general? Any delay? Any problem? Possible reasons for the challenges?
- How much did FTB invest in the campaign?

##### **2. Organizing phase:**

- What were the Get Together meeting on 6.8 and the ceremony on 7.8.2014 about? Were they successful and helpful?
- Were there pre-tour meetings for trip 2, 3, and 4 as well?
- Were there arising problems during the trips? How were they dealt with?
- How was the communication with companies during the trips?
- What were the Finnish bloggers responsibilities?
- What are the challenges to organize the same campaign in the future?
- What could have been done better?

##### **3. Post-campaign:**

- Are relationships with bloggers/co-companies maintained? In what ways?
- Is the campaign perceived as successful?
- What profits have it brought so far? How to measure its effectiveness?

- Will this campaign be repeated in the future? What will be done differently?

Questions for Inna-Pirjetta Lahti – campaign coordinator of Outdoors Finland for Bloggers 2014:

**1. Recruitment phase:**

- How long was the recruitment phase?
- How was it done? (How many announcing channels and what are they? Any application form? What were the selection criteria? How many bloggers applied in total?)
- Did it go well? (Your comments about the process, any problem/challenge you met while you were recruiting bloggers?)
- How were the groups divided or did the bloggers choose their own trip?
- Was there any type of contract/agreement with the bloggers? How was the daily fee paid?

**2. During the trips:**

- Any problem arising during the trips?
- Your own experience and feeling?
- What do you comment about other bloggers attitude and feeling towards the trips?

**3. Project outcome:**

- What is the public reaction towards the blog posts?
- How many photos and videos were produced?
- Are there companies' links in the posts?
- Is it possible to track any profitable action of the readers resulting from the blogposts?
- How to measure the campaign ROI?
- Have companies used any of the bloggers' content for their own marketing? In what way?
- What happens next? (How do you maintain relationships with the bloggers, what are you planning to do to take advantage of the campaign reputation?)
- If this campaign is repeated in the future what would you do differently to enhance its performance?