



# **Implementation of Social Media Marketing in AVAIN Asumisoikeus Oy Ltd.**

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| <p><b>Abstract</b></p> <p>The popularity of social media as a marketing method has been rapidly increasing during the last couple of years. However, there are still some companies that are aware of the benefits of social media marketing but the lack of knowhow and courage prevent those companies from starting to utilize it themselves. Gaining a competitive advantage, increasing brand awareness and boosting sales make it worthwhile.</p> <p>The purpose of the research was to discover suitable means for implementing social media marketing in the commissioning organization. Hence, the main research question aimed at finding out how to implement social media marketing in a service company operating in the housing industry. The supporting research questions concentrated on the choice of social media channels and content.</p> <p>The theoretical framework chosen for the research was a social media model that introduces four steps of implementing social media marketing in a company. The research was executed as a qualitative study with action research as the method. The action research cycle was repeated a couple of times, and the steps of the social media model were implemented in practice. The research followed and monitored the commissioning organization's progress and results of their Facebook launching project.</p> <p>The results show that creating guidelines and objectives is important and that Facebook was the most appropriate channel to start with Instagram as the next channel. The research gives ideas of content production for a service company working in the housing industry. Monitoring and measuring social media marketing results in the future will improve defining the target audience and the focus of social media marketing in the company.</p> |  |                                     |
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| Tiivistelmä   |  |                                    |
| <p>Sosiaalisen median markkinoinnin suosio markkinoinnin menetelmänä on kasvanut nopeasti parin viime vuoden aikana. Kuitenkin vielä löytyy yrityksiä, jotka ovat tietoisia some-markkinoinnin hyödyistä, mutta tietotaidon ja rohkeuden puute estäävät noita yrityksiä aloittamasta some-markkinoinnin hyödyntämisen itse. Kilpailuedun saavuttaminen, brändin tietoisuuden ja myynnin lisääminen tekevät siitä sen arvoista.</p> <p>Tutkimuksen tarkoituksena oli löytää keinot some-markkinoinnin käyttöönnottoon toimeksiantajana toimineessa yrityksessä. Siitä syystä päättutkimuskysymys tähtäsi selvittämään kuinka sosiaalisen median markkinointi toteutetaan palveluyrityksessä asumisen toimialalla. Tukevat tutkimuskysymykset keskittyivät sosiaalisen median kanavien valintaan ja sisältöön.</p> <p>Tutkimukseen valittu teoreettinen viitekehys oli sosiaalisen median malli, joka esittelee neljä askelta some-markkinoinnin toimeenpanemisessa yrityksessä. Kyseessä on laadullinen tutkimus, jonka metodologiaksi valittiin toimintatutkimus. Toimintatutkimuksen syklit toistettiin pari kertaa ja sosiaalisen median mallin askeleet pantiin toimeen käytännössä. Tutkimus seurasi ja valvoi toimeksiantajarytksen Facebookin lanseerausprosessin edistymistä ja tuloksia.</p> <p>Tutkimus todisti, että toimintaohjeiden ja tavoitteiden laatiminen ovat tärkeitä ja Facebook osoittautui sopivimmaksi sosiaalisen median kanavaksi aloitusvaihessa, mutta tutkija ehdottaa Instagramia seuraavaksi kanavaksi. Tutkimus antaa ideoita sisältötuotantoon asumisen toimialalla toimivalle palveluyritykselle. Some-markkinoinnin tulosten valvominen ja mittäminen tulevaisuudessa auttavat parantamaan kohderyhmän määrittelyä ja some-markkinoinnin kohdistamista yrityksessä.</p> |  |                                    |
| Avainsanat ( <a href="#">asiasanat</a> )<br>Sosiaalisen median markkinointi, some-markkinointi, sosiaalisen median kanavat, sisältö, toimintatutkimus, Facebook   |  |                                    |
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## 1 Introduction

In the world we live today, you are considered strange if you are not interested in sharing your business as well as your personal life with everyone else. According to Safko and Brake (2009, 3) “Humans like to know about the good, the bad, and the ugly side of people, places, and situations, as well as to share this information with others, often as quickly as possible.” The thing that enables this constant communication and sharing is called social media. This fairly new communication channel offers opportunities for companies in the form of social media marketing.

The idea for this thesis came up from the realization that not every company is involved in social media, yet. Sometimes it feels like everyone is there but that is simply not the case. Is it really compulsory for all companies to be on social media? Are they losing customers because of it? What does social media marketing even mean? What are the benefits of joining in this fad? Or perhaps it is not a fad but a completely new way to do business. According to Schaefer (2014, 19) “social media can deliver a lot to a company – brand awareness, market intelligence, customer insight, and a cost-effective platform for customer service.”

The topic is important because no matter how popular social media is nowadays, there are still companies out there that tackle with the uncertainty of whether or not to use social media and if yes, how to use that. Ambition puts on the brakes because there is a desperate need and want to be perfect. According to Schulze, Schöler and Skiera (2015, 8) “many companies are looking beyond simply establishing a social presence – and are seeking to ‘get social media marketing right.’ The prospect of free, yet effective viral marketing recommendations from consumer to consumer is very appealing – but often elusive.”

The topic is important to the case company because the company really needs a push to go forward in the social world of today. Traditional marketing is simply not enough anymore. There is no time to stand still and watch by as the competitors get all the attention of the customers on the social media. Discovering the fact that the case company is not alone with its problem was revitalising. All is not lost, yet. This thesis will follow the case company’s process of implementing social media marketing and taking its first steps on Facebook. And so the journey along posting

and gaining followers begins. It is interesting to observe how customers will react or whether or not they notice the case company's existence on social media at all.

## 1.1 The Potential of Social Media Marketing

The phenomenon called social media started to spread rapidly ten years ago. After that, marketing has been taken online to social media. What makes social media marketing worth getting acquainted with? According to a number of books and blogs it is a great addition to companies' traditional marketing and digital marketing plans.

A recent study that was done to 3700 marketers discovered that 96 % of them were somehow involved in social media marketing and that 22 % had done it less than a year and another 22 % 1-2 years. Businesses have started to realize that social media marketing is not going away and really being something that should be paid attention to. 92 % of the marketers believed that social media marketing was important to their business (Stelzner 2015).

Social media marketing is not just advertising on social media as quite many seem to think. It is much more than that. Social media is a very personal and interactive platform. It is all about sharing information and the need to connect with other people. Social media marketing means becoming part of the online community and joining in conversations and simply, communicating with people. At its best social media marketing can raise visibility, bring lots of traffic to the company's website and build brand awareness (Weinberg 2009, 4).

This is the ultimate goal of every social media marketing campaign: increased online visibility. It is the reason why social media marketing is worth getting acquainted with and even becoming an expert at it. If the company has a strong presence on the web, for example compared to its competitors, the advantage is huge. The companies should always pay attention to the competitors and not be left far behind. If the competitors are already in the social media, they have the competitive advantage but if they are not there, social media marketing could be the chance to outwit them. To revise, increased online visibility means more visitors to the company's web site, more incoming links to the website and more views of the company's content on social networks (Barefoot and Szabo 2010, 15, 17).

According to Schaefer (2014, 20) “a critical foundation of social media is providing consistent, meaningful provocations to remind customers that you are there, and you want to help them.” It is about producing meaningful content and positive commotion as well as giving good customer service in the process. Being successful on social media heavily relies on word-of-mouth recommendations. People spend more time online than ever before. Social media channels have become important search engines. It is the way of comparing products, reading reviews online and giving their own feedback. Word of Mouth (WOM) has been around as long as people have been able to talk and tell stories to one another. According to Fulgoni and Lipsman (2015, 18) “WOM has been recognized as a powerful driver of consumer behavior.” They also say that “digital social media can be used by marketers to reach consumers efficiently and effectively with organic and paid brand communications that subsequently are amplified by influencers – both online and offline.”

Traditional advertising has always been considered expensive and difficult to measure. Do you really know how many people have seen the company’s advertisements in the newspaper or TV? Social media marketing brings you the hard facts with the help of web analytics programs such as Google Analytics. It helps the companies to understand how many people have seen the advertisements and perhaps even visited the company’s web page. Social media also offers free tools for setting up online marketing campaigns easily, which is a bonus (Barefoot and Szabo 2010, 14).

Overall, social media marketing has increased its value in the marketing world. According to Carlson and Lee (2015, 81) “understanding the potency and competency of capturing and utilizing both social media and social networking, is leading to the next generation of marketing and customer relationship management.” Social media marketing is not only considered as part of marketing but nowadays it also plays a big part in building customer relationships. This is good news because no matter how well the social media marketing campaign works for the company in terms of bringing people to the company’s website and making them buy products as long as they do not stay as your customers. Short-term customers are a quick fix. Social media marketing can be used in building relationships. In order

to do so, the company needs to strengthen its expertise, participate in social networks, avoid over-selling and spamming, pass on interesting content that brings value to the customers (Zimmerman and Ng 2015, 18).

## 1.2 Research Questions and the Structure of the Thesis

The absence from social media and not quite knowing what to do with it can be a problem for companies. There can be a little bit of prejudice or even fear in the air. The fear simply comes from not knowing what to publish on social media and which social media channels to use as well as how to respond to feedback. People tend to talk back and give critic. What to do in such a situation? Usually there are no methods, procedures, guidelines and previously set examples of what to do on social media and how to do it. The fact that these things do not exist in the company can have a negative influence and add confusion towards social media marketing.

This is also the case with the commissioning organization and case company of this thesis. The commissioning organization is called AVAIN Asumisoikeus Oy Ltd and it operates in the field of right-of-occupancy housing. The case company has not been involved in social media very much. There is a need and will to be on the same level and preferably ahead of competitors that makes this problem worth facing.

What is the starting point? AVAIN Asumisoikeus Oy Ltd has a company blog. A team of volunteer employees have taken the challenge to write blog posts in turns. The first blog post was released in November 2015. The company has a YouTube channel that was created spontaneously in late September 2015 and a non-active Facebook profile that was created only because of advertising purposes but due to lack of knowhow, prejudice and resources both the YouTube channel and the Facebook page remained passive. This research concentrates on implementing social media marketing in the commissioning organization.

Therefore, the main focus of this study is to answer to the following research question:

- How to implement social media marketing in a service company in the housing industry?

The supporting research questions are:

- What are the most suitable social media channels for a service company in the housing industry?
- What is the most suitable type of social media marketing content for a service company in the housing industry?

The methodology chosen for this thesis is action research. According to Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008, 193) "if the research question is related to understanding the process of change, development or improvement of some actual problem, then, in order to learn from it, action research is an appropriate application for research." This study will follow the progress of the implementation of social media marketing project in the case company. Interviews are conducted on different levels of the organization in order to find answers to the research questions. The progress of the implementation is observed and reflections are made throughout the project.

The first chapter is the introduction to the topic of the thesis. The second chapter of the thesis will define the definitions in social media marketing. Next the most popular social media marketing channels are described as well as the importance of content of posts in them. This thesis will also discuss the benefits and risks of social media marketing and compare it with traditional marketing. A four step social media model was chosen as the theoretical framework for the research and is described in the end of chapter two.

The third chapter describes the methodology, data collection of qualitative interviews, analysis and verification of results. The fourth chapter presents the results of the qualitative interviews conducted by the author.

This research aims to find a way to implement social media marketing in the commissioning organization by defining a clear set of guidelines. The fifth chapter is the discussion part of the thesis, consisting of answers to the research questions and making recommendations that are based on the theoretical framework as well as the conducted interviews.

## 2 Literature review

This chapter explores the theoretical framework and concepts related to the research topic. It is vital to gain a proper theoretical understanding of the topic before tangling with the practical research problem. The key definitions that are mentioned in this research are described first. Next the most popular social media channels and the importance of content are defined. The benefits and the risks of social media marketing as well as the measuring and monitoring of social media marketing are also discussed. Finally there is a short look into the differences between social media marketing and traditional marketing.

### 2.1 Definitions

**Content marketing** is promoting company's product or service by producing online content such as blog posts, videos, images and podcasts (Zimmerman and Ng 2015, 230).

**Digital marketing** is utilizing digital technologies such as the desktop, mobile and tablet in order to achieve marketing objectives. In real life, digital marketing basically means managing company websites and social media company pages with the help of online communications techniques (Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick 2012, 10).

**Electronic word-of-mouth** (e-WOM) is a developed version of the traditional word-of-mouth (WOM). According to Harrison-Walker (2001, 63) WOM is "informal, person to person communication between a perceived noncommercial communicator and a receiver regarding a brand, a product, an organization or a service." The Internet has developed word-of-mouth communication into e-WOM. Now consumers have more ways to connect with each other than ever before. There are online forums, blogs, wikis, recommendation sites and different social networks that enable recommending or criticizing products and services to other people. The difference between WOM and e-WOM is that WOM is more intimate because it happens face-to-face. Due to this it is also quite slow and less influential but often perceived more credible than e-WOM because usually the receiver knows the communicator (Levy and Gvili 2015, 97).

**Search engine optimization (SEO)** helps in making the company's web site more visible to search engines. SEO is all about using keywords that the company's customers use when trying to find something from the Internet (Clapperton 2009, 96-97).

**Social media** refers to people gathering together and forming communities online using web-based applications in order to share information, knowledge and opinions. People can belong to many communities and use multiple different applications. Even just watching a video from YouTube or reading a blog is sufficient enough to be considered as using social media (Safko and Brake 2009, 6).

**Social networking** is the act of connecting with other people online using social networking tools and sharing information through them (ibid., 26).

**Social network** is a site or in other words a social media platform that enables peer-to-peer communication within a group or between individuals by giving them the means to develop user-generated content (UGC) and to exchange messages and comments between users (Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick 2012, 29).

