

Marketing strategy to attract Russian-speaking customers and increase direct sales for Raya Divers

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Ivan Kirillov

Abstract

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Abstract		
<p>In recent years, the COVID-19 pandemic has changed tourist flows. Russian-speaking tourists from Russia and other former Soviet countries make up a significant part of the tourist flow to Phuket and the Kingdom of Thailand. The numbers are growing every year. Despite the rapid growth in demand, diving centres face intense competition and difficulties in increasing their share of direct sales, as a significant proportion of bookings are made through commission-based travel agencies, which reduces the profitability of the business.</p> <p>The object of this work is to develop recommendations for adapting Raya Divers' marketing strategy to attract Russian-speaking tourists and increase direct sales. To accomplish this task, theoretical aspects of marketing and social networks were studied with a focus on this industry, the current position of the company and external and internal factors were analysed, and specific measures were proposed to improve and adjust the marketing strategy of Raya Divers.</p> <p>The research revealed that despite the significant share of Russian-speaking tourists, direct sales remain close to zero, and barriers preventing higher direct sales were identified. Specific recommendations were suggested to improve this performance indicator and increase the total number of Russian-speaking customers. The main recommendations were: a more active presence on social media in Russian, including Russian social media; the introduction of new technologies (AI and chatbots); closer cooperation with Russian tourist platforms; Russian search engines optimisation.</p>		
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Raya Divers, Marketing strategy, Russian-speaking, Direct sales, Social media, Tourism, Digital marketing		

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background Information

Phuket's tourism industry has changed significantly over the past years because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Russian-speaking tourists from Russia, Kazakhstan, Ukraine, Belarus and other Russian-speaking countries are still a significant part of the arrivals. In 2023, Russian tourists were the leaders among all nationalities regarding tourist flow to Phuket. In the first half of 2023, almost 450,000 arrivals were registered (Russian Travel Digest 2023). In total, about 1.48 million people from Russia visited the Kingdom of Thailand in 2023. In 2024, these figures increased by 18% and reached about 1.745 million tourists with a Russian passport (TASS 2025). This trend is logical, since Europe is now inaccessible to many Russian tourists, and more people are visiting Asian and Middle Eastern countries. The Russian-speaking market is important for local tourism operators, including diving centres such as Raya Divers.

However, despite the growing demand, diving centres are facing increasing competition and difficulties in converting tourist interest into direct sales. Many companies still have a high percentage of sales of their services through agents such as travel agencies, which reduces profitability. Raya Divers is not an exception and has only 44,9% of direct sales (Raya Divers 2025).

The consumer behaviour of Russian-speaking tourists is also changing. More and more attention is given to personalised services, safety and convenience of e-booking. The COVID-19 pandemic initially led to a decline in the number of tourists from Russia, but the recovery was rapid. Direct and charter flights from Moscow and other major cities to Phuket contributed to the quick return of Russian tourists (Russian Travel Digest 2023).

1.2 Objectives and Delimitations

The objective of the thesis is to formulate useful recommendations to enable Raya Divers to adapt its marketing strategy to the Russian-speaking market and increase its direct sales to this population group.

In order to achieve this goal, the following steps should be taken:

- Explore and describe the theoretical aspects of marketing strategy in the travel and recreational activities industry.
- Analyse the current market, external, internal factors and the case company marketing activities.

- Give recommendations and propose possible actions to the case company.

The delimitations of this study are as follows:

- The geography of the research is limited to Phuket and Khao Lak. The company's offices are located there.
- The research is based on secondary sources and statistics from Raya Divers, including industry reports, competitor websites, and articles.
- The research focuses on activities and services related to diving and snorkelling.

1.3 Research Question

International companies operating in the tourism sector face the need to adapt their marketing strategies to different cultural and linguistic groups. For Raya Divers, which operates in the diving services market, attracting Russian-speaking customers is important and requires a complex approach to promotion and sales.

Therefore, the research question is the following:

How can Raya Divers effectively attract more Russian-speaking customers and increase direct sales?

1.4 Research methods

The methodological basis of the study is a comprehensive approach combining quantitative and qualitative methods of market analysis, customer base analysis, and analysis of internal and external factors that influence the company's activities. In addition, industry and company internal statistics, specialised industry research and various digital promotion channels to identify the most effective steps to attract a geographically defined audience and increase direct sales.

2 Theoretical framework

2.1 Marketing strategy concept

In today's highly competitive world, companies with clear marketing strategies have concrete advantages for achieving their goals and growth. A marketing strategy involves creating a comprehensive plan that includes achieving business goals through positioning and differentiation in the market, as well as determining how the organisation will attract its target audience. To maximise business effectiveness and create value for customers, a comprehensive plan serves as a map that guides efforts and allocates resources. (Kotler and Armstrong 2018, 72).

West and Kotler (2020, 112) note that it is necessary to base decisions on an understanding of market dynamics, customer needs, and competitor actions. According to Johnson (2019, 45–47), a marketing strategy should include certain components: target market segmentation, positioning, and implementation planning. These components work together to form an approach to business growth and market penetration. To ensure the overall goals and opportunities of the organisation, a thorough analysis of the components and strategic decision-making is required.

Organisations without a strategic approach have profits that are 15-25% lower than organisations with clear marketing strategies, reports Baker (2019, 28). It is difficult to overestimate the importance of a well-thought-out marketing strategy. Marketing strategies provide a basis for evaluating success, simplify resource allocation, determine direction, and focus marketing efforts (Morgan 2017,83). Businesses can adapt to changes in the market, conditions and take advantage of new opportunities.

To develop a marketing strategy, the external marketplace is studied first, then a situational analysis is conducted, which includes an assessment of internal capabilities. Next, clear marketing objectives are set, which must be aligned with the organisation's goals. (McDonald & Wilson 2021, 56). The following stage involves making strategic decisions about target markets, competitive advantages, and positioning. (Smith 2018, 112–115). Finally, a detailed plan is developed and performance indicators are established.

In the tourism and recreational services sector, such as diving, marketing strategies require special attention. Lovelock and Patterson (2022, 67) argue that the intangibility, inseparability, variability, and perishability of services demand unique marketing approaches compared to physical products. For example, tourism service providers should pay extra attention to experience-related elements and create strong brand associations to compensate customers for their inability to evaluate services before purchasing (Grönroos 2020, 134).

