

# **Inbound marketing funnel for B2C tour operator / Case Elämymatkat**

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<p>The way businesses market their services and products have changed a lot in the past 20 years. The old method of pushing the information to as many people as possible through tv, radio, billboards, direct mail and newspapers etc. has lost its importance remarkably. Indeed, the internet and various digital devices have shifted the power from companies to consumers. The consumers are now capable of both to search valuable information and to shop online wherever and whenever they feel like. This has led companies to modernize their online marketing methods. A solution to excel online marketing is called inbound marketing where the purpose is to pull the customers to companies with compelling content and start a meaningful two-way relationship.</p> <p>This product-based thesis is commissioned by Elämymatkat, a Finnish tour operator organizing sport and adventure travel packages principally for B2C sector. The purpose of the thesis is to construct an inbound marketing funnel that gives guidance and instructions for Elämymatkat on what kind of marketing techniques and content should be utilized throughout the B2C customer's online journey. The funnel takes one customer segment, downhill skiers, as focus point. Hence, a fictional buyer persona is formed to depict the customer segment more precisely. The persona is created and based on a semi-structured interview conducted with a person of this target group.</p> <p>The product - the inbound marketing funnel - is constructed on the basis of HubSpot's inbound marketing methodology, theory of the buyer persona and the main elements of inbound marketing, and the results of the research methods. Besides being a guideline for online marketing actions, the funnel aims to transform strangers of a company into promoters who refer the brand to their friends and family.</p> <p>The theoretical framework together with the empirical part forms the final product. The empirical part constitutes of two different research methods. Firstly, an interview was conducted to form the buyer persona. Secondly, an online survey was created for Elämymatkat newsletter subscribers to discover which online and digital channels they preferably use and what type of content they prefer to consume.</p> <p>On the basis of the combination of the theory and the empirical research, a functional inbound marketing funnel was created. The complete funnel, which can be found from the appendices of the thesis, is applied together with the established buyer persona to demonstrate the applicability of the model. Both the commissioning company and the author were satisfied on the outcome of the thesis project i.e. the product. The future implementation of the funnel will tell if it is a success or not.</p>	
<b>Keywords</b> Inbound marketing, Inbound marketing methodology, Buyer persona, Content marketing, Social media marketing, SEO, Paid search, Email marketing, Landing page optimization	

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# 1 Introduction

The world of marketing has changed tremendously in the past decade, primarily due to the revolution of world-wide-web. The internet has connected people from all around the world assisting in social networking and information sharing. Together with the extensive connection, the abundance of diverse digital devices e.g. smartphones, laptops, tablets, wearable devices & internet of things etc. have ensured that the information is readily accessible for 24/7. When one needs a solution to his/her problem that is quickly found within couple of seconds with the help of a digital device. As information is constantly at the fingertips of people, the power of traditional marketing, e.g. tv advertising, to spread the message as widely as possible, is not working anymore. The people know what they want and need, and the internet and various digital devices have enabled everyone to easily search relevant information or buy products/services that meets one's needs. In terms of marketing, the people are now in control as opposed to advertisers and companies. (Anderson Miller 2015, xiv.)

The old, ineffective" form of marketing where companies push products, services and information to the people, namely outbound marketing, is losing its importance. The people feel this kind of an approach being disruptive. The traditional mass marketing techniques i.e. tv advertisements, cold calls, radio, direct mails, spams and brochures are seen as one-way communication creating no value for the person in the other end. The outbound marketing lacks personalization and does not engage with the audience of a company. In fact, predominantly the audience reach with outbound marketing methods is too large and the ideal client is not defined well, consequently resulting in less conversion and often in lower return on investment (ROI) than with the modern online marketing methods. (Gregg s.a.)

What people and consumers really value nowadays is a content or message that is of high relevance and value. The type of content that benefits the consumer when one consumes it. The type of content that is not sent randomly to a consumer with no interest, but rather has been personalized and sent according to one's needs and wants. The type of content that starts a two-way dialogue between the consumer and the brand. The type of content that is accessible online and can be consumed whenever and wherever. And from the company's point of view, the type of content that does not push message to the consumer, but in reverse pulls traffic i.e. consumers to the company's own media or website. There is a name for this type of marketing approach and it is called inbound marketing. (Anderson Miller 2015, xiv-1; Gregg s.a; HubSpot 16 Jul 2014a; Singleton 2017.)

In this product-based thesis, inbound marketing as a marketing practise is covered and applied in depth. The theoretical framework introduces inbound marketing, its main elements, buyer persona and the HubSpot's methodology of inbound marketing. Inbound marketing constitutes of multitude of elements and techniques that can be utilized. However, in the thesis the focus is on the elements that are of relevance for the commissioning party operating in tourism industry.

As mentioned above, the project is done as a product-based thesis and it is done for a commissioning company; tour operator called Elämymatkat. The idea of the thesis is to help and give guidance for the commissioning company's online marketing by constructing an inbound marketing funnel, the product, that can be later applied and executed in its business operation. The constructed funnel assists and serves as a guideline on how to leverage the inbound marketing and its techniques throughout the customer's online journey. With the help of the funnel, the commissioning party is able to engage with its downhill skiing customers at the right place and the right time. In fact, the model concentrates on this customer segment. However, the idea can also be applied for other segments. The inbound marketing funnel has been formed on the basis of HubSpot's Inbound marketing methodology and other literature, which are later introduced in the theoretical part, and also on the basis of the results of the research methods i.e. a semi-structured interview and an online survey.

The empirical part of the thesis constitutes of the introduction and results of the research methods. In this thesis, both research methods of qualitative and quantitative methods are used. In order to form an accountable inbound marketing funnel for the downhill skier customer segment, a buyer persona is constructed on the basis of a semi-structured interview with the commissioning company's downhill skier customer. Thus, the buyer persona is based on a real person, but given a fictional name in the thesis. The other research method used in the thesis is an online survey conducted for the newsletter subscribers of Elämymatkat. The survey investigated Elämymatkat potential and existing customers' online preferences when engaging with the company; in which digital channels they prefer to engage with the company and what type of content is preferably consumed. The results of the survey helped to form the inbound marketing funnel in which the buyer persona is applied.

On the basis of the author's literature and desktop research, and the analysis of the research methods outcomes, the final product is formed. The completed inbound marketing funnel can be found from the appendices of this thesis as appendix 3. The established buyer persona is applied to the funnel as an example of the applicability. Eventhough it is

created for the commissioning company, the funnel can also be utilized in other tourism industry businesses.

The thesis is concluded with the discussion phase. The chapter constitutes of the product and project assessments, product relevance and validity, discussion of future recommendation/research, analysis of leanings and a summary of the thesis.

## **1.1 Case company**

Elämysmatkat (Milargo Ltd Oy) is a mid-sized Finnish tour operator and event company with almost 30 years of experience specializing in ski, active, sports and event travel both for consumers and corporate clients. Elämysmatkat focuses primarily on Business-To-Consumer market by offering outdoor adventure services such as regular slope and off-piste skiing holiday packages and sport event travel arrangements e.g. Winter Olympics 2018 package. (Elämysmatkat 2018a.) Therefore, the inbound marketing funnel is designed for B2C sector and addressed specifically for a downhill skier customer segment. However, the company forms a consolidated company with DMC, PCO and Event Management Company called Elämys Group, which focuses on the Business-To-Business market with services such as incentive trips, event and sport arrangements, and MICE planning and production in Finland and Europe (Elämys Group 2018a).

Elämysmatkat has currently several digital marketing channels in use. The key channel where the traffic wants to be directed to is the website, as the channel is where the e-commerce occurs. In addition, the company has two own social media channels: Facebook and Instagram. (Elämysmatkat 15 June 2018b.) Together with these channels, the company shares its social media presence with Elämys Group on Twitter and YouTube. The name of the accounts in these two latter channels goes by the name of Elämys Group. Nonetheless, Elämysmatkat promotes its services and communicates with its stakeholders in these channels. (Elämys Group 2018b; Elämys Group 2018c.)

## **1.2 Purpose and objective**

The purpose of the thesis is to construct an inbound marketing funnel, which acts as a guideline and framework for the commissioning company's online marketing. The final model gives instructions and advises to what type of content, i.e. videos & pictures etc., and digital marketing techniques, i.e. search engine marketing & social media marketing etc., should be utilized in various stages of the online customer journey. In essence, with the help of the funnel the company is able to determine what kind of information the target

customer is desiring in his/her respective online customer journey stage and how their desires can be met. This thesis and the final product do not insist any major investments for tools or software that would assist in reaching the desired outcomes. However, some helpful free and paid softwares and tools are mentioned as suggestions to maximize the effectiveness of inbound marketing.

The objective of the funnel is not only to provide inbound marketing guidelines for Elämysmatkat, but also to increase website traffic, conversion from visitors to leads and from leads to customers, loyalty of the customers and ultimately seeing an increase in sales. Basically, the desired outcome is to streamline the customer online journey in every stage of the path and maximize ROI (return on investment) with an efficient inbound marketing model. The success of meeting the objectives are not able to be fully evaluated during the thesis. Hence, the future will tell if the model has worked. Nonetheless, the success of the complete funnel in this thesis is evaluated on the basis of the commission company's feedback and the author's own reflection.

### **1.3 Delimitations**

Marketing communication as a topic is really broad. Thus, in this thesis the emphasis is on the inbound marketing. Inbound marketing as a focus point excludes the traditional outbound marketing methods, i.e. radio, cold calling, newspapers and all other traditional media etc. from the thesis. The focus is kept in techniques and content that pull people to Elämysmatkat digital channels instead of pushing the message for them. Pulling in this context means attracting the customer to engage with the company with valuable and helpful content delivered at the right place and at the right time.

Secondly, this thesis does not cover in-depth which tools or software to use to master inbound marketing. The inbound marketing funnel is formed knowing which tools and software Elämysmatkat is already using. Only proposals of relevant marketing tools are recommended for mastering the inbound marketing. However, the purpose is to explore what kind of content, marketing techniques and tactics of inbound marketing can be applied in the various stages of the customer journey.

This thesis takes a closer look on the online world of marketing, meaning that the completed inbound marketing funnel gives guidance on how to practise online marketing in business-to-consumer business. Nonetheless, the mobile optimization is not in the core of this thesis. In other words, the utilization of mobile marketing and its optimization for the digital marketing efforts are not the main focus of this thesis. In consequence, no mobile



optimization techniques to maximise the inbound marketing efforts are revealed in this thesis. However, the author of this thesis wants to highlight that mobile device optimization for inbound marketing should not be disregarded, as smartphones and other mobile devices are part of our everyday life in searching answers for our problems.

Furthermore, one customer segment is applied for the formed inbound marketing funnel meaning that not all the customer segments are covered in the text. The reason for delimitating and selecting only one customer segment for the application of the inbound marketing funnel is based on the choice of the commissioning company and the author of this thesis. The specific customer segment that is selected for the thesis was agreed collectively with the commissioning company. Thus, the inbound marketing model is applied for the downhill skier buyer persona, which is also constructed for Elämysmatkat. Eventhough the complete funnel has been applied just for one customer segment, the framework of the funnel and the buyer persona can be used and tested for diverse customer segments with a little alteration.

As Elämysmatkat is a tour operator, the emphasis of the thesis and the funnel is on B2C tourism industry companies. Thus, the digital marketing content suggestions have a focus to meet the needs of the travellers, the target audience of Elämysmatkat in this case.

#### **1.4 Personal interest**

A determinant factor on the purpose of conducting this thesis subject came from the interest of the author in online marketing and specifically in inbound marketing. The author has conducted several marketing communications modules with the emphasis on digital marketing. Thus, the interest on 'digital marketing has derived from these completed modules.

Another crucial factor on the realization of the thesis topic came from the commissioning company's need for an online marketing funnel with the purpose to streamline the customer online journey in every stage. These two relevant reasons assisted in choosing the thesis topic.

#### **1.5 Project plan**

This section unveils the project plan of the thesis by introducing all the pertinent project tasks, how the tasks were practised, the outcomes of each task and the whole timeframe of the thesis. This all is displayed in the table 1 below, which is constructed on the basis of a Gantt chart. Gantt chart is a project planning tool that visualizes the scheduled works and tasks. It is a helpful tool for all kinds of projects as it helps to display when in time a

specific task and the whole project should be completed. For instance, it assists a company's manager to realize quickly when the project will start and end. (Kukhnavets 21 Jun 2018.)

Table 1. Thesis project plan in the form of a Gantt chart

Project tasks	Project management methods	Task outcome	Project timeline							
			Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov
1. Thesis overview	Writing	Informative introduction of the thesis	Writing							
2. Theoretical framework	Study, writing	Theoretical foundation for the product		Study & writing						
3. Empirical research	Online survey, interview, analysis	Empirical basis for the product		Survey	Inter view			Analysis of the outcomes		
3.1 Qualitative research (Buyer persona)	Interview, analysis	To form a buyer persona for the product			Inter view			Analysis		
3.2 Quantitative research (survey)	Online survey, analysis	To study the customers' online behaviours		Online survey				Analysis of the outcomes		
4. Product of the thesis	Writing, presentation	<u>An inbound marketing guideline</u>						Writing and thesis presentation		
5. Discussion	Writing, evaluation, finishing	To reflect and assess the thesis and project							Writing and finishing	

As can be seen from the table above, the kickoff of thesis is in April 2018. The thesis project starts with the writing of the thesis overview (**task 1**), which essentially introduces the thesis project.

The **second task** is to form the theoretical foundation for the thesis. This includes collecting relevant literature by the means of a desktop study. As the thesis topic, the inbound marketing, includes many components, the completion of theoretical framework is by far the most time-consuming part of the thesis. Hence, the timeframe for studying and writing the theoretical part starts in the middle of May lasting till the end of August.

The **third task** and part of the thesis comprises of the empirical part, which is of significant importance regarding the construction of the final product, as it adds validity and reliability by laying the empirical foundation for the inbound marketing funnel. It is divided into two sections, the qualitative research (**task 3.1**) and the quantitative research (**task 3.2**). The author applies two diverse research methods, a semi-structured phone interview (the qualitative research) and an online survey (the quantitative research), as having both of these methods does not only supplement the relevance of the empirical part, but also the significance of the whole thesis. With the help of the outcomes of both research methods,

a buyer persona to be applied in the final product is formed and the Elämymatkat customers' online behaviours and preferences are uncovered, which are subsequently taken into account in the end-product.

The empirical part includes project management methods such as data collection by an online survey and an interview, and the analysis of the outcomes. The data collection of both research methods is done well in-advance (in May-June) before the analysis phase (in September), which starts right after the theoretical part.

Once the theoretical and empirical grounds are established, starts the **fourth project task** that is the completion of the product of the thesis i.e. the inbound marketing guideline in the form of a funnel. It is to be finalised and presented in the end of the October.

The final project task **number 5** is the discussion. This is to be carried out as last part of the thesis and is fine-tuned before the end of the November. Here the purpose is to reflect and evaluate the successfulness of final product and the whole thesis process.

## **1.6 Thesis structure**

The thesis is structured in a fashion that the theoretical framework and the empirical research done by the author form the basis for the final product, which is the inbound marketing funnel constructed for Elämymatkat. The theoretical framework constitutes of inbound methodology, and the relevant components of inbound marketing. In addition, the empirical research comprises of the results of the semi-structured interview and the online survey, which have the purpose to back the literature collected in the theoretical framework. Figure 1 below shows the simplified structure of the thesis.

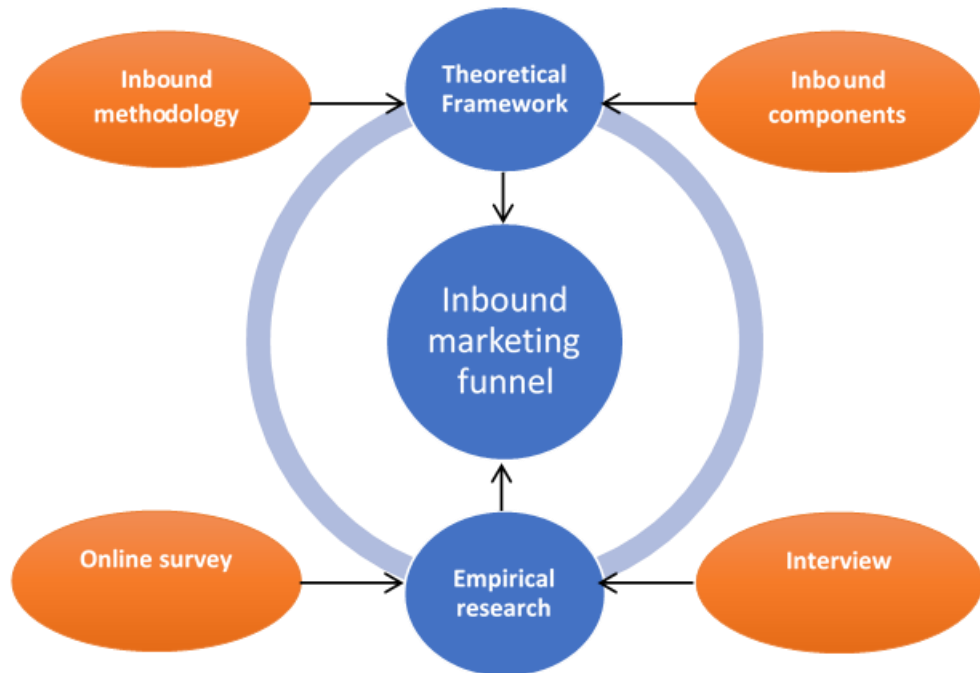


Figure 1. Structure of the thesis

By applying and understanding the inbound methodology and incorporating the relevant inbound components, the final product gets a solid theoretical ground. When it is compounded with the results of the interview that brings forth a buyer persona of the downhill skier customer segment, and with the analysis of the online survey about the digital marketing preferences of commissioning party's potential and existing customers, the commissioning company receives an effective step-by-step inbound marketing funnel tailored for the downhill skier customers.

### 1.7 Key concepts

**Buyer persona:** A fictional and generalized representation of a company's ideal client. A created buyer persona helps a company to understand better its customer segment. Hence, the company is able produce more personalized and targeted content to the particular target group. (Vaughan 28 May 2015a.)

**Content marketing:** A strategic marketing approach that focuses on producing and creating valuable, useful, relevant and helpful content e.g. videos for a defined audience with the aim to engage and entice the person to interact with the brand (Content Marketing Institute 27 Jul 2012).

**Conversion:** Conversion is defined as the action of someone in the company's own medium that is desired to happen. For example, if a company is targeting its potential cus-

tomer to subscribe to a newsletter in its website, the action of completing the task by subscribing the newsletter is considered as the targeted action. In short, conversion happens when someone completes the action one desired. (Heijmans 16 Nov 2017.)

**Email marketing:** The use of email to build up a relationship between a company and its customer. It is considered as an ingredient of online marketing. (Ward 19 Jun 2018.)

**Inbound marketing:** As opposed to outbound marketing, the purpose of inbound marketing is to create remarkable content e.g. blog or other information that earns the attention of the customer by pulling one to the company's medium (Marketo s.a.).

**Inbound marketing funnel:** It is an online marketing process containing 4 different phases where respective customers are during the online purchase journey. It displays steps to be taken in order to convert the website visitors into happy customers that promote one's business, which is the end goal. (Enfusen s.a.)

**Inbound marketing methodology:** It is an inbound marketing model that serves the purpose of turning strangers of a website into visitors, from visitors to leads, from leads to customers and eventually to promoters of a company. The model constitutes of four different phases, namely: attract, convert, close and delight. Along those phases different marketing initiatives and techniques are used to move the customer forward in the purchase path. (HubSpot 3 Jan 2014b.)

**Paid search (PPC) marketing:** Paid search marketing is a form of digital marketing where advertising occurs online in search engines e.g. Google and other platforms such as Facebook by making the company pay for either each time the ad is clicked on (Pay-Per-Click) or less commonly each time it is shown (Cost-Per-Impression) (Ratcliff 12 Nov 2013a).

**SEO:** SEO stands for search engine optimization. It is a practice to increase quantity and quality of the website traffic through organic unpaid search engine results. (MOZ s.a.)

**Social media marketing:** A form of online marketing where the company uses the social networking site e.g. Facebook as a marketing channel in order to spread its message. The aim of this technique when posting content is to get people within the social networking site reach to react e.g. by sharing or liking the content, which further spreads and scales the message to even broader audience. (Rouse 2017.)

## 2 Inbound marketing

As the name refers, the term inbound marketing derives from the revolution of marketing, where the power shifted from the traditional “outbound” marketing to the more modern method of marketing. The HubSpot’s co-founder and CEO Brian Halligan and his partner Dharmesh Shah (2014, xviii) called the traditional, interruptive methods as “outbound marketing”, as the purpose of this approach was to push the message out, and consequently started calling the new way as “Inbound marketing”, where the purpose is to pull people in by sharing relevant and beneficial information, creating valuable content and just being generally helpful. This definition is the basic idea behind inbound marketing. However, there are a lot more diverse elements between the old traditional marketing i.e. tv advertisements and the inbound marketing. (Halligan & Shah 2014, xviii.)

When implementing inbound marketing in one’s business operation, the company enables the consumer to engage and interact with the company with his/her own terms. It is not the company, who is in control to decide what content does the consumer consume in his/her spare time. In fact, as we live in a world of everlasting connectivity, the consumer looks for information what and when she/he desires and needs, meaning that the power is now at the hands of the consumer. The key to win the consumer at one’s side is to provide, create and share remarkable content for the target audience. The content needs to deliver value for the consumer to start a two-way relationship with a company. Basically, inbound marketing is a competition between companies online of who provide the most compelling content, and thus attracts the visitor to one’s hub i.e. website of the company. Consequently, from the very first visit of a visitor to one’s website or other media, the company tries to convert the visitor overtime into an ultimate goal of a loyal and happy customer. (Anderson Miller 2015, 7-15; Halligan & Shah 2014, 29.) This is what inbound marketing is all about.

Inbound marketing is a company’s online conversion system, which is designed to attract and convert. When well-designed it will lead the customers to take action and later reaction. The conversion system encompasses multiple touchpoints between the prospective customer and the brand. Each touchpoint with a prospective customer strives to facilitate the conversion. The conversion does not necessarily mean a sale, it can derive from a desired action such as: reviews, shares or likes on Facebook, retweets on Twitter, downloads, demos, free trials and newsletter subscription etc. The purpose of these actions is to advance the brand-customer relationship. As inbound marketing is considered as the conversion system encompassing diverse touchpoints in prospective customer’s purchase

path, its system consists of different stages where the customer moves along. Hence, each stage has its own objectives and marketing techniques to be used. (Anderson Miller 2015, 11-15.)

The inbound marketing system with stages is called the Inbound marketing methodology, which is covered later in-depth in the text. It helps the reader to better understand what inbound marketing is and how to apply it. The methodology is also applied in the formation of the final product, the inbound marketing funnel, which can be found from the appendices of the thesis.

Inbound marketing constitutes of many marketing techniques that need to be applied in order to maximize its effectiveness in reaching the desired marketing objectives. The respective customer's point in his/her purchase path determines, which marketing techniques the company should utilize in the attempt of the conversion. The key marketing techniques that are regularly used in inbound marketing strategies and campaigns include content marketing, search engine optimization, paid search (pay-per-click) marketing, social media marketing, email marketing and landing page optimization. (Tripura 13 Sep 2017.) These elements are crucial parts of inbound marketing, thus their importance is introduced in the literature part of this thesis and their application is explained in the final product.