**Social media platforms** are web-based technology and applications that enable social networking among people. For example Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn are social media platforms. Marketers also call these social media channels (Cohen 2011).

**Social media marketing** is a process that enables people and companies to utilize online social media channels in order to promote their websites, products and services. It also gives an opportunity to the companies to communicate with people and reach a much larger group, a community that was not possible with more traditional advertising channels in the past. Social media marketing is about communicating with people. It is listening to the community and answering, which bluntly means having a conversation. Social media marketing is almost like a word-of-mouth type of marketing but it is online instead of in person and in a much bigger scale (Weinberg 2009, 3-4).

**Owned, earned and paid media** are main types of media channels that are used a lot in the digital marketing world. Paid media is like the name suggests something you have to pay for. The companies pay for visibility in search engines or other web pages in order to gain visitors of their own. This can be compared to traditional print or TV advertising. Earned media is also called organic media. It is public relations and something that everyone in social media marketing is aiming for because it is free. It includes word-of-mouth that spreads with active social media marketing and through conversations on social media networks and blogs. Publishers, bloggers and customer advocates can be powerful partners in increasing earned media. Owned media on the other hand includes company's own websites, blogs, mobile apps and their presence on social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter or LinkedIn (Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick 2012, 11).

## 2.2 Social Media Channels

There are a multiple social networks out there that can be used as social media channels so companies are almost spoilt due to the amount of choice. Marketers like to use the word “channel” because there are also media channels in traditional marketing. Basically social networks are social media platforms as well as social media channels. Although it is important to be present on social media nowadays, it still does not mean that there is a need to be on every channel available. According to Helmrich (2016) “It’s important that you choose and nurture the social platforms that work best for your business so that you don’t spread yourself too thin.” Helmrich also suggests that a key to a good social media strategy is to get to know the differences between social networks and audiences. Otherwise it is impossible to know how businesses will get the best use out of them. The most popular social media channels amongst marketers are introduced next (see Figure 1).

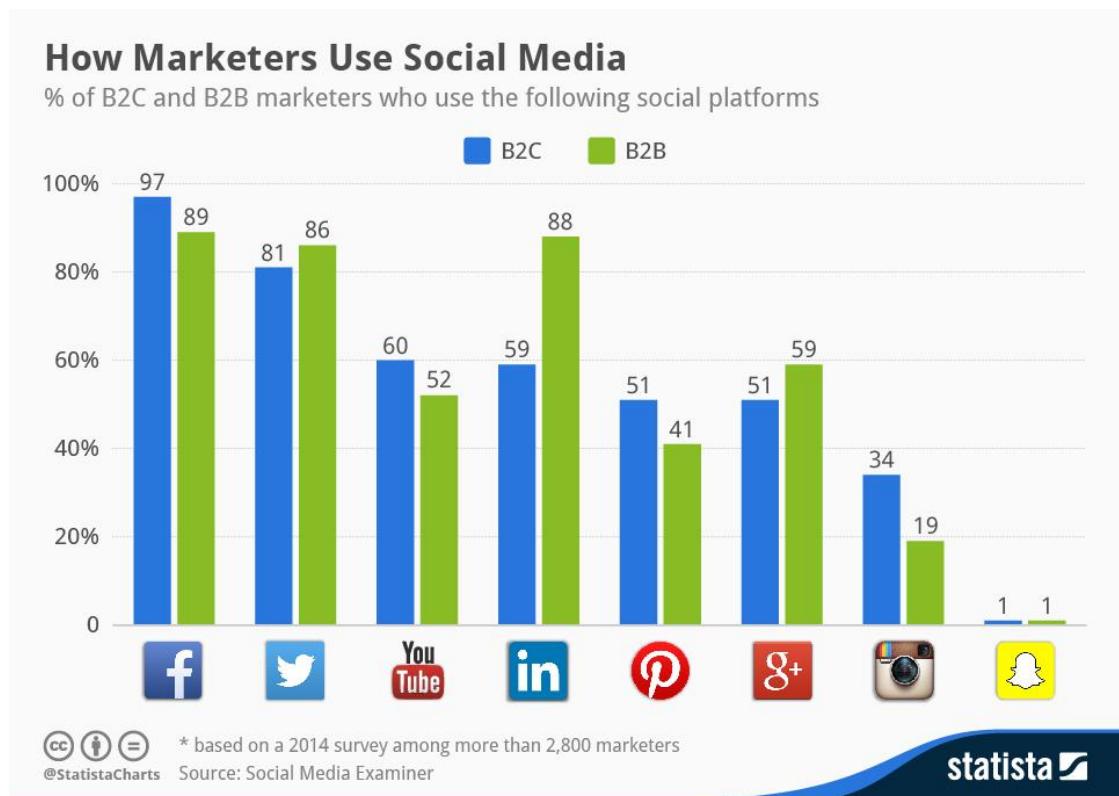


Figure 1. How Marketers Use Social Media (Statista Inc, 2014).

**Facebook** wins the popularity contest amongst marketers because it is the largest social network. Facebook has almost 1.5 billion active monthly users. The users of Facebook share one million links in every 20 minutes (Statistic Brain Research Institute 2015). Facebook has many targeted potential customers, which means that creating a Facebook page for the business is something that just has to be done. However, the page should be updated on a daily basis with interesting content in order to be successful and bring in those customers (Bendror n.d.). Due to the huge possible clientele building opportunities Facebook offers, there are plenty of businesses using this channel for advertising and social media marketing. According to Sareah (2015) “there are more than one million small or medium sized business advertising here and it is estimated that larger companies are spending as much as \$100 million on Facebook advertising per year”.

**Twitter** is a micro blogging social network that limits the posts only to 140 characters. The number of active twitter users is much more modest than those of Facebook but it still is the second most popular social network used by marketers.

There are 58 million tweets being sent and 2.1 billion twitter search engine queries made every day (Statistic Brain Research Institute 2015). Marketers are interested in one of Twitter's most popular features, which is re-tweeting. The feature allows the users to republish tweets that they have received from individuals or companies. Re-tweeting enables companies to expand people's knowledge about their brands and improve visibility. Twitter users usually re-tweet content that they feel an emotional connection to or they think it has a special informational value (Araujo, Neijens and Vliegenthart 2015).

**YouTube** is a website where individuals and companies can share videos. The contents are usually user-generated, educational or corporate media. The videos can be for example music videos, TV clips, webinars and video blogs. YouTube is used by over a billion people, which is almost one third of the users of the Internet. It is the world's second largest search engine, right behind Google. The number of hours people spend watching videos has doubled. Since March 2014, the number of people watching YouTube has increased by 40 % so sure, this is a marketing channel well worth the consideration of companies. The number of companies advertising in YouTube has also increased by 40 %. Mobile devices are such a phenomenon nowadays that more than half of YouTube views come from them and it has doubled YouTube's mobile revenue (Youtube n.d.).

**LinkedIn** is a business oriented social network. Facebook is meant for free time, fun and friends but LinkedIn is the place to build professional social networks and get connected. It is great for finding new job opportunities, making connections and discovering new business partners. LinkedIn has over 300 million users in over 20 countries. 40 % of the users are regular and visit LinkedIn daily. An average user spends 17 minutes on the site monthly. Companies can also create a page for their business, which enables users to learn about the company, the brand and possible job opportunities. Just like on Facebook and Twitter, the followers of the company page can see the posts made by the company and share them if they find them meaningful (LinkedIn 2014, Blake 2015).

**Pinterest** is based on images. It is a very visual social network where users create different boards of photos (which are called pins). A board concentrates on a certain

theme. There are no annoying links, text or headlines, just lovely photos, which is why Pinterest is the greatest place to get new ideas for example on redesigning a bathroom, changing your hairstyle, going on a holiday, new fashion looks or interior design. According to Zimmerman and Ng (2015, 436) "Pinterest is the perfect social network for clothing retailers, interior designers, foodies, landscapers, travel professionals, and members of any profession who can benefit from telling a story with an image."

**Google+** is a social network where people can share content with each other and join in video chats called Google hangouts. Google+ is automatically created when a person or a company gets a Google account. This is why there has been a debate going on whether or not Google+ has really any active users. A recent study discovered that there are 2.2 billion Google users and 90% of them have never posted in Google+ (Denning 2015). However, Google+ is still beneficial to marketers due to the search-engine-optimization value obtained from Google indexing public posts (Zimmerman and Ng 2015, 495). That is how the companies get their brands appear in search engine results and it is the reason for its popularity among marketers.

**Instagram** is a social network where users share photos. There is no link-sharing or posts with lots of texts. Only photos, likes, comments and perhaps a few hashtags. The idiom "a picture is worth a thousand words" portrays the idea of Instagram very well. There are 300 million active users in Instagram and 75 million of them use Instagram daily. 51 % of the users are male, which is surprising as women usually represent the majority in social networking (Blake 2015). Instagram is a great and inexpensive place for companies to show their creative and empathic side to the customers. Companies can for example like and share photos of customers using their products (with permission of course). They can also share ideas of different ways to use products and how the products are made. People are interested in what goes on behind the scenes, which means that company meetings, conferences, luncheons, fairs and photoshoots are now also a marketing opportunity (Zimmerman and Ng 2015, 382). People like it when companies are not faceless big corporations but there are only normal humans at work doing their best.

The visually attractive Figure 2 presents the infographic comparison between social media channels (excluding YouTube) as a conclusion of this subchapter.

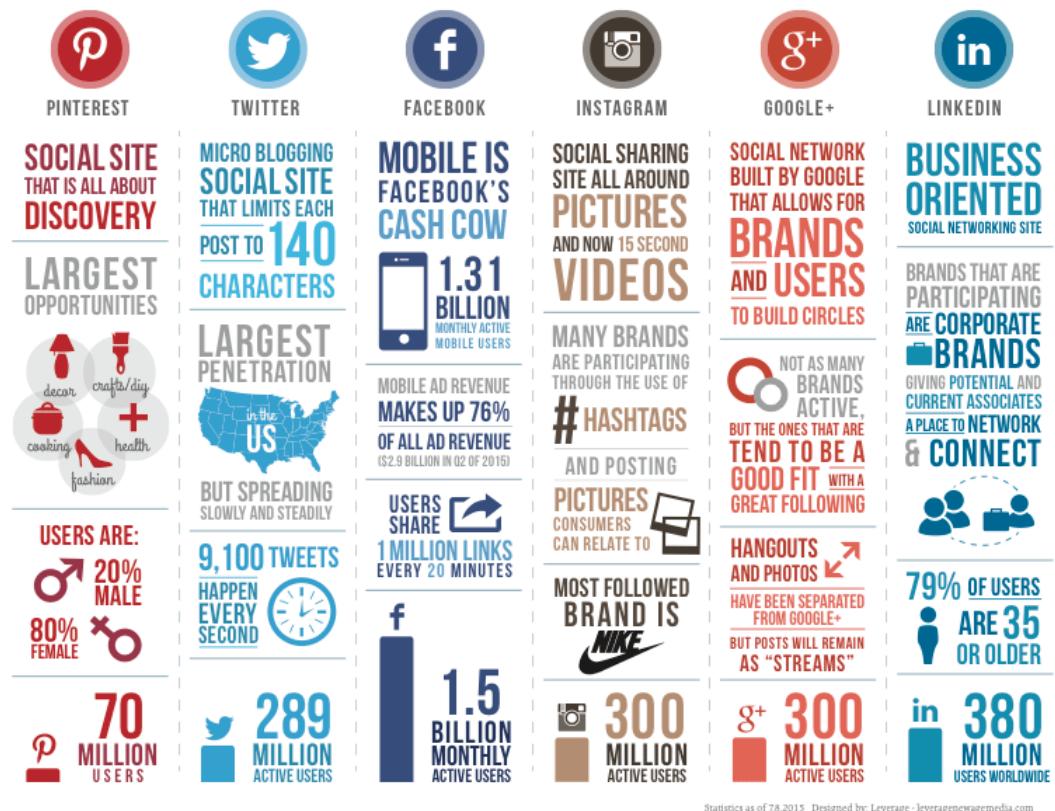


Figure 2. Social media comparison infographic (Leverage New Age Media, 2015).

## 2.3 Content Marketing

The key in social media marketing is not only to get as many likes, tweets or followers as possible but for a company to share meaningful content and to get people to share it onwards. That is why content marketing plays a vital role in the big picture. It is a crucial part of social media marketing. According to Gillin (2009, 180) “content is undeniably the most important element of a successful social media campaign, yet it is one of the most mysterious and least understood.”

Content marketing is used to promote a company's product or service by producing online content such as blog posts, videos, images and podcasts. Content can be created in such a way that it appeals to search engines and makes the brand easier to

be discovered online. The purpose of content marketing is not only to induce traffic to the company website and boost sales but to connect with people and share the knowledge. The saying “pay it forward” works well here. There is no need for companies to hold information for themselves. The idea is to let it all out and talk about what you know with the customers. The best thing that could happen is that people actually read the company’s content, leave a comment and perhaps even share it within their own networks. It means that the company has successfully created good content, joined in the conversation and started to build that much wanted brand recognition and customer relationships (Zimmerman and Ng 2015, 230-231).

Weinberg (2009) describes the meaning of a popular saying “content is king” in her book. Basically you can write very good and amazing content and post it online but no one notices. No one talks about it. Just like it never happened. According to Weinberg this happens a lot. There is a better slogan that Gary Vaynerchuck has been using: “Content is king, but marketing is queen, and runs the household.” The goal is to write good and relevant content for your customers but also to put it in a relevant place for people to see. That is why marketing is part of the mix. With the help of marketing, everyone soon knows what an amazing piece of content the company has published (Weinberg 2009, 15).

