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THE MAIN SOCIAL MEDIA OUTLETS USED IN BUSINESS TO BUSINESS MARKETING

Case: Viexpo

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ABSTRACT

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This study was made in collaboration with a company called Viexpo, which operates in the field of internationalization. Also the author was employed at the firm.

The aim of this thesis was to find out how B2B companies are utilizing social media marketing through the main social media outlets, such as Facebook and LinkedIn and how they are engaging their audience in these social media outlets. The results will help Viexpo perceive how these different social media outlets can be utilized in marketing.

At first, the theoretical study displays the main social media outlets, then how they can be used for B2B marketing and in engaging the audience is presented. Also challenges of social media marketing are reviewed and how one can overcome those challenges is examined.

The empirical study introduces Viexpo as a company. The study examines what social media outlets are they using at the moment and how are they utilizing social media marketing and engaging their audience. An interview was held to get an understanding of how Viexpo perceives social media, what kind of challenges has Viexpo had with social media marketing and what are Viexpo's aims in social media.

Viexpo is advertising on the radio and in newspapers at the moment, but the company's goal is to include social media marketing into the existing marketing channels, which would enhance and modernize their marketing significantly.

Keywords: business-to-business, social media, marketing, networking

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Liiketalous ja matkailu: International Business

TIIVISTELMÄ

Tekijä	Emma Liuski
Opinnäytetyön nimi	Sosiaalisen median yhteisöpalvelut business-to-business markkinoinnissa
Vuosi	2012
Kieli	englanti
Sivumäärä	74 + 2 liitettä
Ohjaaja	Margit Niemelä

Tämä opinnäytetyö tehtiin yhteistyössä Viexpon kanssa, joka erikoistuu kansainvälistymiseen. Opinnäytetyön tekijä on ollut töissä Viexpolla.

Opinnäytetyön tarkoitus oli selvittää kuinka business-to-business yritykset hyödyntävät markkinointia sosiaalisessa mediassa ja kuinka he saavuttavat yleisön mielenkiinnon eri sosiaalisen median yhteisöpalveluissa. Tutkimuksen tulokset auttavat Viexpoa hahmottamaan kuinka eri sosiaalisen median yhteisöpalveluja voidaan hyödyntää markkinoinnissa.

Teoriaosuus esittelee ensin käytetyimmät sosiaalisen median yhteisöpalvelut ja sitten kuinka näitä palveluja voidaan käyttää business-to-business markkinoinnissa. Myös sosiaalisessa mediassa markkinoinnin haasteet käydään läpi ja kuinka näistä haasteista voidaan päästä yli. Sitten keskitytään, siihen kuinka yleisön mielenkiinnon voi saavuttaa eri sosiaalisen median yhteisöpalveluissa.

Empiirinen osuus esittelee Viexpon yrityksenä. Tutkimus selvittää mitä sosiaalisen median yhteisöpalveluja Viexpo käyttää tällä hetkellä ja kuinka he käyttävät näitä palveluja markkinoinnissa ja yleisön mielenkiinnon saavuttamisessa. Työntekijöitä haastateltiin, jotta saataisiin käsitys siitä miten Viexpo näkee sosiaalisen median, millaisia haasteita Viexpolla on ollut markkinoinnissa sosiaalisessa mediassa ja millaisia tavoitteita heillä on sosiaalista mediaa kohti.

Tällä hetkellä Viexpo markkinoi radiossa ja sanomalehdissä, mutta heidän tavoitteensa on saada sosiaalinen media osaksi heidän olemassa olevia markkinointikanavia, mikä parantaisi ja modernisoisi Viexpon markkinointia huomattavasti.

Avainsanat: markkinointi, business-to-business, sosiaalinen media, verkostoituminen

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1   INTRODUCTION

I have decided to write about business to business (later on B2B) social media marketing, not only because the subject was assigned to me by Viexpo, but also because the subject is interesting and current.

The research is made for Viexpo, a company focused on internationalization services. Viexpo is located in Vaasa, Kokkola and Pietarsaari and they have 10 employees. They aim to help small and medium sized companies in every stage of their internationalization process. Viexpo is very interested in adding social media as part of their marketing channels and hopefully this study will help Viexpo gain understanding of B2B social media marketing and ultimately constructing a social media marketing strategy.

1.1   Background of the study

Social media is now more important than ever before, it has become a platform not only for private people but organizations, too. Organizations have realized that social media marketing can easily reach their current customers as well as the desired target market. It is an inexpensive way to get more visibility, improve and maintain customer service, and implement marketing campaigns. In social media, the customers and stakeholders become participants by reviewing, commenting and sharing rather than just by being viewers. (Wikipedia, Social Media Marketing, 2010)

Advertising has started to move viewers from the traditional outlets to the electronic ones. Organizations used to advertise through printed ads and television; then became the Internet and company websites, and now companies are interacting in social media with customers and even specific products have entire pages. (Wikipedia, Social Media Marketing, 2010)

By now that social media marketing has been proven to be effective and profitable for organizations, it has been debated if social media is only a place for business to consumer (B2C) companies or if it can be suitable for B2B companies as well.

The study displays how B2B companies could utilize different social media outlets.

The case company has also realized this marketing opportunity and that is why this thesis studies this particular phenomenon, and tries to find a suitable solution for the case company.

1.2   The aims and objectives of the study

The aim of the study is to study how B2B companies can utilize social media marketing and engage their audience in the main social media outlets. The theoretical study aims to assemble the main social media outlets and show how they can be used for B2B marketing, networking and customer engagement.

The study will also review success stories of B2B companies which have used social media successfully for marketing, networking and customer engagement. These examples of other B2B companies can be used as an inspiration for Viexpo.

The empirical study was accomplished by conducting an interview with a Viexpo employee Mr. Rainer Rönnback, an internationalization expert. The aim of the interview was to gain an understanding of how Viexpo is engaging their customers in the main social media outlets at the moment. Other aims were to find out the current status of Viexpo's social media marketing, learn about Viexpo's goals, challenges with social media marketing. In the end, this study will hopefully help Viexpo to gain a more thorough understanding of social media.

1.3   Research problem

In summary, the following question will refine the research problem for this study:

> *How can B2B companies use social media marketing to engage their audience in the main social media outlets?*

1.4   Study limitations

B2B social media marketing is a fairly new concept. Social media marketing has been studied and researched a lot over the last decade but benefits of the social media has mostly been concerning B2C companies. The whole business model of B2B companies differ from B2C companies, for example, B2B companies build relationships for pricier, more complex, and longer-term sales than B2C companies. (Bodnar & Cohen, 2012, s. xi) This means that B2B companies need to have a different kind of a strategy also for social media. Finding the material to prove that B2B companies can also utilize social media marketing was quite challenging, but the ones that exist are recent and up-to-date, which is always beneficial for a study.

Another challenge was the fact that social media is always changing and improving. Most of the information out there is already outdated even if it was published last year.

1.5   Literature Review

A theory called "Honeycomb Framework" will be used in this thesis. It was created in 2011 by Jan H. Kietzmann, Kristopher Hermkens, Ian P. McCarthy, and Bruno S. Silvestre. This model divides social media into seven different blocks, which helps companies to understand social media better and create a congruent social media strategy.

The main literature for this thesis is "The B2B Social Media Book: Become a Marketing Super Superstar by Generating Leads with Blogging, LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook, Email, and more" written by Kipp Bodnar and Jeffrey L. Cohen. The writers of the said book have also two websites - www.b2bsocialmedia.com and www.b2bsuperstars.com – which will be referenced alongside other web materials and articles. This book was chosen, because it is recently published, it has up-to-date information and it has clear instructions of how B2B companies should do marketing in social media.

Also relevant blog posts, reports and articles were used as a reference to gain a comprehensive and congruent outlook on the main social media outlets and how can they be used in B2B marketing.

2 SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE MAIN SOCIAL MEDIA OUTLETS

This chapter reviews social media and networking as a concept and displays the main social media outlets.

> "Social media is the media we use to be social. That's it."

(Safko, 2012)

2.1 Social Media and Social Networking

Social media, also known as Web 2.0, is more than a source for information; it is a "social instrument of communication" that interacts with internet users while giving the information. You can, for example, share, vote, chat, comment, like or dislike, or recommend some content such as text, video, photo and audio in social media. Social media websites act as "word of mouth" in today's business life. (Nations, 2012) Below you can find a "social media map", which displays all the social media technologies and most of its forms that they include.

Figure1. Social Media map (What Easy Social Media Marketing Does, 2011)

Social networking is individuals or groups who have a common interest and are sharing information, ideas and/or services. (Dictionary.com) As an example, in business life professionals in the same industry are usually using trade fairs as a good platform for networking.

Web-based social networking platforms, such as email and instant messaging, do not require meeting face-to-face. These platforms started to prosper in the turn of the millennium and shortly after that they became part of the Internet mainstream. Users of the social networking platforms can share a common interest across any kind of political, economic and geographic border. These sites gain revenue mostly from subscriptions and selling advertising space to companies.

(Danah M. Boyd, 2007)

> *""Networking" emphasizes relationship initiation, often between strangers. While networking is possible on these sites, it is not the primary practice on many of them, nor is it what differentiates them from other forms of computer‑mediated communication (CMC)."*

(Boyd & Ellison, 2007)

A recent study by Content Marketing Institute and MarketingProfs showed that 91% of B2B marketers use content marketing, and social media now is the most popular content marketing tactic used by these B2B marketers (see figure2). This particular study truly demonstrates the importance of social media at the present time and why this subject is worth researching. Social media has left behind content marketing tactics such as website articles, books, print magazines, newsletters and in-person events.

B2B Content Marketing Usage (by Tactic)

Social Media – Other than Blogs 87%, Articles on Your Website 83%, eNewsletters 78%, Blogs 77%, Case Studies 71%, Videos 70%, Articles on Other Websites 70%, In-person Events 69%, White Papers 61%, Webinars/Webcasts 59%, Research Reports 44%, Microsites 40%, Infographics 38%, Branded Content Tools 38%, Mobile Content 33%, eBooks 32%, Print Magazines 31%, Books 29%, Virtual Conferences 28%, Podcasts 27%, Licensed/Syndicated Content 26%, Mobile Apps 26%, Digital Magazines 25%, Print Newsletters 24%, Annual Reports 20%, Games/Gamification 11%

2013 B2B Content Marketing Benchmarks–North America: CMI/MarketingProfs

Figure2. B2B Content Marketing Usage (MarketingProfs & Content Marketing Institute, 2012)

2.2 Honeycomb Framework

Honeycomb framework by Jan H. Kietzmann, Kristopher Hermkens, Ian P. McCarthy, Bruno S. Silvestre (2011) demonstrates how social media can be divided into seven different building blocks: identity, conversations, sharing, presence, relationships, reputation and groups. Social media is such a large concept in its entity and the Honeycomb framework segregates social media into these seven elements to help companies understand the different aspects of social media. All these groups differ in terms of function and impact, which helps the companies to build a congruent social media strategy by choosing the suitable balance of these blocks.