Wilson (2019, 78) also notes that marketing strategies for tourism services often have to take into account seasonal changes in demand and cultural differences between target markets and target audiences.

Chaffi and Ellis-Chadwick (2019, 45) suggest that such integration is particularly important for tourism services, where online presence significantly influences consumer decision-making. According to their research, approximately 67% of travellers research and book their tours and activities online.

2.2 The specifics of the tourism services market and consumer behaviour

The tourism services market is a complex economic system. The tourism market brings together various industries: tourism, catering, the hotel business, entertainment and other activities (International Journal of Tourism and Hospitality 2021). Any marketing strategy requires an understanding of the specifics of the tourism business and consumer behaviour, taking into account cultural characteristics.

2.2.1 Characteristics of services in the tourism industry

Travel services have four distinctive characteristics. In general, they can be characterised as intangibility, inseparability, heterogeneity and perishability (International Tourism and Hospitality Journal 2021). Intangible means that travel services cannot be seen, touched or tested before use. This creates unique marketing challenges. Inseparability reflects the parallel production and consumption of tourist services. Consumers, at the same time, actively participate in their delivery. Heterogeneity represents a potential opportunity for high variability in the provision of services, especially for services with high labour intensity. Performance can vary significantly in these types of services. Finally, the perishable nature indicates that services cannot be rescheduled (International Tourism and Hospitality Journal 2021).

The abovementioned characteristics influence the sales of travel services through proper positioning. Developing a strategy is very important to address the unique challenges in the tourism industry. For example, due to their intangible nature, customers should get an idea of the service provided through some kind of marketing materials. They help the client understand how valuable these services are in terms of impressions and positive experiences. Dynamic pricing, in turn, allows you to increase occupancy in any season, offsetting the perishability of tourist services.

2.2.2 Motivation of tourists and the decision-making process

Tourist motivation - a key factor in understanding the behaviour of tourists. It plays an important role in the decision-making process. Dunn (1977) suggested the importance of attraction factors in the formation of tourist motivation. This approach is based on the idea that travel decisions are made in two stages. The first is the inner desire to travel, the second is the external resources that determine the direction. (Journal of Empirical Generalisations in Marketing Science 1998).

Socio-physiological factors (the desire to relax, improve health and seek of adventure) are motivating and pushing people to travel. These inner forces are intangible. Determining the destination depends on the attractiveness of the vacation spots in terms of history, culture, activities, and climatic conditions. These are the factors of attraction. (Journal of Empirical Generalisations in Marketing Science 1998). Tourism marketing specialists analyse and combine offers in accordance with the wishes of travellers, based on motivational factors.

To successfully promote a tourist destination, it is necessary to analyse what influences tourists' choices. The main factors are accommodation, positive reviews, convenience, price and attributes. Impressions of a trip depend on the quality of accommodation. Reviews and recommendations from other travellers play a big role in choosing a holiday destination. Transport infrastructure, accessibility of attractions, and ease of travel are also important to tourists. People are willing to pay extra for more comfortable conditions and memorable experiences. (International Tourism and Hospitality Journal 2021).

2.3 Marketing Mix: 4Ps

The 4P model (product, price, place, promotion), developed by E. Jerome McCarthy (1960), has remained the basis for building marketing strategies in many industries. Diving tourism is not an exception.

2.3.1 Product strategy in diving tourism

Diving companies offer tangible (equipment) and intangible products (dives, training). Offers should be tailored to different customer segments (Nieh 2025). It is possible to stand out from competitors through high quality, safety and personalised offers, such as certification programmes for different levels of training. According to Colbert (2024), the key success factor in this industry is the alignment of the product with consumer expectations in terms of adventure, education and environmental sustainability.

2.3.2 Pricing strategies for competitive positioning

In the diving services sector, companies use various pricing methods, each with its own specific features and areas of application. One of the most common is cost-based pricing. The idea behind this approach is to price based on the costs incurred in providing the service and adding a fixed markup. In this sector, the main costs are usually depreciation of equipment and vehicles (if the company owns them), instructors' and crew members' salaries, transport, and providing comfort and safety for customers. (Hilmiana et al. 2020.)

Another key method is value-based pricing. This means that the price is set based on the customer's perceived value of a particular service. In diving, this could be an individual approach, international certification, exclusive routes or professional underwater photography. With this type of pricing, the company can set higher prices for a unique and prestigious experience. (Hilmiana et al. 2020.)

In addition to these two methods, other less autonomous and more narrowly focused methods are also used:

- Differentiated pricing involves setting prices based on different categories of customers and services. For example, a lower price is set for independent and more experienced divers, while separate rates with higher costs may be provided for more complex and exclusive dives. (Camilleri 2019, 113-142.)
- Package pricing is the combination of several services. For example, equipment rental with training and several dives. This offer is more attractive to the customer, but at the same time, it maintains the company's profitability. (Nieh 2025.)
- Dynamic pricing is based on fluctuations in demand due to external factors. Such as seasonality, when prices may be higher for popular destinations during the high season due to increased demand. (Yudelson 1999.)

2.3.3 Distribution channels (Place) to ensure accessibility

Customers of diving companies can find out about services at the office, on the diving company's website, and on partner websites (travel companies, hotels) (Colbert 2024). A multi-channel approach is needed, combining online booking and on-site service delivery (Nieh 2025). Having offices and retail stores to sell equipment provides opportunities for additional sales. Brand awareness, for example, among Russian-speaking tourists who want to dive, is increased through geotargeting and localised content (Colbert 2024).

2.3.4 Promotion: Increasing brand awareness and engagement

A well-thought-out communication strategy is essential for the successful development of diving tourism. Visual content is needed to inform and convince potential customers. Underwater photos, videos and reviews from divers allow people to experience the beauty of the underwater world and attract new customers (Nieh 2025). Beautiful photos and reviews on social media platforms such as Instagram and YouTube help expand the audience reach. Collaboration with influencers and participation in tourism and specialised exhibitions further help to expand the range of potential customers. Loyalty programmes attract and retain customers and encourage them to make repeat bookings. Advertising campaigns with real evidence of high-quality services have a significant impact on tourists' choices (Colbert 2024).