A company can market its social media involvement as much as they like but in the end it is the customer who decides whether or not the content has any value to him or her. For example, if a company posts a video to YouTube and it is only for marketing or advertising purposes without any valuable content, the customer will stop watching the video before getting to the end of it or post a negative comment on how terrible it was. Both situations are bad but companies should not be afraid of negative comments because it is feedback and without feedback it is impossible to get any better. Creating valuable content to customers is tricky and can be achieved in different ways because after all, customers are all different. Usually content either fills a certain need or solves a problem for the customer (Evans 2010, 227).

According to Gillin (2009, 185) it is important for the marketers to remember that “in order to succeed in social media, you must think of yourself as a publisher.” Both

Gillin (2009) and Evans (2010) believe that it is crucial to study the audience so the companies can understand their customers' needs in order to create good content consistently. There is a difference between simply announcing a feature of a product and describing how that feature can really be of assistance. Here is a chance to develop authority about one or two topics that the company's customers or potential customers find interesting. It is important to look for feedback in order to develop and make adjustments. Being coherent and patient makes customers to trust the company and its message. Building authority and trustworthiness is a long-term commitment but it pays off eventually. When the customer finds the content valuable, she or he starts or joins in the conversation and possibly shares the content with her or his friends. (Gillin 2009, 185, Evans 2010, 226-227).

To revise, a company should not just post content on social media just because "they have to post something." Content should offer some value to a customer or solve a problem. At the same time, the content should be eye-catching visually and have a captivating title. Constantly posting unique, entertaining and inspiring content that people can relate to is a winning combination, which will make people share the content and increase brand awareness (Zimmerman and Ng 2015, 235-236). Gillin (2009, 193) highlights the importance of good writing and "making it human". Social media is quite a laid-back place and terms "I" and "you" are essential. People can't relate to the message in the content and they are not interested in starting a conversation if it is done in third person with written standard language. It is boring and too official.

The 2015 social media marketing industry report asked marketers of their most commonly used types of content. The Figure 3 presents that visual content is the most common way to post content followed very closely by blogging. Videos are also quite popular, probably due to the increasing popularity of YouTube. Podcasts are only used by 10 % of the marketers but there could be an opportunity up for grabs here (Stelzner 2015).

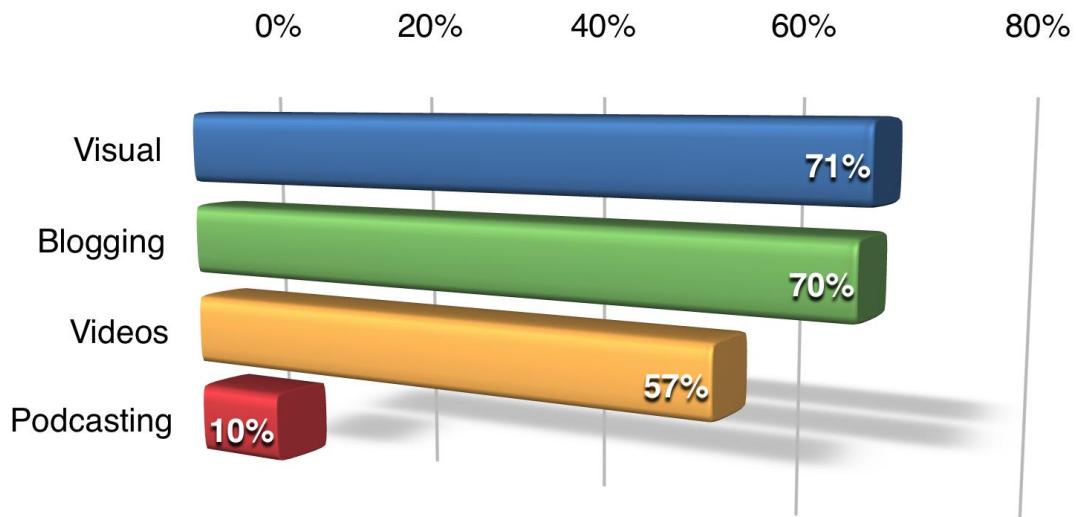


Figure 3. Commonly used types of content (Stelzner 2015).

When talking about content, one must say a few things about blogging because it is a major thing nowadays. Most of the blogs are written by individuals and some of them have quite a lot of influence. There are also plenty of corporate blogs, which give companies a chance to utilize search engine optimization (SEO). Although meaningful content is still very important, no one stops companies at using targeted content. With the help of just a few specific keywords, the blog can be found more easily from the depths of the Internet and hence, create more traffic to a company's web site (Clapperton 2009, 128-129).

According to Scott (2010) there are four ways to use blogs in marketing. First, it is an easy way to monitor what people write in their blogs about the company and its products. Second, it gives the company a chance to participate in conversations by leaving a comment on someone's blog. Third, there is the opportunity to work and cooperate with bloggers that are writing about the company, its products or industry in general. Last but not least, a huge opportunity lies with starting a corporate blog and sharing content to customers. (Scott 2010, 63)

According to Weinberg (2009) "a blog can be a tremendous asset in building a brand empire." It creates new relationships with customers. In order to get a solid base of readers for the corporate blog, it requires right content and marketing. Networking with other bloggers and leaving comments is important because bloggers share

corporate blog links on their own blogs or social networks. It is also important to keep the comment section open and urge the readers of the corporate blog to participate. If readers can't see the comments or if leaving a comment requires readers to register, it puts them off. Offering an easy way to post comments, holding competitions on a regular basis and running short polls keeps readers interested in the blog (Weinberg 2009, 89, 107-110).

## 2.4 Benefits of Social Media Marketing

According to an article by Kaul et al. (2015) companies dive into social media with three objectives in mind, which are building brand awareness, building community and engaging with the customer. The article also refers to a study done by Ernst and Young in 2014, which found that "75 % of the online customers were digital consumers who relied more on peer feedback from communities than company-controlled media channels" (Kaul et al. 2015, 457).

The above mentioned objectives are achievable thanks to social media marketing and are mentioned in several books. According to Weinberg (2009) social media marketing can bring more people to the company website, make them more aware of the brand and inspire them to start conversations. Weinberg believes that it is possible to affect consumer's behavior with an engaging social media marketing strategy and turn them into customers, hence improve sales. Social media marketing also assists in building organic links, which means that when for example bloggers share company content it is a sign for search engines that the company page can be trusted. The result is that then the company shows up in the search results more easily when people search for specific content (Weinberg 2009, 4-6).

Zimmerman and Ng (2015) agree with Weinberg and Kaul et al that increasing brand awareness, building relationships and improving search engine rankings are achievable benefits from social media marketing. They also believe that there is money to be saved on advertising costs. Social media marketing can be expensive. There are possibilities to spend a lot on advertising. But in general, social media is quite a low cost marketing channel if done right. It offers great opportunities to advertise completely for free. It is possible to create a paid social media marketing

campaign as well as a free one. The key to success in this approach is to monitor the results of the campaign and remember that advertising is only one part of social media marketing. The goal is to get as much traffic and conversions as possible so at some point the company can cut down the amount of paid advertising campaigns and enjoy the results of organic advertising – for free (Zimmerman and Ng 2015, 18-21).

Figure 4 presents the benefits of social media marketing as seen by marketers in the 2015 social media marketing industry report. The figure confirms the arguments made by the authors of text books and scientific articles because the marketers mostly agree with them.

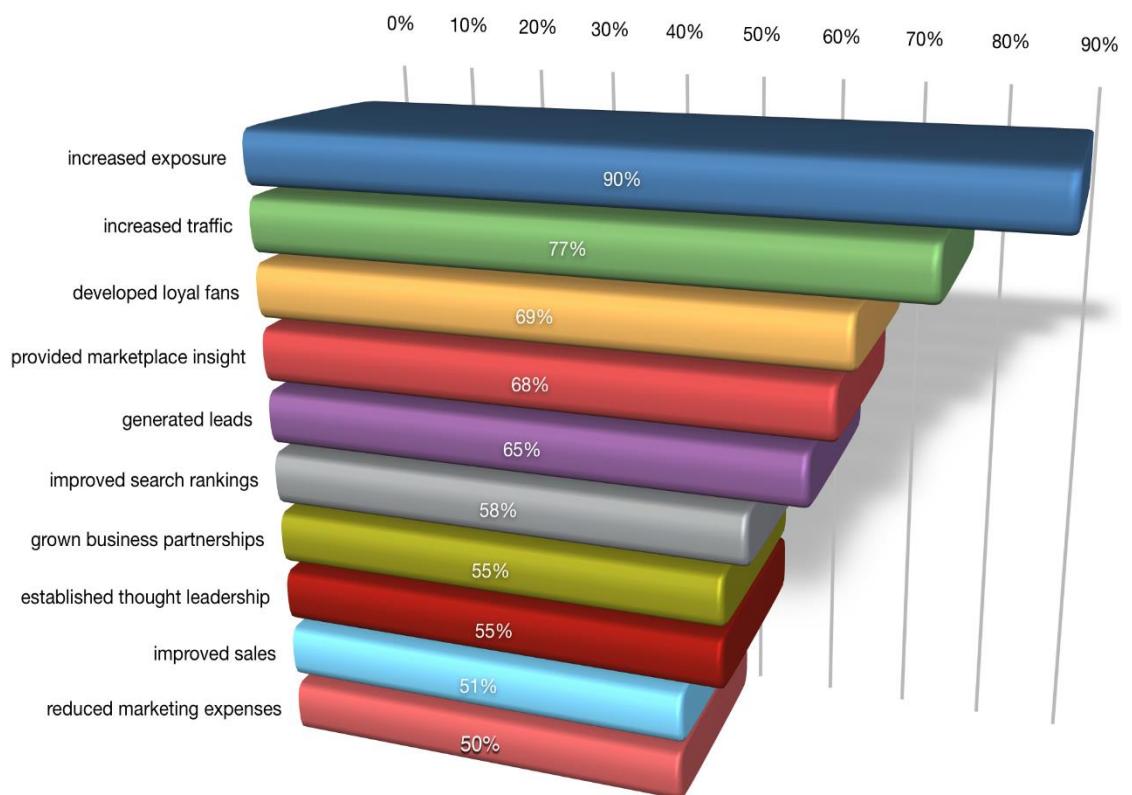


Figure 4. Benefits of social media marketing (Stelzner 2015).

One of the key benefits of social media marketing is the increased exposure and traffic. Theoretically the more people arrive at the company's website through social media, the more of them will become customers. Half of the marketers believe that social media marketing improves sales. The sales happening due to social media marketing are not always obvious and in most of the cases social media marketing is

only one of the factors slightly improving sales, which is why not all of the marketers believe that social media marketing improves sales. Increased traffic and improved sales are combined in Figure 5, which presents the conversion funnel of the steps of visitors arriving from social media and only 2-4 % of them turning into buyers. Social media brings value to a company in the form of visitors. These visitors could become potential customers if the rest of the sales process is done well. To put it bluntly, the more traffic, the better (Zimmerman and Ng 2015, 17-18).



Figure 5. The conversion funnel (adapted from Zimmerman and Ng 2015).

## 2.5 Risks of Social Media Marketing

Naturally when someone is not that familiar with social media marketing but still feels the pressure to get in there with everyone else, one can only wonder are there any risks involved? According to Barefoot and Szabo (2010, 116-129) there are ten risks related to launching and running a social media marketing campaign.

**Risk 1. The campaign doesn't really take off.** There is the chance that a Facebook page has been created, videos and pictures have been uploaded and shared,

bloggers have been contacted but nothing happens. This can also happen in traditional marketing. Sometimes changing the marketing channel helps. Just putting a Facebook profile up doesn't mean that now everyone will notice the company. According to Barefoot and Szabo (2010, 117) "Like with conventional media, social media relations is primarily about building relationships." And also in their opinion "you must first post valuable information and then seek out interested parties to invite into the conversation. This all takes time." There is the possibility that the campaign was not really that interesting, which means that the reason for failure was not in social media but in the content. There is no need to worry because there is always the opportunity to be more creative in the next campaign (Barefoot and Szabo 2010).

**Risk 2. Counterblow from a blogger.** Blogging is very popular nowadays and some of the bloggers are very influential. There are bloggers out there holding a grudge against some companies. If the blogger gets online with a very foul mouth, the post is there forever. The wider the audience of the blogger, the harder you have to work to make people ignore the harsh words (ibid., 118-120).

**Risk 3. The people start to talk back.** The risk is in the fear of losing control of what you are broadcasting. A company can post its message on Facebook or in the company blog but the final input and impact depends on the customers and critics. There is a positive side to this risk, which is getting real, immediate feedback. According Zimmerman and Ng (2015, 22) the company has to make the commitment to respond to the feedback and comments.

**Risk 4. Getting a bad review and even rejection.** It is so easy to share opinions and give reviews in the Internet nowadays and people do it a lot. There is the risk of a customer giving a poor review concerning product or service. Luckily, social media works both ways. According to Barefoot and Szabo (2010, 122): "Comment astutely on negative posts, discuss improvements, or defend your product. You don't have to accept a bad review as the last word; you can participate in the ongoing conversation."

**Risk 5. Company's social media initiative fades away and dies.** This risk basically means that a company decides to enter social media with a big bang and then forgets to pay any attention to it. Social media is a world that changes fast. The company has to be active and keep posting and commenting on a regular basis. Marketing teams should be given more time and right tools in order to monitor the web. It is also a good idea to find people inside the company who are already active online because those people have experience in social media and are not afraid of writing blog posts or commenting on Facebook. It is crucial to engage employees into seeing and thinking from the social media point-of-view (ibid., 122-123).

**Risk 6. Forgetting other marketing channels.** Social media is important but Zimmerman and Ng (2015, 22) summarize that social media is only one part of the company's online marketing and online marketing is a part of the company's overall marketing. This means that social media should not be used only on its own. It is there for support. Although there is a lot of hype surrounding social media, other marketing channels and means of communication still exist. There are customers who are not online.