(Kietzmann;Hermkens;McCarthy;& Silvestre, 2011)
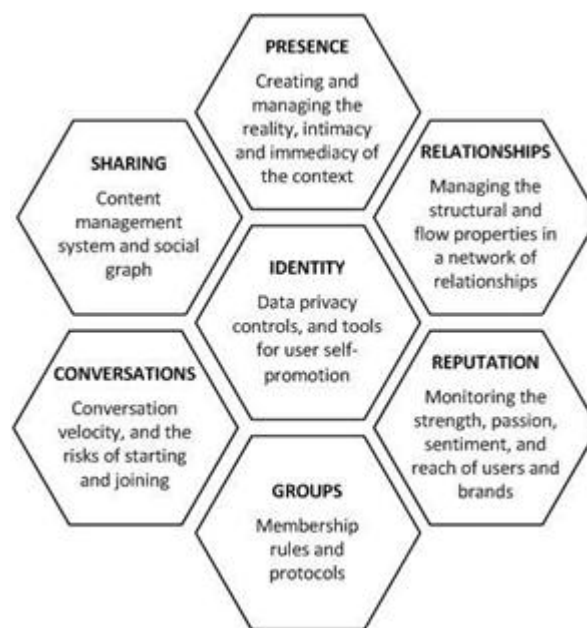
Figure3. Social Media Functionality (Kietzmann;Hermkens;McCarthy;& Silvestre, 2011, s. 243)

2.2.1 Identity

The first block, *identity*, describes the degree of revealing the users identity in social media. Depending on the site, the user can decide whether to share his/hers personal information, e.g. name, age, gender, profession, and location. For example, bloggers usually tend not to use their real name and prefer to stay anonymous. Basically, the user has to develop an identity strategy, whether to appear with a real identity or virtual identity. But some of the social media sites such as Facebook require the user to set up an account with the real name. Privacy also plays a big part in the identity block. Users are concerned by the fact that the information that they share might end up in the wrong hands. (Kietzmann;Hermkens;McCarthy;& Silvestre, 2011, ss. 243-244)

2.2.2 Conversations

The second block is *conversations*, represents the different ways of communicating with other users in the social media sites. The conversations can be among either individuals or groups but it can also be either one-way conversations (e.g. blogging or tweeting) or two-way conversations (e.g. chatting). The rate of change and direction of the conversation also play a role in

the conversation block. The rate of change means the number of new conversations in a certain time frame and the direction of change means the continuity or the discontinuity of the conversation, for example, changes how customers perceive the company's products/services in the conversations. (Kietzmann;Hermkens;McCarthy;& Silvestre, 2011, ss. 244-245)

2.2.3 Sharing

The *sharing* block is representing the extent of receiving and distributing content in social media. People in social media are connected to each other by shared object, and whether it is a picture, text, video, link, audio or location, it depends on the aim and the content of the site. For example a shared object in LinkedIn is careers. The purpose of sharing is to build a relationship with the other users. (Kietzmann;Hermkens;McCarthy;& Silvestre, 2011, s. 245)

2.2.4 Presence

The *presence* block represents "the extent to which users can know if other users are accessible". People are connecting in social media more than ever before, which has led to the narrowing of the gap between real and virtual presence. Foursquare is a good example of this, because you can share your physical location online and "check in" to different places which able the other users to see your whereabouts in real-time. Presence can also mean that the user's presence is linked to other blocks in the Honeycomb framework, e.g. conversations and relationships. (Kietzmann;Hermkens;McCarthy;& Silvestre, 2011, ss. 245-246)

2.2.5 Relationship

The *relationship* block aims to describe the type of relationship that the users share in social media. It is the association among the users. You might be able to share content with other users as friends and sometimes you can only act as a fan or a follower. Some social media sites, such as LinkedIn and Facebook, allow users to talk only to the people you are connected to. You have to send a friend request to connect with the desired person and maybe even state your relationship e.g. "colleague" or "classmate" when sending the request and then the desired

person has to accept this friend request. Other platforms, like blogs, allow anyone communicate with anyone without establishing a formal relationship. (Kietzmann;Hermkens;McCarthy;& Silvestre, 2011, s. 246)

2.2.6 Reputation

The *reputation* block has a different meaning depending on the social media site. For example, in LinkedIn the user can build a reputation by getting endorsements from other users. In YouTube the reputation means the amount of views and the amount of ratings. In Facebook the reputation could be the amount received "likes". Ultimately, each can decide the metric that is used to measure reputation. A good reputation means trustworthiness. (Kietzmann;Hermkens;McCarthy;& Silvestre, 2011, s. 247)

2.2.7 Groups

The *groups* block "represents the extent to which users can form communities and sub communities. The more 'social' a network becomes, the bigger the group of friends, followers, and contacts." Again, the groups vary in different social media sites. Some sites, e.g. Google+ the user can divide his/hers friends into different groups such as "Family", "Colleagues", "Classmates". In Twitter the user can separate his/hers friends from fans and in Facebook you can create groups which can be either public or secret. (Kietzmann;Hermkens;McCarthy;& Silvestre, 2011, ss. 247-248)

J.H. Kietzmann et al. has taken this Honeycomb framework even further and showed how these social media sites can be placed to the model by considering the main activity of the site (see figure4). Different shades of colour in the Honeycomb framework displays the functionality of the social media sites in the model. The darker the colour is, the greater the functionality of the site in the block is.
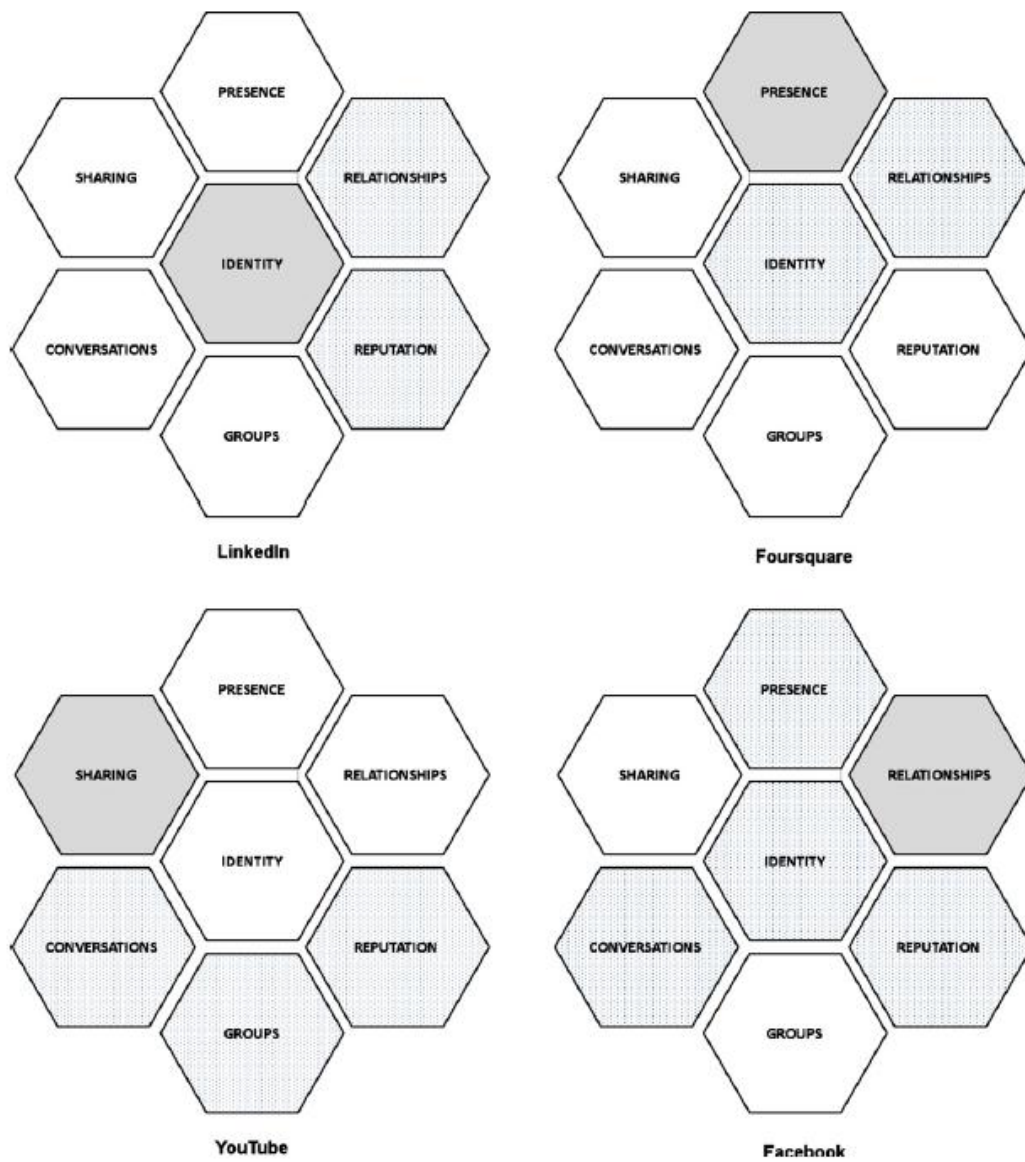
Figure4. Contrasting the functionalities of different sites (Kietzmann;Hermkens;McCarthy;& Silvestre, 2011, s. 248)

2.3   The main Social Media outlets

For this study, "the big 3" social media outlets where chosen: Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter, because these three are the most used social media sites by B2B marketers (see figure5). Facebook is seen as a channel where users "pay attention" and the B2B marketers also think that Facebook is useful for branding and event promotions. LinkedIn is used by B2B marketers because of lead generation, web traffic and content marketing. Twitter is the third popular social media outlet after Facebook and LinkedIn, and the B2B marketers prefer to use Twitter for short and concise promotions and web traffic. Blogs where also chosen for this study because B2B marketers identify blogging as good way to improve customer feedback and engagement. Blogs also increase search engine optimization and it is ideal for sharing and gaining knowledge about the industry. In other words, each of these social media sites has a main purpose and these purposes are demonstrated in a Figure6: "Social Media Marketing Landscape" to clarify the above mentioned. (Holden-Bache, 2011)
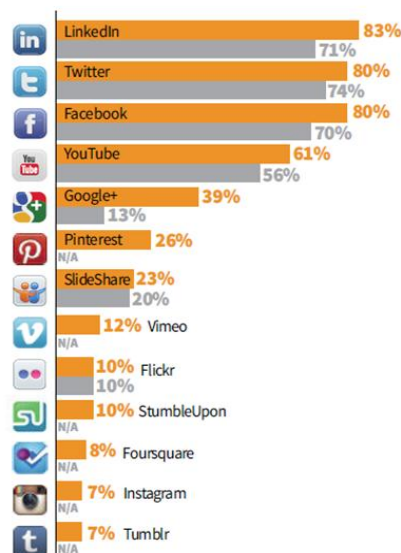
Figure5. Percentages B2B Marketers who use various Social Media sites to distribute content (MarketingProfs & Content Marketing Institute, 2012)

Figure6. Social Media Landscape (Holden-Bache, 2011)