Furthermore, inbound marketing is about creating content that resonates and attracts the target customer of a business. In order to master the content creation and engaging with the potential customer, the company needs to understand its customer in-depth and acknowledge its needs, expectations and pain points. The answer for better customer comprehension and consequently successful inbound marketing is the creation of a buyer persona. (Wildman 21 Jul 2017.) To make the final product of this thesis, the inbound marketing funnel, more relevant, tailored and effective for the downhill skier customer segment, a buyer persona of the segment has been created and applied for the final product. The established buyer persona of the customer segment is introduced in the empirical part of this thesis in chapter 4.

In the above text, the purpose, idea and key elements of inbound marketing have been covered. The following theoretical chapters unveil the methodology and components of the inbound marketing more in-depth. In addition, the relevance and construction of buyer persona is introduced. Hence, a better view of the bigger picture of inbound marketing is to be gained at the end of chapter 3.

## 2.1 Inbound marketing methodology

The pioneers of inbound marketing, HubSpot, has visualized the idea of inbound marketing into a process called the inbound marketing methodology. The slogan and principle of the methodology is “The best way to turn strangers into customers and promoters of your business”. (HubSpot 2018c.) The methodology itself contains four different phases, “attract”, “convert”, “close” and “delight”, that steers the potential customer from being a stranger towards being a promoter of a company. In consequence, along the stages of the process the potential customer evolves from a stranger into a visitor, from visitor into a lead, from lead into a customer and eventually into a promoter. At each phase there are diverse marketing techniques, tactics, methods and metrics that can be utilized in order to get the conversion. This is where the inbound marketing methodology helps companies to conduct right marketing actions at the right time of a buyer’s journey. (Kelly & Kvarfordt 2013, 6-7.)

The figure 2 below depicts the process of the inbound methodology as a funnel, consisting the four stages wherein the stranger transforms towards being a promoter. The methodology is normally portrayed as a linear process, however HubSpot has also visualized it as a sales funnel (HubSpot 3 Jan 2014b). The figure below has been adapted from the HubSpot’s original inbound sales funnel version, and the form and idea of the funnel has been applied in the final product of this thesis. Furthermore, each stage of the methodology is covered below in the text step by step.

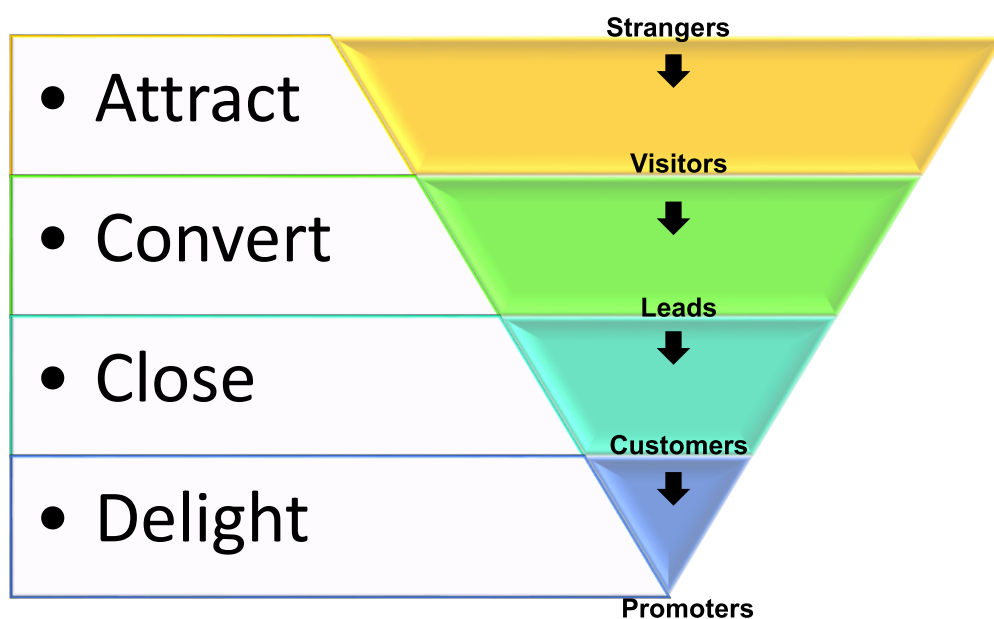




Figure 2. Inbound methodology in the form of a sales funnel (adapted from HubSpot 3 Jan 2014b)

In the stages below, the main marketing techniques, methods, tactics and tools to use in each stage of the inbound methodology are also presented. These are introduced in order to understand how to maximize the benefits of the methodology. However, this thesis focuses mainly on content and marketing techniques to be used in each stage of the funnel as requested by the commissioning company. Hence, the marketing tools' importance and application are not covered in-depth in the latter chapters of the thesis. Some marketing tools and systems are still mentioned due to their high relevance in the respective stage of the methodology. Nevertheless, more precise review and application of the content and marketing techniques in inbound marketing are described in chapter 3, where the main elements of the inbound marketing are revealed.

### 2.1.1 Attract

The first phase of the inbound methodology by HubSpot is "**Attract**". In the attract stage, the company wants to attract and lure the right people to its website. There is no sense to attract everyone to one's site. The focus should be to get the right traffic, visitors who feel getting value of engaging with the company. In order to understand who the right people are that the company is pursuing for, the company should identify and create **buyer personas**. Buyer persona is an ideal customer of the company who is studied holistically by the company to comprehend a particular customer segment's goals, challenges, desires, pain points etc. together with the personal and demographic information. Once, a buyer persona has been developed, the attracting of this target group can begin efficiently. When companies are aware what their customers value, need and are unsure of, the content creation to attract this customer type to company's site is easier. (Flynn Meyer s.a. a.) In the realization of the final product, the inbound marketing funnel, for the commissioning company, a buyer persona of the downhill skier customer segment has been identified and analyzed on the basis of a phone interview.

In order to attract the right customers to company's site, the company needs to create quality content that is meaningful and valuable. The purpose of the content is not only to attract people in, but to start a relationship with a company and consequently move the visitor forward, i.e. convert, along the buyer's journey. Together with quality content creation, there are several other inbound marketing techniques that assist in attracting strangers into company's mediums. These techniques are listed below and later introduced in-depth in chapter 3. (Flynn Meyer s.a. a; Kelly & Kvarfordt 2013, 7-11.)

Inbound marketing techniques used in the attract phase (Flynn Meyer s.a. a; Kelly & Kvarfordt 2013, 7-11):

- Blogging (content marketing)
- Social media marketing
- Keyword optimization (SEO & Pay-Per-Click marketing)

### 2.1.2 Convert

After the company has attracted the visitor into a website, the following step is to **convert** that visitor to become a lead, more precisely a MQL (marketing qualified lead). The method in conversion is by gathering the visitor's contact information e.g. email address or phone number by giving him/her something valuable in return. The exchangeable content can vary from webinars, videos, whitepapers, slideshows, checklists, product demos, case studies, blog posts, educational material etc. With the help of offering useful content in return, the visitor is ready to give his/her permission in the form of contact details for further engagement with the company. This type of approval shows that the visitor is not disturbed by the marketer/company, but rather intrigued and ready to hear more. The reason why gathering contact information of potential customers is crucially important part of inbound marketing is because when the lead has been collected and stored into a centralized database i.e. CRM, the lead nurturing and real conversation between a customer and a brand can take place. Below have been listed the most significant inbound marketing elements that companies should take into consideration in the "**convert**" stage of the methodology. (Flynn Meyer s.a. b.)

Important elements in the convert stage (Flynn Meyer s.a. b):

- Landing pages with forms
- Calls-to-actions
- Effective email marketing

### 2.1.3 Close

Once a company has turned its visitors into leads, it is of utmost importance to convince the lead to take the next leap, which is an action called closing. This step is crucial as the purpose here is to make revenue out of the qualified website visitors and leads by converting them into customers. If the company does not manage to induce its leads to take an action into a sale, all the marketing efforts being done are useless. Principally, potential customers need persuasion and full trust of the company's expertise in order to advance in the funnel. This trust building between a lead and a brand before closing a deal (purchase of a product or service) can vary in great deal in terms of time from short to very long. (Aufray 29 Nov 2016; Flynn Meyer s.a. c.)

In the “**close**” stage, the leads are ready to invest in company’s products and services. The way this buying readiness is reached is by providing right content to the leads constantly and consistently at the right time and at the right place. This relationship building with interesting content in accordance with the potential customer’s needs is called lead nurturing. Lead nurturing can be done via diverse channels, one of the most prominent being email. In order to excel in lead nurturing the company has to know its customers and their preferences. A CRM (Customer Relationship Management) tool e.g. Salesforce can be of high significance in lead nurturing as with the CRM tool, the company can analyse and keep track of its leads. Together with the CRM, a marketing automation software can help the company to send the lead nurturing quality content automatically and repetitively via different channels e.g. email to its customers based on their past engagement and preferences with the brand. When the company is aware how the leads act and behave online, a lead scoring i.e. marketing tactic and tool, can be used to determine the sales-readiness of a person with a numerical value. Consequentially helping the company to decide what type of content will help in closing the deal with the respective lead. The most relevant marketing tactics and tools used in this phase are listed below. (Aufray 29 Nov 2016; Flynn Meyer s.a. c; Kelly & Kvarfordt 2013, 13-15.)

Important tactics and tools in “close” stage (Aufray 29 Nov 2016; Flynn Meyer s.a. c; Kelly & Kvarfordt 2013, 13-15):

- Lead nurturing
- Email workflow
- CRM
- Marketing automation
- Lead scoring
- Analytics

#### **2.1.4 Delight**

As introduced above, the process of inbound marketing starts with attracting the potential customers into a company’s website. That remarkable and valuable content induces the visitor to leave his/her contact information for the company, resulting in a converted lead. After a time of gaining meaningful content through different channels the lead starts feeling ready to buy the service/product. As soon as the closing has happened, many companies forget their customers without ever making them the promoters of the brand. This crucially important stage, where a lot of companies fail, is called **delight**. (Kelly & Kvarfordt 2013, 15.)

The purpose of this stage is to maintain and build-up the customer-brand relationship in a manner that delights the customer to transform him/her into a happy promoter of a brand, whom share his/her great customer experience to other people e.g. friends. As the idea of inbound marketing is to deliver meaningful content and engagement to the company's target customers, it does not end in any phase of the buyer's journey. The way customers can be turned into promoters of a brand is by engaging and delighting the customer with constant communication and content. The two-way dialogue in-terms and preferences of customers is the key in this stage. In addition, the post-sale engagement is of great significance, as it has direct impact on the bottom line of a company. Therefore, the customers should be made to feel special of choosing the given brand. (Donahower 26 Aug 2016; Flynn Meyer s.a. d.)

There are several marketing techniques and methods to be used in the "delight" stage. These techniques and tactics help companies to transform their customers into raving promoters to whom even upselling and cross-selling is easier compared to a new potential customer. As already mentioned, the main task in developing the relationship is to continue providing remarkable content and keeping conversation via various channels such as social media and email, meaning that social media monitoring, email marketing and dynamic content are effective in this part of the buyer's journey. Dynamic content, also known as smart content, is content that adapts to the platform and characteristics of the person consuming it. Consequentially adding more relevancy and personalization to the user experience of the customer. Furthermore, surveys can play a big part in helping the company to understand what the customers really want and desire. The key tactics and techniques of the stage, introduced by experienced marketers, are listed below. (Donahower 26 Aug 2016; Keaney Andersson 9 Aug 2017 Kelly & Kvarfordt 2013, 15; Flynn Meyer s.a. d.)

Significant marketing techniques and tactics used in the delight stage (Donahower 26 Aug 2016; Keaney Andersson 9 Aug 2017 Kelly & Kvarfordt 2013, 15; Flynn Meyer s.a. d):

- social media monitoring
- email marketing
- surveys
- dynamic "smart" content with highly targeted calls-to-actions

## **2.2 Buyer persona**

Buyer persona is a profile that represents the ideal customer of a company. It is used in marketing and sales to understand what efforts and messages work the best in terms of a

respective customer segment. By forming a buyer persona of a target customer, a company is better able to communicate, engage and tailor its message for the customer according to their needs and wants. (Hughes 24 July 2017.)

For the execution of the product of this thesis, a buyer persona is constructed of the downhill skier customer segment of Elämymatkat on the basis of a phone interview with an Elämymatkat customer. The persona is later applied into the final product to tailor the inbound marketing efforts for the inbound marketing funnel. Figure 3 below forms the basis for the buyer persona completed for Elämymatkat. This particular persona is a free downloadable and modifiable model from [iterativemarketing.net](http://iterativemarketing.net) (Earin 15 March 2016a). However, not all the factors included in the example persona are taken into account for the downhill skier buyer persona, as the persona focuses on the relevant factors in terms of the final product and the commissioning company.

**Place Your Logo Here**

**BACKGROUND**

- 30 years old
- Married
- Lives in Greenville, South Carolina
- Earned her degree in Psychology, which she used as a school counselor before deciding to stay home with her kids, now ages 3 and 1

**FINANCES**

- Household income of \$120,000
- Makes most of the purchasing decisions, and does most of the buying
- Misses the discretionary income she had before becoming a stay-at-home mom

**SOCIAL MEDIA PROFILE**

- Facebook is her life-line, especially the 3 private groups
- Active on Twitter, Instagram, and Pinterest
- LinkedIn profile hasn't been updated since she left the workforce

**TECHNOLOGY**

- Accesses the internet from her smartphone, which never leaves her side
- Uses video chat and social media to stay connected with friends and family

**MARKETING & SALES PERSONA**

**HANNAH HEATH**

*"I want what is best for my kids, but sometimes it is hard to know what that is"*

**A DAY IN THE LIFE OF HANNAH**

- First to get up in the morning and last to go to sleep
- Responsible for taking care of the kids, the house and all of the family errands
- Despite saying she needs to take care of herself, her needs seem to come last
- Tries to plan an outing each day so she doesn't go stir crazy
- "Mom" parody videos seem to capture her life in a nutshell

**HOPES & DREAM**

- Meet another mom with kids approximately the same age, and on the same nap schedule
- Find more time to take care of herself
- Stop feeling guilty for missing the life she had before kids
- Finding homeopathic solutions that treat her children holistically

**WORRIES & FEARS**

- Questions whether she is a good mom
- Paranoid that her kids are behind on their milestones
- Lack of independence from not making her own money
- Wondering what she will make for dinner

**WHAT INFLUENCES HER**

- Parenting book, blogs and magazines
- The women in her life, like her mom, mother-in-law, grandma, sisters and friends

**MAKE HER LIFE EASIER**

- Allow her to make informed decisions for her family
- Help her balance between being a mom and her former self

Figure 3. A free downloadable example of a constructed b2c buyer persona (Earin 11 March 2016b)

Buyer personas are highly important for sales and marketing as they allow to gain a lot of information of the specific buyer and target audience. When the relevant information of the buyer persona is applied and aligned well with right content at the right channels, the result can translate into increased revenue and brand affinity. (Earin 15 March 2016a.)

When forming a buyer persona, there are a few things to keep in mind. First of all, it ought to be fictional, but realistic. It constitutes of fictional characteristics of a buyer based on facts. Thus, the data for it can be collected through quantitative or qualitative research methods. Secondly, not all the questions or issues of the respective buyer needs to be tackled. The information should be completed via relevant data collection method e.g. interview or questionnaire. Nevertheless, the rest of the information holes can be filled together within the company with colleagues, by own observation, through experimentation or feedback received from the sales team and customers. First and foremost, the most important aspect of constructing it is to put oneself into the shoes of the customer. The elements of which the persona constitutes of include the following: personal background, name, photo, finances, a day in the life, hopes and dreams, worries and fears, technology, social media profile, what influences the persona, brand affinities, and quote. (Earin 15 March 2016a.) However, only the relevant elements in terms of the final product and the commissioning company of this thesis were covered in the completed buyer persona of the downhill skier.

### **3 Components of inbound marketing**

In this chapter the main components of inbound marketing are covered more in-depth. All of these six constituents i.e. content marketing, social media marketing, SEO, paid search (pay-per-click) marketing, email marketing and landing page optimization are integral parts of inbound marketing, and should be used in unison to achieve excellent results. When these marketing tactics are along different stages of inbound campaigns and strategies, the benefits of inbound marketing can be maximized. (Tripura 13 Sep 2017.)

Below in each marketing technique, a travel company's business-to-consumer perspective is taken in order to delimit the literature and to have more relevant content regards to the commissioning company. Furthermore, each element is uncovered and described in terms of inbound marketing.

#### **3.1 Content marketing**

Content marketing is a strategic approach where the emphasis is to create and share relevant and consistent content such as a blog or video to attract and retain the ideal customers, and ultimately to drive them towards a sale (Ruffolo 30 March 2017). Content marketing has the same idea as inbound marketing that of earning the trust of a potential customer with quality content and further entice the customer forward in the buyer's journey. However, content marketing does not consist of diverse marketing tactics (i.e. social media marketing, SEO, paid search, email marketing and landing page optimization) as the inbound marketing does. (Lieberman 11 Jul 2016a.)

Inbound marketing does not work without content marketing, but in the other hand content marketing campaign can be done without using various tactics of inbound marketing. For instance, when implementing inbound marketing it is impossible to attract strangers into one's website if one does not have any content as an enticement. (Marketing Zen 10 Aug 2017.) Content marketing is essential in every part of the inbound marketing methodology. By harnessing content marketing well in inbound marketing, quality content attracts strangers to one's website, helps to convert visitors into leads in exchange for contact information, nurture leads into customers with tailored messages and finally delights customers into promoters with the help of relevant and timely follow-up content that boosts the engagement with the company. (Rottigni 14 Nov 2017.)

A piece of content is the instrument that serves the purpose of drawing a potential customer to start the relationship by moving him/her to the website of the company. There are

endless amounts of various types of content that can be harnessed in both content marketing and inbound marketing, but in this thesis the focus is on content that can be used for tour operators. The types of content created and shared in travel and tour operator business are inherently emotional and exotic by nature. This is due to the fact that travel companies such as tour operators are selling adventures, dreams and memories – namely experiences. In other words, meaning that tour operators already have the stories in front of them, they just need to be conveyed and shared to the audience in a compelling story-telling manner. On the basis of the literature research done by the author, the most relevant content types for travel companies and tour operators, especially for Elämysmatkat, are listed below. (Briesies 2015; Dukeman 17 Feb 2018; Hanratty 20 May 2016; Joshi 3 Sept 2014; Marketing Zen 10 Aug 2017; Talreja 7 Dec 2017.)

Most effective forms of content for travel companies: (Briesies 2015; Dukeman 17 Feb 2018; Hanratty 20 May 2016; Joshi 3 Sept 2014; Marketing Zen 10 Aug 2017; Talreja 7 Dec 2017)

- Social media content – posts on various social networking platforms such as pictures, videos, hashtags, messages and specialized content like Twitter moments, Snapchat, Instagram and Facebook stories etc.
- Blogs
- Pictures – gifs, memes, panoramic pictures, emotional pictures, quotes etc.
- Ebooks
- Video – how-to-videos, explainer videos, brand awareness videos, educational videos, vlogs, vines etc.
- Testimonial and reviews
- Live streams
- Infographics
- Interviews
- Quizzes and contests
- User generated content – content from the customers
- Checklists
- Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)
- Newsletters
- Product brochures
- Q and As (Questions and answers)
- Live chats

### **3.1.1 Relevance of content in inbound marketing**

Without content marketing inbound marketing campaigns are useless. Content is the key driver in connecting with customers and building engagement. In online marketing in general, by creating, publishing and distributing content the company can obtain interaction with customers. As inbound marketing is about two-way dialogue between the brand and the customer, making sure that content published is relevant to the right target person's need in every stage of the buyer's journey is crucial, as it builds trust between the parties.



The purpose of the content is to connect the customer with the company. The more meaningful the content is for the customer, more connected s/he is with the company. (Anderson Miller 2015, 162-163.)

In order for content to be relevant in the execution of inbound marketing, it has to be of high value for its consumer. Making purposeful content that draws in people is important, but so is making the content connections purposeful. There are three diverse characteristics with quality content connections that entice people to engage with the brand or take action: timely, relevant and contextual. (Anderson Miller 2015, 164-168.)

**Timely** content creates urgency and encourages to act. It increases attractions and conversions when published or distributed to the right customer, in the right channel and at the right time of the purchase path. Examples of timely content distribution and publishing are to send emails to customers prior their need for something or to provide a slide-up chat box in a company's website for meaningful customer-service that the potential customer might need for the support of his/her future decision. (Anderson Miller 2015, 165-166.)

Creating **relevant** content induces user engagement, which is significantly important conversion component in inbound marketing. The reader wants to consume content that resonates with him/her – content that speaks to him/her. Relevant content that creates value for customers is excellent increasing factor of engagement. For instance, providing content that has information that one is searching for is considered as relevant. (Anderson Miller 2015, 166-167.)

Together with timely and relevant content, creating relevant content and delivering that **contextually** increases the familiarity and consistency of the inbound campaign, thus consequently boosting attraction and engagement. Deciding the right context for the company's content, the message of the inbound marketing becomes clearer and consistent. The factors that play important role when deciding content's contextuality are diverse mediums (videos, ebook, social media, website, blog), forms (desktop, smartphone etc.), depth of the content (e.g. whitepaper vs ebook), need-centricity of the content (serves a need), knowing of buyer personas and the customers' place in the purchase path. (Anderson Miller 2015, 164-168.)

### 3.1.2 Four E's of content marketing

Understanding different stages that a potential customer goes through during his/her buyer's journey is important when creating compelling content that engages with the target audience in every level and nurtures them into customers. In the application of the four E's of content marketing shown in figure 4 below, the visitor undergoes through the research phase i.e. Top-Of-Funnel, shopping stage i.e. Middle-Of-Funnel, the action stage i.e. Bottom-Of-Funnel and reaction stage i.e. Repurchase-Funnel. Each stage requires tailored content that appeals to the potential customer, and in consequence advances him/her down the funnel into being an advocate of the company. The four characteristics that describe the purpose and attributes of various content used in each stage of the funnel are as follows: educate, engage, encourage and embrace. The model is effective as it provides guidelines on what kind of content should be created and published in the right moment of the customer's purchase path. (Anderson Miller 2015, 168-169; Marketing Matters Inbound 2013.)

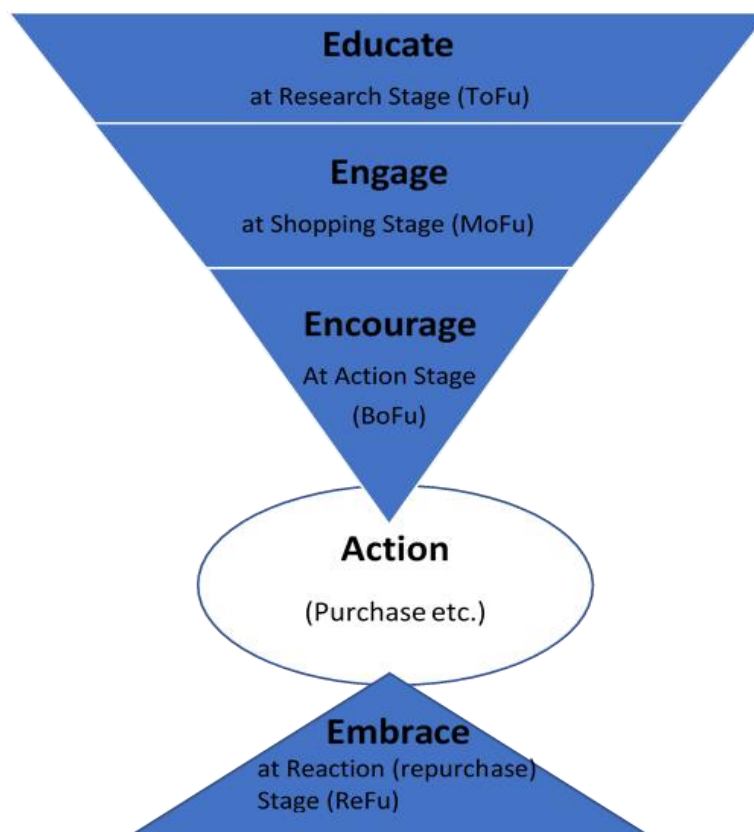


Figure 4. 4 E's of Content marketing funnel (adapted from Anderson Miller 2015, 169)

Below, each content stage has been uncovered, and content that work well in each stage are listed down. Later in the final product of this thesis, the content ideas based on this model and the results of the research methods form a fundamental ground for the content

recommendations given in the completed inbound marketing funnel for the commissioning company.