**Risk 7. Hitting a home run way too quickly.** What if a social media campaign is an overnight miracle? It is possible that there are not enough resources to handle all the incoming comments or the web pages crash due to heavy traffic. Companies should be prepared beforehand to be able to organize possible extra resources in case of sudden popularity (Barefoot and Szabo 2010, 126).

**Risk 8. Being too slow instead of being proactive.** Corporate blogs allow companies to react fast and tell about upcoming scenarios and possible changes to its customers early on before they actually happen. For example, announcing an upcoming law amendment or possible product improvement in a couple of short social media posts allows people to join in the conversation. The risk exists for companies that are too slow in communicating these things to their customers and hence, could face negative feedback (ibid., 127).

**Risk 9. Facing the measurements.** Marketers can be afraid of numbers and often seem to think that incoherent results are the safest results. Online activities are easy

to measure for example with Google Analytics, which displays straight away whether the activities taken on social media have been a success or not. According to Barefoot and Szabo (2010, 128) "if hard numbers and direct questions make you nervous, you'll need to toughen up before your social media marketing campaign gets underway."

**Risk 10. A sudden loss of courage.** It is no use how great a social media strategy a company has created if a manager on a high level gets scared at the last minute and pulls the plug. That is why it is important to convince the managers and the colleagues that it is absolutely essential to be online where the competitors most possibly already are (*ibid.*, 129).

## 2.6 Measuring and Monitoring Social Media Marketing Results

According to Barefoot and Szabo (2010) measuring and monitoring success in social media begins with determining the goals of the company. Barefoot and Szabo also compliment on Forrester Research Inc.'s four-step approach for developing social media objectives in their book. The approach is called POST and stands for people, objectives, strategy, and technology. The first step of the approach is to get to know the customers and where they hang out and why. The goals should be set accordingly. Next step is setting up the objectives, which means figuring out why the social media marketing campaign is done and what it is trying to achieve. The strategy comes to the picture after that. What if customers start commenting and actually participating? The company must think ahead and come up with ideas how to keep customers interested now that they have customers' attention. The results that the company is trying to achieve in the end determine the last step, which is technology. It means deciding on the applicable social media network and content (Barefoot and Szabo 2010, 100-101).

There are a few things that a company could measure. Those possibilities naturally depend on the objectives set by the company. First, the company can measure its visitors, which means traffic. How many people have visited the company's website and/or its social networks? Second, it can measure the degree of its social network activity. How many followers the company has on Facebook? Do people join in the

events and like posts? How many times the company blog has been mentioned or shared? Third, the company can measure search engine results. How many incoming links are to the company's web site? Are there direct or indirect referrals? Fourth option is the most obvious way to measure: financial figures. What are the costs, sales and revenue of a social media marketing campaign? Companies should not treat financial figures as incontrovertible as such. The figures should be used to compare change. For example, the traffic on company web site increased by 20 % after setting up a Facebook page. Naturally these are interesting statistics to companies because numbers often indicate whether or not the campaign has been profitable or not. Or do they? (Zimmerman and Ng 2015, 668)

Although the numbers are all very interesting not to mention revealing, the quality and extent of participation in online conversations and building customer relationships should not be forgotten (Barefoot and Szabo 2010, 102). This is backed up by Gillin's (2009, 258) opinion that "the best metrics may also have nothing to do with website traffic." He means that a successful social media campaign can very well increase the amount of blog referrals, press mentions and brand awareness but fail to bring more visitors to the company's website. Despite a low number of traffic, a campaign can still be a success.

According to Zimmerman and Ng (2015, 126) "Social media monitoring is about who's saying what. It's about your brand, your products, and your reputation. It's not the same as social media measurement, which deals with traffic statistics, conversion rates, and return on investment (ROI)." So, there is a difference between measuring and monitoring of social media marketing. Measuring refers to analyzing quantitative data and monitoring means reviewing qualitative data from social media (ibid., 667).

There are different things that the company can monitor, just like there is in measuring. Naturally each company should pick the most suitable topics to monitor according to their set goals. However, useful for every company is to pay attention to what people are saying about the company, the brand and its products. There can be negative as well as positive comments. Second, there can be some trends or hot topics that the customers find interesting and could be utilized in social media marketing. Third, staying up-to-date on news related to the industry as well as

conducting market research and checking what the competition is doing are also worthwhile options for monitoring. Customer satisfaction surveys are always great for getting feedback, improving products and developing marketing efforts (*ibid.*, 127).

Luckily there are many different, free tools in the Internet that can be used for measuring and monitoring the social media marketing activities. Many of these tools are by Google such as Google Analytics, Google Alerts and Google Trends. There are also tools for monitoring blogs and forums, Facebook, Youtube, Twitter, social news and RSS tools. The list goes on. In the end it does not really matter, which tool to use. Often it is beneficial to pick a few of them, preferably one for each social network. Most of all, it is about taking the effort to learn how to interpret all that nitty-gritty information gained with the help of that tool and utilize the results in order to perform better in the future (Barefoot and Szabo 2010, 105).

To revise, the most useful things to monitor and measure in social media marketing are traffic, number of incoming links, the activity level on social networking sites, and number of mentions on social networking sites as well as in blogs (Barefoot and Szabo 2010, 114). The thing to remember is not just to focus on the quantity but also the quality when pondering about the success of social media marketing campaigns. Zimmerman and Ng (2015, 127) suggest that useful keywords to monitor are the company name, domain name, product names, names of executives and staff in customer service, competitors, keywords relating to the industry.

## 2.7 Integrating Social Media with Traditional Marketing

There are differences between social media marketing and traditional marketing. Social media marketing is interpreted as more people-oriented because it feels more personal, informal, spontaneous, fast and innovative than traditional marketing. It is also more available because the Internet is open all the time. Traditional marketing on the other hand is all about uniform and clear advertising campaigns that are well planned months ahead. Because the campaigns have been considered beforehand, the style and manner are formal and quite strict. Traditional marketing is also

invariant, because it cannot be changed after the ad has been printed or TV commercial has been aired – not without a great cost (Weller and Schwenke 2012).

Traditional marketing is passive, one-way type of communication. It is like an announcement from a company to the consumers. Social media marketing is two-way type of communication, which appeals to most people spending time in social media. Customers feel that there is a real chance to discuss, give feedback and even bond with a brand instead of just looking at advertisements in a newspaper or commercials on TV.

Figure 6 presents an interesting infographic of the differences between classic (traditional) marketing and social media marketing. The infographic was made by Robert Weller using the information provided by Thomas Schwenke.

| CLASSIC MARKETING  | MARKETING ASPECT            | SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING  |
|--|-----------------------------|---|
| UNIFORM, STRUCTURED, CLEAR ADVERTISING CAMPAIGNS, SERVICE HOTLINES                                       | TYPE OF MARKETING           | DISSECTED, SPREAD, UNCLEAR STATUS UPDATES, TWEETS, AD CAMPAIGNS, BLOG ARTICLES, COMMENTS, COMMUNITY POSTS     |
| UNIDIRECTIONAL<br>INFORMATION SPREAD BY COMPANY (ACTIVE)<br>CUSTOMERS/CONSUMERS ONLY LISTEN (PASSIVE)    | DIRECTION OF COMMUNICATION  | BIDIRECTIONAL/DIALOG<br>BOTH COMPANY AND CUSTOMERS TALK AND LISTEN (BOTH ACTIVE)                              |
| LONG-RANGING<br>AD CAMPAIGNS ARE PLANNED BOTH OVER AND FOR A LONG PERIOD OF TIME                         | SCHEDULING                  | SPONTANEOUS<br>AD CAMPAIGNS NOT PLANNED (IN DETAIL) BUT REACTIONS TO COMMENTS AND REQUESTS                    |
| WELL CONSIDERED & REVIEWED<br>COMMUNICATION ONLY BETWEEN COMPANY AND CUSTOMER, BACKGROUND IS KEPT SECRET | COMMUNICATION WITH CUSTOMER | FAST, PUBLIC<br>REACTIONS TO COMMENTS ARE IMMEDIATE AND EVERYBODY CAN READ THEM                               |
| DURING WORKING HOURS<br>NO SUPPORT BEYOND REGULAR WORKING HOURS  | AVAILABILITY                | PERMANENT<br>READINESS TO REACT TO (NEGATIVE) COMMENTS AND CUSTOMER REQUESTS                                  |
| SPECIFIC<br>OPTIMIZED FOR CERTAIN TARGET AUDIENCE AND MARKETS  | SCOPE                       | PERMANENT<br>AVAILABLE FOR EVERYBODY, EVERYWHERE  |
| ANALOG<br>SIMILAR CAMPAIGNS, ASSURED LEGAL POSITION  | WEALTH OF EXPERIENCE        | ALTERNATING, INNOVATIVE<br>CHANGING TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS, NEW MARKETING CONCEPTS, NO ASSURED LEGAL POSITION |
| CONSUMER PROTECTION AND COMPETING COMPANIES  | SUPERVISION                 | USERS, PLATFORMS<br>AUTHORITY FOR CONSUMER PROTECTION, COMPETING COMPANIES, PLATFORM OPERATORS AND USERS      |
| FORMAL, LEGALLY SAFE<br>STRICT „MARKETING LANGUAGE“, READY-MADE FULL SENTENCES                           | LANGUAGE                    | GENUINE, DIRECT<br>NO READY-MADE SENTENCES BUT PERSONAL RESPONSES AND SHORT ANSWERS                           |
| MARKETING DEPARTMENT<br>PUBLIC RELATIONS DEPARTMENT AND AGENCIES   | PEOPLE INVOLVED             | SOCIAL MEDIA DEPARTMENT<br>ANY EMPLOYEE, MARKETING AND PR DEPARTMENT AND EVERY USER                           |

© 2012. INFOGRAPHIC DESIGNED BY ROBERT WELLER.  
INFORMATIONEN PROVIDED BY THOMAS SCHWENKE.  
[WWW.TOUSSENNE.DE](http://WWW.TOUSSENNE.DE)

Figure 6. Differences between classic and social media marketing (Weller and Schwenke 2012).

Social media marketing has become very popular in quite a short time and although it has its advantages, traditional marketing should not be forgotten. In fact, the two should be integrated in order to maximize the gained benefits from both. Despite the differences between social media marketing and traditional marketing, the other one supports the other. If these two are treated only separately and not as a part of a unified marketing plan with the same goals, the company could face big difficulties (Rogers 2015).

Those who are not active online can be allured by traditional marketing to visit social media and the customers who spend more time online should be encouraged to meet the company's customer service and sales people offline. For social media marketing to work, it has to be done in an active, constant manner. A company cannot simply just put up a Facebook page and leave it there to hang around waiting by itself. On top of posting concise content constantly, marketers must actively ask people to connect with the company. Social media channels should be promoted on all communication material such as newspaper ads, flyers, brochures, company newsletters or magazines, company website, blog and even on email signatures. According to Hewstan (2015) asking for connection could be something like this "Make sure to follow us on Instagram for the latest trends and new arrivals." There is no shame in asking. People might simply not know that the company is in social media or what it does there. Let people know that you are social and ready to connect (ibid.).

In addition to promoting its existence in social media, companies should also remember to promote their competitions, offers and special deals with the help of both social media and traditional marketing. People love competitions and good discounts. According to Hewstan (2015) in order to gain more fans on Facebook by hosting a contest, a company should promote this activity and the chance to win a prize in other places besides Facebook. The promotion could be done for example by sending emails to customers, putting posters up in company's stores/offices, verbally mentioning Facebook pages to customers, advertising the Facebook contest on company web pages or sales receipt and printing it on flyers that are placed in places where people spend their time such as gyms and neighboring businesses. However, a company can also choose to promote a special offer only in social media on purpose.

It can be a thank you to all those followers in social media. It might even bring new customers in (ibid.).

Companies can promote their presence in social media with the help of traditional marketing activities. It can also be done the other way around. Companies can promote for example their live marketing events such as exhibitions, trade shows or seminars in social media not to mention post its advertisements and TV commercials. An advertisement in a local newspaper or a flyer has more impact when a similar ad is also posted on Facebook and targeted to a specific area. A greater number of people will be reached this way. It is important to include a coherent brand image to all social media channels, company web pages as well as print and TV for the look to be unified throughout all marketing activities (Rogers 2015).

## 2.8 Theoretical Framework: Social Media Model

According to Faber (2011) "Especially mid-sized companies lack a clear focus and dedication for the successful implementation of social media marketing." This literature review has aimed at giving background information on the implementation of social media marketing. After all, the goal of this thesis is to answer the research questions with the help of the conducted action research and the literature review. The theoretical framework uses a social media model that was found from social media. The implementation of social media marketing was discussed in a number of blogs. The reason why this particular model was chosen is that this four step social media model explained the steps of implementation of social media marketing clearly and effectively. In addition, the four step social media model (see Figure 7) has similarities with the action research cycle described later in the methodology chapter that the author of the thesis found appropriate.



Figure 7. A social media model (Faber and Scan Yours 2011).

The first step is to plan how to go forward. It is important to define the target audience, set the objectives, and select the proper social media channels. Creating guidelines relating to content and company policy is also a part of strategy and goal development. The second step is called prepare and organize. This step includes creating and designing the social media accounts, creating content to those channels and choosing tools for monitoring social media marketing activities. The third step is to execute and manage, which means publishing content actively and interacting with customers. Responding to comments and promoting social media involvement in other channels is important as well as monitoring the fans and followers. The fourth step is to analyze and optimize. The achieved results are compared to the set goals. Monitoring fans and collecting data on interaction in social media channels means building up an understanding who like the company and use that information to target the company's product or services to similar audience in order to attract more fans. The social media marketing strategy is adjusted in order to achieve improved results in the future. (Faber 2011).