2.3.1 Facebook

Facebook was launched in 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg and it was originally made for Harvard students only, where Zuckerberg studied at the time. After the first month more than half of the Harvard undergraduates had created profiles on Facebook. Within the same year this phenomenon started to gain interest among other universities around USA. Facebook became incorporated and received its first investment from PayPal. Finally, the service was expanded for high school students as well as employees of several companies, but it was still kept as "invitation only" network. In 2006 Facebook was opened for the public and everyone over 13 year old with a valid email address could join. In 2009 Facebook turned cash-flow positive and the next year the company was already valued at $41 billion, which made Facebook the third largest web company in the USA after Google and Amazon. Since then, Facebook has kept growing steadily and it has over 1 billion active users. (Wikipedia, Facebook, 2012)

Facebook users can share their photos, basic information and personal interests in their profiles. Users can use either public or private chat to communicate with friends. In addition, you can link, post, like, poke, share and tag almost anything in Facebook. In 2011 Facebook launched a new feature, the "Subscribe" button, which allows the users to follow public updates from, for example, companies and public figures. By subscribing to a certain company or a public figure you can follow the updates and promote the activities on the page. This way the company

or the public figure and a private person can connect and interact. If a company has a public profile in Facebook it can reach the customers very inexpensively and gain more visibility. (Wikipedia, Facebook, 2012)

According to recent studies, several companies have grasped the opportunity of social networking to improve interaction with their customers. A particular study by Aberdeen Group revealed that organizations that are using social media networking sites such as Facebook are 17 times more likely to improve customer satisfaction than companies that are not using social media networking. But it is not enough for the company to just be part of the social media networking sites; you have to have a clear strategy in order to actually benefit from it. There are two ways to spread the awareness of your company. First, the company can create an account (Facebook Page, not Facebook profile), get the customers to join it and then post information (such as upcoming events, offers, news, etc.) and interact with customers and fans. The second option for companies to gain visibility in Facebook is advertising. A company can buy advertising space from Facebook and be visible for everyone. Facebook users can see these advertisements on their profile pages and click on the advertisement. Facebook expert Mari Smith reminds companies to appear in social media websites as a member and not as a marketer. She suggests that companies should rather use "relationship marketing" than "push marketing" in their Facebook Pages. Being an aggressive marketer can turn off potential customers, but if you find the right balance with being a marketer and a friend at the same time you can really succeed. (Gault, 2009)

If we take a look on Facebook through the Honeycomb framework, it was stated by J.H. Kietzmann et al. that Facebook's main function in the Honeycomb framework is "relationships". But if you look at all the building blocks you can see that all those seven elements exist in Facebook.

Identity: In Facebook you must appear with your own name. If you "like" something or have joined some group other users can create an image of who you are as a person or as a company.

Conversations: In Facebook you can have conversations through private messaging, chatting or commenting a status.

Sharing: One can share almost anything in Facebook; pictures, links, videos, locations, etc.

Presence: Facebook can appear either online or offline. If you are out and about, you can add your location to your status update and all your friends/fans will see where you are. You can also have a link to your website or to your blog in Facebook, which makes your presence even stronger.

Relationships: Facebook's form of a relationship is friendship. Users are connecting with each other by sending a friend request. You can decide whether to have informal or formal relationship with the other users.

Reputation: Facebook reputation can be measured by the amount of "likes" or friends.

Groups: You can form either public or secret groups in Facebook. In a public group anyone can join but if you have a secret group you need to get an invitation or send a request to join.

(Kietzmann;Hermkens;McCarthy;& Silvestre, 2011)

2.3.2   LinkedIn

LinkedIn was launched almost a decade ago, in May 5th 2003 by Reid Hoffman. In June 2012, LinkedIn reported that the site had now more than 175 million registered users. LinkedIn has three offices in USA (headquarters in California), one in London and one in Dublin. (Wikipedia, LinkedIn, 2012)

Compared to the other social media sites, LinkedIn is the most business-oriented of them. LinkedIn profile can be used as an "online CV", as it displays the profile users' educational background, previous professions and skills. There are three different dimensions of connecting in LinkedIn; the registered users can invite

other people (co-workers, employees, friends, fellow students, business partners, etc.) to be their connection, join groups and follow companies.

In LinkedIn it is fairly easy to find new connections, because LinkedIn suggests connections, which are 1st, 2nd or even 3rd degree connections. This means that, for example, a 2nd degree connection is a friend of your friend, and so on. LinkedIn can also be used as a job search website, you just have to choose the country, job function and perhaps even the position you are interested in. Registered users can add their résumés and profile pictures to their profiles to give the complete view of them for others to see. There are also tons of different groups for different industries where people can share ideas and talk about recent industry topics.

The Honeycomb framework indicated that LinkedIn's main function is "identity" but LinkedIn has functions in other elements as well.

Identity: LinkedIn is self-branding and users are presenting their professional identity.

Conversations: LinkedIn is a great site for following and attending to the current industry conversations.

Sharing: The more the users share information about themselves, the more complete their profiles are. Sharing a CV in LinkedIn is very common and even recommended.

Presence: Not applicable in LinkedIn. Whether you are online or offline or where you are physically located does not matter in LinkedIn.

Relationships: The form of a relationship is a professional connection in LinkedIn. Your connections are defined as 1st, 2nd or 3rd degree connections. When adding a new connection you need to make a request in order to connect.

Reputation: Reputation in LinkedIn is based on endorsements. As an individual, you can receive endorsements (e.g. language skills) from your connections. As a

company, you can receive endorsements about your products/services from your satisfied customers.

Groups: LinkedIn has various different groups with different purposes. For example some universities have groups where the students can join and the different degree programmes can be divided into subgroups. Groups are either open groups or member only groups.

(Kietzmann;Hermkens;McCarthy;& Silvestre, 2011)

2.3.3   Twitter

Twitter is a micro blogging service which is used for short-messaging. This micro media outlet was launched by Jack Dorsey in 2006 and today there is more than 500 million people using it. The founder studied in New York University and he wanted to create a SMS service for communicating with a small group of people. (Wikipedia, Twitter, 2012) Twitter users can post a 140-character-long comment, which is called a "tweet" and the users' contacts are called "followers". Users can also post links which will lead the viewer to other content, such as news or photos. This micro blogging service is also used by many celebrities who want to connect with their fan base or do self-promotion. (Mashable.com) For example, comedians may post a joke as a "tweet" to advertise themselves. Twitter is a good way to speak your mind and make a statement about a recent topic. Users can mention or reply to another user by using the "@" sign and by using the "#" symbol the user can connect existing conversations from a specific topic. (Wikipedia, Twitter, 2012)

Twitter is focused around short messaging which are mostly real-time status updates, so J.H. Kietzmann et al. suggests that Twitter would function in the "Conversations" block of the Honeycomb Framework, but can also function in other blocks.

Identity: User does not have to appear with his/hers real name and instead create a username. Other users create a conception of you based on your "tweets".

Conversations: Twitter is a micro blog and the main function of the site is short messaging. It is common to "tweet" several times a day and the other users are not obligated to reply.

Sharing: Users can share basically anything in Twitter with friends or followers as long as the message content is short.

Presence: Not applicable in Twitter.

Relationships: In Twitter the users have followers. Relationships does not matter that much in Twitter.

Reputation: The amount of followers could be a metric for measuring reputation in Twitter. But you can follow somebody without reading their posts, which makes measuring reputation in Twitter harder.

Groups: Twitter has self-created groups ergo a list of friends divided into categories.

(Kietzmann;Hermkens;McCarthy;& Silvestre, 2011)

2.3.4 Blogs

Blogs, also known as web logs, are internet diaries. The author of the blog ("blogger") can write about his or hers personal life, political views, objects of interest such as sports, décor, fashion, food, etc. Blogs can include links, photos, text, audio and videos. The contents and the appearance of the blogs are unique, because everything depends on the blogger. Also companies are using blogs for communicating and informing with customers and stakeholders, because it is easier to update than a website and you can write about the subject more in depth. It can also be used as a company newsletter and linked to the company website. (Varlack, 2009) There is no certainty when the first blog was exactly created but it was somewhere around mid-90's. The blogging became popular not until the turn of the century and according to NM Incite, a Nielsen/McKinsey company, there were over 181 million blogs around the world in the end of 2011. (Nielsen, 2012)

The main types of blogs are categorized as follows:

- Personal blogs (e.g. on-going diary)
- Micro blogs (e.g. Twitter)
- Corporate and organizational blogs (can be internal or external)
- By genre (political, healthy, traveling, decorating, fashion, etc.)
- By media type (only videos, links, photos or sketches)

(Wikipedia, Blog, 2012)

Blogs could be placed also to the "Conversations" block in the Honeycomb Framework just like Twitter, but blogs differ slightly from Twitter when thinking about the functions in the different elements.

Identity: Blogger can be anonymous when writing a blog. Identity of the blogger could be based on the blog posts, because he/she is expressing his/hers point of view or lifestyle.

Conversations: Blogs are often seen as a place for "rich and lengthy conversations that can be traced back on the blog itself".

Sharing: Blogs are mostly for sharing text, but the text can be supported with pictures and videos.

Presence: Not applicable in blogs.

Relationships: Bloggers are able to "develop a relationship with each other, without a formal arrangement of what and how much information they should share".

Reputation: A blog's reputation can be based on the amount of readers.

Groups: Not applicable in blogs.

(Kietzmann;Hermkens;McCarthy;& Silvestre, 2011)

3   B2B SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING

B2B marketing differs in many ways from the general B2C marketing. In business markets the end user is not included, one organization is selling its products or services to another business, which is using this product or service in the creation of their own goods and services. This means fewer but larger customers are involved in purchases than in B2C markets, which creates higher value but also higher risks when economic, technical and financial factors are considered. (Vitale;Giglierano;& Pfoertsch, 2011, ss. 1-8)

In B2B marketing it is important to create value for the B2B customer who also needs to provide value to the end users. The buying motivation for businesses is more complex and therefore the marketing process differs from the general consumer marketing. In consumer markets, the marketing process is usually one-way communication to the customer, companies are creating awareness and interest but customer feedback is not always invited. In consumer markets, advertising is the most used promotion method, but in B2B markets it is personal selling. The customer relationship is more communicative and more profound, and the goal is to create long-lasting relationships. This is usually achieved by providing information, personal service to the customer, customizations, staying in touch with the client and even meeting face-to-face. (Vitale;Giglierano;& Pfoertsch, 2011, ss. 1-8)

Social media marketing has replaced the traditional marketing outlets over the past few years, such as newspapers, magazines and television. Several businesses have had to face the fact that the viewership in traditional sites has declined; in some industries it has decreased as much as 25 per cent. Viewers might not even visit websites as much as they used to, and they are spending more and more time in social media sites, such as Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter. And of course, businesses need to keep up with their customers and find new ways of engaging them when the audience is moving away. (Baker, 2011) A blogger, educator, business consultant and author Mark W. Schaefer says:

> *"Social Web is not business-to-business, it's not business-to-consumer, it's people-to-people."*

(Baker, 2011)

Social media is a game changer for B2B marketing, and some businesses do not want to take part in it because they think it is not useful for them. These businesses think that social media is only for B2C companies because it seems to be more suitable for them. The B2B Social Media Book reminds these doubters that