2.4 SWOT

SWOT analysis is a method used to evaluate performance and make management decisions. With SWOT analysis, it is possible to update a strategy, solve a problem if a product is not generating the desired profit, make a decision about expanding the business, and assess risks. This analysis identifies the strengths and weaknesses of an organisation, as well as potential opportunities and threats that affect the company's activities and marketing strategy (Pickton 1998). This method is versatile and can be very useful in the tourism sector.

2.4.1 Strengths and weaknesses

Strengths are potential competitive advantages over other companies based on internal resources and capabilities. These may be quality of service, a well-known brand, unique resources, or expertise. In the field of diving tourism, the availability of experienced instructors, the level of customer service, and access to exclusive diving sites can be considered strengths (Haghkhan et al. 2011).

Weaknesses are internal shortcomings that reduce the competitiveness of a business. In the tourism and diving industry, examples include seasonality, insufficient marketing activity, budget limitations, and excessive dependence on a narrow circle of customers (Borthakur 2024).

2.4.2 Opportunities and threats

Opportunities are external factors that a company can use to strengthen its market position and grow. These could be changes in market trends, population structure, or uncovered

audiences. In the tourism industry, opportunities may be related to the emergence of new promising markets, technological innovations, changes in tourist preferences or the growing popularity of certain types of leisure activities, such as diving (Šilović 2017).

Threats are external factors that could potentially worsen a company's position in the market. These include the presence of strong competitors, political and economic instability, or changes in legislation that affect the company's operations (Effendi & Narti 2020).

2.4.3 The SWOT analysis process

SWOT analysis is a systematic process for identifying and evaluating strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. According to Skillbox (2023), the process consists of several stages:

1. Identifying key factors for each SWOT category.
2. Collecting data (e.g., through market research).
3. Assessing the significance and impact of these factors.
4. Identifying priority strategic directions based on the analysis.
5. Developing specific action plans to reinforce strengths, find ways to take advantage of opportunities, and minimise risks and threats.

2.4.4 The strategic value of SWOT for tourism marketing

SWOT analysis is the basis for strategic decision-making in marketing. It is a tool for linking the results of an analysis of the current situation with specific actions. In the tourism sector, it helps organisations identify their strengths and make them unique in the market. SWOT analysis allows the identification of important cultural characteristics, preferred means of communication and service expectations, which directly influence the success of marketing strategies in the provision of tourism services targeted at a specific customer group. (Kuchumov et al. 2024, 4.)

According to Kotler and Keller (2015), SWOT analysis should be flexible, dynamic and constantly adapt to the changing market environment. This is especially important for the tourism industry, as technology, preferences, tastes and trends change rapidly.

2.4.5 Limitations of SWOT analysis

Despite the widespread popularity of SWOT analysis, it is important to bear in mind its limitations. It is rather superficial without in-depth analytical approaches and can provide an

overly simplified picture that does not reflect the full complexity of the market situation (Pickton 1998). If this analysis is carried out by interested company employees without the involvement of external experts, there is a risk of distorting the results and obtaining a subjective opinion.

Tourism businesses, as well as companies with a narrow specialisation, such as dive centres, should integrate SWOT analysis into their overall strategic planning process rather than using it as a stand-alone tool (Loxton et al. 2020, 166). In combination with other methods, it provides valuable data for developing an effective marketing strategy to expand markets and increase direct sales.

2.5 PEST Analysis in Tourism Marketing

Originally developed by Francis Aguilar (1967), PEST analysis allows companies to assess the impact of political, economic, sociological and technological factors and helps in strategic decision-making. These factors shape the business environment. (Kenton 2025.) It is an indispensable tool for tourism marketing, helping to understand the factors influencing tourism development, develop marketing strategies, and understand customer behaviour (Makos 2024).

2.5.1 Components of PEST Analysis in Tourism Marketing

2.5.2 Political factors

Political factors influence tourism marketing. Government policy, visa requirements and overall political stability shape the conditions in which the tourism industry develops. Government policy can either stimulate or hinder the growth of the industry (Makos 2024). Subsidies, grants and tax breaks attract investment in tourism infrastructure and services. This expands marketing opportunities. In contrast, visa restrictions can be an obstacle to the development and promotion of tourism services. A simplified visa regime attracts more tourists and makes countries with a visa-free regime more attractive for business purposes.

2.5.3 Economic factors

Economic factors influence the tourism business. Indicators such as economic growth, exchange rates, inflation, and interest rates affect tourists' purchasing power. These factors influence tourists' willingness to spend money on travel and determine their financial capabilities (Fairlie 2024). By analysing economic conditions, tourism companies can develop pricing policies and advertising campaigns. Currency exchange rates are important for international tourism, as they determine the attractiveness of different countries for foreign

tourists. When developing marketing strategies for Russian-speaking populations, it is necessary to take into account the economic situation and currency exchange rates in their countries. (Singh 2024.)

2.5.4 Social factors

Social factors are also important in tourism marketing. These include cultural differences, health and wellness, demography, and career goals (Makos 2024). By looking at these factors, you can create more effective advertising campaigns for specific groups of tourists. When working with Russian-speaking tourists, it is important to consider their cultural preferences, travel habits and activity on social media. Tourism offerings that take these social aspects into account are more likely to be successful. (Costa 2008.)

2.5.5 Technological factors

Technological developments have significantly expanded and simplified the process of organising trips. Mobile apps, online booking platforms and social media have changed the way people plan and perceive travel (Makos 2024). For companies offering specialised services, such as diving, the use of new technologies helps to attract customers. With virtual reality, which allows you to see the underwater world before diving, online certification and the use of social media to showcase the underwater world, marketing is more target-oriented (Fairlie 2024).

2.5.6 Application of PEST Analysis in Tourism Marketing Strategy

PEST analysis enables the creation of effective marketing strategies. It supports tourism companies in identifying potential opportunities and risks. For successful promotion of services, this analysis allows understanding and consideration of external factors such as the political situation, economy, social and technological factors (Singh 2024).

With the help of PEST analysis, companies working with Russian-speaking tourists can create more effective and targeted marketing campaigns. When developing a strategy for creating a unique product, various factors must be taken into account, including visa requirements and cultural preferences for a given segment (Costa 2008).