### 3 Methodology

This chapter discusses and justifies the choices regarding the chosen methodology. It describes the research context, action research, and data collection methods, means of analysis and verification of the results of the thesis.

#### 3.1 Research context

The commissioning organization of this thesis is AVAIN Asumisoikeus Oy Ltd, which is Finland's third largest owner of right-of-occupancy apartments. The company owns 6000 right-of-occupancy apartments in 30 populated communities around Finland. Head office is located in Helsinki. Other offices are located in Lahti and Jyväskylä.

AVAIN Asumisoikeus Oy Ltd belongs to AVAIN Yhtiöt Corporation. There are six companies altogether in the corporation that offer services from the different fields of real estate such as construction, building, housing and administrative as well as technical real estate management. Companies belonging to the corporation are called AVAIN Rakennuttaja Oy Ltd, AVAIN Vuokra-asunnot Oy Ltd, AVAIN Holding Oy Ltd, AVAIN Vuokrakodit Oy Ltd, Aari Isännöinti Oy Ltd and Renevo Oy Ltd. AVAIN Asumisoikeus Oy Ltd is a part of AVAIN Holding Oy Ltd. There are altogether 110 employees working in AVAIN Yhtiöt Corporation.

According to the AVAIN Asumisoikeus Oy Ltd's web pages, the company owns many different kind of apartments in order to meet the ever changing needs of living of different customers from singles to big families. There are large apartment buildings with balconies as well as terraced housing with own small yards. The apartments are mainly located close to services and in good areas. The company wants to offer its customers good quality apartments in nice surroundings topped off with a customer oriented service. Utilization rate has been quite high in the past and customer satisfaction has risen every year. According to the latest customer satisfaction survey, 94 % of the respondents have recommended or would recommend AVAIN Asumisoikeus Oy Ltd to their friends and family (AVAIN Asumisoikeus Oy Ltd 2015).

Main competitors for AVAIN Asumisoikeus Oy Ltd are other companies owning right-of-occupancy apartments, such as Asuntosäätiön Asumisoikeus Oy Ltd (also known

as Asuntosäätiö or Asokodit), YH Kodit Oy Ltd and TA-Asumisoikeus Oy Ltd.

Companies that own rented apartments are also considered competition because right-of-occupancy housing is often an alternative form of living to the existing tenants or people considering to rent apartments. The reason for this is that the monthly fees are usually lower than in rentals, which makes them an appealing choice to customers.

Right-of-occupancy housing is a system that combines the benefits of rental and owner-occupied housing. Basically you own the right to live in the apartment but you can never buy the whole apartment for yourself. That is why it is called right-of-occupancy housing.

In order to live in a right-of-occupancy apartment, you have to pay a fee before you move in. Right-of-occupancy payment is approximately 15 % of the price of the apartment. If you do not have the money for the right-of-occupancy payment, you can ask a loan from a bank. If a person's financial matters are ok, banks are more than willing to give a loan for the right-of-occupancy payment. The right-of-occupancy contract acts as a security, which means that the bank will get its money back. There are no financial risks in right-of-occupancy housing and it is a much safer choice compared to buying your own home (Infopankki.fi 2015).

In addition to the right-of-occupancy payment, the residents pay a monthly fee for the management and maintenance of the apartment building. This fee is comparable to rent. The residents can live in their right-of-occupancy apartments as long as they want. But if they want to move out, the residents do not have to worry about selling the apartment. The owner of the right-of-occupancy building will buy it from you automatically. The residents will get their right-of-occupancy payment back after it has been calculated according to the construction cost index (City of Helsinki, 2015).

### 3.2 Action Research

The purpose of the thesis is to implement social media marketing in the case company. Therefore, the methodology used in this research project is insider action research because the company has decided to start the implementation of social media marketing. The author of the thesis is involved in the project and helps the

company to act, analyze and report the change. Insider action research is applied in this research because the author of this thesis is also an employee in the commissioning organization. According to Gray (2009, 314) "one of the advantages of adopting insider action research is that managers have an intimate knowledge of the organization being studied – they know its culture, its jargon and its personal networks."

Action research is about taking action, doing research and telling the story forward. Action research is realizing that taking steps towards improving something are necessary and finding out how to do it, then actually doing it and checking if that original "something" improved in the process. Naturally after discovering a new process of improvement, it is crucial to make a claim and tell other people what, how and why you have done what you did (McNiff and Whitehead 2009, 11).

Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008, 193) describe that researchers often get their research questions from the everyday life of businesses, which is a never ending source. The researchers also collaborate and work within businesses so they can help them solve practical business problems, and develop parts of business or organization that need improving. According to Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008, 193) "This sort of research, where close collaboration with the research object and its practical problem solving is part of the research process, is often termed action research."

Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008, 194) describe the relationship between the researcher and the organization. According to them, there is no big difference. They belong to the same entity but have clear differences. The researcher is seen as an outside facilitator bringing about change in the organization and after that does research about the change that happened. According to Stringer (2007, 25) one of the roles of the researcher is not only to offer a solution to a certain problem but to inspire people to change and develop.

A few of the text books mention Kurt Lewin, who is thought to be the original person who came up with the action research approach. A few slightly different forms of action research have emerged over the years but the initial idea remains the same.

Action research is seen as a cycle or rather a spiral of certain steps taking place during the research (see Figure 8). Those steps are problem identification, action planning, implementation, evaluation and reflection. Along the way the action plan is changed and the process starts again (Lowe 2007, 105-107).

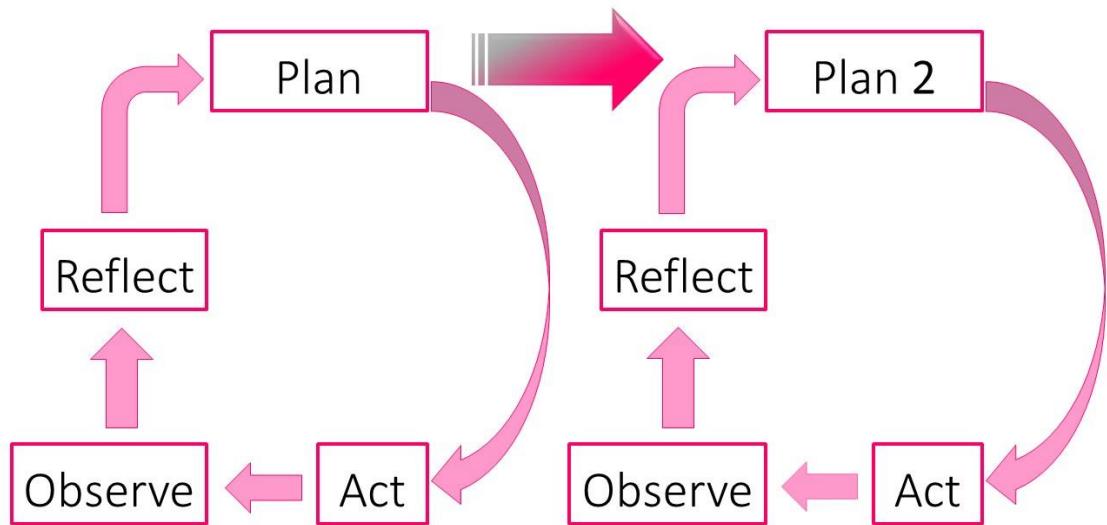


Figure 8. The action research cycle (adapted from Lowe 2007).

Planning is the step when the topic of the research is chosen and objectives are set. A plan is created about what actions should be taken and how it should be done. Acting is the step when the data is collected for the research and something is being done in order to achieve the objectives that have been set. The next step is called observation because the impact of the action needs to be analyzed. According to Gray (2009, 322) “the individual action researcher is not in a position to say whether their actions have had an impact – it is for participants in the project to judge for themselves.” The purpose of reflection is to discover what was learned and what its value is. Stringer (2007, 9) explains that “people will find themselves working backward through the routines, repeating processes, revising procedures, rethinking interpretations, leapfrogging steps or stages, and sometimes making radical changes in direction.”

### 3.3 Repeating the Action Research Cycle

The planning of the action research started in September 2015. The sales & marketing director and the author of this thesis discussed the implementation of social media marketing and decided that research on the topic would be beneficial both to the company and to the author of the thesis. The main objective from the company point-of-view was to concentrate on the development of their Facebook presence and create social media marketing guidelines. The reason for concentrating on Facebook was that the company had created a Facebook page in February 2015 in order to advertise on Facebook. However, the page was not active and a text “under construction” was put up based on the lack of knowhow. Next the author made a research plan with a timetable based on the objectives.

The active phase of action research included gathering data. The author of the thesis created interview questions and conducted interviews in the company in December 2015 in order to gather the primary data relating to the expectations, resources, content and implementation of social media marketing in the company. The secondary data was collected simultaneously from the applicable literature.

The observation phase of the action research followed after the interviews in January 2015 when the data was analyzed and guidelines for the company created. The author also started to write this research report and analyze the secondary data.

The reflection phase also took place in January 2015 when the social media marketing project team reflected upon the guidelines and decided to adjust them slightly. The implementation team consisted of the sales & marketing director, sales manager and the author of the thesis. The team felt that it would be good to have more concrete examples in the guidelines for the new social media team to act upon in the future. The team discussed about the guidelines as well as the issues concerning the process of posting to Facebook three times via Skype during January 2016. The team reflected, planned and acted and as a result, the guidelines were edited and the company finally published their first post on Facebook on 27th January 2016.

The steps of the action research were repeated a couple of times during the project. The implementation project team started to recruit personnel to the brand new social media team, which was going to be in charge of the posting of content to the Facebook pages. However, the project team still felt that it was better to observe some more just to get things right and hence, a social media workshop was held at end of February 2016 by professionals of the field. The objective was to get assurance from the social media professionals that things were being done in the correct way as well as to receive more ideas on content and online customer service. The workshop was successful because the professionals complemented on the guidelines and actions that had been taken. Assurance was received. The workshop also brought new ideas to the table, the most important one being the advantage of keeping up a publishing calendar.

The steps of the action research were followed in this research more than once and because the implementation of social media marketing is not completely over, the action research cycle is still going on.

### 3.4 Data Collection

According to Lowe (2007, 110) “action research is a holistic approach to problem solving, rather than a single method for collecting and analyzing data.” It means that there are many different research tools that can be utilized in collecting data. Data collection methods that were used in this research were observations, keeping a research diary, interviews and analysis of literature.

Secondary data was collected from a variety of sources such as searching the Internet, relevant articles from business magazines, theoretical text books, and practical business handbooks. Social media channels such as blogs, Pinterest and LinkedIn were also used in data collection.

Due to this thesis being an insider participant research, primary data was collected by making observations in addition to conducting semi-structured interviews. According to Gray (2009, 399) part of the participant observation is “the reporting of the researcher’s own experiences, feelings, fears, anxieties and social meanings

when engaged with people in the field.” The author of the thesis is an employee in the commissioning organization, and hence in this context, called practitioner-researcher, who has good access to records and other information when the research is sponsored by the organization and especially the senior management (Gray 2009, 402). There are three members in the implementation of social media marketing project group. One member from senior management, one from middle management and the practitioner-researcher. The members of the project group have known of the research being done throughout the project, which is why no specific permissions for making observations and field notes have been asked. There have been several discussions (on the phone or face-to-face), a dozen emails, three skype-meetings as well as a workshop during the implementation of social media marketing project, which have all contributed to the data gathering.

During the implementation project, eight people from AVAIN Yhtiöt Corporation were interviewed separately in December 2015. Three of the interviewees were a part of an executive board. One of the interviewees was the account manager, two were sales managers and another two were sales negotiators. AVAIN Asumisoikeus Oy is not a big company. The purpose was to get an opinion to the topic from all levels of the organization top to bottom and especially get the opinion from those who deal with customers the most. Hence, sales negotiators, sales managers and the account manager were interviewed. The objective of the interviews was to gather information in order to answer the research questions as well as form social media marketing guidelines for the company. The interviewees said themselves that they are not experts in the field of social media marketing but the answers were real, genuine and supported the data gained from the literature review.

The interviews were conducted via telephone, skype and in person. The reason for this many means of communication was the distance between the interviewer and interviewees as well as time restraints. Three of the interviews were done over the telephone. One person wished to receive the questions beforehand and sent her answers back via e-mail, which were reviewed together over the telephone. Four interviews were conducted via skype, which was almost as good as in person. One interview was done in person in the case company’s office in Jyväskylä.

The interviews were conducted in Finnish language due to the fact that all interviewees as well as the interviewer were native Finnish speakers. The list of semi-structured interview questions is presented in Appendix 1. Questions are in Finnish and in English. All questions were open-ended, allowing the interviews to evolve if necessary and go deeper in the topic. Some interviewees were clearly more talkative than others and got very excited about the topic. On the other hand, a couple of the interviewees felt that they were unable to contribute enough because they did not know that much about the topic. The interviewees were told beforehand that there was no need for them to be specialists in the topic and everyone's ideas as well as possible prejudice was more than welcome. In an interview, there are no right or wrong answers.

The interviews were 40 minutes in length on average. The duration varied from the shortest lasting only 20 minutes and the longest about one hour. The data collected in the interviews consists of field notes or recordings. Two of the Skype interviews were recorded online and transcribed word for word afterwards providing very accurate answers. The field notes from the rest of the interviews were typed and analyzed right after every interview. The clear, typed notes were sent to every interviewee via e-mail to make sure that the interviewer had recorded everyone's thoughts and opinions in the correct manner.

The author of the thesis kept a research diary throughout the project. The diary was for the purpose of making field notes during conversations and writing down ideas. This was in order to help with the observation and reflection parts of the action research.