> *"B2B social media marketing is a new set of marketing tool that integrates with existing marketing strategies to help you work smarter instead of harder. When done well, social media marketing can reduce marketing expense, increase lead volume, and provide a clear and measurable return on investment."*

(Bodnar & Cohen, 2012, s. 3)

Bodnar and Cohen (2012) have also listed five reasons why B2B companies should use social media marketing and why is it suitable for them:

1. Good understanding of customers

2. Deep knowledge of the industry

3. Creating more profit with smaller budgets

4. Experience of relationship-based sales

5. Existing knowledge of this type of marketing (experience of publishing newsletters, quarterly magazines, etc.)

(Bodnar & Cohen, 2012, ss. 4-6)

B2B customer relationships are more long-term oriented and more profound compared to B2C customer relationships. This is a huge advantage for B2B social

media marketing, because you have clearer image and *knowledge of your customer base*, which makes the customers easier to reach and connect with. Both the company and the customer share the knowledge of the same industry and the customer is more thoughtful about buying. (Bodnar & Cohen, 2012, s. 5)

Having *that deep knowledge of your industry* is a huge advantage because you can share that knowledge with your customer. "Because social media is often used as a platform for educating prospects through content and relationships, having the depth of knowledge is a clear boost in the quest for social media marketing success." (Bodnar & Cohen, 2012, s. 5)

In B2B marketing you always aim to *do more with less*, minimizing costs and maximizing brand recognition. The goal is to gain as much as value with a low budget. That is why social media suits for B2B companies, because it enables doing that. Companies do not have to have a big budget in order to succeed in social media. (Bodnar & Cohen, 2012, s. 5)

B2B sales have higher prices and longer sales processes, so you inevitably build relationships with your customers. Social media sites enable to connect better with your customer by communication and *getting feedback* on your products and/or services. (Bodnar & Cohen, 2012, s. 5)

B2B marketers have been practicing social media marketing long before social media even existed without even realizing that. For instance, they have experience of "publishing company newsletters, quarterly magazines, and other marketing tactics that map to many key social media marketing methods." They also have "*a history of telling business-focused stories and educating customers with content.*" (Bodnar & Cohen, 2012, s. 5)

3.1 Benefits and challenges with B2B Social Media Marketing

As any other marketing strategy, also social media marketing has its pros and cons. In this chapter the benefits as well as the challenges of B2B social media marketing are reviewed.

3.1.1 Benefits of B2B Social Media Marketing

When asking business owners or marketing professional why are they doing social media marketing, the answer usually is "because everybody is doing it" and they do not have a clue how to track the results or even what results they should be tracking. (McElaney, 2012) This chapter hopefully helps solving the problem why the B2B marketers are so eager to be present in social media.

One of the key benefits of social media is the *sharing of expertise and knowledge* and helping others to solve problems. "59% of B2B buyers are engaging with peers online who addressed their challenges" and "41% are following online discussions to learn more about topics." (PromoTadka, 2011) Social media is providing a great opportunity to gain a better understanding of your industry, including customers and competitors. (Kerley, 2012)

Educating customers by writing a blog post about the company products is a huge advantage, because the customers can learn about your company and its products in his/hers own time. The customers can also post questions and ask for more information. (PromoTadka, 2011) Social media is enabling companies to interact with customers directly in real-time and build a relationship with current customers as well as prospects, while advertisements and campaigns are just one-way streets. (Kerley, 2012) "In providing two-way communications, B2Bs will not only educate the customers, but also build trust and credibility that can lead to increase sales in shorter periods." (Kerley, 2012)

Because the B2B purchase is more time consuming and more complex, *word-of-mouth* is influencing buying decisions in B2B even more than in B2C. For the company it is a huge advantage when a satisfied customer can endorse the purchased product on a social media site like LinkedIn or write a positive comment to a blog post. This way the prospects can see that the product is well received and gets their attention. (Kerley, 2012)

Even though social media marketing "requires an investment of budget and professional resources, it is nowhere near the costs associated with other media".

"*Social media are the most cost-effective media.*" (Kerley, 2012) Most of the social media outlets can be used for free, but it always requires somebody's time to keep the sites updated.

Marketers are always thinking of new ways to strengthen their competitive advantage and to engage their customers. Social media is now the place to be, but the B2B companies are moving a little behind, so many companies have the *advantage of being the "first-mover"* of the industry. (Kerley, 2012)

By being present in different social media sites, the company can gain *brand awareness*. "Instead of waiting for buyers to go search for your website and information when they need you, you must reach out to them, so that you would be the first company they seek when the need arises." (PromoTadka, 2011)

3.1.2   Challenges in B2B Social Media Marketing

All marketing strategies have their own issues and challenges, and they have to find a solution how to overcome them. B2B social media marketing is no exception. Just because social media marketing is new and different, it means even more obstacles than in traditional ways of marketing. There is a short list below, where you can find examples of issues with B2B social media marketing. The issues are explained more in depth after the short list. There are also suggested solutions for these issues.

- Superior authority does not approve or everybody is not on board
- Access blocked to social media sites
- Lack of support by executives or co-workers
- The customer base is not in social media sites
- Lack of time
- Lack of employees who are right for this job
- Reluctance to try something new
- No idea how to get started

(Bodnar & Cohen, 2012, ss. 185-191)

Even though, one can be fully committed to this social media marketing project, everybody else might not feel the same way. You might be able to handle the social media posts and updates by yourself but you still want to get everybody on board and have their approval. Perhaps the legal department or the IT department are hesitant and have *concerns about the security and legal issues*. This can be solved by getting everybody involved as soon as possible and training the staff on these concerns, so everybody knows about them and can avoid the legal and security issues. (Bodnar & Cohen, 2012, ss. 185-186)

A survey conducted in 2011 showed that *access to social media sites was blocked* in 31 per cent of companies with more than 100 employees. The reason was that the managers of these companies think that social media is only for pleasure and not for business. But these managers have to realize the potential of social media as a place for business, too. Possible solution for this issue is to find and contact that person who is behind the decision of blocking social media sites and get that person on board. (Bodnar & Cohen, 2012, ss. 186-187)

Some executives might be from the "older generation" by being a little bit more conservative and you might not get the needed support from them concerning the social media marketing project. In order to *convince these executives*, you could show some proper results and calculations of how this social media marketing has improved the amount of connections and customer satisfaction, as well as sales and ROI. (Bodnar & Cohen, 2012, s. 187)

It is possible that your *customers have not yet joined to different social media sites* but the ideas and tools of social media can be used even though the customers are not using social networks. For example, by creating blog posts about your new product and sending that link to your customer. If the customer is interested in your product and sending you an email inquiry about it, you can answer with a blog post which has information about that product. In the blog posts you could also have a link to your Facebook page for more information, which can creates curiosity. (Bodnar & Cohen, 2012, ss. 187-188)

Lack of time can be a problem, you have other more important things to do and you just do not know when to put your thoughts into these social media posts and updates. By planning and organizing your time well, you can always have a moment to keep up on the industry, create posts and updates, and communicate with your customers. (Bodnar & Cohen, 2012, s. 188)

It depends on the company whether you have one person who is responsible for the social media marketing or a whole team. You might even have to hire a new person for this job, but it is not necessary. It is important that you *have the right person for the job*. The person who is responsible for the social media image needs to have a clear understanding and good knowledge about the company's products and services. Furthermore, this person should also have the ability and motivation to engage the customer with the posts. (Bodnar & Cohen, 2012, ss. 189-190)

There is also at least one person in the company who likes things the way they are and *does not want to change anything*. This person is perfectly satisfied with the way things are at the moment, and he or she is always used to getting new customers by using traditional advertising outlets, attending trade fairs and sending emails. The intention is not to put all these traditional types of marketing aside, but to improve the marketing by keeping up with the trends and finding new ways to engage your customers. The fact that the business is still running by keeping things the way they are, it does not mean that you could not do better. There is always room to improve, because the world is constantly changing and the competition is getting harder. (Bodnar & Cohen, 2012, ss. 190-191)

You can get easily overwhelmed by the thought of starting this social media marketing project. You might think that everything you read makes sense but you still *have no idea where to begin*. Think about the customer; is the customer currently present in these social media sites and what does the customer want to read and know about your company and your products and/or services. Think about how you can engage your customer, keep the posts interesting and standing out from the crowd. If your customer base can be found from the social media

sites, you can start planning and getting the co-workers on board. (Bodnar & Cohen, 2012, s. 191)

A B2B marketing expert, Holger Schulze (2012) has conducted a survey about the biggest challenges with social media. Below you can find a chart of the results. 253 B2B marketers answered to this survey, and the most selected issue was "*measuring results*", which is understandable since the metrics and social media goals are still developing. These challenges are correlating well with the challenges that were listed before. (Schulze, 2012)
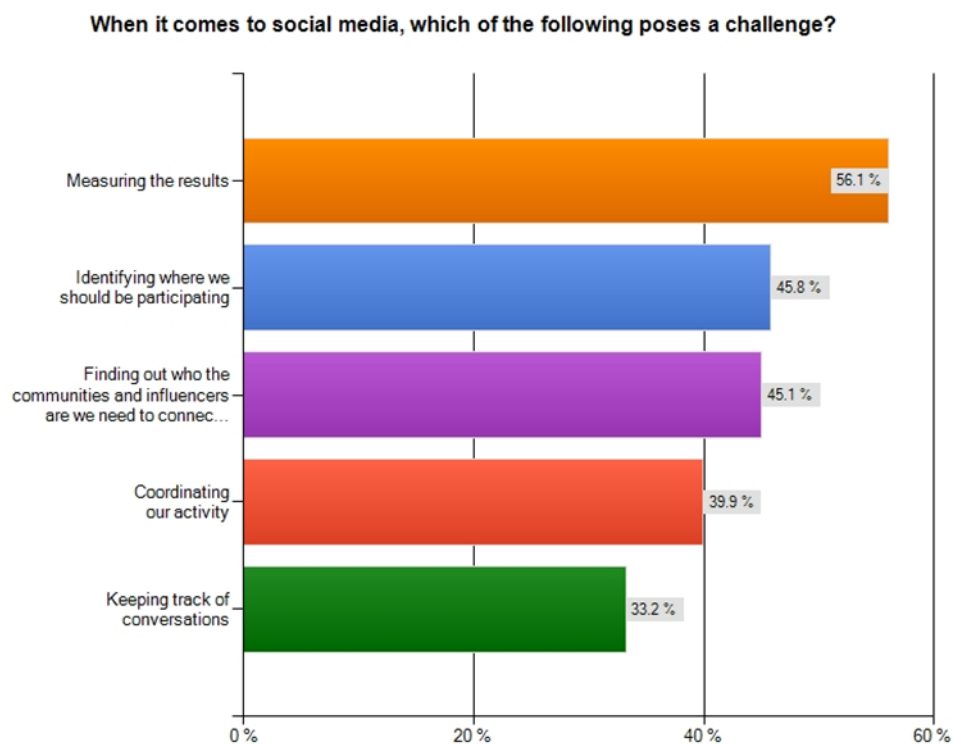