2.6 The customer journey and modern digital tools in tourism marketing

Modern marketing studies the entire customer journey. Each stage is described in detail, including points of contact with the company, actions, thoughts, emotions, customer issues, and what is missing for a decision to be made. Lemon and Verhoef (2016, 71) define the

customer journey as a complex structure that includes cognitive (mental), emotional, behavioural, sensory, and social responses of the customer to the company's offers at each stage of the purchasing process. When developing a marketing strategy, all data is extremely important, as customers interact with brands through multiple channels and platforms (Lemon & Verhoef 2016, 69).

In tourism, mapping customer journeys helps to better understand travellers' needs and expectations. Mapping and analysing journeys increase satisfaction, loyalty and brand loyalty (Reali 2023). The main stages of a customer journey are: researching destinations and services (pre-purchase), booking and payment (purchase), travel experience, reflection and feedback (post-purchase) (Lemon & Verhoef 2016, 76).

With the development of digital technologies, travel companies have gained the ability to interact with potential travellers at every stage of the purchase process. There are more offers and new opportunities, which makes it harder for travellers to make a choice. A study by Ambassify (2024) highlights that social media has become a key tool for the travel industry. It's now possible to reach a wider audience, engage potential travellers, and showcase the appeal of destinations through visual content.

With social media, travellers can see familiar destinations in a new light, get inspired to travel, and see traditional destinations in a new way (Ambassify 2024). Bright photos, exciting videos, and live streams encourage potential tourists to take a trip. For example, visualising underwater beauty demonstrates the uniqueness of scuba diving, creating an emotional connection with the destination and inspiring underwater adventures.

Technological advances have transformed the tourism industry and changed the way trips are planned and organised. The use of artificial intelligence and big data analysis allows companies to study customer behaviour more effectively, take preferences into account, and develop targeted marketing campaigns (Kumova 2021). During the research process, problem areas are identified, analysed, and individual solutions are developed and proposed.

Artificial intelligence has made it possible to automate the process of creating customer journey maps. The process has become more efficient, allowing for the analysis of customer data and market requirements. Artificial intelligence enables the formulation and resolution of business problems, leading to more successful marketing strategies. (Okazaki & Inoue, 2022.)

Another effective digital tool is chatbots. They optimise and improve customer interaction at different stages. Giving chatbots human attributes makes communication more pleasant.

The quality of service is improved thanks to prompt support and the provision of necessary information (Kumova 2021). This is especially valuable for international customers, as it is usually available in their native language.

For companies working with foreign customers, this tool provides a unique opportunity to learn about cultural characteristics and language preferences. Travel companies can analyse the needs and expectations of different customer groups and create personalised offers. In an increasingly competitive environment, the ability to use digital tools to understand and improve the customer experience is key to expanding an international customer base.

2.7 Promotion of Travel Services in a Digital Environment

The use of digital marketing is a mandatory condition for successful development in the tourism and hospitality industry. Brand promotion, customer acquisition and retention depend on digital marketing. Research confirms that the implementation of influence marketing, SMM and SEO increases business efficiency and benefits companies operating in the travel industry (Al-Haidari et al. 2021).

The modern tourism industry requires the use of digital marketing. It has become a necessity in order to remain competitive. According to statistics, in 2024, 70% of sales in the travel and tourism sector were made online, and further growth is predicted (Statista 2025). Travel service providers need to actively develop and use online channels to attract customers.

Data obtained through digital marketing allows tourism companies to analyse customer behaviour and preferences. This enables them to create personalised content that encourages online bookings and purchases. According to (Lai & Vinh 2013), the introduction of digital technologies in various areas of activity contributes to the development and vitality of the tourism business, including service, communication, management, distribution and marketing.

2.7.1 Social Media as a Strategic Tool for Travel Services Promotion

Social media is playing an increasingly important role in travel planning. Most travellers rely on social media to search for and select destinations, plan and book their trips (WordStream 2020). Social media marketing is particularly effective in the tourism sector due to its ability to showcase attractive visual content. Through engaging content, travel companies can expand their audience and establish close ties with potential travellers (Rybalko et al. 2024).

To promote services in the international tourism market, including the Russian-speaking market, it is important to take cultural and linguistic characteristics into account. Russian

tourists actively spend money on travel, especially abroad, representing a promising market for tourism companies (Miloradov & Eidlina 2016). Marketing on social media in Russian will significantly increase the reach of this audience.

2.7.2 Evolution of Digital Marketing in Tourism

There have been significant changes in the field of digital marketing in tourism. Recently, travellers have increasingly valued a personalised approach and authentic experiences, seeking to immerse themselves in local culture and everyday life. They want to feel like they are part of everyday life, rather than just sightseeing. These desires are forcing travel companies to rethink their offerings and adapt to customer preferences. (Zed 2023.)

The way travel services are promoted is changing due to the introduction of artificial intelligence and virtual reality. They are radically changing digital marketing in the tourism industry. Potential customers can learn about a trip before they take it through photos, videos, and other content. These technologies significantly improve interaction with potential customers, leading to increased sales of tourism services (Aleksahin et al. 2024).

To succeed in the competitive digital market, travel companies must constantly innovate and adapt their marketing strategies to attract and retain customers.

3 Research implementation

3.1 General description of the company

Raya Divers was founded in 2000 and is now one of the leading diving companies in the industry. The company's offices are located in Phuket and Khao Lak. This provides coverage for a large number of tourists who come to the Kingdom of Thailand on vacation. The main activities are one-day diving tours, snorkelling excursions, training for PADI international certificates of various levels, and multi-day diving safaris. There are more than thirty different tours to choose from, departing from two locations. The company is not standing still and now also provides its services in Greece, so even when the high season in Thailand ends, diving enthusiasts can still enjoy their favourite hobby.

The company's offer is distinguished by its high attention to safety, first-class equipment and service in different languages. Equipment and transport are regularly inspected to ensure that any malfunctions are eliminated in a timely manner, providing customers with the best diving experience possible. The price always includes insurance for unforeseen circumstances, as well as all possible fees for visiting national parks and islands. The booking and cancellation procedure is also simple and transparent to avoid any negative experiences or misunderstandings. There is a team of multilingual instructors on board to enhance comfort and communication. Russian is always integrated into the company's operations. This applies to both the website and on-site service.