### 3.5 Data Analysis

Data collection and analysis happened almost simultaneously. Data from the interviews was analyzed by the means of categorizing and coding. According to Stringer (2007, 98) "The major task of this procedure is to identify the significant features and elements that make up the experience and perception of the people involved in the study (stakeholders)." The author of the thesis went through the interview material several times and familiarized herself with the contents and asked

questions from the data related to the objectives of the thesis. What was the original problem that this research is trying to solve? Categories were then chosen based on their relevance to the research questions. Four main categories were implementation of social media marketing, social media channels, content and expectations. Implementation of social media marketing had additionally two sub-categories, which were guidelines and communication. A helpful Excel worksheet was created in order to keep a better log of the different categories and codes. The interviews were conducted in Finnish language so in the coding phase, the answers were translated to English and typed to the Excel worksheet under a specific category. After categorizing and coding it was easier to compare the themes arisen from the interviews and write them down in chapter four, which addresses the results of the research.

This research is a qualitative research but it uses some quantitative data in the results section of the thesis in measuring the implementation of social media marketing in the company. Quantitative data is used to provide complementary information relating to answering the research questions and also explain the development of the on-going social media project in the case company.

### 3.6 Verification of the Results

Action research should explain how the research steps were followed, how data was recorded and was it truthfully recorded. The methodology, data collection methods as well as data analysis are described in detail and as they happened in this thesis.

The purpose of the interview was explained to all interviewees before the interviews took place. Permission for publishing their names in the thesis was asked and granted on 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2016 via e-mail. The list of interviewees is presented in Appendix 2.

According to Silverman (2006, 290-291) there are two appropriate forms of validation to qualitative research. One is called triangulation, which means that different kinds of data and different methods are compared with one another in order to verify the results. The other is called respondent validation, which means

that the results are taken back to the subjects that are being studied. In this research, triangulation (also known as multiple methods) is used. The results of the thesis are based on the interviews and observations as well as quantitative and qualitative data. Different kinds of methods and data were used in order to corroborate the results. Hence, validity of the thesis is fulfilled.

There can be a few limitations to action research. Due to its' reflective and "learning by doing" nature, action research can take longer than other studies to complete. Although action research projects never really end, they just move to a different phase. In long projects the people involved can change, which is distracting. Another limitation is generalizability. Action research project are claimed to be quite unique and rarely published in the academic world, which means that the solutions to problems cannot be utilized by others. There is also the disadvantage of insider action research, which is that it can be challenging for the researcher at times to remain detached from the organization and think outside the box (Gray 2009, 314, 331).

Although the generalizability of action research in general is questioned, the author believes that the topic and results of this thesis are found useful by other similar companies interested in social media marketing. As said in the introduction chapter, there are companies who want to get their plans for social media marketing "just right" before starting their implementation project. It seems that stage fright is quite common, which is why the findings in this thesis are generalizable.

## 4 Results

The fourth chapter summarizes the starting point that existed in the company before the implementation of a social media marketing project. The fourth chapter also focuses on the results based on the interviews that were conducted in the company. Some quantitative data is presented in order to measure the implementation of the social media marketing project. The results are organized based on the categories of coding, which were expectations, the implementation of social media marketing, social media channels and content. The implementation of

social media marketing also had two sub-categories of communication and guidelines.

The idea of the implementation of the social media marketing in AVAIN Asumisoikeus Oy emerged in the beginning of 2015 when the company decided to try an advertising campaign on Facebook. Advertising on Facebook works better if a company has their own Facebook page, because it is possible to incorporate ads with a newsfeed compared to only putting them on the side panel. This is the reason why a Facebook page was created for AVAIN Asumisoikeus Oy on 26<sup>th</sup> February 2015. This was the first step towards social media marketing in the company. However, AVAIN Asumisoikeus Oy did not feel comfortable with starting to update and post on their Facebook page, which is why the text “under construction” was put up and the page ignored. The company felt that they did not have the resources and the knowhow to be active in social media.

The second step towards social media marketing was starting a YouTube channel on 29<sup>th</sup> September 2015. This happened very fast as a result of a discussion between the author of the thesis, sales&marketing director and sales manager. So far the company’s YouTube channel has not been very active and has only five videos so there is definitely room for improvement.

The third step towards social media marketing was starting a company blog. A group of volunteers was assembled and given a short half-day training for inspiration and tips in order to start writing. The first blog post was published on 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2015. The blog has been more successful compared to the YouTube channel. Although the gap between blog posts is around two weeks compared to the set goal of posting once a week.

#### 4.1 Expectations of Social Media Marketing

Many books about social media marketing as well as the theoretical framework of this thesis state that setting goals is where social media marketing really begins. The aim of asking interviewees their expectations regarding social media and possible guidelines was to discover what the objectives of social media marketing for the company could be.

Three out of eight interviewees expected customer acquisition and sales to increase with the help of social media marketing. Two of the interviewees believed that social media marketing will raise brand awareness and one thought that conspicuousness of the right-of-occupancy system will improve. The interviewees believed that people use social media as a search engine nowadays. The company offers an alternative form of housing to house hunters. Hence, being active in social media was considered important. According to the social media marketing industry report (Stelzner 2015), 90 % of marketers ranked increased exposure as the biggest benefit achieved by social media marketing. 51 % of the marketers also believed in improved sales. Both of which are good objectives for a company in the housing industry to aim for.

Half the interviewees have a surprisingly clear view of what to expect from social media marketing. Interactive discussions and improved customer service were mentioned most often. Half the interviewees expected to get new ideas based on the discussions with customers. Perhaps they will come up with a suggestion for improvement that the company had not thought about. Based on the initial observations made by the author of the thesis social media marketing was seen intimidating by the staff in the company but based on the interviews it was also seen as an opportunity. This was very positive to notice. Strengthening the existing customer relationships and offering a new communication channel to customers is very important. According to the social media marketing industry report (Stelzner 2015), 69 % of the marketers believed that loyal fans is a benefit achieved by social media marketing.

To sum it up, the objectives for social media marketing in the company based on the interviews and literature review are increased sales and brand awareness as well as improved customer service.

## 4.2 Implementation of Social Media Marketing

Implementation of social media marketing consists mainly of questions what, how, when and who. Six out of eight interviewees said that social media marketing activities should definitely be organized and handled internally. Main reason for this

was that right-of-occupancy system can be difficult for outsiders to understand and the interviewees felt that persons in-house have the best knowledge of the field. Hence, they are the best to produce content and answer to comments. According to account manager Kirsi Härmä, social media would not be social media if it were done by some outsourced marketing agency. It loses that personal touch related to social media marketing. Two of the interviewees thought that both outsourcing and in-house were good options. Outsourcing got points from being objective and good at the technical side of things.

When talking about resources, half the interviewees questioned the fact who really has the time to do it because they believed that answering to comments and designing content will be a full-time job for someone. According to sales negotiator Erja Tuononen, the person or persons responsible for social media marketing should be given the time to do the job properly. One comment supporting this statement was that the task should definitely not be given to someone who already has a full work schedule. Five out of eight interviewees relied on setting up a special social media team that would perhaps have rotating shifts. This way there would be multiple individuals coming up with ideas on content and everyone would take turns in posting and commenting without spending too much of one a specific person's time. The interviews also revealed that the social media team should have one or two persons in charge as team leaders.

All interviewees believed that with good instructions and guidelines, social media marketing could be done internally. Guidelines should be short, clear, explicit and simple. Guidelines should be easily applied in practice and offer a few ready made set of examples for answering to comments. The examples should not be viewed as an absolute truth but they would be there to lower the bar for the social media team members to answer to the comments. Based on the interviews, the company receiving negative comments from customers was the most feared event of entering social media. Everyone felt that it would be challenging to answer to those negative comments. This attitude is understandable and it derives from the past when the company received some negative comments from bloggers and journalists. However, most of the interviewees said that reacting to the comments and turning the negative comments to positive is the most important task of social media. Literature

on the matter supports these beliefs. Interviewees also agreed on that the person in charge of social media marketing and the team should be stated clearly so the other staff members know who to contact if they had an idea concerning social media. The author of the thesis wrote the guidelines for the company based on the interviews and they were refined together in the social media marketing implementation team. Guidelines are now being used in the company.

The author of the thesis aimed to find out what the communication should be like on social media. Most of the interviewees considered social media as a popular and relaxed place where people can interact with other people. Hence, the communication there should be friendly, relaxed, cheerful and positive but most of all active and also informative. All results can be seen in the colourful Figure 9. This figure was also used in the guidelines as an inspiration to its readers.



Figure 9. Communication in social media.

One of the interviewees raised an important point-of-view to the table. Internal communication should not be forgotten. There is a lot of talk about social media marketing and being social externally but what about being social internally? Not all employees are in Facebook. They cannot check Facebook newsfeed on their freetime because they do not have a Facebook account. On the other hand, those who are in

Facebook, necessarily are not that interested in following their employer on their free time. However, people are curious and certainly employees are interested in knowing how the company is doing its social media marketing and how it is perceived by customers. The interviewee suggested that a short report or a five minute presentation in the monthly staff meeting would be enough. For example, shortly mentioning if there are any on-going competitions or polls and how many fans the company has on Facebook.

To sum it up, based on the interviews, the implementation of social media marketing should be done internally by a social media team and perhaps with rotating shifts. The team should have one or two persons in charge. Social media marketing guidelines are needed in order to help the team to get started and cope with its new task. Social media team should post actively in a personal, relaxed, genuine, approachable and positive way.

### 4.3 Choice of Social Media Channels

The author of the thesis aimed to establish some background information by discovering whether or not the interviewees themselves are involved in social media and what their thoughts are about the topic. Five out of eight admitted having a Facebook account and four of them use it regularly. The biggest reason for this was that Facebook makes it easy to keep in touch with friends and family who are far away. Senior management had LinkedIn accounts but claimed that none of them used it very often. One of the interviewees, sales manager Ruut Vesenterä had multiple social media accounts including Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn and Twitter. As a heavy personal social media user, it is no wonder, that she is naturally part of the company's implementation of social media marketing team.

According to Managing Director Maarit Toveri social media is the manifestation of the present busy lifestyle. She values personal encounters and hence, only has a LinkedIn account but she understands that if social media marketing is done properly, it can be very useful to a company. Account manager Kirsi Härmä also believes in the usefulness of social media because it raises consciousness and it is also an affordable method.

During the interviews the company already had a YouTube channel and a Facebook page, but there were only five videos in YouTube and Facebook was not active at all. This was considered very bad by the interviewees. The opinion was that if the company has any social media accounts, they should definitely be active. The point of social media is to be social and interactive and it cannot be done if no one takes care of the company's social media accounts. One of the interviewees said that there is no point if someone just takes a look once a week in the style of "Hey, what is going on in here" and then does nothing about it. The company should definitely post actively, like people's comments and answer to their comments.

Most of the interviewees thought that the company should be active at least on Facebook because there are so many customers spending their time there. The statistics support this so the result is not surprising. Facebook is the biggest of social media channels with 1.5 billion active monthly users (Leverage New Age Media, 2015). One of the interviewees questioned Facebook and whether or not it is as popular as it used to be. It still is popular, but the users are getting older and the younger users are moving to other social media channels. In the interviews Facebook was considered to be a good communication channel to share information and it was considered good also for advertising purposes. There is a chance to get organic media on top of paid media. The organic media is what the company naturally wants, because it is free. One of the interviewees argued that people are waiting for the company to start posting to Facebook because even though the company is not active on Facebook, there still were almost 100 fans in December 2015.

One of the interviewees said that the company should be in all the most popular social media channels because that is where the customers are. On top of having an active YouTube channel and a Facebook page, Twitter and Instagram got one vote each. Twitter is widely used by lots of Finnish politicians and journalists. Twitter could be used to communicate more informative and proper news and get the much needed positive attention of politicians and journalists concerning reforms and legislative proposals relating to the rather complex right-of-occupancy housing system.

Instagram, on the other hand, got a vote because Instagram-user and sales manager Ruut Vesenterä had spotted that competitors (for example YH Kodit) are there

already. It is also a visual channel that younger people prefer to Facebook. Good, stylish and emotional photos of apartments can effectively create mental images for customers. Although there were four LinkedIn users among the interviewees, no one felt that the company should have a profile in LinkedIn. The main focus in choosing suitable social media channels for the company is on consumers.

To conclude, based on the interviews the company should be active on Facebook because it is a diverse channel offering many possibilities in terms of organic and paid media. Most of the customers are there, too. Benchmarking and literature review support this claim. YouTube did not get as much support from the interviewees as Facebook but quick benchmarking showed that it is popular among real estate agents because videos sometimes present the apartments better than pictures. Instagram is most likely the next possible social media channel for the company in order to reach younger customers.

#### 4.4 Choice of Content

The case company has its own blog, which means that some steps have already been taken towards posting content online. In the interviews the preferred type of content was quite even. Blogging, videos and photos got an equal number of votes, which simply shows that they are all considered good options for a housing industry.

Blogging gives the opportunity to describe and explain more about the system but pictures and videos present the apartments and emphasize visuality creating the much needed mental images in order to produce a purchasing decision. No one mentioned podcasting, which is not a surprise because it is not yet very popular or known.

According to one of the interviewees the goal is to write the kind of content that makes people, who have never heard of the company, interested in it. The company should make their product, price and insuperability known to people, which in other words means raising brand awareness.

Six out of eight interviewees believed that the most important topic as well as an objective for the content of social media marketing is raising the conspicuousness of the right-of-occupancy system. The system has been around for over twenty years

but it is still unknown to many people. Especially the advantages of the right-of-occupancy system should be highlighted and the “easy living” compared to owning your own apartment. The possible reformation of the system should also be talked about more in public and get politicians and authorities to join in the conversation.