**Educate** in the context of content marketing means that the company presents and introduces itself to the visitor. When the marketer delivers researchers and searchers educational content, the inbound content marketing process has begun. It is the stage where the company has the opportunity to tell who it is and how it can help. A list of educational contents that companies can utilize: (Anderson Miller 2015, 168-169.)

- Blog posts
- FAQs
- “How To” Tips sheets
- Product Spec sheets
- Infographics
- Informational videos
- Social media posts
- Industry overview reports

**Engage** is the stage where the company produces and provides content that the potential customer can engage with. After a stranger has been attracted to the website with quality content and the company has introduced itself, the company does not yet have information of the person. With engaging content, the purpose is to lead the potential customer towards the first conversion by requesting reasonable information relative to the value of the content being provided. The lead interaction and data collection through engaging content are fundamental parts of content marketing, as a real spark for the dialogue between the potential customer and the company can begin. Content that are engaging include the following: (Anderson Miller 2015, 170-171.)

- E-books
- Interactive tools
- Research
- Buying guides
- Webinars
- Podcasts
- Newsletter
- Workflow emails

**Encourage** is what the company should do when a visitor has been converted into a lead. Encouraging content are content types that incentivize the lead to take an action i.e. the purchase. This type of content is at its best when the lead has expressed his/her interest for a particular product or service. In other words, the content that encourages the lead serves the purpose to facilitate a sale. Therefore, this type of sales-oriented content features often a Call-to-Action button or text. Encouraging contents that are typically harnessed include: (Anderson Miller 2015, 171-172.)

- Onsite incentives
- Product demos

- Free trials
- Coupons
- Pricing estimates
- Customer reviews
- Online live chat
- Workflow email

**Embrace** is the content stage when a customer has already purchased from the company, but where the main purpose of content is to reinforce the relationship. Re-engaging customers is an excellent way to strengthen the communication and also to lower the cost-per-acquisition for additional sales. Furthermore, there are other reasons for embracing content, which are to provoke engagement, to provide opportunity for customer feedback and to deliver rewards for the best customers. Embracing content is generally provided after a sale or regularly after the first sale to build-up the relationship even more.

Typical embracing contents include: (Anderson Miller 2015, 172.)

- Automated “Thank You” emails sent immediately after a purchase
- Private sales
- Rewards / Loyalty points
- Customer feedback reviews
- Surveys
- Onsite live customer support
- Workflow emails

### 3.2 Social media marketing

Social media marketing is a form of digital marketing where a company aims to communicate and interact with its customer throughout the web to encourage positive engagement with the company. This can occur on the company’s own website, social networking sites (e.g. Facebook & Twitter) and other third-party sites. Engaging in customer conversations related to the company’s products and services, promotions and customer service are conducted with the intention to learn more about the customers and to provide support, which consequently improves the way the brand is perceived among customers. (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick 2016, 484a.)

It goes without saying that all companies that implement inbound marketing should conduct social media marketing. Over two billion people (2 196 million), over a quarter of the world’s population, are active users of Facebook (Statista 2018). Thus, social media marketing is a must-do practice for companies implementing inbound marketing or marketing in general, as it is an excellent method to reach and engage people. A rule of thumb is that a company should hang out where its target audience spends their time. and clearly diverse social networking sites provide this opportunity. Each social media site has its own features and characteristics, however all of them share the ability to create a user profile,

connect to others, interact and share information with the network's community of people. (Halligan & Shah, 2014, 67.) In this social media marketing section of this thesis, the author reveals the importance of social media marketing in inbound marketing, the diverse techniques that can be utilized in various stages of the funnel and lastly the main social media channels used by tourism b2c companies.

### **3.2.1 Relevance of social media marketing in inbound marketing**

When the content has been produced, it is time to share it with people and attract target audience to the hands of the company. Inbound is about sharing the right content to the right person at the right time meaning that a right place is needed. This is where the power of social media comes in, as it is a content sharing and discussion vehicle helping companies to reach their customers. From the perspective of inbound marketing, social media gives companies a more personable manner of having a two-way interaction with their prospects and customers. Thus, it enables the customers to build trust and resonate with the brand. (Anderson Miller 2015, 247; Perek 17 Feb 2014.)

There are multiple benefits of including social media in inbound marketing plan. If social media marketing is implemented well with quality content, it will be an invaluable part of a company's inbound performance. The most prominent advantages of excellent social media marketing according to marketing expert Scott Anderson Miller (2015, 247-248) are listed below:

- Increases customer engagement and two-way communication
- Increases number of prospects
- Cements customer loyalty and trust
- Improves brand interaction at every point in the customer's online purchase path
- Increases traffic and number of leads
- Improves customer service
- Improves organic search-engine rankings
- Provides consumer trend insights
- Expands business partnerships

A very notable asset that was not included in the list, but which should not be overlooked is that social media insights provide better comprehension of a company's audience. Social media channels possess a vast amount of data of the visitors. Crunching and scrutinizing the available data e.g. the demographic and geographic information of the visitors, with social media analytics, the company is able to produce and share more targeted and engaging content for their visitors on their social networking sites. In consequence, the rankings in search engines' result pages improve as the search engines such as Google praises the content that responds to audience search queries. (Cisnero 12 Jun 2015.)

### 3.2.2 Channels

In this section the social networking platforms that are best suited for b2c travel companies executing inbound marketing are described and listed below. There are several factors that companies should take into account when considering which social media channels to exploit in their business operations, and for their marketing and inbound purposes. The main emphasis is on the understanding of the target audience. The key questions, gathered from the relevant literature, to ponder when selecting the channels include:

(Barker, Barker, Bormann, Roberts & Zahay 2017, 83.)

- Is the target audience consumers or professionals?
- Is the target audience mainly female or male?
- Where online does the target audience spend time and are active? – Fish where the wish are
- Is the product/service offered visual?
- Is the target audience content oriented that expects to be consuming content e.g. blogging?
- Do the target consumers enjoy collaborating and interacting within themselves?
- Are product or service demonstrations needed on these channels to convince the target audience?

On the basis of the questions above, companies are able to find correct platforms to establish interactions and presence in. However, the channels that work best for business-to-consumer marketing are content-oriented, extremely social, engaging and interactive by nature, as the primary goal in b2c channels is to create a conversation with the potential customers (Barker, Barker, Bormann, Roberts & Zahay 2017, 86-87). Below is a short description of each channel that fit according to the features mentioned above, and which work well for b2c travel companies. Nevertheless, this section will not cover in-depth how these channels work, rather how travel companies are able to benefit from them. Furthermore, not all the effective social networking platforms are introduced below, instead the major ones applicable for business-to-consumer travel companies are included.

**Facebook** is the most popular social networking channel in the world with over two billion users (Statista 2018). In consequence, it is a must in terms of social media and inbound marketing, as one's audience is certainly registered as users. Facebook is a fact a mini-website containing quality content. People who are interested in a company's site are able to "like" and follow the content. The channel is a best choice when a company wants to reach a large audience, add extensive information and content of one's company, and spark a dialogue and interaction with its customers. The content scale that can be used to captivate followers and customers for a travel company comprises of images, videos, stories, feedbacks of customers, important information such as events of interest, fact

sheets, newsletters, itineraries, links to other pages, and any other relevant posts or updates. Even offering booking of trips/holidays via Facebook is possible. (Bogdan 15 May 2014.) Being present in this channel is significantly important for any company, especially in the highly competitive travel industry.

**Twitter** is a great platform for providing customer service and communicating with followers. It is a social media platform accessible via web and mobile-device application where users can exchange micro-posts of 140 characters long called “Tweets” that anyone can send or read. The tweets are public by default, however they are automatically visible to the users who follow the tweeter. Current topics such as industry trends and news are commonly shared in Twitter to stir a conversation among users. Along with buzzing industry topics, in order to be involved in the Twitter game, the companies should follow the industry influencers e.g. big brands, promote own products and services, and join conversations by using trending #hashtags and by adding shortened links to the content published. (Severt Dec 2017; Zeevi 12 Apr 2013.)

**Instagram** is a social networking application with over 500 million active monthly users made for sharing photos, videos and stories, all this done with a smartphone. Similarly as Facebook and Twitter, Instagram’s users also have a profile and news feed, where a user sees posts (videos or photos) published by the people she/he follows. The platform is a home for stunning visual, creative and awe-inspiring masterpieces that its users publish. It is excellent app for travel companies as many Instagrammers use it to discover new places and destinations to travel to. Hence, it is “must be” channel for travel companies to promote their offering, services and brand. Even branding on Instagram is common feature as a company can prompt its users to use branded hashtags, e.g. #Nike, in their content. These branded hashtags can be requested from the users when contests are being held or giveaways used for spreading the hashtag. As the userbase is already looking for new ideas and destinations, travel companies should be there to inspire and provide those ideas in return. (India 16 May 2018; Moreau 5 Jul 2018.)

**YouTube** is one of the most popular video social media channels online today. There are millions of videos uploaded ranging from movie trailers to dog videos. The only resource needed for the use of YouTube is internet. Hence, anyone can upload and share engaging video content on the platform. (Collins 23 May 2018.) Users and companies having YouTube accounts are able to share and edit own videos, create playlists and prompt discussions in comment boxes of the videos. Furthermore, the fact that YouTube is owned

by Google gives quality videos high relevance on Google search results, which underlines the platform's importance in marketing. (Egan 10 Feb 2017.) In terms of travel companies' marketing efforts, not only does the YouTube's search engine ranking contribution help, but the quality videos produced and shared on the platform help to engage and inspire the viewers, and eventually convert them into customers. Leveraging superior and relevant video content on YouTube can help travel brands to build their personalities and strengthen the relationships with customers. (Moore 17 Aug 2017.)

### 3.2.3 Social media marketing techniques in each stage of inbound methodology

In order to leverage social content effectively, companies need to break down the online customer journey into four stages (attract, convert, close & delight), and start delivering more targeted social content to their target audience regarding their position in the journey. Understanding and applying the buyer's journey, known other words as the inbound methodology, in the execution of social media marketing is beneficial as companies are able to produce and share right measurable social content at the right place and at right time. Figure 5 demonstrates the buyer's journey as a continuing process being a valuable tool to determine what kind of social media techniques should be utilized in each stage to drive more results. (Bitly & HubSpot s.a.) Below each stage of the buyer's journey is covered in terms of what kind of social media content and techniques should be used to maximize the results.

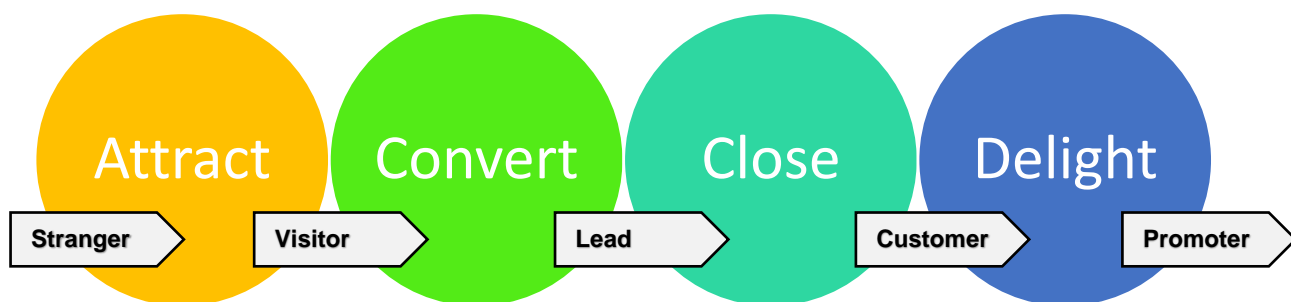


Figure 5. The online buyer's journey i.e. inbound methodology (adapted from HubSpot 3 Jan 2014b)



In the **attract** phase companies need to focus to publish and create content on social media platforms, which are engaging, interesting, meaningful and shareable for their target audience. The aim with the attractive content is to receive more relevant fans and followers, and to make those social communities to engage with the brand. The metrics in this stage that tell if the brand has been successful are engagements, impressions, reach, clicks, shares, follower and fan growths. (Bitly & HubSpot s.a.)

Effective social content and techniques in the attract stage (Bitly & HubSpot s.a; Brand24 s.a.; Edmonds 2017; Williams 14 Feb 2018):

- ❖ **Helpful content** that appeals to target audience and solves their problems
- ❖ Connect with **industry influencers** i.e. bloggers or vloggers relevant to one's business to strengthen industry authority and audience reach
- ❖ Engaging **video content**
- ❖ Get noticed by people with relevant **newsjacking** e.g. a tweet of a breaking news on Twitter
- ❖ Eye-catching **imageries**
- ❖ Convey **brand authenticity** with momentary content such as Facebook and Instagram stories
- ❖ **Create contests** to increase the brand awareness by requiring an engagement e.g. share etc.

The **convert** stage is the next leap of a potential buyer where she/he has been lured into your website or social channel with great and attractive content. In this stage the purpose is to further nurture the relationship with the intention to convert those visitors into leads by incentivizing the visitor to fill out a lead generation form on a specific landing page. This lead generation can be achieved with premium social content that a visitor can acquire by filling the given form. The premium social content is a type of content that helps fans and followers solve their problems and challenges, and shows the expertise of a brand. The benefit of the lead generation is that it enables the conversation to be continued also via other channels such as email. The performance of this stage can be assessed with metrics such as landing page conversion rate from social media sites and email list growth. (Bitly & HubSpot s.a)

Effective social content and techniques in the convert stage (Bitly & HubSpot s.a; Williams 14 Feb 2018):

- ❖ Offer problem-solving **premium content**, e.g. ebook, Google Hangout, video, consultation, free giveaway, in return for an email address or other contact info
- ❖ **Retarget** fans and followers with a personalized offer for conven, e.g. event, product or service, to improve conversions. Sponsored ads work well for this
- ❖ **Invite audience to sign up for live-streams**, e.g. webinars, Q&A's or other digital events, with the help of social media channels' live streaming feature. This helps to connect with audience and is an interactive and immersive experience
- ❖ Incorporate **customer reviews** in the social strategy to boost lead conversion

As learned in the chapter 2.1, the **close** stage is a matter of receiving money from companies marketing efforts. The same applies in the social media marketing. While in the attract stage the social community has been established and then further nurtured the relationship in the convert stage, the purpose of close phase is to turn leads into customers. The transformation from a lead to a customer requires highly targeted and personalized social content. The type of social content that can play a big part in closing are listed below. The metrics for measuring the success for this phase are conversions directly on social media, to company's product site and trial conversions (Bitly & HubSpot s.a).

Effective social content and techniques in the closing stage (Bitly & HubSpot s.a; Williams 14 Feb 2018):

- ❖ **Feature current customers**, e.g. customer testimonials, in the ads to encourage the customer to buy or try the product being offered
- ❖ **Retarget marketing qualified leads**, not whole social audience, with a targeted social ad with **product benefits** and **transparent pricing**
- ❖ **Show the product or service in action** with a video or picture to add relevancy
- ❖ **Offer great deals** on social media for new customers e.g. "join loyalty program for free and get 5€ off" to drive sales later on the other channels such as website
- ❖ **Promote special offers** with a time constraint to prompt fast action

**Delight** stage means strengthening and maintaining the relationship with a customer after a sale. In the context of social media, it implies that the interaction and communication continue across all the company's social media sites. Delighting customers on social media refers to ensuring that the customer experience resumes to be excellent now and in the future. It encompasses answering customers' questions and helping them to meet their desires. The fundamental benefit of delighting through various channels is that it can help to receive customers for life that consequently endorse and promote the brand for their social communities. (Bitly & HubSpot s.a)

Effective social contents and techniques in the delighting stage (Bitly & HubSpot s.a; Probert 1 Jun 2016a; Williams 14 Feb 2018):

- ❖ **Respond** and **personalize** customer answers on social media sites
- ❖ **Empower loyalty programs** on social media, e.g. by using re-targeting pixels on Facebook or Twitter, to keep the customer educated, entertained and delighted
- ❖ **Educate customers of creative service or product uses** e.g. sharing food recipes with a specific product or other relevant tips for customers who have already bought
- ❖ **Inspire with motivational and inspirational content**, e.g. motivational quote, tweet or post, to energize customers in their day-to-day life
- ❖ **Engage** and **interact** with the customers who follow the brand, e.g. share their post, to continue positive social engagement
- ❖ **Set up social communities** for customers to answer questions, to chat, and to promote new services and product
- ❖ **Social media monitoring** is a tool that helps a marketer to monitor customers' actions and discussions by sending a notification when the customer is discussing of

the brand. The tool also enables the marketer to publish and schedule content e.g. what and when to post to social channels

### **3.3 Search engine optimization**

When remarkable content has been published to a company's website, it needs to be found by consumers. One of the methods to attract people to consume this content via search engines, e.g. Google, is by leveraging SEO (Search Engine Optimization) tactics well in a manner that the company's webpage appears high in the SERP (Search Engine Results Page). SEO is a structured approach to increase the position of a company's website or its product page in the search engine's natural and organic listings for specific keywords or phrases. (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2016, 484a.)

In 2014 there were approximately 5.9 billion searches on Google per day. The purpose of these searches is to look answers for one's specific problems, issues or needs. In essence, this means that if a company is not easily found on Google, it is losing major opportunities to generate leads and traffic. The traffic is there, the company just has to direct the right audience to its website. This is where SEO can step up in the inbound game, particularly in the "attract" stage, where strangers are lured into the webpage as mentioned earlier in the text. (Halligan & Shah, 2014, 45.)

SEO is an integral part of inbound marketing, as when mastered well, the company's quality content, e.g. blog, is able to be reached by the visitors, whom can later be turned into leads and customers. For example, when a person is searching for good content or product related to the company's business, ranking high in the SERP, especially in the first page, for a specific keyword can be the detrimental factor in luring the potential customer to the website. The reason behind this is that the first results for given search terms listed by Google are more relevant and credible. Google listings and rankings are based on a combination of two elements: relevance and authority. The relevance is a measure of how close of a match the search query is in relation to the content of the webpage suggested by Google. The components that have an influence on the relevance factor of Google include e.g. page title tag, URL, page content and anchor text of links to the page. The authority in other hand, is a matter of how important, popular and authoritative the given page is in the eyes of Google. Google appreciates sites that get a lot of traffic and have many external links connecting to ones' site from other respectful sources such as from social influencers e.g. well-known bloggers or celebrities. By targeting relevance and authority for desired keywords, the company has the possibility to rank high in the SERP to maximize its opportunities and get traffic to its website. This traffic creation is the purpose

of SEO and its relevance in inbound marketing. (Halligan & Shah, 2014, 45-50.) The techniques and tactics of how to optimize website and keywords in a way that helps in ranking high in the SERP are revealed in this section below.

### **3.3.1 Use of keywords in SEO**

Keywords are words and phrases that best describe the content that one publishes online. From the perspective of searchers, keywords are words or phrases identifying what people are seeking via search engines. In SEO, the purpose of these keywords is to get the audience closer to the content of the company. In general, keywords are highly important ranking factors that Google uses in deciding the rank of one's content in SERP. Thus, researching the relevant keywords to the content preferred by target audience can help in achieving better results through SEO. (Hurley Hall 2018.)

It is essential to understand what the company's ideal customers are searching for and which keywords they are typing. Keyword research is a practise for the company to help its potential customers to find its website. Thus, investing reasonable amount of time with keyword research can have huge benefits on search engine performance and ranking, consequently resulting in an increase in organic traffic to the company's website. (Burnet 2017.)

Investigating the customer preferences in terms of search queries, short and long-tail, is rather easy nowadays. There are multiple free keyword research tools online, which are handy and insightful helping companies to excel their keyword optimization with the intention to increase conversion percentages and the ability to attract right visitors to their sites. (2015, 92-97.)

According to Scott Anderson Miller (2015, 92-97) the most vital and relevant free tools that contribute to effective keyword research, and thus to inbound marketing campaigns, are listed below:

- Google Keywords planner (Partly free)
- Google trends (free)
- Google search bar's auto-suggest feature (free)
- Google's list of related search terms in the bottom of the SERP (free)
- Keyword.io (free)
- SEMrush (free and paid keyword research tool)
- Ubersuggest (free keyword research tool)
- Moz Rank Tracker (Free tool with paid SEO and keyword tools)
- SpyFu (Free limited competitor keyword research, includes paid features)

After the keyword research is done, it is time to segment and categorize the keywords and phrases. The methods to segment the keywords include by geographical relevance (e.g. spas in San Diego), location on the purchase path (e.g. whether customer is in researching, shopping or buying stage), buyer personas (e.g. adventure enthusiast), device used (e.g. smartphone) and branded search terms (e.g. Nike shoes). Segmenting keywords by their implied location on the purchase path is a helpful way to understand and measure the effectiveness of each keyword. This method of segmenting can be divided into three parts: research terms (top-of-funnel), shopping terms (middle-of-funnel) and buying terms (bottom-of-funnel). (Anderson Miller 2015, 97-105.)

Table 2 below, adapted from the original version by Scott Anderson Miller (2015, 89-90), illustrates how keywords can well be segmented for an auto service company based on search queries' implied location on the purchase path. The search queries of each phase have distinct characteristics which form the basis for the classification.

Table 2. Segmentation of keywords by location on the purchase path (adapted from Anderson Miller 2015, 89-90)

Keyword or search term	Position on the purchase path
Signs my brakes are going bad	Research (Top-Of-Funnel)
Best all-weather tires	Research (Top-Of-Funnel)
Oil change frequency	Research (Top-Of-Funnel)
Best brake shop Chicago land	Shopping (Middle-Of-Funnel)
Goodyear tire store Kansas City	Shopping (Middle-Of-Funnel)
Premium oil change store	Shopping (Middle-Of-Funnel)
September brake discounts	Buying (Bottom-Of-Funnel)
Current tire promotions	Buying (Bottom-Of-Funnel)
Oil change coupons	Buying (Bottom-Of-Funnel)

As mentioned above, keyword research and keyword segmentation are of utmost importance when implementing SEO and inbound campaigns. Once these steps have been taken, the execution of proper and result-driven keyword optimization can begin.

### 3.3.2 On-page optimization

The next leap after in-depth keyword research is to begin applying and including those keywords to optimize company's website. On-page SEO has a big role in this part. On-page factors include all the elements that improve the attractiveness, user-experience and

the quality of the website. The webpage can be enhanced with the control of the technical set up and the optimization of the content. When on-page optimization is done right, it improves the ability of the website to rank high in the search engines. (Van de Rakt 5 May 2017.) Below are covered the most important aspects of on-page SEO.