3.2 Analysis of Raya Divers' current position in the Phuket diving services market

The diving tourism market in Phuket is growing more and more every year due to the region's unique location, relatively low cost and constantly improving infrastructure. The underwater tourism market was estimated at \$192 million in 2023. Diving, in particular, accounts for a huge 78% share. According to Grand View Research (2024), the diving tourism market could grow to \$430 million by 2030. The average annual growth rate is estimated at 12.2%. Raya Divers will undoubtedly benefit from this rapid growth as it serves all the most popular dive sites and islands in the Andaman Sea.

Geographically, Raya Divers operates in the Andaman Sea with a clear focus on Racha Yai Island, as it is ideal for easy snorkelling trips and beginner divers due to its shallow depths, absence of complex underwater terrain and proximity to Phuket Island (PADI 2025a). The company maintains seasonality. During the high season from November to April, it uses its own boat when tourist traffic is particularly heavy. The rest of the time, when tourist traffic

decreases, they use boats from other companies by agreement. This allows them to reduce operating costs and maintain the necessary margins of the company.

Even though there are many diving centres in Phuket, Raya Divers stands out from others of similar size, pricing policy and tourist volume. The first important aspect is its convenient location near the main departure point for all boats. Secondly, it has 5-star PADI certification, which means it provides a full range of diving training, high-quality equipment and pays special attention to safety and the environment (PADI 2025b). Next, it is worth noting that everything you need is included in the price and this is clearly stated on the company's website, so customers do not encounter any unpleasant surprises when they find out at the last minute that they need to pay extra for something. Another distinctive feature is the special focus on citizens of Scandinavia, Russia and other Russian-speaking countries. All this together makes Raya Divers the best company on the market for these demographic groups and those who truly appreciate convenience, safety and the company's special values.

3.3 Analysis of the customer base with a focus on the Russian-speaking segment

An analysis of Raya Divers' statistics in the post-pandemic period by customer country for 2021-2025 shows a significant share of Russian-speaking tourists among the total customer flow. Specifically, 23.5% or 4,276 people, with the largest share coming from the Russian Federation (18.03% - 3,281 people). Uzbekistan is in second place with a significant lead (2.5%), followed by Kazakhstan (2.48%) and Ukraine (0.16%). (Raya Divers 2025.) This is not surprising, given that in the three winter months alone, 622,693 people arrived in Thailand from Russia in 2023/24 and 726,018 in 2024/25. Naturally, this boom is due to the strong seasonality of this type of holiday for climatic reasons. Despite the growth in demand for more budget-friendly flights with transfers, averaging up to 30%, 72% of people still prefer direct flights, and interest in five-star hotels has grown by 10-15%, which indicates that Russian tourists are willing to pay more for convenience. (Association of Russian Tour Operators 2025.) This is also an indication that they will choose more expensive and reputable diving centres, such as Raya Divers. (Raya Divers 2025.)

Among other groups, residents of Finland and Sweden stand out, accounting for 56.5% and 5.34% of all customers during this period, respectively. And if we look at the percentage of direct sales, we can see that almost all of the company's direct sales are to non-Russian-speaking tourists. If we assume that Russian-speaking tourists only use domestic travel agencies, we get that only about 2-3% of Russian-speaking people book their diving tours

directly. The total number of tourists who purchased services through Russian-speaking travel agencies is 4,178, with a total of approximately 4,276 people. This is the main problem that causes Raya Divers to pay commissions to travel agencies and lose a significant share of its profits. (Raya Divers 2025.)

3.4 Pest

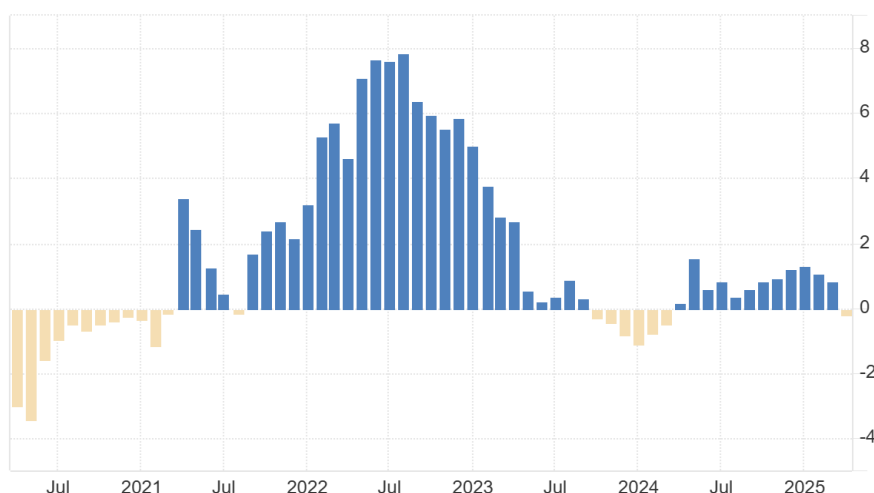
3.4.1 Political factors

One of the most important factors for Russian-speaking tourists, especially those from Russia, is the visa aspect. Currently, Russians can enter the Kingdom of Thailand without a visa for a period of 60 days with the possibility of extending their stay for another 30 days without leaving the country. (Association of Russian Tour Operators 2025b.) Such conditions may have a positive impact on the demand for Raya Divers' services, especially among those planning a long stay.

3.4.2 Economic factors

The economy of the Kingdom of Thailand is considered one of the most stable in Southeast Asia. Since March 2023, inflation in Thailand has been within 3%, which is a very positive indicator. GDP growth rates have remained stable throughout the post-pandemic period. This ensures stability and attractiveness for business and investment.