Figure7. Challenges with Social Media (Schulze, 2012)

Other challenges that B2B companies might face in social media marketing:

- Customer personas are not clear enough
- Failure to make boring into exciting
- Terrible company website
- The belief that social media marketing can replace everything

- Making excuses

- Not enough content

- Using the wrong metrics and focusing on the wrong measures

(SocialMediaB2B, 2012)

In order to succeed in social media, you must have a clear understanding of your customers. Understanding not only your customers' needs and wants, but also their concerns is a key to success in social media. (SocialMediaB2B, 2012)

You have to have confidence in your business and its products and services, and if you have that confidence you will be able to make it look exciting to your customer as well. Boring product descriptions and data sheets are not particularly the most intriguing things to read, but you can make them interesting by highlighting the most unique and unexpected parts about that product. If the company has been successful and won some awards, it should be mentioned and promoted. Some might think this is pretentious, but it actually makes the company look trustworthy and thriving. (SocialMediaB2B, 2012)

If the company's social media profiles are looking excellent and are getting a lot of positive attention, it does not mean that your company website should be ignored. If a current or potential customer is intrigued by your social media post, after seeing that post he or she will definitely visit your website for more information or to find a contact person, so it is crucial have a presentable website as well as a social media profile. (SocialMediaB2B, 2012)

Even though social media is a sufficient marketing channel, the other marketing channels should not be eliminated. Social media marketing should be used as a part of the company's marketing strategy, not replace all the other ones. (SocialMediaB2B, 2012)

"Well social media doesn't work for my industry." "My business is different." "We are boring." "We have a different model. It doesn't apply to us." "We tried, but after a few weeks it just wasn't working for us." These are the excuses that

Kipp Bodnar has listed in www.socialmediab2b.com. Instead of making excuses, you could be getting inspired, finding new customers and beating your competition. (SocialMediaB2B, 2012)

The space in social media is endless, so the posts can easily get lost in the mass and lose visibility. The social media sites can be kept updated and current by posting regularly. That keeps the followers and fans engaged. Nobody is going to follow an empty social media site. (SocialMediaB2B, 2012)

As the Holger Schulze's survey showed earlier, the biggest challenge in social media is measuring the results. Some might not even know how to measure the results and the level of social media marketing success. Kipp Bodnar reminds that you should not look at the weak metrics such as the amount of followers or engagements, but look at the "visitor-to-lead conversation rates" and "visitor-to-customer conversation rates" instead. The question that should be asked is "how many visitors have turned into customers?" (SocialMediaB2B, 2012)

3.2   B2B Social Media Marketing Strategy

Jones (2012) argues that there are 6 steps when developing a social media marketing strategy: Listen, identify goals, develop plan, produce content, engage and measure.

Figure8. Social Media strategy with six steps (Jones, 2012)

Listening is a great way to get started, because you need to find out where your audience is and what are they talking about. By listening you can also identify the key influencers and which ones should you develop a relationship. After you have found your audience and know what kind of topics they are interested in, you can start defining your goals and objectives with social media marketing. Determine what you aim to achieve with social media marketing. The aim might be something like getting more traffic to the company website, increasing the number of the followers or expanding the company's brand presence to the different social media outlets. Considering you're your audience's goals is also important, because when you define their needs and wants, you are able to create value. After identifying the goals, you can start planning how you will approach your audience. In the planning phase you must decide what kind of content will you post to which social media outlet and how often. Then you are able to create a schedule for each social media outlet. If you choose to use multiple different outlets, you should have a plan for each outlet about how you will use them to achieve the goals and objectives determined earlier. Jones (2012) reminds that when starting the social media marketing one should not attempt to be present in too many outlets too quickly. After developing a plan for social media marketing, you can start developing the content by defining different types of content and specific topics which will reflect your brand. Then it is time to execute the plan and engage your audience by producing content to the social media outlets. To be able engage your audience successfully, you must keep up with the schedule, post regularly and be congruent. For this you need to have constant resources to be able to communicate with the audience by commenting, answering questions and feedback. The final phase is measuring the results. For measuring the results, you have to define the metrics that you want to measure. The metrics can be, for example, the number of followers or fans, number of "retweets" or shares or the volume of the traffic back to the company website, depending on the goal that you defined in the beginning. (Jones, 2012)

4 HOW CAN B2B COMPANIES USE SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING TO ENGAGE THEIR AUDIENCE IN THE MAIN SOCIAL MEDIA OUTLETS

This chapter is focusing on the main social media outlets and how can B2B companies utilize those different outlets to engage their audience. There are different ways of engaging the audience in these main social media outlets and that is the reason for dividing the subtitles by the social media outlets.

4.1 Engaging the audience in Facebook

According to The B2B Social Media Book there are three valid reasons for B2B companies to create a Facebook page. The three reasons are: search, reach and content.

Search: Because the company Facebook Pages are public, they will also be accessible by search engines. If your company has a Facebook Page and a potential customer is searching for your company, for example from Google, your company's Facebook Page will show up in the search results. Companies can maximize visibility by including the company website and links to the Facebook Page and vice versa. When the company has links in both directions it will show better in search results. This "cross linking" is very important because it makes it easier for the customer to find information about your company and. The easier your company shows in the customer's search results, the easier it is for you to engage your customers. So make sure you have a link to your company's Facebook Page in your company website and have a link to your company website on your company's Facebook page. (Bodnar & Cohen, 2012, ss. 128-129)

Reach: The more reach the company has the better. The goal is to have as much people as possible who spread your company social media content. If even one of your fans likes or shares one of your company's Facebook posts, it can reach all of that one fans friends by showing up in the News Feed. (Bodnar & Cohen, 2012, s. 129) The amount of reach increases the engagement of the audience.

Content: "Content is the key to success on Facebook." (Bodnar & Cohen, 2012, s. 129) It is highly important to define the amount of content your company posts. As mentioned earlier, you do not want to use "push marketing" and overwhelm your fans with hundreds of posts and over selling. It is easy to think that the more content you post, the more people will be interested. Of course, being active is a positive thing, and by using "relationship marketing" and promoting your services or products in a friendly way you will reach the balance of being a marketer and a friend at the same time. (Bodnar & Cohen, 2012, s. 129) Posting the right amount and right kind of content will engage the audience.

Best way of engaging the customers in Facebook is to ask questions. Do not post only updates, but communicate with the fans by asking interesting and relevant questions about your company or the industry. Another way to connect with the fans is to get feedback on your content. This shows that you are interested in their opinion. (Liendgens, 2012)

Many people wonder how it is possible for B2B companies to engage their audience in Facebook because it is mostly just for private people. How do you find the right people from the right companies? It can be intimidating to think about how you get all these potential B2B customers to "like" you and follow your posts. You should not think about the company as one big entity, and think about all the people working for the company instead. Think about all the companies who you are connected with already in your day-to-day business life – current customers and also potential customers – then send them an invitation to join your company's Facebook Page. Do not wait for people to find your company's Facebook Page and join it; you need to be the first one to make the move. You know who your customers are so just find them and invite them to join. (Bodnar & Cohen, 2012, ss. 129-142)

Many professionals make the mistake and think about if these people even visit Facebook for work information. People might not do that consciously, but the reality is that everybody is constantly thinking about work on some level. They might not go to Facebook to search purposely for products or services that their

company might be interested in, but your company's post catches his or hers eye, it will be noticed and possibly draw attention. Then this one employee could bring up your post the next day at work and talk about it with his or hers colleagues. You just need to make sure your posts will show up in your fans Facebook News Feed. You cannot rely on people remembering your company and actively keeping up with your company news, so when your posts show on the News Feed your fans will see it and they do not have to do any work to see how is your business doing and what are your latest offers. Now you can even promote your posts on Facebook to ensure the visibility. The best B2B Facebook posts are the ones that are promoting in a friendly way and attract conversation and interaction as much as possible. Pictures are also a very good way to engage your fans. Posting pictures about your latest products, services, events and offers are much more exciting than just writing about it. (Bodnar & Cohen, 2012, ss. 129-142) Businesses that post pictures to their Facebook pages receive 53% more "likes" than the posts with only text or links. Image posts also get 104% more comments from the audience than the posts including only text or links. (Didner, 2013)

In short, a good company Facebook page is professional looking but friendly and inviting at the same time. Be active, be visual and be approachable, this will able to engage the audience. Facebook is the perfect opportunity to give information about your company, promote your products and services and interact with your customers cost-free. Do not underestimate the power of visual storytelling, social advertising and giveaways. For example, you can post about your latest offer on Facebook and mention to the customers to drop by for a cup of coffee if he or she wants to get more information about something. That is the start of building meaningful connections with your customers. (Bodnar & Cohen, 2012, ss. 129-142)

Facebook is very useful in "humanizing your company". Companies can share more personal content in Facebook than in LinkedIn for example.

"Many employees within b2b companies have email communication with customers and prospects, but never actually talk to them. Or they have

phone conversations but never meet face to face. Facebook provides an excellent means for sharing photos and even (limited) personal information, to help put a human face on an organization, and "put a face with the name" or voice of an employee for customers and prospects."

(Webbiquity, 2010)

4.2   Engaging the audience in LinkedIn

Compared to the other social media outlets, LinkedIn is definitely the most professional of them all. It is a place purely for business. In the beginning, LinkedIn actually started as a job search site. People who have profiles in LinkedIn are usually employees or job seekers and these profiles can act as an "online CV". "Many people send LinkedIn requests to people they do not know. This creates a network of weak ties with few personal connections." (Bodnar & Cohen, 2012, s. 98) The B2B Social Media Book has listed 8 tips which can help engaging the audience and building a network of strong ties on LinkedIn:

1. Send a LinkedIn connection request after in-person meeting.
2. Send a LinkedIn connection request and inform the person about the request after having a phone call with the potential customer.
3. If you use other social media outlets with good connections, send them a LinkedIn connection request.
4. Send context with the request by adding details about the meeting or the conversation you had earlier, or any other reason for connecting.
5. By importing email contacts to LinkedIn you can find business connections and personal connections, too.
6. Find new connections by reviewing actively suggested connections on LinkedIn and other network connections.
7. Make a strong impression by connecting with all your work colleagues.
8. Send connection requests to those who are in your industry and/or are in the same LinkedIn Group as you. Remember to add context and explain the reason of connecting.

(Bodnar & Cohen, 2012, s. 98)

LinkedIn company profile has 4 different tabs: "Overview/Home", "Careers", "Products and Services", "Employee Insights". In the "Overview" there is usually a company logo and a short introduction about the company. Addition to the introduction part, companies can put a link to their company website in there, tell the year of establishment, industry, company type and company size. By sharing this information the connections can get a clear picture of the company. In the "Careers" section, the company can inform about upcoming job openings, which can be shared with the company networks. "Products and Services" tab introduces all the product and/or services that the company has to offer. This is a very important tab which a company should definitely have and it should be kept updated, because it offers more detailed insights of the company to the connections. It is also important because this is the place where the recommendations go. Companies can get recommendations for their individual products and/or services. "Each product listing has a permalink, or its own address, so it can be shared with others on LinkedIn as an update or in a direct message." (Bodnar & Cohen, 2012, s. 101) Both customers and employees can share these product links. If a customer has been satisfied with the company's product/service, you can ask for recommendations on LinkedIn. Sometimes companies do customer surveys, so if you get positive results from that survey you can follow that with a recommendation request. That way the customers become your "brand advocate" and these customers ought to be thanked and rewarded. They are a huge asset, because they can give you recommendations, but also provide feedback. (Bodnar & Cohen, 2012, s. 101)

In the "Employee Insights" the company's connections can view your company's recent promotions, new titles and departures. This is a handy tool, because by viewing your customers' company profiles and "Employee Insights" you can, for example, update your customer database with this information.