According to Halligan and Shah (2014, 53-54) the most important on-page factor that has an influence on Google is the **page title**. The page title is what appears as a text link in the search engines' search result and is shown at the top of the browser's window above the URL when one has already entered the given search query. Halligan and Shah have given four tips how to come up with great page titles:

- Include the most important keywords in the page title
- Put the most important and relevant keywords first in the page title, as the earlier words carry more weight than later words
- Make the page title user-friendly, meaning that the keywords in it should be sensible and written for humans. Title tag should be targeted to be something that potential customers want to click on in the search results
- Consider putting company name for the home page's end of the title tag. This adds more weight for the most important keywords

Adding a compelling and informative **meta description**, which is a brief summary of what the website contains, is central element of SEO. However, not in rankings, but in attracting visitors to one's site. As shown in figure 6, the description is shown below the page title tag in the search engines' search results. By writing an attractive and accurate description, a company is more likely to get more clicks to its webpage. (Halligan & Shah 2014, 54-55.)

Halligan and Shah (2014, 54-55) have listed three tips for writing effective meta descriptions:

- Keep it short, less than 160 characters, as Google shortens longer descriptions
- Include unique description in every page
- Use the most relevant keywords of the content of the webpage in the description. Google often shows the matching keywords from the search query as **bold** in the description. This adds probability that web searchers will click on the page title tag based on matching keywords

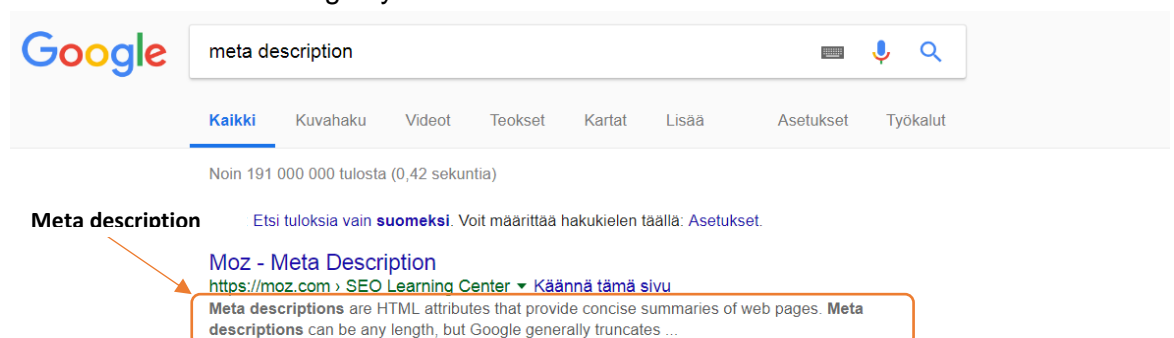


Figure 6. Screenshot of the position of meta description in Google searches (adapted from Halligan & Shah, 2014, 54-55)

Optimizing **URLs**, unique source locators, is also fundamental part of on-page SEO as it enables a company to attract more relevant target audience. Every internet page has its own URL, which basically is an internet address of a website e.g. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Url>. Companies are able to modify and optimize the URLs of their webpages with CMS (Content Management System) such as Wordpress. A reason why URLs should be optimized is that when Google crawls a webpage on the basis of a keyword typed into the search bar, it considers the URL of the webpage as one factor determining the search rankings. Secondly, having keywords of a webpage in the URL can have an impact on other people's anchor texts. The keywords of an URL can make people to use those keywords in their anchor texts, which link to the company's URL optimized website. The third crucial element in optimizing URLs is to come up with a relevant domain name, which is the part of the URL that is shared by all other pages on a company's website e.g. <http://en.wikipedia.org>. Since it is a part of all the URLs on a given site, its keyword should be suitable and relevant in the eyes of a potential customer. (Halligan & Shah 2014, 55-56.)

When creating webpages, a company can include **headings** to make the reading and scanning of the content easier in a similar manner that is applied e.g. in a regular newspaper article. Optimizing headings is imperative, as Google scans through the company's page to understand what it is about. In consequence, the keywords of a page should be included in the headings, as Google sees headings as important words of the page. However, these keywords must be tagged, e.g. with CMS, in order for search engines to understand them being headings. (Halligan & Shah 2014, 57.)

Halligan and Shah (2014, 57) suggest the following tips for writing headings:

- Include important keywords in headings
- To maximize the weight of a keyword, keep the heading short as possible
- Tag headers with h1 on each page, and include multiple h2 and h3 headers

Generally, **image** in a web page is a method to make the content look more appealing and attractive. In terms of SEO, the image itself does not have any effect on Google search results, as Google cannot read or interpret the text in the image. However, with an "alt" attribute, which is a special code enabling the writer to describe the image, Google is able to notice the existence of an image in a respective page. (Halligan & Shah 2014, 57.) Optimizing alt text in a way that it associates well with the given image helps to achieve better results in search rankings. Making use of alt texts improves also the chance of showing up in Google image searches, as Google reads alt texts. (Aslam 23 Jan 2018.)

### 3.3.3 Off-page optimization

As on-page SEO is about controlling and optimizing the website, the off-page SEO is the opposite. It serves for the same purpose as on-page SEO, which is to rank high in search engines and to generate traffic to the website. However, off-page SEO increases the company's chances to rank higher than before. It is about building one's brand and creating trust in the search engines. The fact is that it does not happen on the respective company's website, but on the external platforms such as social media etc. Being mentioned or linked outside from one's own website often increases the popularity, quality and relevance of the given webpage. Thus, resulting in higher ranking in search engines. (Toonen 25 Jan 2018.) Below in the text, the best off-page optimization methods are revealed.

Integral elements of off-page optimization (Ratcliff 7 Jul 2014b):

- ❖ Link building
- ❖ Social media engagement
- ❖ Local SEO

**Link building** means that a company purposefully aims to receive links to its medium e.g. blog post from an external source. In the essence of off-page SEO, it denotes that this particular website has received a vote of confidence from an external party. The more quality links a webpage receives, the better, as Google and other search engines rank webpages higher on the basis of quantity and quality of the links. The quality in terms of a link implies that a link from a high authority, trusted and popular site is more appreciated by Google than low authority site. Hence, companies should be aiming to receive links from its industry's high authority sites to rank high in search results. The key to generate these high authority links is to create remarkable content, the kind of content that people are willing to consume. (Ratcliff 7 Jul 2014b.)

Search engines such as Google considers social signal as an important metric for ranking web pages. Due to this, the importance of **social media engagement** in off-page SEO cannot be overlooked. The first part of starting social media engagement is to start being in the social networking platforms, e.g. Facebook, where the target audience spend their time and converse. By growing one's social communities on these platforms, the opportunity to go viral with quality content increases. The more compelling the content created and published on social media is, the more likely it will be shared by the followers. As a consequence, the ranking of the given webpage gets up in the search engines. The content shares of one's followers will not come easily, as work has to be done from the behalf of the company in order to achieve this. Social engagement is the crucial factor that brings the brand closer with the followers by establishing mutual relationship. This occurs by



providing value and showing care for the followers by means of diverse social media communication methods e.g. re-tweets, shares, comments etc. (Shengale 2013.)

Being involved in the local search listings can be a highly determining factor for a searcher when she/he decides from where to buy the product or service. **Local SEO** is intended to provide the searcher the most relevant search results, service providers and merchants, based on the location, where she/he is at the time of the search. An example of local listings is given in figure 7 below. To make a company's website more search-friendly and findable, it is sensible to claim for a profile in **Google Places** for a business page, where all the basic information of a company (opening hours, address and contact details etc.) can be filled. Once the profile has been set up, the Google Places profile can be linked with **Google Local+** account. This will then feature even more information of the company e.g. reviews, photos, videos etc. in the Google search results. With the help of Google Places and Google Local, a more insightful and compelling search result of a respective company can be found. (Ratcliff 29 May 2014c.)

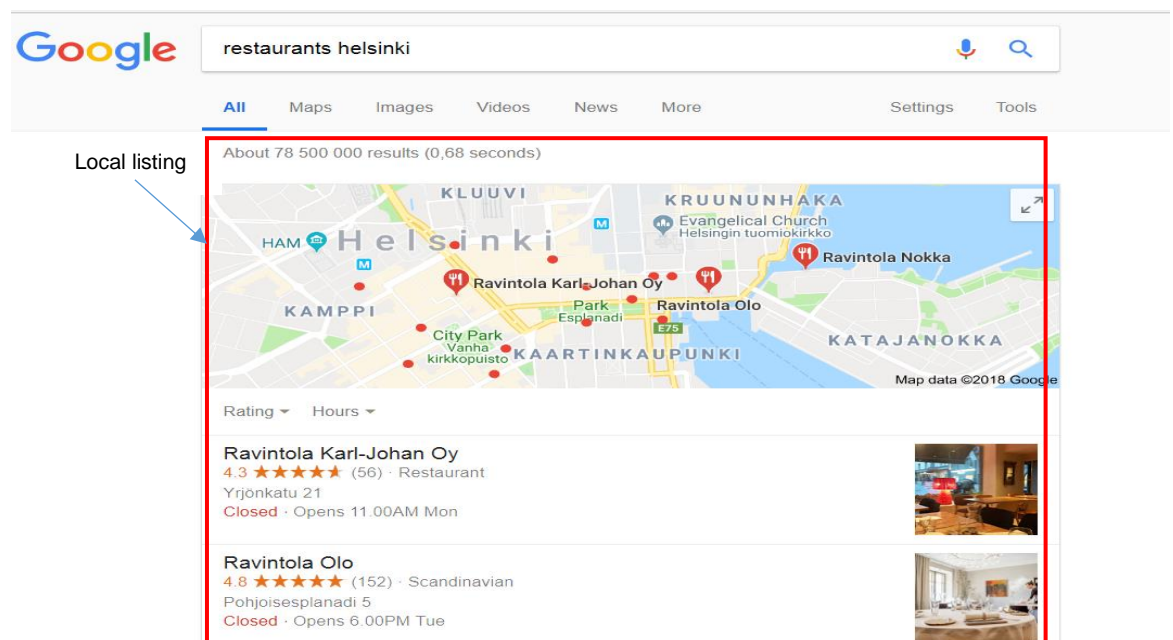


Figure 7. A screenshot of Google's local listing position in SERP (Google 29 Jul 2018)

Above screenshot is a Google search result (Google 29 Jul 2018) with keywords "Restaurants Helsinki" taken by the author of this thesis. However, the screenshot of the position of the local listing has been taken according to the instructions given in a business blog by the digital marketing blogger Cristopher Ratcliff (29 May 2014c), and then further reproduced with different keywords to demonstrate its outlook in SERP.

### 3.4 Paid search (Pay-Per-Click) marketing

Together with SEO, paid search (Pay-Per-Click) marketing is the other form of search engine marketing, where a relevant text ad with a link to a company's page is displayed on the SERPs when a search engine user types a specific keyword phrase. The reason why it is called pay-per-click is that every time each sponsored or paid ad link is clicked, a fee is charged by the search engine. The cost of the click, i.e. the bid, is a determinant ranking factor in the search engines and third-party sites together with landing page experience, expected clickthrough rate (CTR), enabled ad extension (e.g. sitelink) and search term relevancy with the specific ad and the landing page. (Kay Oliver 24 Apr 2018.) Eventhough most of the web surfers tend to click on the links in the natural listings, sufficient number of clicks (a quarter or third of all clicks) come through paid links (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick 2016, 484a). Thus, it is a significant tactic to drive traffic to one's website. The sponsored ads are displayed at the very top of the search results above the natural i.e. organic search results (Si 20 Jul 2016) as shown in figure 8, where the paid ads are illustrated inside the red boundaries. The natural listing below the sponsored listing is cut off from the figure below including just the paid listing.

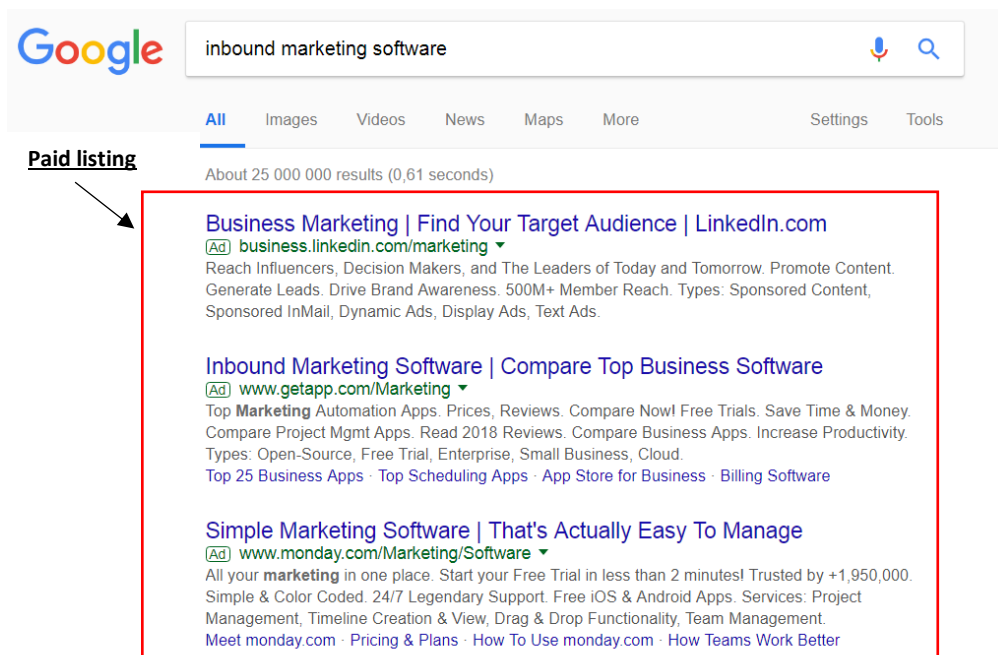


Figure 8. A screenshot of the position of paid ads in SERP (reproduced from Si 20 Jul 2016)

The figure above is taken and re-created by the author of this thesis to illustrate where paid ads are located in Google results page. The foundation of this figure is based on the examples given by SEO specialist and blogger Sean Si (20 Jul 2016) in his blog.

### 3.4.1 Purpose of paid search in inbound marketing

As already explained earlier in the thesis that inbound marketing differentiates from the old traditional marketing by not being interruptive or distractive, as it does not push the message to the audience, but rather attracts the ideal client to the company's website with good content. Even PPC ads fall into this category of not interrupting the search engine user, as the ad appears to the SERP only when the user is searching for information or answers with related keywords that associate with the paid ad. In essence, this means that the users are in control of what they search for and click on. The company's job with PPC is to provide the content and answers for their ideal customer with the aim to initiate a relationship and a customer journey that eventually leads to customer advocacy. Hence, PPC is significantly important element of inbound marketing, as it drives traffic to the company's website, where educating and nurturing of these visitors can begin with the help of diverse inbound marketing methods. (Rare Digital Marketing 9 Feb 2018.)

Google AdWords, which is paid advertising platform, is a tool that can boost the overall inbound marketing performance. The purpose of the tool is to target specific keywords, geographical locations and offers to compete against other companies for ad space in the same place. It assists to promote one's business in Google by highlighting one's content, which aims to provide answers, information and solutions for the searcher. Including Google AdWords tool as part of PPC campaigns is an effective channel that complete the overall inbound marketing strategy. (Rowles 25 Aug 2017.)

### 3.4.2 Utilization of paid search

In this section of paid search marketing, the practises and benefits of including PPC in the execution of inbound marketing are covered. Vital techniques to be used in paid search are explained in order to understand how it can contribute to the overall inbound marketing of a company. It is important to note that the text below does not enlighten how the paid search campaign works practically, however suggestions on how PPC should be used as incorporation with inbound marketing are given.

As inbound marketing is about flowing the customer through a funnel from being a total stranger to a company to eventually becoming a promoter. A company can use paid search as the first step of the potential customer by **moving him/her down the sales funnel** by attracting and encouraging to take the first step in the search engine with quality content that answers a specific question or need (Catherwood 11 Apr 2017).

As mentioned earlier that Google AdWords can be a valuable tool in terms of paid search campaigns and the overall inbound marketing performance. The tool has several benefits that companies can take advantage of. First of all, it is excellent in terms of **targeting** as one is able target on the basis of the keyword intent, people's geographic location, sites they visit, content they consume and interest groups etc. These features enable to reach the desired buyer personas of a business. The second major benefit of the tool is **testing**. For instance, companies can measure call-to-action clickthrough rates and landing page conversion rates to name a few. With the help of testing, subsequent actions to improve the performance can be made. The third crucial benefit of the tool is **traction**. On account of Google AdWords campaigns, a company is able to receive faster results than from search engine optimization, which targets to drive organic traffic. (Lear 26 May 2017.) Below are introduced other techniques on how Google AdWords can contribute in the execution of inbound marketing.

One excellent way to harness paid search is to **test and optimize company's landing pages**. This can be done by setting two different destination URLs of the company, in other words two landing pages, for a specific paid ad that is shown in the paid listing. To take the search query from the figure 6 displayed before, i.e. "inbound marketing software", as an example. With Google AdWords is possible to set one paid ad to direct the searcher to a different page or offer e.g. inbound marketing software blog page and the other for an actual product page, e.g. inbound marketing software, to test and understand which landing page is more effective in terms of conversion. (Taylor Mighty 26 May 2017.)

Another great landing page optimization technique to use also in paid search is called **A/B testing**, where the purpose is to measure and test two versions (A & B) of a landing page, to determine which version of the same landing page is more attractive in the eyes of the visitors and thus receives higher conversion. In Google AdWords it is conducted in a same fashion as the previous landing page testing example given above, however the element to be changed in A and B versions concern the same landing page not a diverse landing page. The elements in the landing page that can be tested in the two variations are layout, design, style, Call-to-actions, pricing, copywriting, headlines and images etc. (Macdonald 20 Feb 2015.)

Together with landing page testing and optimizing, a company can use the primary tool of paid search, i.e. Google AdWords, to **find new keywords** for the paid campaigns. Google AdWords features a tool called **Search Terms report** presenting all the keywords that the company's ad has been displayed with. The report not only shows the relevant keywords displayed with the paid keyword, but it also displays the performance of each keywords

denoting whether it should be added to the campaign or not. Metrics such as clickthrough rates (CTR) and conversion rates (CR) are contained in the report, which are information that assists the company both in paid and organic search engine marketing. Exploiting Google AdWord's both tools, Search Terms report and Keyword planner, while optimizing paid search can have a huge impact in the success of the campaign. (Taylor Mighty 26 May 2017.)

To conclude it is crucial to understand the **paid search cannot stand alone**. It is not a marketing technique to be used separately from the other techniques. However, to make the most of it should be used as a complement to other inbound marketing methods. For instance, even when a company is ranking high in the first natural SERP of Google, having a paid ad for the same keywords, thus appearing in same SERP, gives the ability to widen the search engine coverage and presence enabling the company to be an authoritative figure for those keywords. (Taylor Mighty 26 May 2017.)

### **3.5 Email Marketing**

Email marketing is a segment of internet marketing and is defined as the use of email to develop relationship with potential and existing customers. In addition, it is widely utilized in the service and product promotion. The separating factor of email to direct mail is that emails are sent electronically via email service providers e.g. outlook. (Ward 19 Jun 2018.)

There are several important key performance indicators i.e. key metrics that are relevant in terms of optimizing and leveraging email marketing towards meeting one's business objectives. Some of these essential metrics include open rate and clickthrough rate. The open rate as the name suggests denotes the percentage of email recipients that open a given email. The clickthrough rate in the other hand measures and refers to the percentage of email recipients who click on one or more links contained in the given email. (Kowlich 18 Feb 2016.) GetResponse.com (2018) has collected and assembled interesting facts and benchmarking data about the current state of email marketing. The average open rate in travel sector is 25,69% and the average clickthrough rate is 3,84%. As for the average of all industries the numbers are as follows: 24,82% open rate and 4,07% clickthrough rate. Other relevant findings are for example that the open rates are the highest with over 25% at 2pm just after the lunch break and the clickthrough rates are the highest with ~17% at 6pm in the afternoon when people return home. However, these above-mentioned percentages are pretty low when compared to the interesting insight of welcome

emails receiving a whopping 91,43% open rate and 26,90% clickthrough rate. This signifies that welcome emails are currently receiving four times bigger shares than other types marketing emails. (GetResponce.com 2018.) All these numbers referred above are crucial and important consideration points telling the factual truth of email marketing for businesses employing email marketing as part of the marketing strategy.

Earlier in the introduction of the components of inbound marketing (chapter 3) email marketing was mentioned as playing its part in the whole inbound marketing process. In this section, the relevance of email marketing to inbound marketing, its benefits and techniques in the inbound methodology are uncovered.

### **3.5.1 Relevance of email to inbound marketing**

Email marketing is often seen as outbound digital marketing technique. However, it does play an important role in inbound marketing. The focus of outbound email marketing is mostly in sales specific tasks or in targeting “cold” new business leads, whereas inbound email marketing has the intention to build up rapport with leads, existing or lapsed customers. (Mordue 14 Dec 2015a.) The reasons why email can be highly crucial part of inbound are explained below.

Email marketing can help companies executing inbound marketing in nurturing the leads into customers. In fact, email marketing is one of the most effective methods to nurture leads, whom are the people with shown interest in one’s company, by engaging and connecting with the help of meaningful content sent to them via email. Email workflows, which are series of regular and relevant emails sent to people that have previously interacted with a company, is a powerful lead nurturing tactic requiring an email or marketing automation software for its efficient implementation. Due to the fact that email marketing is useful in lead nurturing it should be utilized in the closing stage of the inbound methodology to turn leads into customers as have been noted earlier in the thesis. (Kaseger 25 Oct 2015, Lieberman 05 Dec 2013b.)

By exploiting an email marketing software (e.g. MailChimp) or a marketing automation software that comprises an email delivery solution (e.g. HubSpot) together with a CRM tool (e.g. Salesforce) in the execution of successful email marketing, a company is not only able leverage the email workflows, but also to send and deliver more personalized and individualized emails to its leads and customers. Personalized and individualized emails are more probable to build a trustful relationship that encourages for a two-way dialogue. Furthermore, accommodating individual’s needs in email messages adds relevancy, and thus is considered as personalized messaging. An example of a competent

personalized and individualized message is a type of email that acknowledges the recipient by name and corresponds on the basis of his/her needs or prior engagement e.g. product activity with the company. Segmenting the customer data, e.g. with a CRM tool, based on the purchase path or previous engagement helps in offering more tailored and meaningful emails that eventually boosts conversions and sales. (Anderson Miller, S. 2015, 262-264.)

One very important element of email marketing for all companies is to use the Opt-in feature, which is a consent that the recipient agrees to receive emails e.g. regular e-newsletters from an organisation. The approval from a prospect or a customer is usually given by filling an on-screen lead-capturing form. This is great as it implies that the prospect really wants to hear from and engage with the company. Companies that use these approval registers i.e. opt-in house lists to leverage email marketing are later able to adjust their email marketing strategy and the type of content to be sent in relation to the prospect and customer's wants and needs. (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick 2016, 523-524a.)

In comparison to print media, email marketing is relatively cheap. It does not include any postage or printing costs or pay-per-click expenses. In addition to being low cost, it is also fast especially when the sender has established a portfolio of modifiable message templates. Even international markets are easy to be reached, as no time lags occur nor are there any expenses for overseas marketing. (Mordue 14 Dec 2015.)

Other prominent factors of email marketing in inbound are that companies can easily and quickly track the performance of campaigns. Metrics such as email open rates, click-through-rates, subscription and unsubscription rates are for analysts to comprehend whether the campaigns have been successful or not. Consequently, all the metrics disclose valuable information of the audience and assist in future planning of the campaigns with the purpose to make the emails more effective. (Mordue 14 Dec 2015.)

### **3.5.2 Email marketing within the inbound methodology**

The inbound methodology and its different stages: **attract**, **convert**, **close** and **delight**, have been covered in this text already several times. Thus, this section does not explain what the purposes of each stage in the whole inbound process are. Instead, below is explained how email marketing can be adjusted into the methodology. As was introduced in the chapter 2.1, email marketing is not a part of the attract stage. Hence, it is not used to attract strangers into one's website. However, it does play an influential role in the other three stages. (George 22 Dec 2017.) Here the author of thesis reveals how.