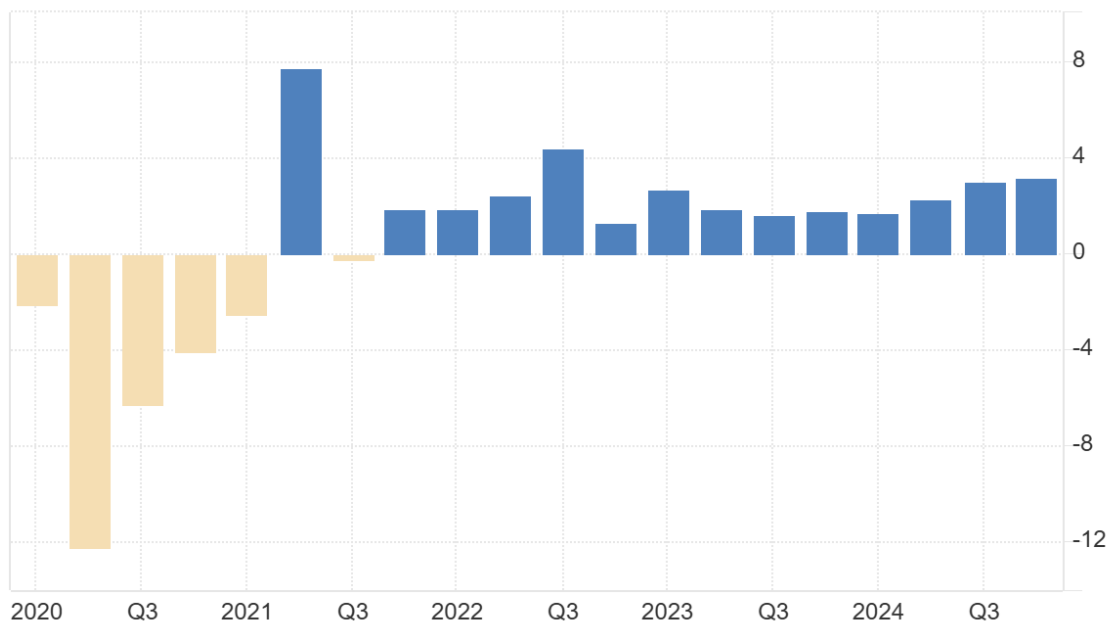
TH Inflation Rate - percent



Source: tradingeconomics.com | Bureau of Trade and Economic Indices, Ministry of Commerce, Thailand

Figure 1. Thai Baht inflation rate 2021-2025 (Tradineconomics 2025, according to Bureau of Trade and Economics, Thailand, 2025)

TH GDP Annual Growth Rate - percent



Source: tradingeconomics.com | Nesdb, Thailand

Figure 2. Thailand - GDP Growth Rate 2021-2025 (Tradineconomics 2025, according to Nesdb 2025)

The most important economic factor is currency fluctuations and the exchange rate itself. The Russian Ruble is far from the most stable currency, and given the current political tensions between Western countries and Russia, this could become an obstacle to travel for the average Russian citizen.

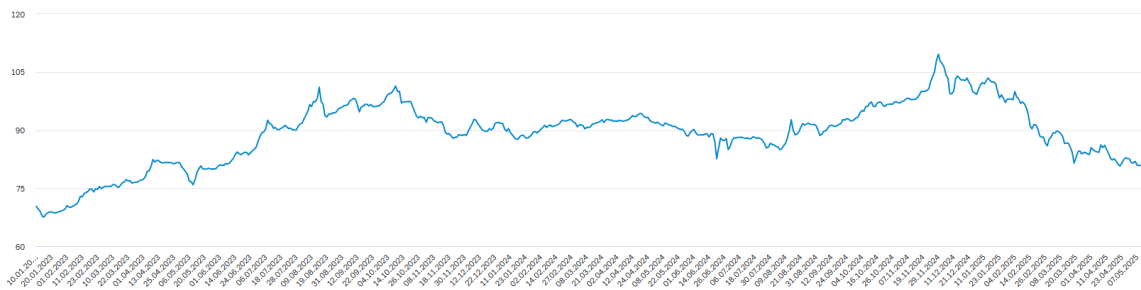


Figure 3. Dynamics of the official exchange rate of a Russian Ruble 2023-2025 (The Central Bank of Russian Federation 2025)

3.4.3 Social factors

Language accessibility in Phuket and at Raya Divers is highly developed. This is of considerable importance, as only 20% of Russian residents can express themselves more or less freely in at least one foreign language, with English being the most common at 15% (Levada 2023). The availability of Russian-speaking guides and instructors significantly improves the quality of service and safety during diving tours for Russian-speaking customers.

It is also worth noting the wide variety of leisure activities on the island, which are suitable for younger solo travellers or couples, as well as families with children.

3.4.4 Technological factors

In some places in Phuket, payment by Russian bank cards is accepted. There are also exchange offices that cater to Russian tourists, where you can exchange physical roubles for baht or receive baht by paying with a Russian credit card (MoneyShopPhuket 2025). It is important to note that Raya Divers actively cooperates with large travel companies and agencies through which tourists can book and pay for any services in Rubles (PEGAST 2025). Therefore, it can be stated that in this case, demand has created supply, and Russian tourists find it much more comfortable to vacation in Phuket without worrying about potential challenges related to paying for various goods and services. Thailand has a fairly high level of digitalisation, with internet penetration at 88% and 63.21 million internet users (Kemp 2024).

3.5 SWOT analysis of Raya Divers in the context of attracting Russian-speaking tourists

SWOT analysis is used to identify internal and external factors that may affect the competitiveness of Raya Divers in the field of diving tourism among Russian-speaking tourists.