By joining a Group on LinkedIn, you can share ideas, connections and discussions with the people from the same industry. You can find possibly suitable Groups for you by viewing your existing connections' Groups. "The goal of a Group is to

provide value to other members by sharing expertise and resources." (Bodnar & Cohen, 2012, s. 103) It is not recommended to start your own company-sponsored group before viewing other groups and how they communicate and how well-managed the groups are. Starting and running your own group requires constant updating and maintenance, so you need to be committed to the group and ready to put time to it. Joining Groups based on your target prospects is an easy way of finding new connections. (Bodnar & Cohen, 2012, ss. 103-105)

Participating in different groups in your industry able you to keep up with the trends, create new ideas and get recommendations from other group members. If there are conversations about your product/service, you should make sure that the other person knows that you work for the company and if possible, you should send a link to another source which talks about your product. More importantly, offer your contact information where the prospect can ask for more detailed information. This is more appealing than leaving a long sales pitch on the discussion board. (Hoffmeister, 2013)

The B2B Social Media Book is advising companies who are about to join LinkedIn to do these three things: complete your company profile, join a group and organize a LinkedIn sharing. These three things will aid in engaging your audience. The book also recommends "developing some type of an editorial calendar for one month that outlines status updates for the company and individual topics and group discussion threads." Employees can coordinate this schedule and this way ensuring that the profile is in active use and updated for building reach and leads. (Bodnar & Cohen, 2012, s. 108)

4.3   Engaging the audience in Twitter

In Twitter's own simplicity, this micro blogging service could be perfect for B2B social media marketing.

> *"Twitter's core concept is the extension of simple, short messages*
> *throughout the past many decades. The postcard begat the SMS message*

> *begat the IM status message begat Twitter. Sometimes the simplest ideas*
> *resonate because of the very fact that they are simple."*

(Siegler, 2011)

It is important to keep in mind that Twitter B2B marketing equals listening. At first, the amount of posts might feel overwhelming but when you get past that you will be able to "hear" fascinating insights and pieces of information and that way also find the most important people and companies who have something to offer for your business. (Voight, 2012) Before engaging your audience in Twitter, you need to define the audience's needs and wants so you can add value for your audience.

One way of getting your prospects attention and engaging the audience is to have an interesting and inviting background. If you settle for the standard white background colour, it gives the impression that you do not care. Fastest way to get people to follow your page is to follow others pages. Follow the influencers of your industry and then follow their followers. As mentioned earlier, you can search these people by using hashtags, for example, #B2B or #Trade Fairs. (Brainrider, 2012)

Laura Fitton has studied how B2B companies can use Twitter to find customers and prospects. Laura Fitton is the CEO and founder of oneforty.com and Pistachio Consulting; and she is also a co-author of "Twitter for Dummies". Fitton has listed 5 benefits on being in Twitter as a B2B company, even if the customers are not in there. The 5 benefits are:

1. Search Engine Optimization
2. Content Generation Engine
3. Research
4. Word of Mouth
5. Pass Along

(Cohen J. L., 2009)

Companies use *search engine optimization* to gain more visibility in the Internet. If the company uses its company name as Twitter account name, the company will get more scores in search engines like Google and the customer will find rapidly information about the company. The search engines use Twitter as a source of regularly updated and relevant content in their search results for a keyword. The more search results the company gets, the better. (Bodnar & Cohen, 2012, s. 110)

With Twitter companies can update the company websites by placing their Twitter posts on their websites in real time. For example, if you participated in a trade fair and "tweet" a short post about it, that "tweet" would go straight to your website for everybody to see it. This is a simple way of *generating content* on both Twitter and the company website. (Bodnar & Cohen, 2012, s. 110)

Twitter can be used as a *search engine* as well. There are two ways of doing research in Twitter: passive and active. A passive search means that you can put a keyword on the search and it will show results about that keyword, just like Google or any other search engine. In the active search you can ask a specific question from the Twitter users, collect the answers and record them. (Bodnar & Cohen, 2012, s. 110)

Word of mouth is considered to be the most powerful marketing tool in business; it is free promotion for the company when a satisfied customer recommends their product or service to another person. (BusinessDictionary.com) This is no exception in social media. Twitter is a place to express your opinion about something and it is a perfect platform for free advertisement.

When *searching your customers* from Twitter, there are tools that can help you in that. Firstly, you can use the Twitter search tool by entering your industry or company's product/service in it and then review the relevance of the results. If you want to find your current customers, you can just search them by their company names or the word Twitter included to the company names. (Bodnar & Cohen, 2012, s. 110)

4.4 Engaging the audience in blogs

Within the last few years blogging has become very trendy, not only for individuals but also for businesses, too. Companies have realized that blogging can be used as a marketing tool by sharing knowledge and information about relevant industry topics and company products/services and happenings. Those companies, who have succeeded in engaging the audience through blogging, usually focus on topics that interest the customers, without being self-promotional. And those companies have become the audience's trusted source of information over time, which will naturally lead to sales. (WindMillNetworking, 2011)

Galen DeYoung, a managing director of Proteus SEO specialized in B2B search engine optimization, has listed eight tips which will help in engaging the audience:

1. Post regularly, but only when you have something meaningful to offer
2. Incorporate images and other media
3. Incorporate humour
4. Be authentic
5. Be original
6. No sales pitches and self-promotion
7. Create a code of conduct for setting boundaries and appropriate behaviour
8. Stay focused

(DeYoung, 2008)

Companies how are starting to write a blog usually wondering how often should they write a blog post. Jeffrey L. Cohen advices in the B2B Social Media Book that ideal frequency is to post one to three times per week and work at least one or two weeks ahead of schedule. He also states that new bloggers need to be taught how to write a good blog and how to make it interesting for the reader, but of course using an experienced (business or leisure) blogger is preferred. Blogging is an excellent way of engaging the customers by, for example, sharing success

stories of customers or sales that was generated from the blog. Cohen recommends sharing the employee photos in the blog so the followers can recognize the writers. Blogs should also be easy to find so it is important to feature a link in the company website. (Bodnar & Cohen, 2012, ss. 77-96) These factors will maximize the customer engagement.

Blogging is a great opportunity for your customers to interact with you and your brand. By blogging about the company's recent happenings and new offers the customers can learn about your company and you can keep your company website "cleaner". The main reason for blogging is to inform your customer, create a relationship and in the end shorten the sales cycles. (Eloqua Grande Guides, 2012)

> *"Continual interaction is a key to shortening lengthy sales cycles. The average B2B sales cycle can range from 117 to 156 days. You need to produce and share compelling content to keep buyers engaged over that time. At the same time, business leaders want content that helps them solve problems, but not in a way that overtly sells your product."*

(Eloqua Grande Guides, 2012)

4.5 B2B Social Media marketing success stories on engaging the audience

Cisco and Caterpillar was chosen to display how can a B2B company be successful in social media marketing and how these companies have succeeded in engaging their audience. Cisco and Caterpillar are not only both well-known and multinational B2B companies, but they have succeeded in creating a winning social media image and a huge fan base. In the following chapters the companies will be reviewed and also the factors of how have they achieved all this success.

4.5.1 Cisco

Cisco is a multinational company that manufactures and sells routers, switches and other network equipment for businesses. (Cisco, 2013) Cisco has established a successful social media image by having a corporate presence in Facebook, Twitter and blogs. Cisco has become one of the leading B2B companies in

Facebook with over 300,000 fans following Cisco news, events and information. (Cisco, 2013)

Figure9. Cisco's Facebook Cover Photo of the week (Cisco, 2013)

In the Cisco Facebook Page there is all the basic information provided: information about the company, link to company website and blog, support centre information and photo material. The Facebook Page also looks stylish with the presentable profile picture and the cover page, which is apparently changing weekly. In the cover page they are promoting "true stories from a connected world", stories of different entrepreneurs and business people from around the world, which is a great way to appreciate the fans and give them something as a thank you. Cisco is interacting with the fans in a very fun-loving way; they have "SuperFan Spotlights", which are pictures and small presentations of the fans, and they also show appreciation to the fans by thanking them for helping Cisco reach the number of 300,000 fans. Cisco uses a lot of visual aids in the Facebook Page, a lot of pictures (both staged and real-life) and videos. Cisco is sharing photos of past seminars, business premises, staff, recent happenings, etc. They also use photos tagged by fans, for example, pictures of Cisco tattoos or children wearing Cisco t-shirts. (Cisco, 2013)

Figure10. Photos from Cisco's Facebook Page (Cisco, 2013)

4.5.2 Caterpillar

Caterpillar is a globally known brand who manufactures "construction and mining equipment, diesel and natural gas engines, industrial gas turbines and diesel-electric locomotives". Caterpillar's product line consists of more than 300 machines for almost 20 different industries, such as marine, mining and forestry. (Caterpillar, 2013)

Also Caterpillar is one of the B2B companies that have realized the opportunity in social media marketing and they have found a successful way to engage their audience. If you search Caterpillar from Facebook, you can see that they have seven different Facebook Pages. In LinkedIn, Caterpillar is divided into three different companies: Caterpillar Inc. (machinery), Caterpillar Logistics Services Inc. and Caterpillar Financial. The organization also has two groups in LinkedIn. Caterpillar's blog community was placed in the top 10 in the world by Mark Schaefer, who is one of the most well-known marketing consultants in USA and specialized in social media marketing. Caterpillar has been active in "the big 3" social media sites: Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter, but they have also recognized the potential value in other platforms, such as blogs. Brian R. Stokoe is a Social Media Program Manager for Caterpillar and he stated in the interview by Mark Schaefer that:

> *"Our techniques for using these tools are always founded in industry best practices. So yes, listening and responding are key in the social media space. The public facing two way conversation is great for us. The Caterpillar brand is built on the backs of great relationships. Social media technologies provide the opportunity to publicly demonstrate our customer / business relationships."*

(Stokoe, 2011)

Caterpillar's aim with blogging is to gain credibility from customers and they are succeeding in that by, for example, adding the writer's photo to the blog post so that the readers' are able to put a face to name. (Stokoe, 2011) Caterpillar has actually decided to write several blogs, they have divided their customers into groups by industries and they have a blog for almost every customer industry. They have blogs for example marine industry and another for footwear industry. This is very understandable because the customers differ in so many ways and Caterpillar is such a huge organization. (Cat Social Media, 2013)

5   CASE COMPANY: VIEXPO

In this chapter the method of research will be reviewed and the reasons why the particular method was chosen. The empirical part will display Viexpo as a company and their services. Then by interviewing Viexpo employee, the current social media status of Viexpo could be reviewed. The aim of the interview was also to get an idea of the challenges that Viexpo has had with social media marketing and what are their goals towards social media marketing.