Email marketing possesses an extremely important role in the **convert** stage. Here the purpose is to convert the website visitors into leads by enticing them to leave their email address for the access of compelling and meaningful premium content e.g. e-book, exclusive guide etc. This method helps the company to gather the right contacts, as only the people who are interested in the company and its content fill the form. After successful lead generation, the lead is considered as a Marketing Qualified Lead (MQL). The company then starts the lead nurturing to gradually turn this MQL into SQL i.e. Sales Qualified Lead. The nurturing can effectively be done through email marketing. (George 22 Dec 2017; Wheatley 2 Feb 2016.) On the basis of a literature review conducted by the author of this thesis, the most crucial email marketing tactics to be used to in this stage to move the visitor forward in the buyer's journey are listed below.

Effective email marketing techniques and methods in the convert stage (Bicks 13 Feb 2018; George 22 Dec 2017; HubSpot s.a. d):

- **Welcome email:** The first email to be sent to people who have just subscribed as a confirmation of email subscription, and as a notification of what type of content will the subscriber receive in the future. Welcome emails are able to be easily automated with an email marketing software tool.
- **Social sharing links:** By including sharing buttons in emails, current leads can spread the message of the company with their contacts to generate more leads.
- **Lead nurturing emails:** When the lead tells you information of him/herself, the company is able to start lead nurturing via email by providing content according to the recipient's needs and wants. The content should aim to provide a solution to a problem through the company's services/products. Subsequently, lead nurturing helps the lead to move down the inbound marketing funnel towards a sale.

During the **close** stage, the company is dealing with known leads. Under these circumstances, the email addresses have already been gathered, and the purpose of the following emails is to convert those leads into customers over time (Wheatley 2 Feb 2016).

There are several email techniques and methods that need to be taken into account in order to close the deal. These relevant email tactics have been collected on the basis of literature from various marketing experts, and subsequently listed down.

Effective email marketing techniques and methods in the close stage (Dent 28 Aug 2017; HubSpot s.a. d; Mineo 28 Aug 2013; Wheatley 2 Feb 2016):

- **Incentive:** Encourage the subscriber into a purchase with an incentive such as a promotion or a discount.
- **Personalized greeting/offer:** Personalize the email offer with the recipient's name or encourage him/her to purchase a product he/she has previously looked on the website. The benefit of personalized emails is that it is more likely to be opened.
- **Catchy, concise and clear subject line:** The headline of the email should be compelling, short and indicative of the body of the email in order to spur the lead to take the next step.



- **Opt-in list:** Send regular emails only to people who have given the permission to hear more from the brand. In consequence, the company stays front-of-mind.
- **Compelling body text:** The copy in the email needs to be enticing to convince the reader to take action. Make the copy as clear and reader-friendly as possible by using bullets and headers.
- **Include CTA:** Include at least one call-to-action as a button or text in the email to make people act on the information provided.
- **Email workflow:** Use series of automated emails that are sent to leads according their profile information and prior engagement with the company. Email workflows help to deliver the right email to the right person at the right time, and save abundance of time for the company.
  - **Educational email:** Send series of educational emails for leads who have signed up but are not ready to buy yet. This helps the leads to learn more about the company's offering.
  - **Reminder email:** Follow-up with personalized reminder emails for leads who are looking at specific products, but not completing the purchase.

The **delight** stage is of utmost importance in making the customer to buy again and in transforming them into promoters of the brand. Eventhough the customer has already bought, the email marketing expertise needs to be presumed in order to delight the customer. (Wheatley 2 Feb 2016.) The most prominent email tactics to be used in this stage according to the literature research done by the author have been listed below.

Effective email marketing techniques and methods in the delight stage (Bicks 13 Feb 2018; Dent 28 Aug 2017; George 22 Dec 2017; Wheatley 2 Feb 2016):

- **Review of recent purchase:** Product/service reviews sent via email help to keep in touch and collect more valuable data of the customer.
- **Email workflows:** Set up series of automated marketing emails that enable to reach the customer several times after the purchase or after their interest in a particular product or service.
- **Customer service:** Keep customers happy with excellent customer service. Complement the customer's experience with an email customer service channel that helps to ensure that the customer gets the most out of the company's offering.
- **Send customer surveys:** Collect more customer feedback through customer surveys launched via email. The feedback can help the company to improve its services and content.
- **Collect more data for content personalization:** Do not stop data collection after the purchase. Ask more information of the customers to personalize the emails even more.
- **Encourage for referrals:** Encourage customers to refer to a friend via email. Offer e.g. coupons, discounts or loyalty points for the subscriber for every referral made.

### 3.6 Landing page optimization

Landing page is an entrance page to an organisation's website for visitors who click on an ad or a link of the landing page in a referring site. The landing page can be a company's homepage, however it is preferable to direct visitors to a page with a more focused offer.

The intention of the landing page is to maximize the conversion rate by turning as many visitors into leads as possible. (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick 2016, 386-387a.)

As landing pages are used for lead conversion, landing page optimization has a big emphasis specifically in the convert stage of the inbound methodology. In consequence, landing page as a single element serves the purpose to convert the visitor into a lead. Once the landing page has been turned into a conversion hub, it is truly working and doing its job. Properly speaking, well-managed landing page should only convert leads who are interested in the given offer, thus a non-focused homepage as the landing page is not a clever choice due to its universal nature. Landing pages are like side doors for the company's website and when the offer in it caters the needs of the visitor, she/he is ready to give up relevant information such as an email address by filling a contact form. Once this happens, the real conversation and the lead nurturing with a prospective customer can begin. (Probert 31 March 2016b.)

As mentioned, a well-optimized and structured landing page targets a specific audience. There are few various sources how this target audience is able to find the landing page including emails, search engines, pay-per-click ads, social media channels, direct and referral traffic. The visitor that has arrived in the landing page has clicked a Call-To-Action (CTA) button or text link, which is an ad encouraging to take action by clicking, in one of the above-mentioned sources. For instance, companies can promote their offers and content through a social media post and have a CTA in it to direct the traffic to its targeted landing page. The landing page where the visitor arrives to, should offer something of value. For example, companies can allow customers to download content offers e.g. ebooks, whitepapers, webinars etc. or redeem various marketing offers such as free trials, coupons, discounts or demos for its products. The visitor who is then interested to acquire this valuable offer or content is ready to fill out a conversion form to leave his/her contact details. This whole process of lead conversion through a landing page then brings forth a prospective customer who is interested in the company's offering, and thus has given a permission to be followed-up in the future. (Vaughan 27 Apr 2012b.)

Now it has been explained what a landing page is, how it works and why it should be optimized to master the inbound marketing. The next step covers the components of an effective landing page. This is to be unveiled in the next section followed by another essential element of landing page that deserves an own section i.e. Call-to-actions.

### 3.6.1 Components of landing pages

Landing pages are designed to convert visitors into leads. In consequence, it is of utmost importance to understand how to form an effective landing page that actually converts. (Anderson Miller, S. 2015, 296-297.) Below have been listed the most important components of landing pages according to inbound marketing experts.

Key components of effective landing pages (Anderson Miller 2015, 296-297; Vaughan 27 Apr 2012b):

- ✓ **Unique offer:** This is the essence why the visitor is on the landing page in the first place
- ✓ **Directive headline:** Include a benefit statement to clearly instruct how the visitor should proceed
- ✓ **Focused copy:** The text of the landing page should explain clearly, succinctly and in a compelling manner the value of the offer e.g. bullet points can be utilized to list the takeaways
- ✓ **Lead capture / conversion form:** This is the most critical component of landing page, where visitors submit their contact details in exchange for the offer
- ✓ **Graphic representation of the offer:** Include a tangible image of the offer to make the landing page visually more attractive
- ✓ **Hidden site navigation:** Eliminate the possible navigation bar from the landing page to prevent any possible nonconversions
- ✓ **Social sharing buttons:** Include clickable social sharing buttons in the landing page to enable visitors to easily share the landing page in their own social networking platforms, which ultimately broadens the reach of the landing page
- ✓ **Social proof point:** Include a social proof point such as a customer testimonial or review to strengthen the value proposition
- ✓ **Post-conversion “Thank you” email:** Send a “Thank you” email for an immediate reengagement opportunity

### 3.6.2 Call-to-actions

As the name suggests, a call-to-action is an actionable button in a webpage that has been encoded with a link. Its idea is to inspire and encourage a prospective lead to take an action and it has an important correlation with landing pages. By clicking it, a person will consciously move to the landing page where conversion from a visitor into lead can happen. As a consequence, the person will move forward in the respective company’s sales funnel and at the same time she/he shows interest towards the brand. (Probert 28 March 2016c.) Even including a CTA in the landing page itself is highly essential as noted earlier in the components of landing pages section.

A call-to-action button is made to induce a favourable response. This button should trigger a sense of enthusiasm and interest in the person scrolling page. To cause this action in the prospective lead, 3 variants needs to be taken into consideration in the creation of the

button, which are wording, aesthetics and position of the button in the page. (Probert 28 March 2016c.) The explanations of their relevance are given below.

3 key components to consider when designing call-to-actions according to Clwyd Probert, the CEO & founder of Whitehat Inbound marketing Agency (28 March 2016c):

- **Wording:** The wording needs to entice the reader to take the desired action. In order to get most of the text, it should speak in the first person, include trigger words such as “download”, “register” and “get”, and be no more than five words. Figure 9 below demonstrates CTA’s with effective wording.
- **Aesthetics:** As buttons come in all shapes, sizes and colours, it should be fitted to the space where it exists. As for the colour, contrasting colours work well whilst ensuring that it fits to the overall style is important. Internal testing in a company can help to decide the right colour. After choosing the colour, the size of the button needs to be pondered. A rule-of-thumb here is to remember that the button should stand out and draw attention, however too large ones can seem intimidating.
- **Position:** The position of the button needs to flow naturally in a way that its relevant to the context of the page and can be easily seen by reader.



Figure 9. CTA examples with encouraging text (Reproduced from Overgaard 1 May 2013)

By leveraging these guidelines gained in this section from marketing experts, a company can produce compelling and encouraging CTAs. As mentioned earlier in the section, with the help of effective CTAs, the company gets more relevant traffic to its landing pages, which assists in lead generation. Hence, CTA optimization for landing pages is a vital part of the whole inbound marketing process.

## **4 Empirical part**

The empirical part comprises of the research methods used for the completion of this thesis. The research methods utilized, a semi-structured interview and an online survey are introduced, justified and analysed in this chapter. The results of the research methods are then leveraged in the construction of the inbound marketing guideline to make it more targeted for the downhill skier customer segment and to consolidate the validity and necessity of the product.

### **4.1 Qualitative research**

Qualitative research is a data collection method that studies participant's meanings and the relationships between them, and in consequence does not intend to produce numerical data as the quantitative research method. The data collection happens e.g. in the form of semi-structure interviews, in-depth interviews, observations and diary accounts. Qualitative research method is a subjective method, as the researcher needs to interpret and make socially constructed meanings of the subjects being studied. Furthermore, it is a non-standardised technique as the questions and procedures may alter during the research process, which is naturalistic and interactive by nature. (Lewis, Saunder & Thornhill 2015, 165-168.)

For the contribution of the product, the inbound marketing funnel, a qualitative research method i.e. a semi-structured interview was conducted. The output of the interview helps to understand the respondent's preferences concerning the subject matters, which are downhill skiing and downhill skiing travelling.

#### **4.1.1 Introduction**

As the purpose of this thesis is to construct a working inbound marketing guideline for the case company Elämysmatkat and apply it specifically for a customer segment. Due to this, a buyer persona was needed to be produced and a target customer segment was selected. The target segment selected under scrutiny was the downhill skiers. The selection of the customer segment came from the fact that Elämysmatkat provides downhill skiing holiday trips abroad, which constitutes a big share of its business operation and service catalogue. Due to this, the application of this target segment for the thesis was proposed to Elämysmatkat, which accepted the proposition of the author. Hence, an interview with an Elämysmatkat customer of this target segment was required to be held.

The objective of the interview was to gain profound understanding of the needs, wants, desires, challenges and online behaviour of this customer type. As have been mentioned earlier in the thesis, for Elämymatkat and all the companies executing inbound marketing, it is crucial to be familiar with their customers, as by knowing a specific customer segment, better inbound marketing and content that meets the customer needs can be delivered. On the basis of the thorough understanding of the downhill skier customer type, the applicability, relevance and validity of the formed inbound funnel is more well-grounded and effective. The application of the persona into the inbound marketing funnel enables more personalized online interaction with this segment, which increases the chances of attracting more relevant and targeted traffic to Elämymatkat webpages, converting more visitors and leads into customers, and ultimately into the promoters of the company. (Vaughan 28 May 2015a.)

To form the buyer persona for downhill skier customers, a semi-structured phone interview was held. For the selection of the interviewee, Elämymatkat made enquiries for its selected downhill skier customers of their willingness to participate in the interview. A voluntary downhill skier customer agreed to take part in the interview. Thereupon, the company informed the author of this thesis of the voluntary customer and gave her contact details to schedule the interview. In consequence, the interviewee was contacted first via email to agree on the time of the interview and to inform of the purpose of it. The anonymity and confidentiality of the interview was also communicated and agreed that a fictitious name is to be used for the buyer persona.

The semi-structured 13-minute interview with over 20 open-ended questions was held on the 20<sup>th</sup> of June. The interview question form that can be found from the appendices of this thesis. The interview contained 5 relevant categories (1. Activities and skiing habits, 2. Motives and interests, 3. Goals and dreams, 4. Challenges and worries & 5. Online activity) together with the demographic information (i.e. gender, age, geographic location, occupation, yearly income, marital status) that were all included in order to describe the main characteristics of the buyer persona. In addition, the open-ended questions enabled the interviewee to give elaborate answers, which would eventually be used in the completed buyer persona.

In the following section, the author of this thesis exposes the research questions of the interview. To conclude the qualitative research phase, the outcome of the interview is provided with the constructed buyer persona done on the basis of model introduced in chapter 2.2.

#### 4.1.2 Research questions

The interview questions were formed on the basis of research questions. The purpose here is that the outcomes of the interview give answers for the established research questions. On the other hand, the research questions consist of a main research question and three sub-questions, which give answers to the main research question. The research questions of the interview are listed below.

##### **Main research questions:**

- “What kind of key attributes does an ideal downhill skier possess that Elämysmatkat should take into account?”

##### **The sub questions that will answer the main research question:**

- “What kind of activities and habits does an ideal persona possess in regards to downhill skiing?”
- “What kind of motives, goals and challenges does an ideal persona have in terms of downhill skiing and skiing holidays?”
- “What kind of online activity does an ideal persona possess in terms of downhill skiing holidays?”

The first sub-question is answered in the first category, i.e. **activities** and **skiing habits**, of the interview. The second sub-question in turn is answered on the basis of the 2<sup>nd</sup> category (**motives & interests**), 3<sup>rd</sup> category (**goals & dreams**) and 4<sup>th</sup> category (**challenges & worries**) of interview questions. The last sub-question is this way answered with the 5<sup>th</sup> category, i.e. **online activity** in terms skiing holidays, of the interview. In addition to these questions, in the actual interview the demographic information of the interviewee was asked. However, this is not included in the sub-questions due to its individualized nature, but it is still important part of the buyer persona.

#### 4.1.3 Buyer persona of a downhill skier

As mentioned several times in this thesis, the purpose of the semi-structured phone interview was to get in-depth information of a downhill skier customer segment, and then apply the information gained by forming a fictional buyer persona, which is based on facts. In this chapter, the interview analysis and complete buyer persona that answers to the main research question is exposed.

The downhill skier person that was interviewed was 36 years old female from Espoo Finland. The persona who works as a sales manager with yearly income of 70 000€ was given a fictional name Daniela for the respect of the anonymity. Below are covered di-

verse themes and subjects from the interview with the focus on downhill skiing and downhill skiing travelling meaning that all themes such as the challenges and worries exclude all the concerns outside the topic of downhill skiing.

As can be seen from figure 10, which presents the complete buyer persona of a typical Elämysmatkat downhill skier customer on the basis of the interview, Daniela enjoys sporty, fast and competitive activities, which are well aligned with her favourite hobbies i.e. road bicycle racing and snowboarding. She is extremely fond of snowboarding that she had over 30 skiing days last year. During those days she participated in total of 4 downhill skiing trips in Finland and abroad. Furthermore, she does not mind skiing alone, but prefers having company.

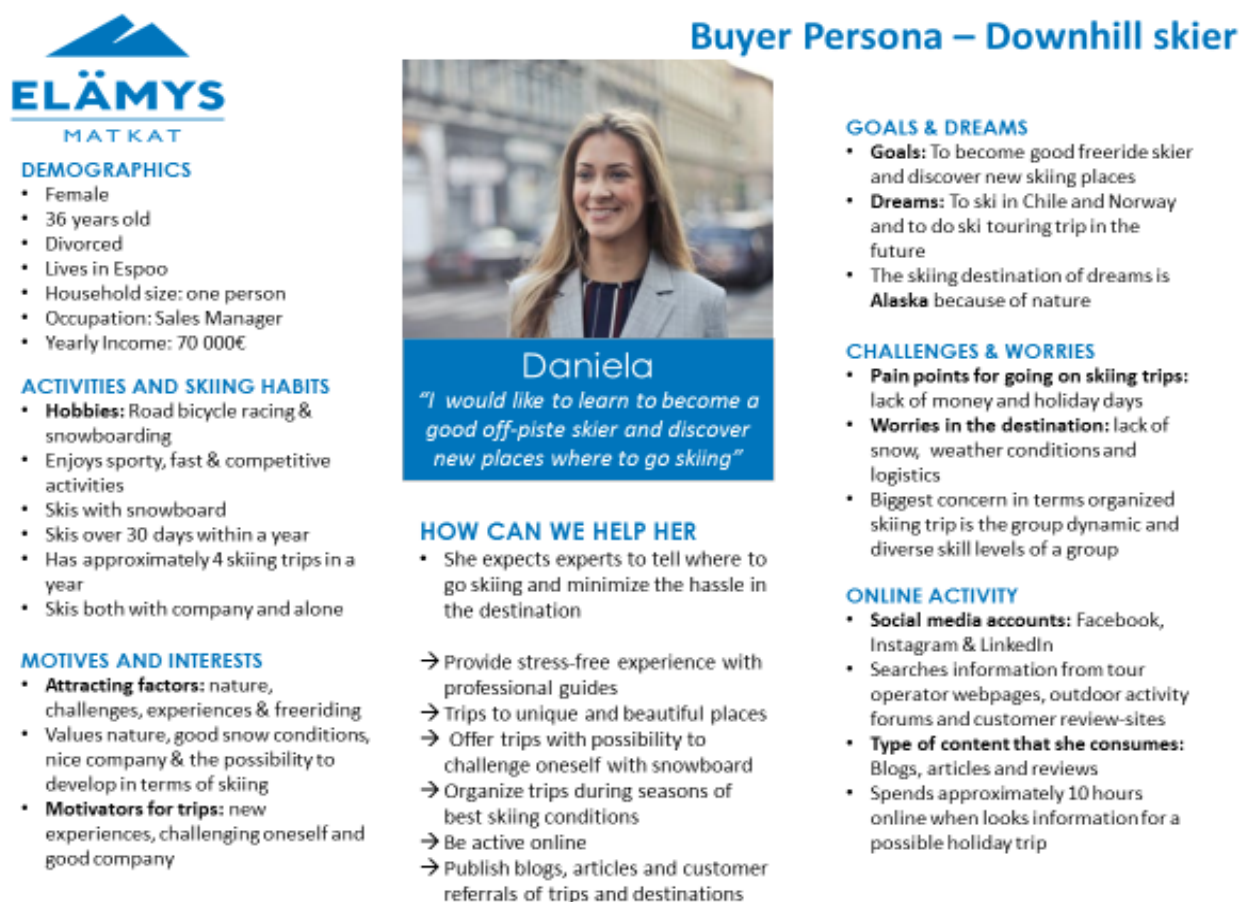


Figure 10. Buyer persona of the downhill skier customer segment (Pippi 2018)

When asked what motives and interests she has in terms of downhill skiing and downhill skiing travelling, the aspects that appeal to her are especially freeriding, new challenges and experiences, and the nature. Regarding downhill skiing and her method of doing it i.e. snowboarding, she values the nature, good snow conditions, nice company and the possibility to develop and become even better in the hobby. Very similar factors motivate



her to go on a downhill skiing trip. The motivating factors for this persona include new experiences, the possibility to challenge herself and the fact of having good company in the trips.

She is also clear with her goals and dreams concerning downhill skiing and downhill skiing holidays. Her goals are to become a good off-piste skier in the future and to discover new beautiful skiing places. In respect of her dreams about the hobby, she dreams to travel to Chile and Norway, and is also dreaming of doing ski touring one day. However, as the biggest skiing destination of her dreams, she mentions Alaska, as the nature of the place is strikingly fascinating and the fact that it is not easily reachable makes it intrigue for her. As the biggest concern over her hobby, she thinks that the lack of money and available holidays are the factors hampering of doing the sport. With more resources available, she would be able to do it more often. In terms of the downhill skiing destinations, the most worrying things in her opinion are the possibility for lack of snow, weather conditions and the local logistics. When asked how tour operators can alleviate the concerns in the trips, she states that by improving the group dynamics and balancing with the diverse skill levels of other skiers in the group. According to her, those are the most common concerns that tour operators can tackle in ski trips.

Due to the fact that the buyer persona is made to assist in targeting the inbound marketing efforts for skier customer segment, the online activity of the person was asked. In fact, Daniela has three active social media accounts: Facebook, Instagram & LinkedIn. Facebook and Instagram are clearly more casual and informal platforms concentrating on leisure time, and in LinkedIn she is certainly more professional-oriented. According to the interview, Daniela seeks downhill skiing holiday related information from webpages, mainly from tour operator webpages, but even from outdoor activity forums such as relaa.com and customer review-sites e.g. Tripadvisor. In these channels, she consumes various forms of content for instance blogs, articles and customer reviews, which have an influence on her decision making. The time that she spends on searching for information regarding the trips and destinations of interests is approximately 10 hours per trip.

On the basis of all these factors, it is important to ponder how Elämymatkat can help the persona to make her satisfied and turn her into a promoter of the company. Above all, according to the interview she expects the tour operator professionals to take full control of the trips to minimize all the hassle that would otherwise occur when travelling independently without a tour operator. When booking tour operator trips, the persona anticipates having a stress-free experience on the account of the professionalism of the com-

pany employees. Another aspect that this persona expects from the company is organizing trips to unique and beautiful places during the seasons of best snow and weather conditions to ensure the best possible downhill skiing conditions. The persona also requires freeriding trips where challenging oneself with the snowboard is possible. Lastly, as Daniela spends great amount of time when being interest in a destination or trip, Elämymatkat needs to be active with publishing the content types, i.e. blogs, articles and customer referrals, that best suit the needs and preferences of the persona.

## **4.2 Quantitative research**

Quantitative research is a data collection method that objectively examines relationships between variables, which are measured numerically and analysed by using range of statistical and graphical techniques. Data collection techniques such as questionnaires that generate or use numerical data are all considered as quantitative research. In quantitative research methods the researcher is seen as an independent from the respondents. This ensures that an objective outcome will be gained. (Lewis, Saunder & Thornhill 2015, 165-168.)

For the implementation of the final product, a quantitative research method i.e. online survey was used. The reason for launching the online survey was to gain an objective opinion from respondents, i.e. the prospective and existing customers of Elämymatkat, to understand where and how they prefer to interact with the company at different stages of their digital buyer's journey. As a consequence, with this information at hand the author was able to apply it to the final product of the thesis.