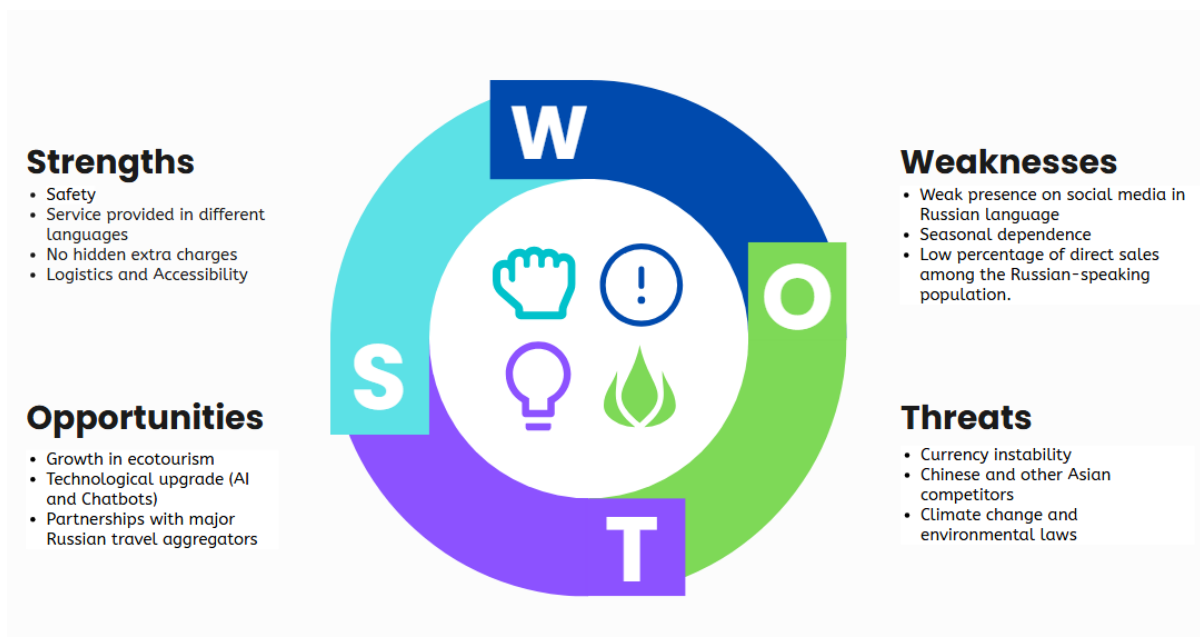


Image 1. SWOT analysis table of Raya Divers.

3.5.1 Strengths:

Safety: PADI 5-star certification, high safety standards, quality equipment and a high level of supervision.

Service provided in different languages (always in Finnish, Swedish, Russian and Thai).

No hidden extra charges: transfers, insurance, park fees, lunch, fruit and soft drinks are always included in the price.

Logistics and accessibility: a large number of tours to more than 10 dive sites in the Andaman Sea, transfers from anywhere in Phuket and two offices in Phuket and Khao Lak.

3.5.2 Weaknesses

Weak presence on social media in Russian, no permanent Russian-speaking SMM specialist and no advertising budget to increase coverage.

Seasonal dependence.

Low percentage of direct sales among the Russian-speaking population.

3.5.3 Opportunities

Growth in ecotourism: 35% of customers are willing to pay 15% more for specialised coral tours (Grand View Research 2024).

Technological upgrade: introduction of augmented and virtual reality technologies during training and preparation for dives. The development of artificial intelligence and its implementation in the company's work will relieve staff of routine tasks. Use of chatbots in Telegram to simplify booking.

Partnerships with major Russian travel aggregators: Yandex Travel, Ozon Travel, TuTu, Ostrovok and others.

3.5.4 Threats

Currency instability: the Ruble is not a stable currency. The purchasing power of tourists may decline sharply. This in turn may also affect the exchange rates of other Russian-speaking countries.

Chinese and other Asian competitors: they tend to dump prices by offering prices 12-15% below market rates (Grand View Research 2024).

Climate change and environmental laws: more and more corals are dying due to water temperatures, and the Thai government may tighten rules for visiting some dive sites and national parks (Hussein 2024).

3.6 4Ps of Raya Divers

3.6.1 Product

Raya Divers is a diving centre that offers a wide range of services. Its most popular product is the Discover Scuba Diving programme, which is the most popular among a fairly large selection. It consists of one or two dives (for an additional fee), usually near Racha Yai Island, as it has all the necessary conditions for beginners. This is the easiest and fastest way to try diving without any certification. There are only two requirements: be healthy and be at least 10 years old. Another popular service is a snorkelling tour with the option of visiting an island (depending on the tour). This is more for those who are afraid or cannot dive due to age or health reasons but want to enjoy the beautiful underwater world of the Andaman Sea. For those who do not want to get wet, the company offers a trip to an elephant park to interact with these incredible animals. (Raya Divers 2024.)

It is also possible to obtain PADI certificates of various levels, with the most basic taking three days and each following level taking two days. This allows you to dive anywhere in the world and master a wide range of skills necessary for exciting and safe diving. The company also offers multi-day tours with a large number of dives, but for that you must have at least a beginner's PADI certificate. (Raya Divers 2024.)

The company is known for the quality and safety of its services. For Russian-speaking tourists, there are always at least two Russian-speaking instructors on board who dive together with the tourists, monitor everything and provide necessary advice and recommendations.

3.6.2 Price:

The company's pricing policy is not very different from other five-star PADI competitors and is aimed more at the mid-range or near-premium diving segment. However, the price includes almost all possible expenses for equipment, transfers, insurance, lunch and national park fees. This makes Raya Divers' pricing policy very transparent and eliminates any unexpected costs, which has a positive impact on customer satisfaction. If the tour is not fully booked, last-minute discounts and other special offers are available. (Raya Divers 2024b.)

3.6.3 Location:

Raya Divers covers all the main dive sites in the region and has two offices in Phuket and Khao Lak, which provides better coverage of the area. Potential customers always have the opportunity to visit the company's office, ask questions and book a tour they like. In all other cases, this can be done online in any convenient way via email, WhatsApp, by phone or through the website, which is translated into 4 languages (Finnish, Swedish, English and Russian). The company actively cooperates with European and Russian tour operators, which allows it to expand its target audience.

3.6.4 Promotion:

The current marketing strategy consists of promotion on social media through Instagram and Facebook, as well as partnerships with tour operators. The problem is that all of this is aimed exclusively at English and Finnish speakers, but the Instagram page is nevertheless informative and entertaining. At the same time, no attention is paid to Russian-language profiles on social media or Russian platforms and search engines. This, combined with zero advertising budgets, makes it impossible to attract Russian-speaking customers and increase reach using such an important marketing tool as social media. Therefore, they are attracted exclusively through partner travel agencies, which sell the company's services to

Russian tourists (Raya Divers 2016). It is worth noting that Raya Divers has excellent ratings and reviews on TripAdvisor and Google Maps (TripAdvisor 2025; Google 2025).

3.7 Digital tools

In this section, I would like to analyse various digital tools for building a marketing strategy and implementing new ways to attract Russian-speaking tourists and increase direct sales for Raya Divers.