Explaining the right-of-occupancy system and its advantages in a relaxed and cheerful way in the company blog provides useful content to the customers. This could be done with the help of case stories or “most asked questions”. People love it when they learn new things that are beneficial for them. The interviewees felt that the blog is a good place to describe the benefits of the right-of-occupancy system but social media channels are the best way to promote the company and their blog. There is no use in writing the blog if no one ever reads it. The interviewees came to the same conclusion as did the literature review about the importance of marketing the content. A couple of the interviewees who were also Facebook users thought that no one reads very long posts on Facebook. Hence, links to the blog or company pages is a better choice.

Other topic ideas for possible content that emerged during the interviews were promoting on-going campaigns, special offers, benefits and open house events, sharing YouTube videos of properties and blog posts, hosting competitions and inform people about general news relating to living. When content was discussed in the interviews, quite a few of the interviewees mentioned yet again the activity. The company needs to post actively. It does not matter if a lot of thought is put to producing good content if it is done too rarely. One of the interviewees said that sometimes it is ok just to mention quite ordinary and mundane things or even the weather if there is nothing else to talk about. People like mundane things because social media is casual.

#### 4.5 Measuring the Implementation of Social Media Marketing

During the implementation of social media marketing project it was time to become active on Facebook. In the beginning there were 137 fans who had already liked the company’s Facebook page even though there were no posts. The cover photo was updated and the first post was published on AVAIN Asumisoikeus Oy’s Facebook

page on 27<sup>th</sup> January 2016. Since the first post was published, the amount of fans grew steadily during February 2016 thanks to paid advertising campaigns as well as publishing other content on the Facebook page. Figure 10 shows the increase in fans from 26<sup>th</sup> January until the end of February 2016. The amount of fans almost doubled from 136 to 254 during the first month. Data is taken from AVAIN Asumisoikeus Oy Ltd's Facebook Business Manager account.



Figure 10. The increase in the amount of Facebook fans in February 2016.

The most liked content in February was a picture of two corgis simply stating that pets are allowed in the apartments of AVAIN Asumisoikeus Oy Ltd. Posting the picture was based on the idea of most frequently asked questions. Customers often ask whether pets are also allowed to move in. The picture received likes rapidly during the same day it was posted. On 1<sup>st</sup> April it had 91 likes and Facebook Business Manager claims that it has reached over 3600 people. The picture was also shared twice, which attracted new fans to the Facebook page. The reason why the author knows this, is that a few of the new people who liked the company's Facebook page had a picture of a corgi as a profile photo. The numbers look great but the biggest victory was that people posted pictures of their own dogs in comments. This was something that the implementation of social media marketing had been aiming for: to generate positive discussion and interaction with customers.

After the first active month in Facebook, the increase in fans was still steady but perhaps a little slower than during the first month. It was clear to the company that now that the Facebook pages existed and were active, getting fans and followers was

important to be able to reach as many people as possible. The company has its own magazine for customers called Avain & Koti and it is published four times a year. The first number of the year was published on 4<sup>th</sup> March 2016 and there was a small article announcing that the company is now on Facebook and everyone who likes the page before 4<sup>th</sup> April take part in a competition. The prize being a 50€ gift voucher to IKEA. A picture was posted in the company's Facebook page on 11<sup>th</sup> March that announced the competition to its Facebook fans, too. The growth in fans was very slow in the beginning of March but on Easter Monday 28<sup>th</sup> March, the picture of the competition started to spread on Facebook rapidly. Figure 11 presents the increase in Facebook fans from 255 to 499 in March 2016. After Easter Monday the amount of fans grew by 150 people in just a couple of days, which demonstrates the real power of social media marketing.



Figure 11. The increase in the amount of Facebook fans in March 2016.

In comparison to its competitors, AVAIN Asumisoikeus Oy is doing fairly well so far because it has been on Facebook only for two months and on 1<sup>st</sup> April had already 500 fans. Benchmarking shows that YH Kodit Oy has 379 fans and it has been on Facebook since August 2014. TA-Asumisoikeus Oy (uses brand TA.fi on Facebook) on the other hand has 910 fans and it has been on Facebook since January 2015. The biggest competitor Asuntosäätiö has just reached a little over 2000 fans and it has been on Facebook since the beginning of 2014. Asuntosäätiö is the biggest competitor because it owns about 15 500 right-of-occupancy apartments in Finland. All the above mentioned companies operate in the right-of-occupancy housing

industry. If the case company keeps up the good work, it also soon has over 2000 fans on Facebook.

The number of people who were served by any activity from AVAIN Asumisoikeus Oy Ltd's Facebook page including posts, posts to the page by other people, ads, mentions and checkins can be seen in Figure 12. The organic reach spike can clearly be seen on 27<sup>th</sup> February, which is when the picture of the two corgis was published. Second best spikes were on 11<sup>th</sup> March, which is when the photo of the competition was first published and on 28<sup>th</sup> March when people started to share it on Facebook.

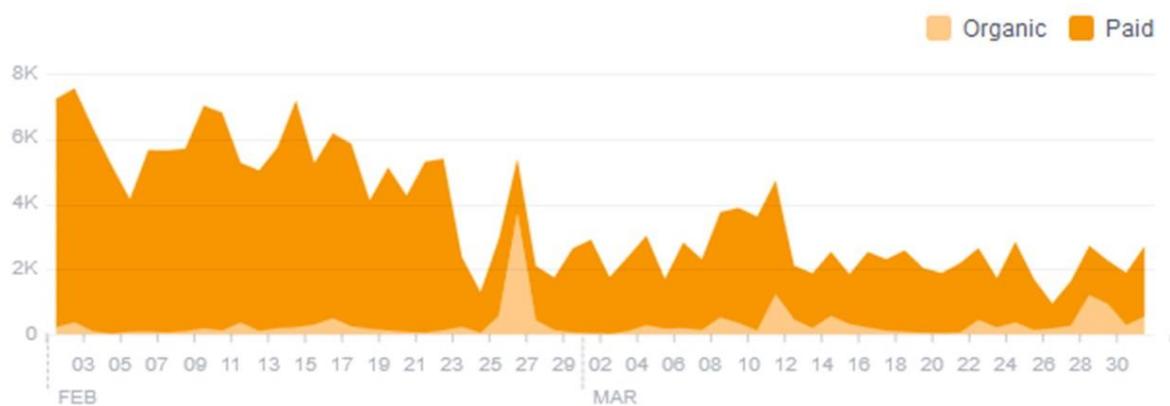


Figure 12. Total reach of people during February and March 2016.

On 1<sup>st</sup> April the picture of the competition had been shared 28 times and it had 195 likes and 99 comments. According to AVAIN Asumisoikeus Oy Ltd's Facebook Business Manager account it had reached a little over 2000 people. The strange thing is that although it has more likes, shares and comments, it has reached less people than the picture of the two corgis. People clearly love dogs. Figure 13 shows screen shots of the two of the most popular posts in AVAIN Asumisoikeus Oy Ltd's Facebook page.

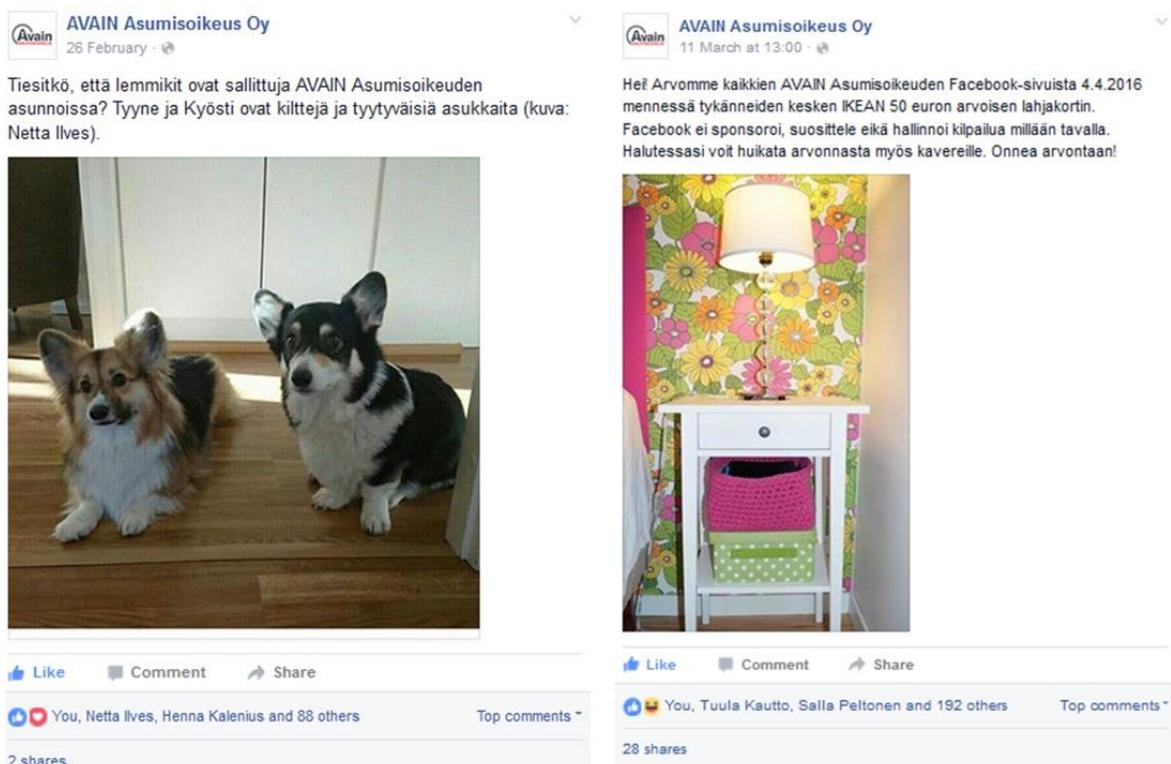


Figure 13. Screen shots of the most popular posts in AVAIN Asumisoikeus Oy Ltd's Facebook page.

Facebook's Business Manager reveals that 78 % of the company's fans are women and the largest audience that the company has consists of 25-34 years old women followed by a group of 35-44 year old women. Most commonly used device is mobile (61%). This is not a big surprise because women are bigger users of social media than men and in general more interested in things related to homes.

Activity on Facebook increases also activity in the company's web pages. Figure 14 presents all visitors in AVAIN Asumisoikeus Oy Ltd's web pages and visitors that arrived through social media during January and February 2016. The data is provided by Google Analytics. About 100 people visit the case company's web pages through Facebook's paid media campaigns. The bendings or downward spikes in the figure happen on Saturdays. It shows that people have other things to do on Saturdays and are not interested in house hunting then. The low amount of visitors through social media in the beginning of January and in the end of February 2016 can be explained by a lack of Facebook campaign during that time.

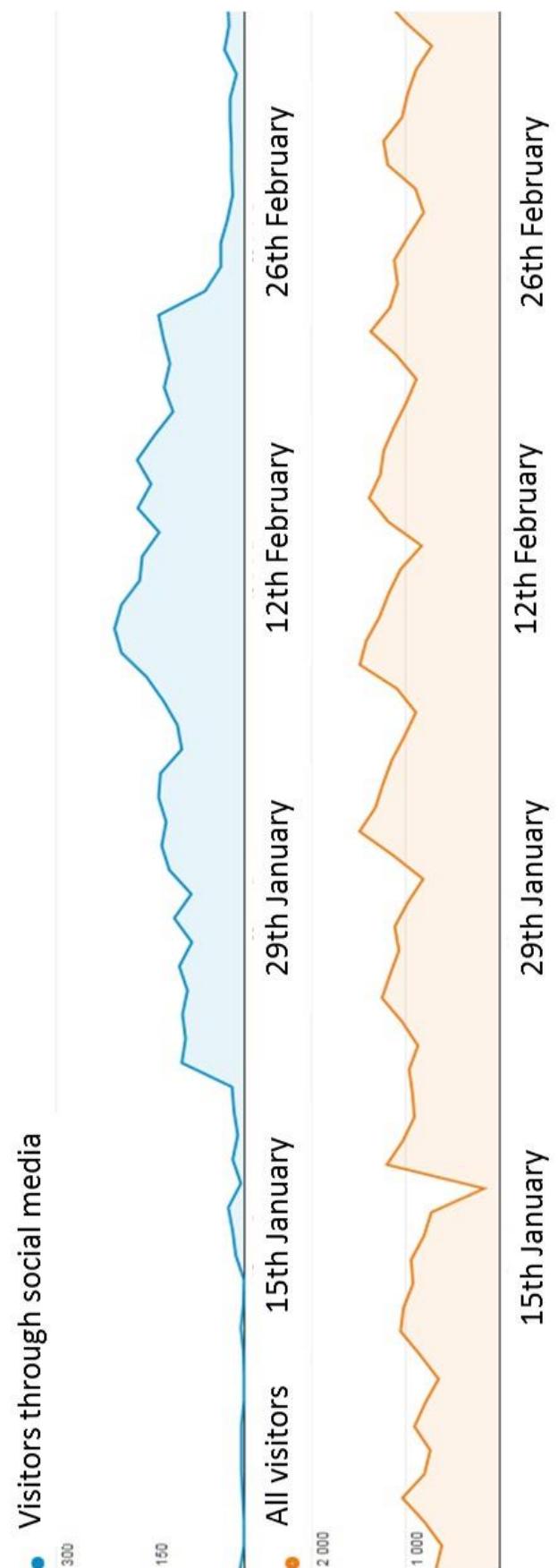


Figure 14. Visitors in AVAIN Asumisoikeus Oy Ltd's web pages.