### **4.2.1 Introduction**

Because the thesis idea is to form an inbound marketing funnel as an online marketing guideline, it is not enough to base the marketing techniques and tactics in it solely according to a desktop study. It is required to study what kind of online preferences and behaviour do typical Elämymatkat customers have during their digital customer journey.

Namely that refers to where online the prospective and current customers prefer to engage and interact with the company, and what kind of content they prefer to consume during diverse stages of the customer journey. The questions aim to provide answers for the implementation of the final product, the inbound marketing funnel, and its stages; attract, convert, close and delight. To get answers on these matters, approximately 7-minute long online survey was conducted for the population of this study, the Elämymatkat newsletter subscribers, whom consist of current and prospective customers. The sampling method

used for the survey was simple random sampling as all respondents had the same probability of participating to the survey.

The commissioning company wanted to ground the survey on the basis of its newsletter subscribers to add reliability into the conclusions and outcomes. Although, due to the limited amount of downhill skier newsletter subscribers, the survey was sent to all subscribers of Elämymatkat to get a bigger reach. Eventhough most probably not all respondents of the online survey were downhill skiers, presumably all the people possess similar characteristics, i.e. being adventurous, activity-driven, thrill and experience seekers, as the company aims to provide and produce unforgettable activity-driven experiences for its customers as referred in the beginning of the thesis. In consequence, the fact of respondents' similar characteristics enables and validates the application of the answers for the inbound marketing funnel.

Moreover, the validity of the survey was pretested with a pilot survey conducted in the research and innovation methods -module at school, which took place two months before the start of the thesis. This pre-tested survey, which did not include a target company, had similar questions and was tested among students of the module. The pre-testing was a crucial part of the construction of the actual survey, as it gave indications of how to modify the survey.

The actual 14-question survey, which can be found from the appendices of the thesis, had only multiple-choice questions, but few questions included scaling basis. The survey that was targeted to improve and help to optimize the online customer journey of Elämymatkat prospective and current customers had two key themes that formed the questions; **digital channel** and **content** preferences of the respondents during the digital buyer's journey. These themes assisted the author to construct questions that would reveal the online preferences of the respondents. In addition, the questions 4-14 were all formed on the basis of the stages of the inbound methodology. Hence, all stages were covered in the form of questions from attracting the customer to making one a promoter of the company. The structure of the questions is further explained in the next section 4.2.2.

The survey was scheduled to start on the 9<sup>th</sup> of May. As a consequence, Elämymatkat sent a newsletter for its subscribers on the 9<sup>th</sup> of May, where the survey and the company's skiing holiday packages were promoted in the same newsletter. The participation to the survey were stimulated with a price defined by Elämymatkat. The price to be won was Salomon's, i.e. sport clothing brand, product package worth of 200€, and it was given to the winner on the basis of a raffle. The ending date for the survey was scheduled to be

the 25<sup>th</sup> of May. In over two weeks answering time the sample turned out to be 54 respondents, whom took part into the survey.

In the next section, the research questions relevant to the survey are unveiled. Subsequently, the analysis of survey results are explained.

#### **4.2.2 Research questions**

This part covers the research questions that were elaborated to form the basis for the online survey. The main research question and sub-question are all listed below. By providing answers for the sub-questions with the help of the survey results, the main research question can be answered. In addition, each survey question is categorized inside the sub-question in the text below.

##### **The main research question:**

- “How can Elämysmatkat optimize and improve its entire digital buyer’s journey with correct digital channel presence and content marketing?”

##### **The sub-questions:**

- “What different digital channels do the prospective and current customers prefer during the various stages of the customer journey?”
- “What type of digital content do the prospective and current customers prefer consuming during their customer journey?”
- “What kind of marketing content can help to consolidate the brand-customer relationship?”

The first three questions of the survey were general segmentation questions of the prospective and current customers, and therefore these questions did not intend to answer on the sub-questions. The following questions, number 4, 5, 7, 8 & 9 were related to the digital channel preferences of the respondents. As a consequence, these questions aimed to provide responses for the first sub-question. The questions 10 & 11 had the emphasis on the content published with clear indication to give answers for the second sub-question. Furthermore, question number 6 had the purpose to reveal the current state of satisfaction of the customer service and content published on digital channels. Thus it correlates between both the first and second sub-question. The last sub-question was answered with the final questions of the survey; number 12, 13 and 14. These questions provided solutions on how to consolidate the brand-customer relationship.

### **4.2.3 Analysis of outcomes**

In this section of the thesis, the survey results are analysed. All the questions are gone through, the relevance in terms of the inbound methodology are explained and the results are exposed. However, only the results that are relevant and significant in terms of the survey and thesis are brought up. With the help of the outcome analysis of the online survey, the author was able to produce the inbound marketing funnel for Elämymatkat, answer to the main research question and back up the theory of inbound marketing explained earlier in the thesis.

The total sample of the survey was 54 respondents. From the total respondents, 3 respondents were aged 18-29 years, 20 were aged 30-45 years, 18 were aged 46-59 years and 13 were over 60 years old. This means that majority (37%) of the respondents were 30-45 years old. The gender distribution of the respondents was 26% female and 74% male indicating that not all the answers are from the men's perspective.

As noted earlier that the survey was sent to the newsletter subscribers i.e. prospective customers and current customers of Elämymatkat. Due to this, the author of the thesis wanted to know what proportion have not or have been in Elämymatkat trips and if have, how many times. From the sample 48% have not been in a single trip, which signifies that almost half of the respondents are potential customers. The rest have all been in a trip organized by Elämymatkat and the percentages are following: 19% have been once, 17% have been twice, 7% have been 3-4 times and 9% have more than 4 times.

#### **Digital channel preferences**

In question 4 the respondents were asked; if they had been in Elämymatkat trip, which digital channels they had used for booking and searching the trip. This question had the intention to unveil which channels owned by Elämymatkat, i.e. website, email, Facebook & Instagram, the current customers had previously used when searching and booking the trip. In terms of the inbound methodology, the question is associated with the attract and convert stages.

The respondents were able to select as many options as they had used from the given selection. The 54 respondents gave 76 answers in total. By far the most used channel was website as over half of the respondents had used it during the searching and booking stage. If not taken into account those who have not been in Elämymatkat trip before, the second most answered option and most used digital channel was email as more than a

third of the respondents had used it. The Elämysmatkat social media channels (Facebook & Instagram) were not in popular use among respondents as only 7% had used Facebook and nobody had used Instagram in the searching and booking stage of the trip. Furthermore, 4% of the population had not used any digital channels when becoming Elämysmatkat customer.

The question 5 discloses the Elämysmatkat digital channel where respondents had spent the most time regarding their last Elämysmatkat trip. Hence, it covers all the stages of inbound funnel. From the channels that were used by the respondents, the website dominated as almost half (48%) had spent the most time in there. The minority of the respondents who had been in Elämysmatkat trip before had preferred and spent more time in other digital channels. Email received 13% and Facebook only 4% of people, whom had spent most time in those two digital channels in regards to their previous Elämysmatkat trip. The rest of the respondents had not been in any Elämysmatkat trip or had used any digital channels in terms of the trip.

When considered the popularity of social media, these numbers from questions 4 and 5 state the fact that Elämysmatkat social media platforms are currently used very little by its current customers. These social media usage proportions ought to be increased, and can be done with remarkable content that is timely, relevant and contextual as referred earlier in the content marketing chapter.

The question 6 was targeted for both the potential and current customers and it had the purpose to assess the current satisfactory level of the respondents for the essential content and customer service received in the Elämysmatkat digital channels. Each channel was being evaluated. From all the platforms, the respondents were most satisfied with the website. 17% were very satisfied and 70% satisfied with Elämysmatkat website activity, and the rest were not sure of being either satisfied or dissatisfied. Respondents were also rather happy with how email communication has been practised as in total 82% were either satisfied or very satisfied and the rest were not sure. Similarly as question 5, the question did not intend to receive answers for a particular inbound methodology stage, rather for all stages.

As for the current satisfactory level of the social media channels administered by Elämysmatkat, i.e. Facebook and Instagram, the opinions from question 6 were really scattered. With respect to Facebook, 4% declared to be dissatisfied and 57% were unsure of being happy or dissatisfied with it. However, 7% voted of being very satisfied and 31% voted of

being satisfied with the customer service and essential content delivered in there. Instagram on the other hand got even more divided answers, as in total 6% were either dissatisfied or really disappointed, 81% were unsure and only 13% were either satisfied or really satisfied with its activity. The huge deviation of the numbers concerning both channels, denotes that an improvement in the social media activity should be targeted. According to the results, many people are unsure of their satisfactory level in regards to Elämysmatkat social media channels, which can be a sign that these respondents have not followed Elämysmatkat actively on social media. Principally the reason why people do not follow a channel is because it lacks meaningful content that resonates to one's needs and wants.

In question 7, all 54 participants of the survey were asked what digital channels they would prefer when searching for a trip, thus providing answers regarding the attract, convert and close stages. It differs from the question 4 as the question 7 concentrated to discover what digital channels they would prefer in the search phase instead of what they had used before with Elämysmatkat. The respondents were also asked to prioritize the answers on a scale of 1-3 with 1<sup>st</sup> answer being the most preferred channel and so forth. The results are displayed in figure 11 below with the answer shares of each channel. The proportions of respondents that selected a particular channel as 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> choice as preferred channel for searching a trip are illustrated in the figure 11 by coloured bars. Furthermore, all answers of the respondents (n=162) are similarly shown in the figure with purple bar to give a better picture of which channels got the most selections when taken into account all the votes disregarding the order of importance.

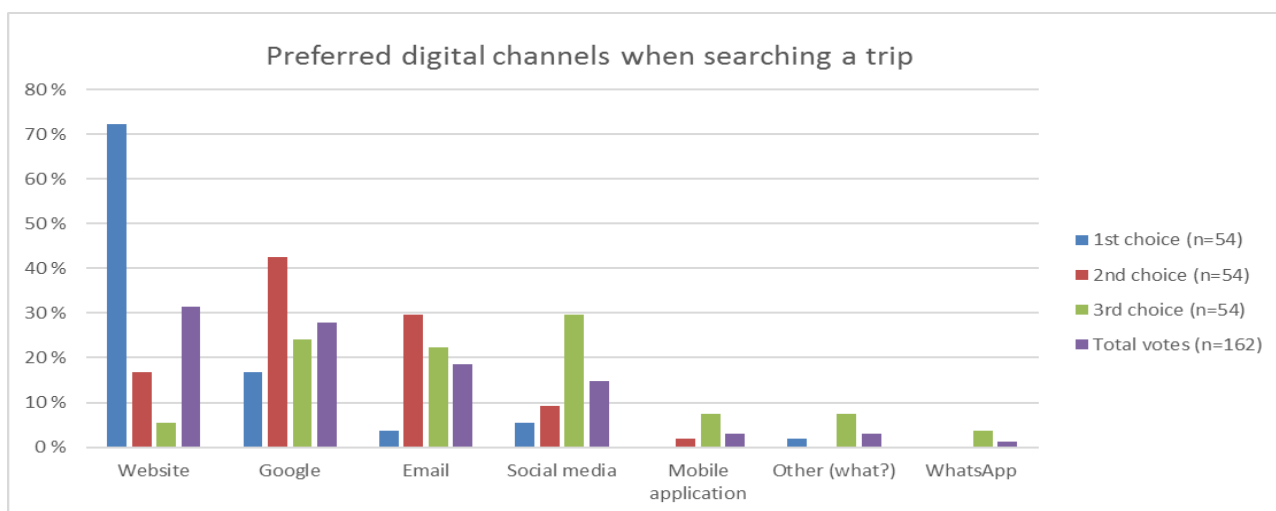


Figure 11. Respondents' preferred digital channels when searching a trip by %

According to the results easily the most preferred channel to search for a trip is website, as over 70% selected it as the first choice. Surprisingly only 17% thought Google as the

most preferred digital channel to start searching for the trip. The other platforms did not receive notable shares as the first choice.

As the second choice, Google was regarded as the most important digital channel when searching a trip with a 43% support. The proportions of the other channels were as follows: email 30%, website 17%, social media 9% and mobile application 2%. From these numbers can be noted that even though Google did not receive a big share as the 1<sup>st</sup> choice, it is an extremely crucial platform where answers to the questions of people need to be given. Moreover, as mentioned earlier in the theoretical part, being prominent in Google directs people to one's website via a landing page where the relevant information is shared.

The answers of the 3<sup>rd</sup> most preferred choice as a digital channel for searching a trip were really scattered. Social media got the biggest share (30%), which indicates its importance as being very influential in providing relevant information when considering going on a trip and holiday. In addition to social media, many answers were given to Google (24%) and email (22%). The rest did not receive significant numbers as the 3<sup>rd</sup> preferred choice.

The question 7 received in total 162 answers, and the total answer distribution plays also very vital role in determining the importance and popularity of digital channels when searching information of a trip. The answer distribution of all answers does not indicate the order of importance, however it gives indication which channels are heavily used in this phase. The answer distribution went as follows: website 31%, Google 28%, email 19% and social media 15%. It can be said that these four digital platforms are the ones that people prefer in this stage. Hence, providing information and answers in these channels are able to stimulate people further in their buying journey. The rest of the choices and other answers typed by the respondents received so little shares that they are not significant in terms of this study.

In question 8 the participants of the survey were asked in which social media channels they would prefer to hear from Elämysmatkat and its offerings. The answer choices were Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, Snapchat, WhatsApp, Pinterest and other channels defined by the respondent. Similarly in this question all the respondents needed to scale the preferred social media platforms from 1-3 in a manner that the first option is the most preferred one. As the channels are relevant in each stage of the inbound funnel, the question did not seek answers for a specific stage.



The results of the question are shown in the table 3 below in such a way that the channels are listed in rows and the scaling options in columns. To help demonstrating the results, a colouring method was used; green colour depicts the biggest share of each column, yellow depicts the second biggest and light blue depicts the third biggest.

Table 3. The best social media channels for Elämysmatkat by % on a scaling basis of 1-3 (n=54)

Social media channels	% of 1st choice	% of 2nd choice	% of 3rd choice
Facebook	63 %	9 %	6 %
Instagram	7 %	41 %	24 %
Twitter	4 %	7 %	26 %
YouTube	11 %	31 %	26 %
Snapchat	0 %	0 %	0 %
WhatsApp	9 %	11 %	11 %
Pinterest	0 %	0 %	2 %
Other (what?)	6 %	0 %	6 %

As can be seen from the table above, Facebook is the most essential and effective social media channel to interact with potential and existing customers. 63% of the respondents consider it as the most preferred channel to hear from Elämysmatkat. Also other channels have been selected as the first option, but the percentages have been rather little compared to Facebook, YouTube being in the second highest place to hear as the first option with a support of 11%.

As the second choice, the respondents preferred Instagram as being the most preferred social media channel to hear from Elämysmatkat. After Instagram's support of 41%, many of the respondents (31%) thought YouTube is the second most important and preferred place to be in contact and get updates from Elämysmatkat.

According to the outcomes of the most preferred choices, it is obvious that Facebook and Instagram are the social media channels where Elämysmatkat wants to be heard, and as a consequence needs to influence in. However, the third preferred choice also shows interesting data of which channels are meaningful for Elämysmatkat potential and existing customers. As can be noted from the third-choice column, Twitter and YouTube got both 26% being the two most preferred channels as the third most important channel. However, given the fact that YouTube appeared in third place in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> columns, it can be stated to be the third most influential channel to reach Elämysmatkat customers over Twitter.

In addition, it is imperative to remark that WhatsApp gained the third most answers in each of the columns. On the basis of this, we can draw a conclusion that it could well be used as a communication platform between the customers and the brand to enhance the interaction throughout their customer lifecycle. The rest of the social media channels received low shares among respondents, and hence are not considered to be effective enough for the operation of Elämymatkat social media marketing.

The last question concerning the digital channels was question number 9. The purpose was to find out in which digital channels would the potential and current customers prefer to communicate, discuss and interact with Elämymatkat. As communication denotes two-way dialogue, the question intended to give answers for convert, close and delight stages, where discussion, correspondence and interaction is more apparent and relevant than in the attract phase of the inbound methodology. A similar scaling basis from 1-3 preferred options was used for giving the answers as in the questions 7 and 8. Figure 12 below shows the answer distribution of this question.

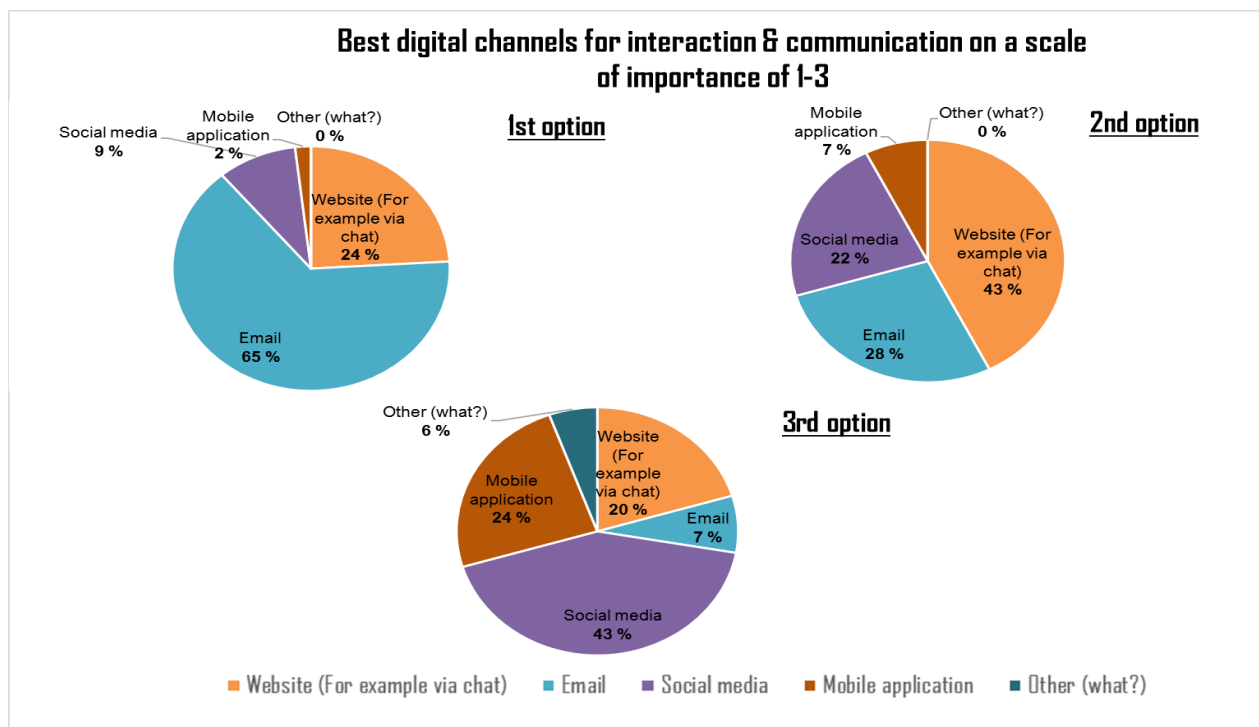


Figure 12. The best digital channels for communication and interaction as % of total answers (n=54)

The outcomes show that the majority of the respondents (65%) favour to use email as a number one platform to interact and communicate with Elämymatkat. This is by far the most popular channel albeit 24% of the population think website is the best option as a channel for two-way communication. Unexpectedly only 9% consider social media as the best choice to communicate with Elämymatkat. This can be by virtue of the fact that even

57% of the respondents are over 46 years old, and this generation is usually less prone to use social media channels (Chaffey 28 Marc 2018b).

As the second most important option for a dialogue with Elämysmatkat, the majority of the respondents (43%) have answered the website. Even in this category email has received a big portion of 28%, which further underpins the fact of being the most used communication and interaction platform among potential and existing Elämysmatkat customers. 22% of the population thought that social networking platforms are the second most important digital channel.

From 3<sup>rd</sup> option of the pie chart, can be noted that social media was answered to be the third best platform to have a conversation with Elämysmatkat with a proportion of 43%. Many people (24%) also considered that mobile application, which Elämysmatkat does not currently have, is a good and customer-friendly option to interact with a company. The other choices mentioned by the respondents in this category did not receive many votes. As a consequence, they do not play a high significance in terms of the outcome analysis.

To conclude the analysis of this question. The top three ranking of the most effective communication and interaction platforms for potential and current Elämysmatkat customers are 1. Email, 2. Website and 3. Social media channels.

### **The digital content preferences**

With question 10, the purpose was to find out what kind of digital content is desired and wanted to be published by Elämysmatkat. The question wanted to disclose the benefits that potential and existing customers are seeking from the content. It disregarded the position of the respondent in the inbound funnel, so its answers are applicable in all of the stages. The answer options were pre-defined, however the respondents were able to type own answer if the pre-defined answers were not satisfying. Nevertheless, only the pre-defined answers were selected by the respondents. The respondents were able to pick maximum of 2 options. This resulted in 103 answers in total. Figure 13 below depicts the shares of the answers as percentages.

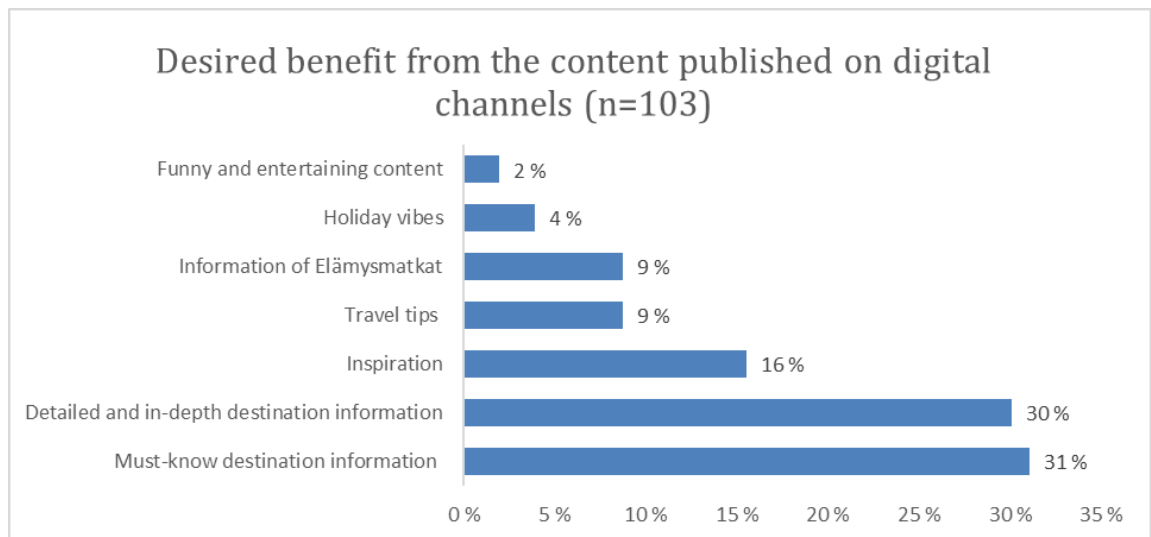


Figure 13. The % share of total answers of the benefits that potential and existing customers expect to obtain from the digital content of Elämymatkat (n=103)

The outcomes show that with 31% must-know information of a trip, e.g. culture essentials and activity possibilities, is the most sought-after content that Elämymatkat can publish on its digital platforms. Almost the same amount of people (30%) thought that detailed and in-depth information of a destination is also very valuable benefit to gain from content. This type of content, e.g. an ebook that covers the local history or best restaurants of the destination to eat local food, goes under the surface and provides more than the essential information. The third most answered benefit was inspiration with 16%, which serves the purpose to inspire and encourage people to do something in the future. The rest of the answer distribution was as follows: travel tips (e.g. packing tips) 9%, information of Elämymatkat 9%, holiday vibes 4%, and lastly funny and entertaining content 2%.