3.7.1 Social media in Russia and Russian-speaking countries

To raise awareness of the company among potential customers, it is necessary to actively maintain Russian-language social media accounts and allocate budgets for their promotion. This includes not only Russian-language Instagram account, which is undoubtedly very important, but also VK, Odnoklassniki, Telegram channels and other social media platforms. According to Statista (2025), Telegram ranks first in Russia in terms of market penetration with a rating of 78.4% for the third quarter of 2024. It is followed by WhatsApp (73.9%), VK (67.7%), TikTok (39.5%) and Odnoklassniki (38.1%).

In 2023-2024, the Russian social media market and audience engagement experienced record growth. VK and Telegram alone have over 150 million users. The audience of Telegram is mainly young, aged 18-34, actively consuming content and communicating. According to the PADI report (2024), the 20-39 age group is the largest (62%) in terms of obtaining certifications over the past 5 years (about 50% of all certifications are obtained by people under 30). Due to the blocking of some Western social networks, such as Instagram, Facebook and X, VK and Telegram have become the basis for promoting businesses on social media to a large audience. In addition, small and medium-sized businesses are more and more choosing VK and Telegram because they're relatively accessible and have a lot of targeting options. The average ad spend is about 15,000 rubles (165 euros). In general, in order to actively promote themselves and remain visible, medium-sized businesses are advised to allocate approximately 50,000-150,000 rubles (550-1,650 euros) per month for content, targeting, analytics and possible cooperation with Russian influencers of various levels. Such activity on social media can significantly increase brand awareness and influence sales growth. (Lysova 2024; TGStat 2023; Chorniy 2024; Kizyakova 2025.)

3.7.2 Chatbot

To increase direct sales, Raya Divers may consider implementing a Telegram bot, which can be linked to social media, your company's website, and directly Telegram channel.

Through the bot, potential customers will be able to explore an interactive catalogue of all services offered and find information that is relevant to them, and then instantly book a tour. The functionality of chatbots is not limited to that. They can automate support and answer questions, send personalized offers to customers, notify them about new products and services, and help gather feedback. (Rytikova 2020, 83-98.)

3.7.3 B2B and SEO

Another way to increase sales is to list products and services on travel aggregation websites such as Yandex Travel, Ostrovok, and Ozon Travel. These platforms allow potential customers to pay in any convenient way. The company gains access to a huge audience of Russian-speaking tourists, increases the number of bookings, and conveniently automates and manages sales, including through API. Combined with SEO optimization in Yandex, which is the most popular search engine in Russian-speaking countries alongside Google, this has the potential to significantly impact sales growth, website traffic and conversion rates from the Russian-speaking tourism segment (Wallenius 2024).

3.7.4 Advanced analytics

Sales analytics should be monitored regularly using new tools and customers should be segmented by country, age, gender and preferences for ongoing strategy and budget adjustments to achieve the best results (Higher School of Economics 2023).

4 Summary

This study was dedicated to developing a marketing strategy for Raya Divers. The objectives of the marketing strategy are to increase direct sales and attract more Russian-speaking tourists from Russia and other Russian-speaking countries. The introduction outlined the key objectives. This included analysing the theoretical foundations of marketing strategies in the tourism industry, assessing the company's current position in the recreational diving market, identifying external and internal factors affecting the company's operations, and formulating practical recommendations. The work carried out as a result allowed the objectives to be achieved and showed that by integrating new digital tools and placing greater emphasis on Russian social networks, it is possible to significantly improve the effectiveness of interaction with the Russian-speaking audience.

4.1 Key findings, practical significance and recommendations

The theoretical part clearly defined possible approaches to evaluating marketing strategies and the criteria used for the analysis. The focus was on the tourism services sector in general and diving in particular. The analysis of the 4P, SWOT and PEST models confirmed their applicability for assessing external and internal factors that indirectly or directly affect the company's activities. An important aspect was the adaptation of the strategy to the digital environment. The need to focus on visual ways of attracting potential customers and to form close ties with them through various social media was identified.

An analysis of available statistics revealed an insufficient focus on the company's Russian-speaking audience. Despite the high share of Russian-speaking customers (23.5% over the last four years), this has not been converted into direct sales due to an excessive reliance on travel agencies and a virtual absence from the Russian media and social networks. An analysis of the competitive environment demonstrated the competitive advantages of Raya Divers, even though many Asian companies offer similar services at lower prices, and similar companies with five-star PADI certification focus on different demographic groups. The application of SWOT analysis, in turn, demonstrated the existence of various opportunities to improve business performance and attract new audiences.

The developed recommendations include three key areas:

- Increasing digital presence. Active promotion on Russian social networks with an advertising budget of €500-1,500 per month and a Russian-speaking SMM specialist hiring. The content should showcase an unforgettable diving experience, comfort and safety.

- Introduction of new digital tools. Creation and integration of a chatbot on the Telegram social network to improve automation, personalisation of offerings and feedback collection.
- Development of partnerships and integration. Listing services on popular travel aggregators and SEO in Russian search engines.

4.2 Assessment of the reliability and ethics of the results

The result is considered to be fairly reliable, as it was based on current research data, industry statistics, reports, internal company statistics and other sources of information. For greater reliability and representativeness of this thesis, surveys and interviews and more detailed internal statistics of the organization were not sufficiently available. The research was conducted in full compliance with ethical standards, as all necessary documents were signed and internal statistics were provided personally by the company's CEO. The recommendations for developing a marketing strategy are not illegal and do not contain any discrimination or insults.

4.3 Prospects for further research

Further development of the topic may include the following steps. A more in-depth analysis of specific digital tools and ideas related to Russian-speaking tourists with more complete data to understand their preferences and behaviour. Comparison of new and existing marketing strategies to identify the most effective tools and areas for development in this area, especially considering the significant changes in technology and people's behaviour. Another promising area is the integration of cryptocurrencies for the payment of goods and services. Investigate the use of cryptocurrencies in the tourism sector under anti-Russian sanctions. In addition, it is important to consider and study development trends in other countries in Southeast Asia, where tourist flows will also grow inevitably. Such a set of measures will provide a deeper understanding of current trends and opportunities emerging in the field of tourism and marketing.

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