5.1   Research methodology

For this study it was clear that the best choice for research methodology would be qualitative research. Qualitative research means that it is comprehensive acquisition of information and the data is collected in a natural and actual circumstance. It is preferred that the examinee or the interviewee can express his/hers point of view and the researcher is able to adapt in the constantly changing situation and able to change the direction according to the situation. The aim is to reveal unexpected factors. The researcher does not determine what is important, the examinee is the one to steer the research according to the answers. (Hirsjärvi;Remes;& Sajavaara, 2009, s. 164)

The other option was quantitative research, but it did not seem suitable for this study. In the quantitative research there is usually a large sample group, which is clearly defined, and the results from that group can easily be transferred into a numeric data. Questionnaires and surveys are often used as a data collection method in quantitative research. (Hirsjärvi;Remes;& Sajavaara, 2009, ss. 139-142) If a questionnaire would have been the data collection method for this research, some aspects might have been missed or overseen.

Interview was chosen as a data collection method, because the study is a case study about one particular company and interview was seen as the most beneficial method for this study. Interview enabled to gain more profound answers and clarify some answers for the study. The questions for the interview were prepared

in advance, but they were only used as a guideline for the conversations rather than restricting the interviewee to answer the specific questions.

For this thesis it was very important to interview Viexpo in order to get a clear picture of what are the actual needs with this project, how do they see the social media and what is their goal. Also the challenges were defined in the interview. Rainer Rönnback, Viexpo's internationalization expert, was interviewed and it became clear that Viexpo wants to have social media sites as part of the marketing strategy.

5.2   Viexpo company overview

Viexpo is a Finnish internationalization company, which was founded in 29.1.1970 in the small city of Pietarsaari, located in Ostrobothnia. Now Viexpo has offices located in the cities of Pietarsaari, Vaasa and Kokkola. The company has 10 employees in total and over 200 members. Viexpo serves all industries and business communities. (Rönnback, 2012)

Viexpo's purpose is to support companies in the different stages of internationalization. Viexpo offers, for example, free basic counselling, including finding information and answering to internationalization related issues, helping with trade issues in general. The demands of companies depend on the industry and the experience of the business. Viexpo aims to lower the threshold to start exporting, as well as to speed up the company's access into new target markets. (Viexpo Services, 2013)

5.2.1   Services

Viexpo offers services that help Finnish small and medium sized companies in internationalization. There are seven different kinds of services that will aid these companies to e.g. gain knowledge about their new target market, meet new potential customers and business partners, and in the end, give the customer all the tools to succeed in internationalization. (Viexpo Services, 2013)

5.2.2 Fact finding trips

Fact finding trips organized by Viexpo are an excellent first step towards new markets. These trips offer a chance to check out the latest trends in the industry, as well as new production technologies. The companies can meet new potential customers, business partners and visit different local companies and trade fairs. The fact finding trips encourage companies to move forward in the process of internationalization. (Viexpo Services, 2013)

For example, Viexpo organized a Fact finding trip to Hong Kong for Finnish designer companies in 3.-9.12.2012. On the first day in Hong Kong they visited the Finnish Chamber of Commerce where they were introduced with the different opportunities what Hong Kong has to offer for companies and how to build a business in there. The second day they went to two different exhibitions, Creative Ecologies+ and German Design Standards. In the evening they attended a designers' party. The day after that they went to an event called Business of Design week, which included conferences, seminars, exhibitions and trade fairs. Some of the companies decided to also visit a trade fair called Innotech Design Expo. (Harinen, 2013)

5.2.3 Trade fairs

Viexpo also organizes joint projects with companies in international trade fairs where companies are able to exhibit their products/services, gain visibility, increase brand awareness and create new customer contacts. Viexpo is managing this project, which means handling the negotiations of stand bookings, coordination of the event, as well as providing on-site support during the trade fair. (Viexpo Services, 2013)

As an example of a joint project in trade fair is Interstroyexpo 2012. Viexpo gathered five construction companies from Finland who were interested in attending to that trade fair and exhibit their products in there. Viexpo booked the stand for these companies, handled the documentations and pro forma and all the other things that needed to be organized before the event. During the event

Viexpo provided on-site support, for example, translation assistance in negotiations. (Ylitorvi, 2012)

5.2.4 Export networks

Export network is a joint venture of 4-6 companies from the same industry, in which the companies share an export manager, who specializes in either the industry or the country of desired target market. Export network is a cost-effective way to start the export and gain experience in the new markets, because the companies share the costs of the project. (Viexpo Services, 2013)

Last year, Viexpo set a wooden building construction export network into motion. Six companies who manufactured different elements for houses (e.g. windows, walls, roofs, and isolations) were put together and they chose to hire an export manager via Viexpo for this project who planned a market entry strategy for the target market in France. (Rönnback, 2012)

5.2.5 Basic consultation

Internationalization is a long process that requires expertise and long-term preparation. Viexpo's internationalization experts advise companies on all issues related to internationalization. The company decides what kind of help they need and they also determine the timetable. (Viexpo Services, 2013)

For example, some smaller companies, who are starting to import their products to a new country, need help with the documentations and Viexpo will use their resources to find an answer to the companies' questions. These companies might need assistance in what kind of documentation is needed in what kind of situations and also want to know about the regulations in the target market. (Ylitorvi, 2012)

5.2.6 Export manager services

A company can hire an export manager through Viexpo with a fixed-term contract basis. An external export manager offers experience in foreign trade business and brings a new perspective to internationalization. (Viexpo Services, 2013)

5.2.7   Language services

Viexpo handles professional translations for both companies and individuals. Viexpo's language services cover all business areas, and translation services provide almost all the language pairs. (Viexpo Services, 2013)

For instance, if a company is doing business with a foreign company, they might need help with the communication. Viexpo can translate offers, inquiries and invoices for the company and any other aspects of business communication. (Ylitorvi, 2012)

5.2.8   Training programs

Viexpo also organizes regularly different kind of internationalization training programs for companies. Companies can participate in these events and update their knowledge about the markets. (Viexpo Services, 2013)

Last year Viexpo organized a training program called "Bemästrad Internationalisering" where they helped the Swedish speaking companies from Ostrobothnia area with the internationalization issues. (Ylitorvi, 2012)

6 VIEXPO USING SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING TO ENGAGE THEIR AUDIENCE IN THE MAIN SOCIAL MEDIA OUTLETS

At the moment, Viexpo has a Facebook Page and LinkedIn account as a company and as a group. Unfortunately, Viexpo is not using either of them actively since they are not aware how to be part of them in a successful and efficient way. Viexpo also wonders how they can engage their audience in the different social media outlets. Viexpo's current Facebook and LinkedIn accounts could be described as quite primitive. Viexpo is currently considering other social media outlet options. (Rönnback, 2012)

6.1 Viexpo's social media marketing

Because Viexpo is not sure what kind of social media outlets they should use and how, Viexpo is using only email and websites. The goal is to get social media sites into the marketing strategy as well. Mr Rönnback stated that social media marketing has a huge relevance in today's business life. Among the other marketing channels, it would improve the customer satisfaction, if it is done right. (Rönnback, 2012) This is the right mind-set, because this implicates that Viexpo understands the importance of social media marketing in today's business life and they also now understand that social media equals interaction, two-way communication with the audience. It is also a positive thing that Viexpo has the Facebook and LinkedIn accounts so there is a solid basis already existing and now Viexpo does not have to see the trouble of creating all the social media accounts all at once. Instead, now they can just improve and update the profiles.

Facebook and LinkedIn accounts were created because those were the only ones that Viexpo had any previous knowledge of how to use them. There was a third one, Wikipedia, but administration objected it. The administration thought it was not needed, professional enough and did not meet the quality standards. (Rönnback, 2012) As mentioned in the theory, one of the challenged that B2B

companies might face would be that the authorities do not approve of the social media marketing. It seems that Viexpo has this particular problem.

6.2 Viexpo's challenges with social media marketing

Viexpo had a good beginning with social media marketing, when they started in the autumn 2011. The administration was committed to the idea and they also had agreed that the company website need to be improved. The challenges at that time were that Viexpo did not know what they should post on the social media sites, how often should they post and what is relevant information in which social media site. (Rönnback, 2012) This indicates that Viexpo has had another challenge that was mentioned earlier in the text. Viexpo did not know how to get started and they did not prepare a proper social media marketing strategy. Those are the first things that should be decided on in the planning phase when defining the goals.

Later on, the resources and the funding were taken away. Furthermore, Viexpo's CEO resigned during the summer 2012 and Viexpo got a new temporary CEO. This change lead to another strategy and the priorities also changed. (Rönnback, 2012) Now that Viexpo would be ready to improve its social media image, there is a fear that they will not have enough resources once again. Viexpo is using radio and magazines/newspapers at the moment, but their goal is to get social media marketing as part of the existing marketing channels, which would enhance their marketing significantly. (Rönnback, 2012)

Viexpo could improve the process by communicating better and training someone to update the social media sites. The resources are now a matter of prioritizing. The importance of social media marketing needs to be understood (by the administration as well as the staff). The quality must also be defined. (Rönnback, 2012)

In summary, this indicates that Viexpo's main challenges are the lack of resources, and lack of support by the authorities and co-workers.

6.3   Viexpo's goals towards social media marketing

Viexpo had a staff meeting on 31 October 2012, and they made a decision that the communication outwards needs to be improved and prioritized. According to Rönnback, Viexpo's aim with social media marketing is to get more visibility, improved level of quality, and increase ROI, more contacts, better contacts, modernization and professionalism. Viexpo believes that this could be achieved by improving the process, resources and quality of their social media marketing. By process Rönnback means the updating of the social media sites efficiently and by resources he means more funding and staff. Quality could be improved by improving the appearance of the sites and the material that is posted. (Rönnback, 2012) According to the theory these three things must be clearly defined when making a social media strategy. It seems that Viexpo have been lacking planning at the first time they started social media marketing. But now Viexpo has learned their lesson and know how much preparation and decision making it needs to succeed in social media marketing.

Viexpo would like to have one or more employee who is/are responsible for the social media marketing. The responsible employee needs to be interested in this subject and would preferably be already experienced. But Viexpo is willing also to train the employee. This employee would not be only responsible for the up keeping but also the improvement of our social media marketing. (Rönnback, 2012) This is very important for Viexpo; because they do not have that much staff and if they would be able to hire a right person for this job it would improve their social media marketing and it would not overload the current employees. On the other hand, it might not be necessary for Viexpo to hire a person for the job, if they already have a person who understands how to engage the audience and publish content not only about the company but the industry, too. This particular challenge, the lack of the right people for the job, has been also mentioned in the theory.