When the nature of the content that is desired and wanted to be consumed by the potential and existing customers was researched and hence is now aware. It was essential to survey what form of content is meaningful and relevant for the population when they ponder to participate an Elämysmatkat trip. The question 11 examines the type of content that underpins the buying decision, and hence helps Elämysmatkat to receive answers on the attract, convert and close stages of the inbound methodology. The question contained 11 pre-defined answers and one alternative where own answer was able to be given. In total 145 responses were collected from the question, as maximum of three alternatives were able to be selected by each respondent. Figure 14 below illustrates the meaningful and essential content when considering participating an Elämysmatkat trip by percentages of total answers.

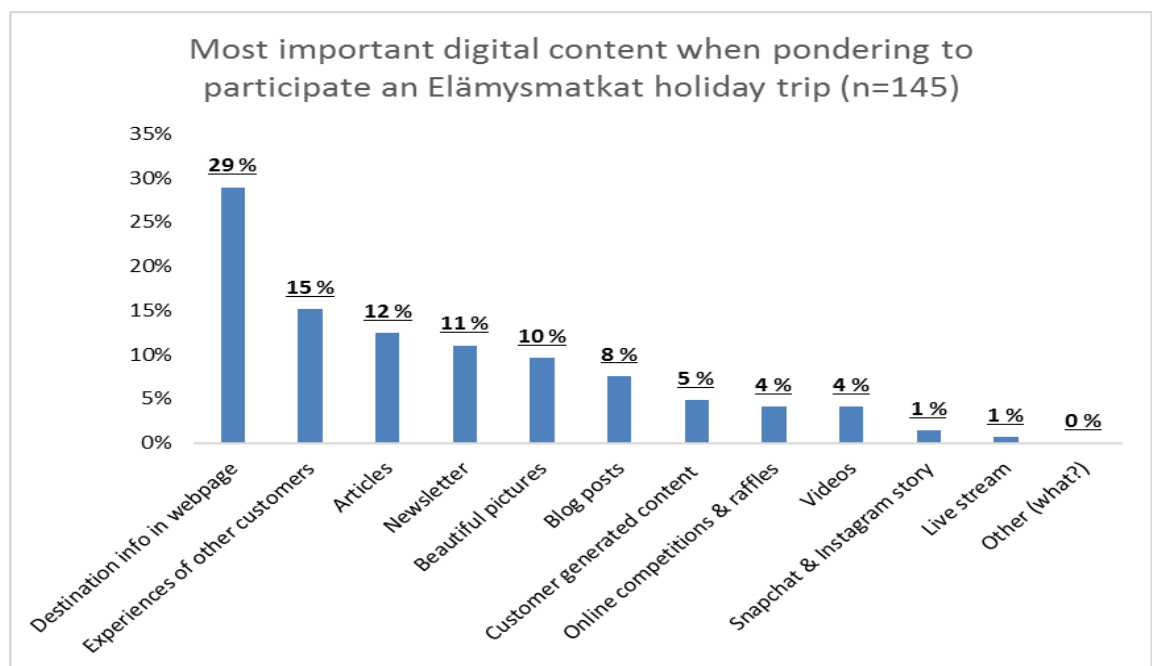


Figure 14. The most relevant digital content when pondering to participate an Elämysmatkat holiday trip as % of total answers (n=145)

On the basis of the survey results, can be stated that most potential and existing customers of Elämysmatkat rely on destination info as the most meaningful and essential content in the consideration and buying phase of the holiday trip. Destination info in the webpage got 29% of the total votes, which means that almost a third of respondents use this information before leaving on a trip. The answer shares of the other alternatives were much lower, which underpins the importance of the destination information.

The second most essential piece of content before the trip is the experience of other customers, which obtained 15% of the answers. This type of content, e.g. a referral, is really meaningful as people principally trust more on other customers' past experiences than the

brands promotional message itself (Duskin 31 July 2017). There is magnitude of forms that referrals appear in digital channels e.g. online word-of-mouth referrals, videos, online reviews and social media recommendations just to name a few (Myers 28 Mar 2017).

The other popular content types that potential and current customers prefer when pondering to take part in holiday trip are articles (12%), newsletters (11%), beautiful pictures (10%) and blog posts (8%). All of these answers received over 10 votes from the total of 145. By utilizing and applying these content types well together with the website info and other customers' experiences, Elämysmatkat can encourage and entice the potential customers to join a trip and make its existing customers to buy again.

The rest of the options did not receive big shares in terms of the respondents' preferences. However, the lack of young respondents of 18-29 years old (only 6%) in the survey might have had an influence regarding the low support for customer-generated content, online competitions & raffles, videos, Snapchat & Instagram stories, and live streams. The unpopularity of these content types in the pre-trip phase was a slight surprise for the author. The result could have been different with more equal age diversity of the respondents.

### **Online customer-brand relationship building preferences**

From the question 12 onwards, the questions were related to customer-brand relationship building and consolidation with the help of digital content. The questions in this category are relevant in terms of the delight stage of the inbound methodology. In these questions, all the respondents needed to regard themselves as being a customer of Elämysmatkat.

In question 12 the participants were asked if they expect to receive more personalized customer service, e.g. customized content, in the digital channels as a customer than before the start of the customer relationship. The respondents were given 4 options to choose from, which were absolutely, somewhat, not sure and no I do not. The share of each answers was as follows: absolutely 8%, somewhat 48%, not sure 17% and no I do not 20%. These numbers indicate that most respondents (56%) expect to receive better or somewhat better customer service online than before becoming a customer of the company. Only fifth of the respondents consider that potential and existing customers should be served equally and 17% do not have an opinion on it.

In question 13, the potential and existing customers were asked what they consider to be the most important benefit in terms of digital customer service that they are able to receive

as a customer of Elämymatkat. All respondents were given only one option to choose from the pre-defined answer alternatives. Although, by selecting the “other” option, an own answer was able to be typed. From figure 14 below, one can see the answer distribution of the benefits that the 54 respondents consider the most important regarding the online customer service received as a customer of Elämymatkat.

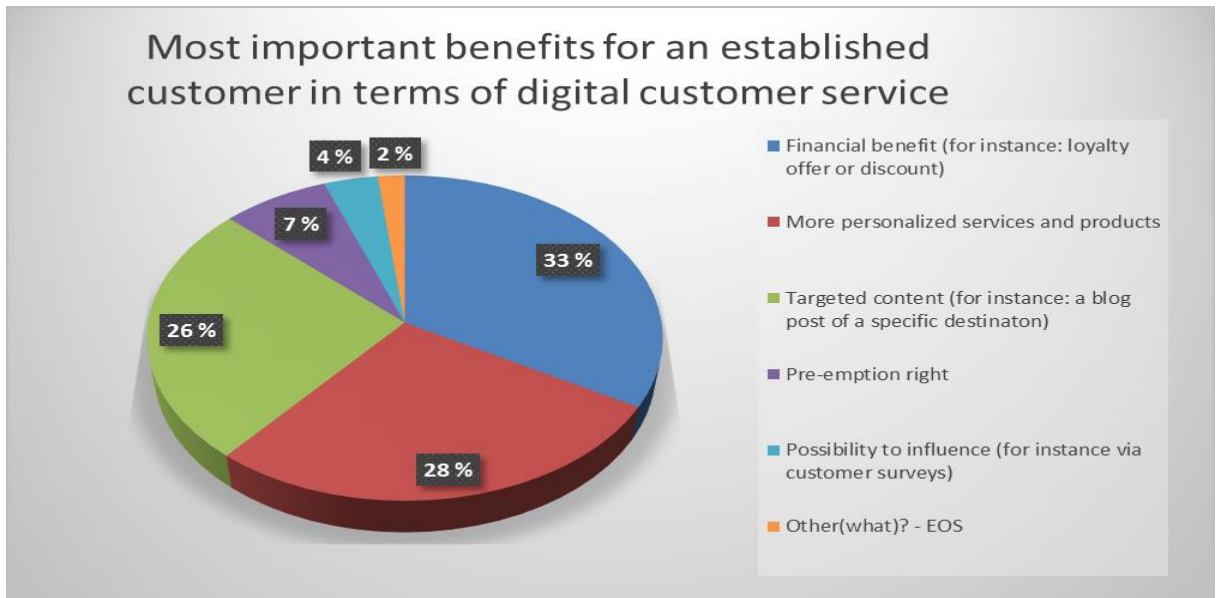


Figure 14. Answer distribution by % of the most important benefits of digital customer service that a customer expects to receive from Elämymatkat (n=54)

According to the study the benefit that was valued the most in terms of digital customer service received as an established customer was financial benefits. Examples of financial benefits that were given in the survey were loyalty offers and discounts. One third (33%) of the respondents think that financial benefit is the most important benefit that a customer of Elämymatkat should be receiving. Obviously, this fact states that a customer expects to be rewarded with content offering financial reductions for their established loyalty.

The second most common answer from the question 13 with 28% was “more personalized services and products”. Thus, the population think that as being a customer of Elämymatkat one should be offered more targeted and personalized offers of the holiday trips of his/her interests. By offering targeted and personalized services and products online, only meaningful and relevant offers according to the interests and desires of the person are offered. This requires a customer database, i.e. CRM, which keeps track of all customer data such as interests and contact information. (Dunay 3 Jun 2013.)

A quarter of the respondents (26%) regard that as an established customer, the highly personalized and targeted content, e.g. blog post of a destination of interest, is the most

important benefit of digital customer service. This is also a big share of the total answers, and in consequence should be taken into account when attempting to deliver excellent digital customer service for established customers. As explained earlier in the inbound methodology chapter, the delight stage of the inbound methodology is significant in terms of post-sale customer relationship building. Hence, in this stage delivering the before-mentioned smart content with the help of a CRM system, can maximise the effectiveness of personalized content marketing.

The other answers that were regarded as the most important benefit in terms of digital customer service that can be received as an Elämysmatkat customer obtained answer rates as follows: 7% for pre-emption right for services & products, 4% for possibility to influence in terms of the company e.g. via surveys or other means, and 2% for EOS.

The last question (question 14) of the survey examined what type of digital methods are the most effective to strengthen the existing customer relationship according to the potential and existing customers of Elämysmatkat. Thus this question assists Elämysmatkat and the author of this thesis to understand what digital methods work in the bottom-of-funnel of inbound marketing. In terms of the inbound methodology, this targets to enhance the implementation of the delight stage. Six pre-defined answer options were given in the question, and the respondents were able to select two choices that they think work best for customer relationship consolidation. As can be seen from table 4 below, a total of 98 answers were given meaning that not all respondents gave two answers. The table shows share of the answers by percentage of total.

Table 4. The best digital methods for Elämysmatkat to strengthen existing online customer relationship by % of total answers (n=98)

Digital methods	Answer %
With a regular newsletter	34 %
With offers targeted to loyal customers	33 %
By offering products and services according to customer's prior interests	14 %
By delivering personalized and targeted content for a customer (for instance: blog post, video etc.)	10 %
By enabling customers the possibility to take part in service and product development online	7 %
By means of social media interaction and engagement (for instance: liking, comments, shares etc.)	2 %

According to the respondents, the best digital method or content with a 34% support to use for customer relationship consolidation is to send regular newsletters. When one subscribes for a newsletter of a company, she/he has given the permission to be informed via email of the company's new offers, content or other updates. Albeit the potential and existing customers of Elämysmatkat want to hear of the company via newsletter, not every



piece of content should be sent to every newsletter subscriber. Newsletters should be sent in accordance with the interest and needs of the recipient. The segmentation of effective newsletter distribution can be done with email marketing and marketing automation softwares, and CRM. (Castro 12 Feb 2018.)

The second biggest share of answers, and thus also very effective digital method to bolster the existing customer relationship is to send offers exclusively targeted for loyal customers. This choice received a third of all the answers. From this can be drawn a conclusion that existing customers expect to be treated slightly differently due to their past history and loyalty with a company.

The third most answered digital method with 14% is to streamline the customer relationship is by offering products and services that reflect prior interest of the customers. For example, by offering skiing holiday trips that a customer has shown prior interest and admiration of, makes the customer feel his/her needs are being valued by the company.

Other digital methods and techniques for customer relationship strengthening with their answer percentages are listed here: 10% support for delivering of personalized and targeted content for the customer, 7% for enabling the customer the possibility to take part in service and product development online, and 2% support for social media interaction and engagement by the company. As regards to the results, the low support of the social media interaction and engagement between the customer and the company is surprising. However, one reason for its low share is the fact that only 3 respondents of the population were between 18 and 29, and almost 60% of the population were over 46. Elder people are less likely to use social networking sites as customer-brand communication platforms (Anderson & Smith 2018).

## **5 Discussion**

This phase of the thesis ponders and reflects the successfulness of the project and the completed funnel. Therefore a product assessment, relevance and validity of the thesis, future recommendations for the company in terms of the completed product, project assessment, and analysis of the learning are disclosed and given in this chapter. With the help of these sub-chapters, the satisfaction level of the commissioning company and the author of this thesis are brought out.

The final part of the chapter is comprised of the summary of the thesis. The summary covers the main problem and purpose for the thesis, and gives the answer on how the constructed inbound marketing funnel can help Elämysmatkat to master online marketing by practising inbound marketing.

### **5.1 Product assessment**

In terms of the completed product for the commissioning company, the Elämysmatkat CEO and the author of this thesis are really satisfied with the outcome. In fact, CEO of the company assessed the product being very useful for the company and field of business. According to the CEO of Elämysmatkat, the company is aiming to implement the funnel and its key findings to its ski products and possibly to other B2C products in the 2018/2019 winter season. The results and functionality of the funnel will later be evaluated and measured by Elämysmatkat to understand the impacts.

As mentioned above, the author is similarly delighted with the formed inbound marketing funnel. The author regards that the funnel is a clear and explicit guideline for Elämysmatkat online marketing, which was also the aim of the thesis. The funnel is also easily duplicable meaning that it can be used for other customer segments and even for the use of other companies.

### **5.2 Relevance and validity**

The topic of inbound marketing and the completed funnel are really relevant for the commissioning company as inbound marketing is really a current and modern method of online and digital marketing. Leveraging the constructed funnel with inbound marketing efforts and techniques will help Elämysmatkat to attract more traffic to its website, convert more leads, generate more sales and delight its customers even more in the future.

Elämysmatkat has recently launched a new design for its website. The funnel is therefore a useful way to maximise the effectiveness and use of the website. In addition, when taking into account the feedback gained from the commissioning company, the outcomes are satisfying, and the company will take the funnel into implementation in its day-to-day marketing.

In terms of the sources selected for the theoretical part of the thesis and for the construction of the funnel, the sources were collected from the experts of the field of digital and inbound marketing. The sources of this thesis consist of a comprehensive list of literature from relevant marketing books to blogs from authorities of online marketing and inbound marketing in particular. As inbound marketing is a modern, dynamic and ever-changing marketing method, not abundance of academical books are published and available of the subject. Thus, many blogs and other electronical sources served a great help for the basis of the theoretical part. The blogs and articles chosen for the foundation of the theory were selected on the grounds of the authority, relevancy, company, job title and popularity of the author.

A critical point of view can be taken into the credibility and validity of the conducted online survey for the subscribers of Elämysmatkat email newsletter. Only 54 respondents answered to the survey in two weeks period, which is not as much as was desired by the author. A bigger quantity of respondents would have added more credibility and relevance in terms of the answers regarding on online behaviour of the subscribers of Elämysmatkat. However, the respondents who took part in in the survey comprised of potential customers i.e. leads and existing customers, and the share of leads and customers were almost even. This signifies that the results do not only provide significance from the perspective of existing customers, but also from the potential ones.

Another critical factor is the fact that the subscribers of the Elämysmatkat email newsletter are not only downhill skiing customers, which in fact is the target audience of the thesis. In consequence, some of the respondents might not possess any interest in terms of taking part to any downhill skiing holidays provided by Elämysmatkat. However, the survey was not constructed in a manner that it would have been targeted for a specific customer segment meaning that it gives a generalised idea of the online behaviour and preferences of the respondents.

### 5.3 Future recommendations

To maximize the outcomes and efforts of inbound marketing, Elämymatkat needs to invest resources into it. The results will not show up overnight. Mastering inbound marketing requires knowledge, creativity, time, money and consistency. In essence, it is important that the company understands the inbound philosophy of attracting potential customers with quality content and gradually transforming them eventually into the promoters of the company. When this basic idea of inbound has been understood in the whole organizational level, the start of changing marketing approach into inbound can begin. It is important that everyone in the company, especially the marketing and sales team, start to employ the inbound techniques to get better results.

Accordingly, the implementation of inbound marketing requires money. As referred earlier in the theory, testing and measuring the inbound results are of utmost importance to adjust the efforts for the future. However, testing and measuring requires certain tools in order to collect data and further make optimized inbound marketing decisions based on the data. Acquiring a marketing automation software integrated with a CRM and email marketing software can be the game-changer in providing content at the right place, at the right time and in the right form. Certainly these tools do cost money, however the return on investment will pay off the costs when used correctly. Moreover, Elämymatkat already has a CRM and email marketing software in use. Hence, the author of this thesis recommends and suggests that a suitable marketing automation software e.g. HubSpot that can be aligned and integrated with other tools should be purchased.

The other crucial factor in making most out of the inbound marketing approach is to possess employees with inbound marketing knowhow, experience and creativity whom can put inbound into practice. The company has several options. It can rely on the employees that it currently has in the roster, recruit new people that are able to excel inbound marketing or buy external services from companies that consult or produce inbound marketing campaigns. The decision on which option from the above-mentioned to choose from, should be based on an internal assessment and discussion done among the company.

Last but not least, Elämymatkat should start constructing more buyer personas of its target customers. As mentioned earlier in the thesis, when in-depth understanding of the target segments has been formed by means of buyer personas, more targeted and effective content and thus inbound marketing efforts can be produced.

## **5.4 Project assessment**

The project was a long and exhaustive with the start in April 2018 and the end in November 2018. Within that schedule, a detailed and pleasing outcome was able to be carried out. The biggest factor concerning the length of the project was the lack of time of the author during a regular week to work on the thesis. However, with an elaborate Gantt chart of the tasks to be done in each month, the time was able to be optimized to finish the product in time.

One major reason why the commissioning company was so satisfied and surprised with the final outcome is because when the thesis topic was introduced and discussed between Elämymatkat CEO and the author for the first time in February 2018, the focus of the thesis was not very evident or clear. After the project had its kickstart, the author started to invest more time to it and gradually become more knowledgeable and apparent with the ideas of how to implement the thesis project. It can be said that core and red thread of the thesis project was found when the author was getting familiar with the concept of inbound marketing.

Besides the lack of time to work on the project, the biggest challenge of the thesis was to collect the data for the empirical research phase of the thesis. The reason behind this is that the data collection i.e. attracting participants for the online survey and a participant for the interview was at the hands of the commissioning company meaning that Elämymatkat was responsible to get the sample for the research analysis. Eventhough the sample size for the online survey ended up being rather small and not as big as was intended, the analysis of the research outcomes was applied well according to the CEO of Elämymatkat. Hence, the author of the thesis is also delighted that the biggest concern was overcome.

To conclude the project, the thesis project outcomes were presented for the commissioning company. The presentation took place in the premises of the company in Helsinki. The presentation was conducted in a professional manner and the insights of thesis were presented clearly and comprehensibly. As the company showed a lot of gratitude towards the project and the presentation, the author of the thesis can assume that the total project was a success.

## **5.5 Analysis of learning**

Many hours of studying were spent to understand the topic of inbound marketing and similarly a great deal of hours were invested for the researching phase of the thesis including

the research methods used. Nonetheless, the most satisfying part of the thesis was the application of the theory and research outcomes in the form of the final product – the inbound marketing funnel. This phase was crucial in showing the professionalism of the author of the thesis. The ability to apply the theory and data together into a functional inbound funnel developed the author's skills in creating a descriptive and informational model that demonstrates unambiguously and understandably the actions to be taken in each stage of the funnel. The author regards the skill of applying theory and data as very important in respect to the useful and relevant occupational skill set. The fact of having employed this proficiency helped the author to grow and develop oneself professionally.

A leap into the world of inbound and digital marketing has been very interesting and educational. The spark of interest that the inbound marketing as a topic has induced for the author will certainly nurture to study and learn even more of it. The author of this thesis believes that becoming an inbound marketing specialist is a huge benefit in terms of future career possibilities in the field of digital marketing, and this thesis has given the foundation to become one. Applying and practising inbound marketing in the future as a profession has evolved to be a dream and aspiration for the author of the thesis.

## **5.6 Summary**

The purpose of the thesis was to construct an online marketing model for a mid-sized tour operator called Elämymatkat, which works as a guideline and framework on how to practise online marketing in today's digital world. The idea of constructing the online marketing model was based on the concept of inbound marketing, which is a marketing philosophy that intends to attract a total stranger to the hands of the company with valuable and helpful content, and gradually transform that stranger into a promoter of the company. The process of Inbound marketing is very well demonstrated and easily understood with the help of the inbound marketing methodology created by HubSpot. It contains four various stages – attract, convert, close & delight – that the total stranger goes along. In each of these stages, diverse inbound marketing techniques are applied and utilized to forward the person in his/her online customer journey. The methodology was applied to the thesis product, and it was created and visualized for Elämymatkat in the form of an inbound marketing funnel.

As inbound marketing aims to attract more traffic to a company's website, generate more leads and sales, and ultimately increase the number of the delighted customers who refer the company to their friends and family, this is what is expected from the completed inbound marketing funnel. The future will tell if these objectives have been met.

To delimit the inbound marketing funnel, it was created for a specific customer segment. The target audience under scrutiny, which was chosen collectively with Elämymatkat, was the downhill skiing customers. The completed funnel is therefore designed specifically for the downhill skiing customer segment, but with little alteration it can be leveraged for other customer types as well.

In order to build a reliable and valid funnel for the segment, a buyer persona was constructed on the basis of a semi-structured phone-interview held with an existing Elämymatkat downhill skiing customer. Buyer persona, which is a semi-fictional profile of the target audience, helps Elämymatkat in understanding their customers. The constructed buyer persona of a downhill skiing customer is crucial for Elämymatkat, as the persona is a determinant factor when choosing what kind of content and techniques to employ in each stages of the inbound marketing funnel. Eventhough, the formed buyer persona was made specifically for the downhill skiers, its design can be and should be applied for other customer segments as well.

In addition to the interview, another research method was used to build an in-depth inbound marketing funnel to cater the needs of the downhill skiing customers. An online survey was conducted for the newsletter subscribers of Elämymatkat. The purpose of the survey was to find out the online preferences and behaviour of the potential and existing customers of Elämymatkat. In essence, the survey aimed to discover where online do they spend time and what type of content they consume in various stages of the buyer journey. The survey results were analyzed and applied to the various stages of the inbound marketing funnel. The survey results concerning the content and channel preferences of the respondents complements and supports the theory collected and applied for the funnel.

As last and conclusive part of the product, the inbound marketing funnel that is based on the theory of inbound marketing and the empirical research made by the author, is shown in action for the buyer persona i.e. downhill skier. This application shows a concrete example of how the buyer journey of the downhill skier can go from the perspective of inbound marketing. This example demonstrates evidently how Elämymatkat generates sales and converts the stranger into a promoter with the help of the inbound marketing funnel and its techniques

The author of this thesis believes that by following the guidelines of the created inbound marketing funnel, Elämymatkat is able to maximise its online marketing efforts for the

downhill skier customer segment and meet the objectives. By implementing this funnel, the conversion from strangers to visitors, from visitors to leads, from leads to customers, and eventually from customers to brand promoters can be optimized.