## 5 Discussion

The fifth chapter explains the results of the research and gives answers to the research questions. The discussion chapter also makes recommendations for the managers of the case company or other companies who are tackling with the same questions involving implementation of social media marketing. In the end of discussion chapter, the author of this thesis suggests what future research possibilities there could be in the field of social media marketing.

### 5.1 Answers to the Research Questions

A social media model, which was chosen as the theoretical framework for this thesis and the primary and secondary data collected during this research will assist in answering the research questions. The social media model is shown in Figure 7 in chapter 2. The main research question was: How to implement social media marketing in a service company in the housing industry? The supporting research questions were: What are the most suitable social media channels for a service company in the housing industry? What is the most suitable type of content of social media marketing for a service company in the housing industry?

The implementation of social media marketing takes place by following the four steps of the social media model described by Faaber (2011). The first step is defining strategy and goals. The second step is preparing and organizing. The third step is executing and managing. The fourth step is analyzing and optimizing.

**The first step of the social media model** is defining the goals and strategy. In this research the case company was interested in doing things right and put a lot of value on the guidelines and social media channels. The reason for this was the decision to deal with social media marketing internally. The creation of policy and content guidelines are a part of the first step of the social media model. The guidelines were defined and tailored specifically for the case company during the research.

Discovering the target audience and setting up objectives also play an important part in the first step. The goal must be known to everyone because without it no one

knows what to aim at. Luckily the objectives emerged for the case company during the interviews. However, defining the target audience still needs some work.

Selecting the appropriate social media channels also belongs to the first step of the social media model. The first supporting research question also refers to the most suitable social media channels for a service company in the housing industry. This is a very tricky question. The case company had earlier already chosen Facebook and YouTube. That did not really matter because the research looked at it from the perspective whether or not those were the right decisions and if there could be other channels to be considered of. The reason why Facebook was chosen in the first place was that the advertising in Facebook is a lot easier when the company has its own Facebook page. YouTube was chosen because it is the best place to share videos and benchmarking had showed its increasing popularity in the housing industry.

The research proved that Facebook is the best place to start the implementation of social media marketing due to its massive amount of active users. During a two month period, the company has increased the number of fans from 137 to 500 in Facebook. The interviews and the literature review ruled LinkedIn because it is a professional social network and it is not in line with the objectives. The main goal is to concentrate on reaching consumers. On top of Facebook and YouTube, Instagram is a good opportunity because it focuses on pretty pictures and has a younger target audience. In addition, according to Facebook's Business Manager, most of the case company's fans are female interested in beautiful interior pictures.

No matter what the channel is, the same rule applies, which is that the social media channel must be actively updated and promoted in other channels.

**The second step of the social media model** is preparing and organizing everything in getting social media marketing started. This means setting up different social media accounts, creating content, choosing monitoring tools and having workshops for knowledge sharing purposes. It is also important to decide who is going to do all these things. According to the risks of social media marketing described in the literature review (see chapter 2.5) "It is also a good idea to find people inside the company who are already active online because those people have experience in social media and are not afraid of writing blog posts or commenting on Facebook." A

social media team was put together internally who are going to be responsible for posting content. The team includes eight persons and two of them share the responsibility of team leadership.

This phase was executed quite smoothly in the case company because Facebook and YouTube accounts were already established. Google Analytics and Facebook's Business Managers were chosen as monitoring tools because Google Analytics is already used to monitor the company's web pages and Facebook's Business Manager is very convenient and handy at delivering data relating to Facebook activities. Also a workshop was arranged during the implementation of social media marketing project in order to share ideas and get confirmation from the professionals of the field that the company was on the right track.

Defining and creating content is a crucial part of the second step of the social media model. The second supporting research question also relates to content and especially discovering the most suitable type of content for a service company in a housing industry. The interviews revealed that the most suitable type of content would be blogs, photos and videos. Literature review also defined these as the most popular among marketers. The interviews gave good insight on what the content of blogs, photos and videos could be. Good content could be for example news relating to living and housing, amendments, special offers, open house events, frequently asked questions, benefits of right-of-occupancy housing, case stories of satisfied customers and competitions.

The workshop in February 2016 was beneficial because the case company's implementation of social media marketing team got the idea of keeping a content diary in order to plan ahead and keep track of what has already been published. This way the most popular posts and content ideas could be recycled and used again somehow. Another idea that sprung up during the workshop was introducing the social media team members on Facebook during the course of spring 2016. That way the company is not just another faceless company on Facebook but people can see who they are chatting with. After all, social media is casual and personal.

**The third step of the social media model** is executing and managing. This is the part when everything is set up and the time has come to publish content, update and

promote the chosen social media channels. During the research the case company started publishing in Facebook. The case company had an account in Facebook for almost a year but nothing was ever posted until the end of January 2016. Publishing content, responding to customer comments, updating cover photos and other information has been executed well and in timely manner. The Facebook page has been mentioned a couple of times in newspaper advertisements so promoting social media involvement has also taken a few steps forward. This research followed the case company's debut and results on Facebook, because it felt comfortable and easier for the company to concentrate on one channel in the beginning after deciding to do things internally. The actions taken in the Facebook project should be repeated in YouTube and also in other social media channels.

**The fourth step of the social media model** is analyzing and optimizing. In implementation of social media marketing there comes a time when the company must take a look at how it has done. This step happens when data on social media interaction, fans, followers and likes is collected, analyzed and reported to stakeholders. After that the achieved results are measured and compared to the set objectives. If the results reveal that some of the objectives have not been achieved or are not doing as well as predicted, countermeasures are agreed on. Some adjustments and improvements must be made accordingly. It depends on the analysis whether the improvements concentrate for example on content design, activity and interaction, refining target audience or adjusting guidelines.

During this research and the implementation of social media marketing project analyzing and optimizing has not been completely completed by the case company. In that way the implementation of social media marketing is still in progress but at least now there are objectives and a sense of direction. The analysis of the results is the next step to be taken in the case company.

## 5.2 Recommendations

The interviews revealed that there is an interest to target the services of the case company to everyone because "everyone has to live somewhere". That is a big group of people. It is quite difficult to publish content for everyone in social media.

According to Clapperton (2009, 4) it is important to know who are the customers of the company and how do they behave. The customers can be asked for example to fill a questionnaire regarding their use of media, whether it is social or more traditional media. That way the company can discover what the customers do when they get fliers through the door or when they surf in their social networks. Who do they like to follow? There is no need to ask all customers, just a few will suffice. The case company conducts customer satisfaction surveys yearly so arranging something this small or incorporating it into the bigger survey is manageable. Clapperton explains that the reason for doing this is, that social networks such as Facebook and Twitter have millions of users but there is no use in having an account and posting if no one actually follows the company (Clapperton 2009, 4-5).

Now that the implementation of social media marketing is well under way in the case company and it has reached the final step of implementation which is analysing and optimising the results, there is a good opportunity to review who like to follow the case company on Facebook. This brings probably more insight to what the target audience is like and what kind of posts or advertisements should be created. Perhaps the ones that follow the company on Facebook are interested in following the company also in other social media channels.

For example, Facebook's Business Manager reveals that 78 % of the case company's fans in Facebook are women. On top of concentrating on defining the target audience more, the case company could consider the next suitable social media channel to be Instagram. According to the literature review, 51 % of the Instagram user are male. It seems that men like pictures more than words and links. Perhaps Instagram could offer a way to get more male followers. The key in Instagram is to use hashtags and post pictures that consumers can relate to. Instagram should be promoted on Facebook and also by the means of traditional marketing. Some of the Facebook fans could be persuaded to follow the company also in Instagram with visually good pictures and competitions. In addition, they could attract their own followers to do the same.

Fast and short benchmarking unveils that YH Kodit Oy Ltd. from right-of-occupancy housing industry is on Instagram with only 58 followers. Another competitor, Asuntosäätiö has just created an Instagram account on 5<sup>th</sup> April 2016 and it had six

followers. TA-Asumisoikeus Oy Ltd, is not on Instagram, yet, but it can be found from Facebook, YouTube and LinkedIn. It also has a blog of its own. However, a few real estate agents have found their way to Instagram and why not because consumers can relate to pictures of nice looking homes and apartments. The author of this thesis believes that the case company has a strong opportunity to do better and achieve much more in Instagram compared to its competition. This is the opportunity to create competitive advantage.

This research concentrated on Facebook because after deciding to do social media marketing internally, it was easier for the case company to start updating one social media channel instead of many. After all, this was a new way of marketing for the company because it had not tried it before. The case company has a YouTube channel, so the last recommendation is that the social media marketing team responsible for commenting, posting and inventing content on Facebook, could think about content for YouTube and get that also activated. In literature review there is a chapter describing the risks relating to social media marketing. One of the risks is that the company's social media initiative fades away. It is important to keep paying attention to it and keeping it alive.

### 5.3 Suggestions for Future Studies

Social media has been a popular research topic during the last few years because social networking is a trend. No one can predict the future but it is interesting to see how much more social media marketing can develop. New social media channels appear all the time. It is going to be very challenging to keep track of all the new channels and possibilities that social media marketing offers. Professionals of this field will definitely be much sought after in the future because although social networking and social media marketing are trendy, they are here to stay.

One suggestion for future studies relates to the development of social media marketing. How to develop social media marketing even further? Now that so many companies are in social media or if they are not, they certainly plan to go there, it would be interesting to observe the next steps that take place after implementation.

With the focus being especially on the companies that decide to use social media marketing internally.

In order to develop social media marketing in companies, one must know how well social media marketing actually works. Some research has been done of the importance and effectiveness of social media marketing as a marketing tool. The benefits of social media marketing are known and described for example in the literature review of this thesis but it would be very intriguing to see how effective it really is in a specific industry. In this case, the author of this thesis naturally means the housing industry. The companies working in the housing industry have discovered Facebook and YouTube and are slowly moving towards other social media channels such as Instagram. A possible research topic could for example concentrate on customer acquisition or customer satisfaction. How can social media marketing be customized to work the best way possible in the housing industry?

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## Appendices

### Appendice 1. Interview questions

- 1) Kuinka kauan olet työskennellyt AVAIN Asumisoikeudella?  
[How long have you worked for AVAIN Asumisoikeus Oy?]
- 2) Mikä on toimenkuvasi?  
[What is your job description?]
- 3) Minkälaisia asioita sinulle tulee mieleen, kun puhutaan sosiaalisesta mediasta?  
[What kind of things come to mind, when discussed about social media?]
- 4) Käytätkö itse sosiaalista mediaa? Mitä kanavia? Miksi?  
[Do you use social media? Which channels? Why?]
- 5) Millä tavalla AVAIN Asumisoikeus Oy tällä hetkellä näkyy sosiaalisessa mediassa?  
[In what way is AVAIN Asumisoikeus oy visible in social media?]
- 6) Onko näkyvyys mielestäsi riittävä?  
[Is that visibility enough?]
  - a. Jos ei, niin miten ja miksi sitä tulisi parantaa?  
[If no, how and why it should be improved?]
  - b. Jos kyllä, niin miksi se on riittävä?  
[If yes, why is it enough?]
- 7) Onko sosiaalisessa mediassa olemisesta AVAIN Asumisoikeudelle mielestäsi jotain hyötyä?  
[In your opinion, are there any benefits for AVAIN Asumisoikeus Oy about being in social media?]
- 8) Minkälaisia aiheita/asioita AVAIN Asumisoikeuden pitäisi tuoda esille sosiaalisessa mediassa (esimerkiksi facebookissa)?  
[Are there topics/things that AVAIN Asumisoikeus Oy should emphasize in social media for example in Facebook?]

- 9) Jos AVAIN Asumisoikeudella olisi facebook-sivut, mitä odottaisit niiltä?  
[If AVAIN Asumisoikeus Oy had a Facebook page, what would your expectations be?]
- 10) Minkälaisista viestinnän pitäisi olla sosiaalisessa mediassa?  
[What should the communication be like in social media?]
- 11) Tulisiko sosiaaliseen mediaan liittyvät asiat hoitaa sisäisesti vai ulkoistaa?  
[Should the matters related to social media be handled internally or should they be outsourced?]
- a. Jos sisäisesti, miten? (esimerkiksi kiertävä vuoro/vastuuhenkilö?)  
[If internally, how? For example taking turns/someone in charge?]
  - b. Jos ulkoisesti, miksi?  
[If outsourced, why?]
- 12) Onko AVAIN Asumisoikeudella mitään toimintaohjeita liittyen sosiaaliseen mediaan? Pitäisikö olla?  
[Does Avain Asumisoikeus Oy have any guidelines concerning social media? Should it have?]
- 13) Jos toimintaohjeet olisivat olemassa, minkälaisia odotuksia sinulla niiden suhteen olisi?  
[If there were guidelines, what would you expect from them?]
- 14) Mikä on mielestäsi tärkein asia mikä toimintaohjeista tulisi käydä ilmi?  
[What in your opinion is the most important thing that should be in the guidelines?]

Appendice 2. List of interviewees

|                         |                                 |                                |
|-------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Ruut Vesenterä          | Sales Manager                   | 11 <sup>th</sup> December 2015 |
| Aune Lauronen           | Sales Manager                   | 16 <sup>th</sup> December 2015 |
| Kirsi Härmä             | Account Manager                 | 17 <sup>th</sup> December 2015 |
| Jan Bertills            | Property Director               | 17 <sup>th</sup> December 2015 |
| Erja Tuononen           | Sales Negotiator                | 18 <sup>th</sup> December 2015 |
| Marjo Lahdenmäki-Ikonen | Sales Negotiator                | 21 <sup>st</sup> December 2015 |
| Maarit Toveri           | Managing Director               | 21 <sup>st</sup> December 2015 |
| Elias Kiviranta         | Sales and Marketing<br>Director | 4 <sup>th</sup> January 2016   |