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## Appendices

### Appendix 1. Online survey



#### **Improving and facilitating the online customer service of Elämysmatkat**

The purpose of the online questionnaire is to understand how and where in digital channels do Elämysmatkat customers prefer to interact and engage with the company. With the help of the responses, Elämysmatkat aims to develop its services and customer dialogue in its digital channels.

##### **1. Age? \***

- Under 18 years
- 18-29 years
- 30-45 years
- 46-59 years
- Over 60 years

##### **2. Gender? \***

Male

Female

3. How often have you been in Elämymatkat trip? \*

I have not been

Once

Twice

3-4 times

More than 4 times

4. If you have been in our trip, which digital channels did you use in booking or searching the trip? \*

You are able to pick more than one option.

Website

Email

Facebook

Instagram

I did not utilize any digital channels in becoming an Elämymatkat customer

I have not yet been in an Elämymatkat trip

5. Which of the following digital channels did you spend the most time regarding the last Elämysmatkat trip? \*

- Website
- Email
- Facebook
- Instagram
- YouTube
- I did not utilize any digital channels in becoming an Elämysmatkat customer
- I have not yet been in an Elämysmatkat trip

6. How satisfied are you until now for the received customer service and essential content in the Elämysmatkat digital channels? \*

Scale 1-5 (Very satisfied, Satisfied, Not sure, Dissatisfied, Really Disappointed)

	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Not sure	Dissatisfied	Really disappointed
Website	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Email	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Facebook	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Instagram	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

7. Which digital channels do you prefer to use when searching for a trip? \*

Select 3 preferred options and put them in order of importance so that 1 is the most important channel in your opinion.

	1	2	3
Website	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Email	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Social media	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Google	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
WhatsApp	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Mobile application	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other (what?) _____	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**8. In which social media channels would you like to hear from Elämymatkat and its offers? \***

Select 3 preferred social media channels and put them in order of importance in the scale of 1-3, so that 1 is the most important channel in your opinion.

	1	2	3
Facebook	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Instagram	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Twitter	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
YouTube	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Snapchat	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

WhatsApp

Pinterest

Other  
(what?) \_\_\_\_\_

**9. In which digital channels do you prefer to communicate and interact? \***

Select 3 preferred options and put them in order of importance in a scale of 1-3, so that 1 is the most important channel in your opinion.

1            2            3

Website (For example via chat)

Email

Social media

Mobile application

Other  
(what?) \_\_\_\_\_

**10. What benefit do you expect the digital content published by Elämymatkat to give and produce to you? \***

You are able to select 2 preferred options.

Inspiration

Must-know destination information (For instance: culture and activity possibilities)

Holiday vibes

Travel tips (For instance: packing tips)

Detailed and in-depth destination information

- Funny and entertaining content
- Information of Elämymatkat
- Other educational content (what?)

---
- Other benefit (what?)

---

**11. Which of the following content are meaningful and essential for you when pondering to participate in Elämymatkat holiday trip? \***

You can select maximum of 3 alternatives.

- Destination info in the webpage
- Articles published by travel companies
- Videos
- Beautiful pictures
- Blog posts
- Newsletter (for example: of new products)
- Experiences from other customers
- Customer generated content (for instance: picture from a trip)
- Live streams (for instance: Facebook Live)
- Snapchat & Instagram story
- Online competitions and raffles

Other (what?)

---

**12.** As a customer do you expect to receive more personalized service (for instance, customized content) in the digital channels of Elämysmatkat than before the start of the customer relationship? \*

Scale 1-4 (Absolutely, Somewhat, Not sure, No I don't)

Absolutely Somewhat Not sure No I don't

Expectation

**13.** What do you consider to be the most important benefit in terms of digital customer service that you are able to receive as a customer of Elämysmatkat? \*

More personalized services and products

Targeted content (for instance: a blog post of a specific destination)

Financial benefit (for instance: loyalty offer or discount)

Possibility to influence (for instance via customer surveys)

Pre-emption right

Other (what?)

---

**14.** In which of the following digital methods is Elämysmatkat able to best strengthen the existing customer relationship? \*

You can select 2 options.

With a regular newsletter

By enabling customers the possibility to take part in service and product development online

- With offers targeted to loyal customers
- By offering products and services according to customer's prior interests
- By delivering personalized and targeted content for a customer (for instance: blog post, video etc.)
- By means of social media interaction and engagement (for instance: liking, comments, shares etc.)
- Other method (what?)  

---



## **Appendix 2.**

### **Buyer persona (downhill skier) – questions**

#### **Demographic information:**

- Gender?
- Age?
- Geographic location?
- Occupation?
- Yearly income?
- Marital status?
- Children?

#### **Activities and skiing habits:**

- What kind of activities do you like in general?
- What hobbies do you have?
- How often do you go downhill skiing within a year?
- How often do you travel on downhill skiing holidays in a year?
- Do you usually go on downhill skiing holidays alone or with company?

#### **Motives and interests for skiing:**

- What attracts you in downhill skiing?
- What do you value in downhill skiing?
- What motivates you to go for downhill skiing holidays?
- What do you hope and expect the most from the tour operator when going on a skiing holiday?

#### **Goals & dreams for skiing:**

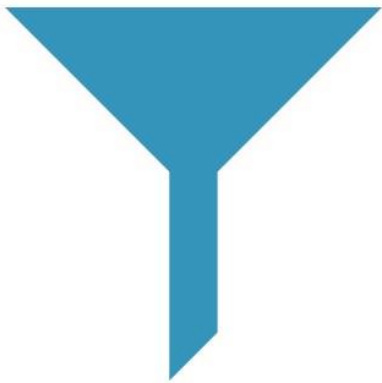
- Have you set any personal objectives in terms of downhill skiing?
- What kind of dreams you have in terms of downhill skiing?
- What is your dream downhill skiing destination? Why?
- How can Elämymatkat help in achieving your dreams?

#### **Challenges & worries in terms of skiing:**

- Are there things that hold you back or make it harder to go downhill skiing? What kind of?
- What kind of challenges you face in downhill skiing holidays?
- What do you fear or concern about in downhill skiing holidays?
- How can Elämymatkat help you in relieving your concerns?

#### **Online activity in terms of skiing holidays:**

- Which social media channels are you actively using?
- Where do you look for information in terms of downhill skiing holidays?
- What kind of content you consume online in terms of downhill skiing holidays?
- How much time do you use online prior the decision to go on an organised skiing holiday?



## Inbound marketing funnel for Elämysmatkat

Alexander Pippi

Thesis

### Purpose:

Inbound marketing funnel for the downhill skier customer segment

### Aim:

- A funnel that serves as a guideline and framework for online marketing
- Guideline that increases website traffic, generates leads and sales, and ultimately delights customers

### Foundation:

- Theoretical framework + empirical research= Inbound marketing funnel
  - Empirical research (phone interview + online survey)
  - Interview → Buyer persona

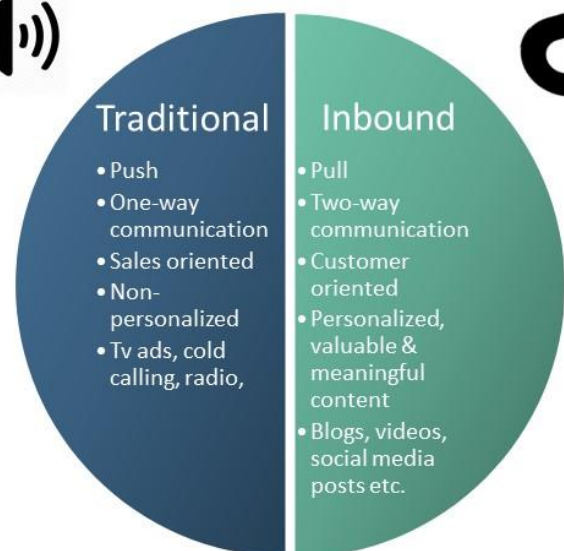
# Table of content

- What is Inbound marketing?
- Inbound methodology
- Components of inbound marketing
- Empirical research outcomes
  - Interview outcome – Buyer persona (downhill skier)
  - Online survey insights
- Completed inbound marketing funnel
- Inbound marketing funnel in the action

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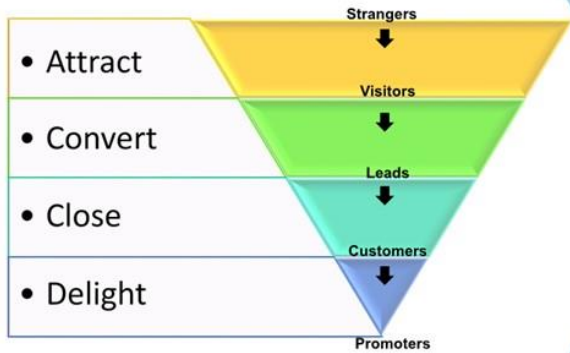
## What is Inbound marketing?

- Marketing philosophy where interaction and engagement with a company happens **in the customer's own terms**
- The key to win customer at your side is to **provide value through content**
- The aim of the valuable content is to spark a relationship with the person
- End goal is a loyal promoter
- To produce content that resonates with the audience → create a **Buyer persona**



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# Inbound marketing methodology



- Created by HubSpot
- Visualized idea of inbound marketing
- “The best way to turn strangers into customers and promoters of your business.” (HubSpot s.a.)
- Foundation of the thesis product

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## Components of inbound marketing

- *Website is the hub*
- *Marketing components for inbound:*
  - *Content marketing*
  - *Social media marketing*
  - *SEO*
  - *Paid search marketing*
  - *Email marketing*
  - *Landing page optimization*
- *The stage of the buyer in online customer journey determines the components and techniques*

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## Empirical research – Interview outcome

- **Aim:** To construct a buyer persona to better understand the segment & to provide more targeted online interaction

→ Applied for the inbound funnel



### DEMOGRAPHICS

- Female
- 36 years old
- Divorced
- Lives in Espoo
- Household size: one person
- Occupation: Sales Manager
- Yearly Income: 70 000€

### ACTIVITIES AND SKIING HABITS

- **Hobbies:** Bicycle road racing & snowboarding
- Enjoys sporty, fast & competitive activities
- Skis with snowboard
- Skis over 30 days within a year
- Has approximately 4 skiing trips in a year
- Skis both with company and alone

### MOTIVES AND INTERESTS

- **Attracting factors:** nature, challenges, experiences & freeriding
- Values nature, good snow conditions, nice company & the possibility to develop in terms of skiing
- **Motivators for trips:** new experiences, challenging oneself and good company

## Buyer Persona – Downhill skier



Daniela

*"I would like to learn to become a good off-piste skier and discover new places where to go skiing"*

### HOW CAN WE HELP HER

- She expects experts to tell where to go skiing and minimize the hassle in the destination
- Provide stress-free experience with professional guides
- Trips to unique and beautiful places
- Offer trips with possibility to challenge oneself with snowboard
- Organize trips during seasons of best skiing conditions
- Be active online
- Publish blogs, articles and customer referrals of trips and destinations

### GOALS & DREAMS

- **Goals:** To become a good freeride skier and discover new skiing places
- **Dreams:** To ski in Chile and Norway and to do ski touring trip in the future
- The skiing destination of dreams is **Alaska** because of nature

### CHALLENGES & WORRIES

- **Pain points for going on skiing trips:** lack of money and holiday days,
- **Worries in the destination:** lack of snow, weather conditions and logistics
- Biggest concern on organized skiing trips is the group dynamic and diverse skill levels of a group

### ONLINE ACTIVITY

- **Social media accounts:** Facebook, Instagram & LinkedIn
- Searches information from tour operator webpages, outdoor activity forums and customer review-sites
- **Type of content that she consumes:** Blogs, articles and reviews
- Spends approximately 10 hours online when looks information for a possible holiday trip

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## Empirical research – online survey insights

### Elämymatkat online customer journey optimization and improvement

- **Purpose:** To understand where and how the prospective & existing customers of Elämymatkat prefer to interact in diverse stages of the digital buyer's journey
- 54 respondents
  - 74% male / 26% female
  - Age distribution:
    - 43% are <45 years old
    - 57% are >45 years old
  - 52% are existing customers and 48% are leads
- **Key findings in 4 categories:**
  - Previously preferred Elämymatkat digital channels
  - Currently preferred digital channels of the respondents
  - Digital content preferences
  - Online customer-brand relationship building preferences

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# Key findings

## Previously preferred Elämysmatkat digital channels by the respondents

### Elämysmatkat website:

- **52%** have used it for searching information of a trip (attract)
- Has been the most used channel throughout the customer journey
- **87%** of respondents satisfied in terms of customer service and digital content delivered in the website

### Email:

- Second most used channel throughout the online customer journey
- **82%** of respondents are happy with customer service and digital content delivered via email ←→ **4%** are dissatisfied

### Social media (Facebook & Instagram)

- Only **7%** have used SM channels for searching info of a trip (attract)
- Majority (81%) are unsure of satisfaction in these channels → **action needed**

## Preferred digital channels by all respondents

### When searching a trip: (Relevant for attract, convert & close stages)



### Social media channels: (Relevant for all stages of the inbound funnel)



### For communication and interaction: (Relevant for convert, close, delight)



## Digital content preferences:

### Most expected benefits from digital content produced by Elämysmatkat:

1. Must-know destination information **31%**
2. Detailed and in-depth destination information **30%**
3. Inspiration **16%**
4. Travel tips **9%**
5. Information of Elämysmatkat **9%**

Relevant for all stages of the inbound methodology

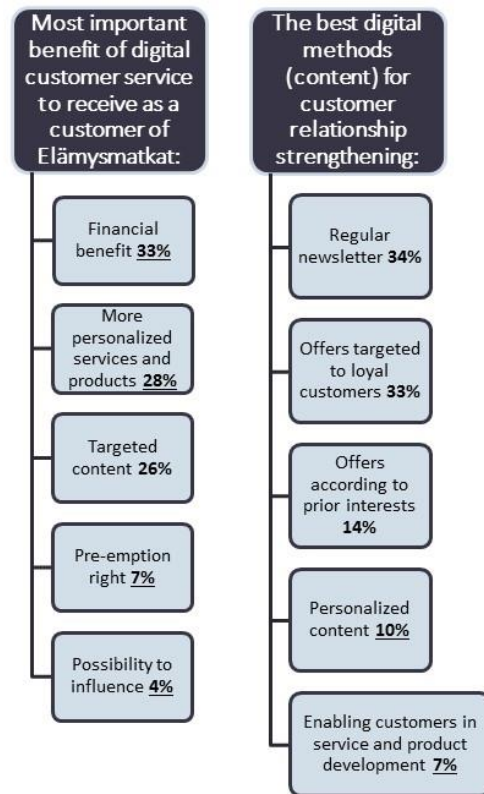
### Most meaningful form of content when pondering to participate in Elämysmatkat holiday:

1. Destination info in the webpage **29%**
2. Experiences from other customers **15%**
3. Articles **12%**
4. Newsletters **11%**
5. Beautiful pictures **10%**
6. Blogs **8%**
7. Customer-generated content **5%**
8. Videos **4%**
9. Competitions & raffles **4%**
10. Snapchat & Instagram stories **2%**

Relevant for attract, convert and close stages

# Online customer-brand relationship building preferences

- Relevant for the delight stage
- In total of 63% expect to receive better (15%) or somewhat better (48%) customer service as established customer in digital channels than before the start of the customer relationship  
 ←→ 20% think that potential and existing customer should be served equally



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# Completed inbound marketing funnel

- Theory + empirical research = Elämymatkat inbound marketing funnel



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# Attract

## Content marketing

- Timely, relevant & contextual – **applies to all stages** (theory)
- **Educate** (theory): Blogging, FAQs, “How To” Tip sheets, Product Spec sheets, Infographics, Informational videos & social media posts
- **Research**: Skiing blogs with travel tips, ski articles with must-know destination info, Inspirational content e.g. beautiful pictures from previous trips or videos e.g. aftermovie of a trip

## Social media marketing

- **Channels** (research):     
- **Techniques** (theory): Helpful & educative content, Connect with industry influencers, Engaging video content, Newsjacking, Eye-catching imageries, Convey brand authenticity with momentary content (Instagram story etc.) & Social media contests

## Paid search marketing

- Google AdWords (theory):
  - Search terms report & keyword planner
  - Keyword targeting
  - Landing page testing and A/B testing



## SEO

- **Techniques** (theory)

**1<sup>st</sup> step** - Keyword research: *Keyword.io, Ubersuggest, SemRush, Google trends, Google keyword planner & Google*

**2<sup>nd</sup> step** - Keyword segmentation (e.g. position in the purchase path)

Keyword or search term	Position on the purchase path
Best skiing destinations in Japan	Research (Top-Of-Funnel)
Skiing holiday trips to Japan from Finland	Shopping (Middle-Of-Funnel)
Hakuba ski trip sales (prices)	Buying (Bottom-Of-Funnel)

(table above created and applied by the author on the basis of theory)

**3<sup>rd</sup> step** - Optimize **on-page** and **off-page** factors to rank high in SERP

- **on-page factors** (page title, meta description, URL, headings & image)
- **off-page factors** (link building, social media engagement & local SEO)

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# Convert

## Content marketing

- **Engage** (theory): Premium content; E-books, Checklists, Buying guides, webinars, Podcasts, Blogs, Newsletters

### Based on research:

- Premium content e.g. exclusive in-depth destination content
- Travel tips (articles or blogs) of a destination/trip
- Blogs e.g. Elämysmatkat provides stress-free experience
- Information of Elämysmatkat (about us)
- Experiences from other customers (WOM)
- Newsletters e.g. introduce trip catalogue
- Destination info

## Social media marketing

### Techniques (theory):

- Problem-solving premium content
- Retarget fans & followers
- Invite signing up for live-streams
- Incorporate customer reviews for lead generation



## Landing page optimization

### Good landing page components (theory):

- **Call-To-Action**
- Unique offer
- Directive headline
- Focused copy
- Conversion form
- Graphic representation of the offer
- No site navigation
- Social sharing buttons
- Social proof from a customer

## Email marketing

### Techniques (theory):

- Welcome emails for subscribers
- Include social sharing buttons/links in emails
- Lead nurturing



Example by MuleSoft (Sukraaj 12 Jul 2018)

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# Close

## Encourage (theory):

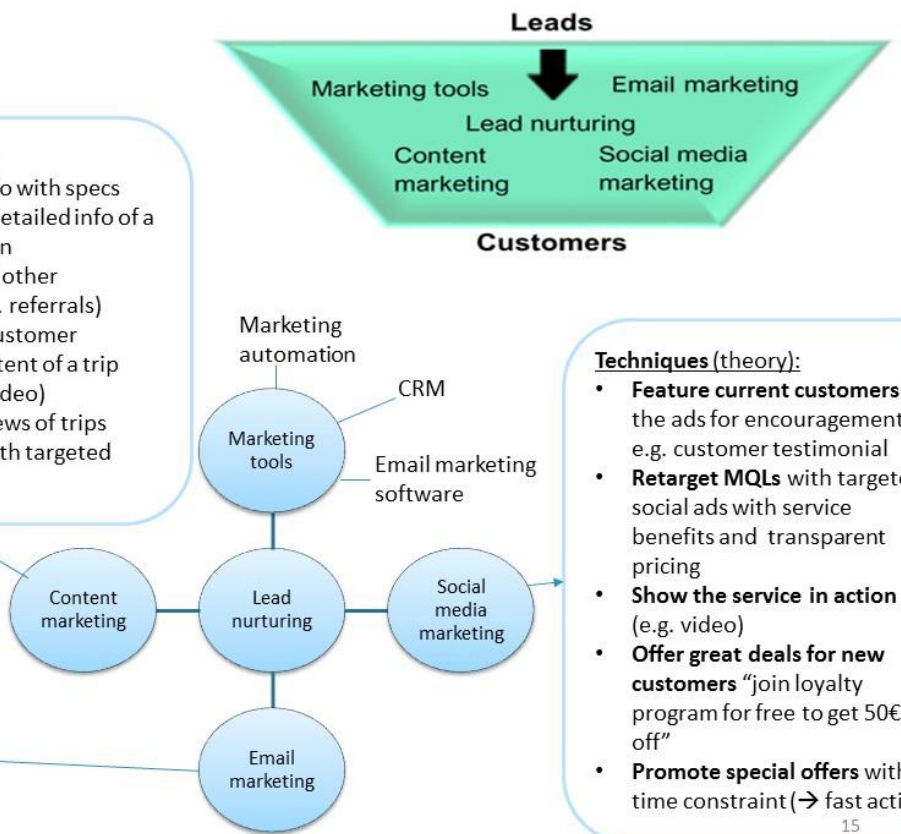
- Onsite incentives
- Service/product demos
- Free trials
- Coupons
- Pricing estimates
- Customer reviews
- Online live chat

## Based on research:

- Destination info with specs
- Content with detailed info of a trip/destination
- Experiences of other customers (e.g. referrals)
- Inspirational customer generated content of a trip (e.g. picture/video)
- Customer reviews of trips
- Newsletters with targeted offers

## Techniques (theory):

- **Email workflow**
- Personalized email (e.g. offer)
- Incentive (e.g. promotion/discount)
- Catchy and concise subject line
- Compelling body text
- Include **CTAs**
- Use opt-in list



## Techniques (theory):

- **Feature current customers** in the ads for encouragement e.g. customer testimonial
- **Retarget MQLs** with targeted social ads with service benefits and transparent pricing
- **Show the service in action** (e.g. video)
- **Offer great deals for new customers** "join loyalty program for free to get 50€ off"
- **Promote special offers** with time constraint (→ fast action)

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# Delight

## Content marketing

- **Embrace (theory):**
  - Dynamic "smart" content
  - Automated greetings after a sale e.g. via email
  - Customer surveys / feedback
  - Private sales
  - Rewards / loyalty points
  - Onsite live customer support e.g. chat
- **Based on research:**
  - Regular newsletters (34%)
  - Exclusive offers for loyal customers (33%)
  - Offering ski trips according to prior interests (14%)
  - Personalized content (10%)
  - Involvement in service development (7%)

## Social media marketing

- **Techniques (theory):**
  - Respond & personalize answers
  - Engage and interact
  - Empower loyalty programs
  - Educate for new service uses e.g. relevant tips
  - Energize with motivational or inspirational content e.g. quote of the day
  - **Social media monitoring**

## Email marketing

- **Techniques (theory):**
  - Get review on a recent purchase
  - Continue email workflow
  - Deliver excellent customer service
  - Customer surveys
  - Encourage to refer to a friend → offer coupons & discounts
  - **Keep collecting customer data for personalization**



According to the survey the most expected benefit of customer in this stage is financial benefit e.g. discount

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# Inbound marketing funnel in action

Attract	Convert	Close	Delight
Types "unique freeriding holiday trips to Alaska" to Google → Blog from Elämymatkat introducing Alaska as a freeride destination → Enters Elämymatkat website	→ Starts following Elämymatkat on social media sites → Consumes various Elämymatkat content → Leaves her contact details in a landing page in exchange for premium content e.g. Exclusive travel tips for Alaska	→ Receives regularly Elämymatkat newsletters → Does a lot of research for the trip (customer reviews etc.) → Sees an Elämymatkat Alaska offer with time constraint on Facebook → <b>BUYS</b>	Is satisfied with 1 <sup>st</sup> the trip → Continues engagement & interaction through various channels → Makes a customer referral for Elämymatkat → Earns a discount/coupon → <b>BUYS AGAIN</b>