6.4   Facebook & Viexpo

Viexpo joined Facebook on 20 October 2011, and since then there have been only 5 posts and 11 likes (most of them probably Viexpo employees) In short; there is a lot of room to improve. But actually that is a positive thing, because the whole social media image of Viexpo is now a "tabula rasa", a blank canvas. (Facebook, 2013)
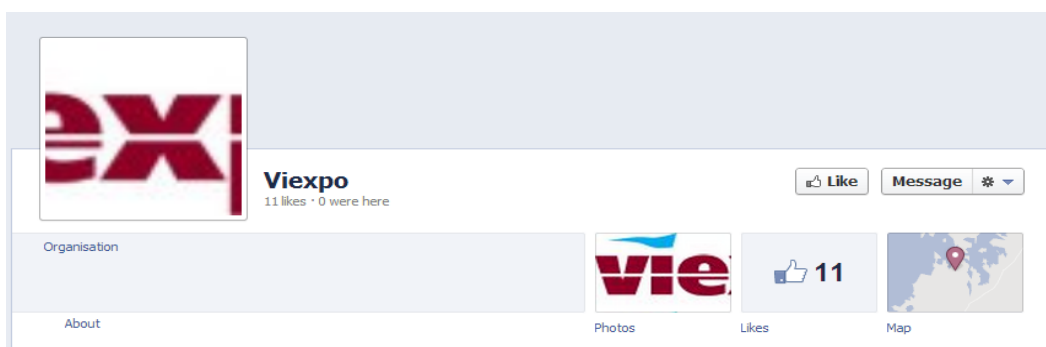

Figure11. Viexpo's current Facebook Page (Facebook, 2013)

Figure12. Viexpo's current Facebook Page (Facebook, 2013)

As you can see, Viexpo was quite active right after joining Facebook but after November 2011 there have not been any activity, which means that Viexpo has

failed in engaging their audience. At the moment, it seems that Viexpo is only using Facebook for search engine optimization and not for customer engagement. Looking at the Figure12 it becomes clear that the posts that Viexpo has been posting are "self-promotion" and "push marketing", which is the wrong approach according to the theory. Also the cover page is not visually attractive and inviting. Appearance is very important in the social media sites. If Viexpo's Facebook Page was more professional looking, it would possibly get more attention from the audience and get the customers to become fans.

If the number of fans (11) or the number of posts (5) would be used as a metric for measuring the success of Viexpo's social media marketing in Facebook, it would indicate that Viexpo is not successfully marketing and engaging audience in Facebook at the moment.

The theory suggests that one can engage the audience in Facebook by producing interesting content in a regular basis with visual aids, such as pictures. Content could be, for example recent happenings in the industry, opinions, news, tips, etc. Facebook would also be a good place to communicate with the audience by asking questions, making polls and getting feedback. This makes the social media outlet social, interaction with the audience. Facebook can also be used for "humanizing the company" by posting information and pictures of the office and staff. This way the audience is able to "put a face on the people behind the company" and the company becomes more approachable.

6.5   LinkedIn & Viexpo

Viexpo currently has a LinkedIn profile and also "Viexpo Group". There are 17 members in the "Viexpo Company" and 24 members in the "Viexpo Group". In the Viexpo Group there are ca. ten discussions but the latest discussion was added almost a year ago. Most of the employees are in it. But as in Facebook, there has been no activity since November 2011. (LinkedIn, 2013)
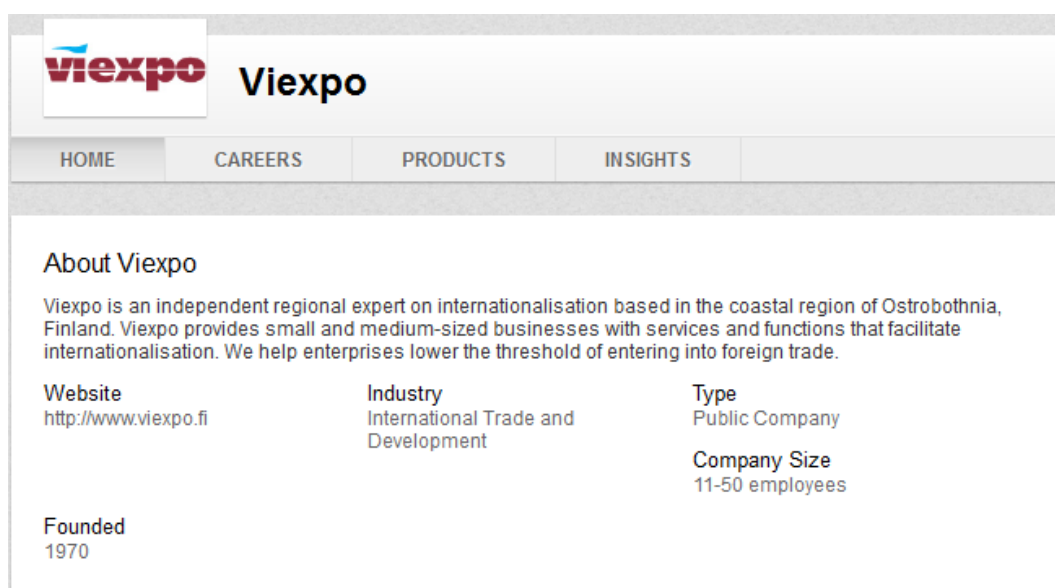
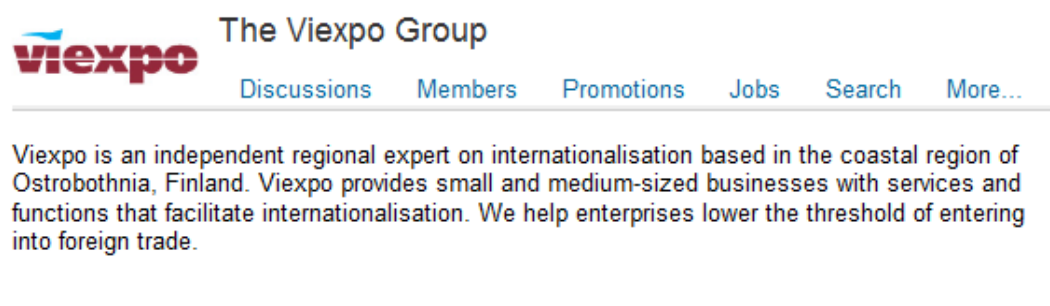Figure13. Viexpo's current LinkedIn account (LinkedIn, 2013)

Figure14. Viexpo Group's current LinkedIn profile (LinkedIn, 2013)

Just like Facebook, Viexpo seems to be using LinkedIn only to increase search engine optimization at the moment. They have all the basic information of the company in LinkedIn, which is a good start, but they failed once again in engaging the audience as they have not produced any content in over a year. According to the theory, it is not recommended to create a Group to LinkedIn before researching how the people interact in a LinkedIn Group. It would be recommendable to first join a Group from your industry, follow the topics and keep up with the trends, realize the needs and wants of the audience and then create a Group of your own. Viexpo has done this backwards. You can engage the audience by sharing your expertise in a Group from your industry and start

discussions in there to gain trust among the audience, then connect with the people in that group by sending connection requests. When you decide to create the Group of your own you can invite these connections to that Group, which they will probably accept because they already see you as a trusted source of information. The theory also suggests that you can ask recommendations for your products/services from your current customers and use these customers as "brand advocates". These recommendations are a perfect way to engage your audience. But before Viexpo starts to ask for recommendations they need to present all their services in the LinkedIn profile.

If the number of followers or the number of posted contents would be used as a metric for measuring success, Viexpo would not be classified as successful in social media marketing in LinkedIn, because they have very few followers and just a handful of posted contents.

6.6 Twitter & Viexpo

Viexpo does not have an account in Twitter at the moment but after this study has been conducted they are able to analyse if Twitter is the right place for the company to be present in. Main concern is whether Twitter is professional enough. (Rönnback, 2012)

As the theory suggests, Twitter can be used professionally in B2B marketing. Viexpo could possibly follow the important influencers of the industry and also follow their followers. As mentioned earlier, the fastest way to get followers is follow other people. If Viexpo decided to start marketing in Twitter, the important thing is again to listen what the people are speaking and then participate in those conversations when you discover the value that you can give to the audience. Appearance is also important in Twitter and if Viexpo decides to join, they should design an inviting background for the page. Viexpo could engage their audience, for example, by linking their blog post URLs to Twitter and linking recent industry news. The key is to keep the message short but interesting. It would also

increase Viexpo's search engine optimization if they decided to create an account in Twitter.

6.7   Blogs & Viexpo

Viexpo is not blogging at the moment. But they are intrigued to know if blogging is the right choice for the company. Main concern with blogging is the content and the time management. How often should they post content? What kind of posts do the customers want to read? Who will have the time to write the blog posts? (Rönnback, 2012)

The theory and the success story of Caterpillar suggest that if you want to engage your customers through blogging, it is essential to think about the customers, once again. If Viexpo decided to start a blog, they should define what kind of posts would interest their customers and blog about those subjects, without being self-promotional. If Viexpo would for instance take a stance on some current industry topic, Viexpo could this way engage the audience and become a trusted source of information. Blogging can be the most time-consuming way of social media marketing, because the contents can be larger. The blog post can be very rich with text, pictures and video. But also because of that blogging could be the most rewarding way of engaging the audience. Blogging could be a good way for Viexpo to educate their customers about their past or upcoming happenings and this way also avoid making the company website look cluttered. The metric for measuring success in Viexpo's blogging could be, for example, the number of readers.

7   RESEARCH FINDINGS & ANALYSIS

This chapter analyses the results of the interview and compares the results with the theory. After the analysis, the reliability and validity are explained as concepts and then considered if this study is reliable and/or valid.

7.1   Using social media marketing to engage the audience in the main social media outlets

By interviewing Viexpo employee Rainer Rönnback I found out that Viexpo was already present in Facebook and LinkedIn. They were also intrigued to know if Twitter and blogs could be suitable outlets for Viexpo. The positive thing was that Viexpo sees social media marketing as a good marketing tool and they are eager to find out how they can improve their presence.

The problem was that they did not know how to use social media to the maximum potential, which led to an average looking accounts with no posts in a whole year. They were unsure about what to post to which social media outlet, how often is enough, how to find the customers and how to engage them. At the moment, Viexpo uses email, radio and newspaper (traditional advertising) which can be more expensive than social media marketing. Even though it takes time to create the posts to different sites regularly, social media are still the most cost-effective media. Another positive thing was that Rönnback realizes the importance of producing visual and regular congruent posts.

After interviewing Viexpo employees I found out that they can relate to those problems that were mentioned in the theory, for example, the superior authority did not approve of some of the social media marketing plans, there were a lack of support by executives and co-workers, and also lack of employees who would be interested in being in charge of the social media marketing. Viexpo did also not have any idea how to get started, and this is the reason why I conducted this study. The other issues were quality and process. The reasons for social media failure mentioned in the theoretical study were, for instance, that the customer personas

are not clear enough, failure to make boring into exciting, terrible company website, making excuses and not producing enough content; and I believe that Viexpo has made some of those mistakes when they first started marketing in social media. For example, they only made a few posts and then stopped completely and the company website at this time is looking a bit outdated. Viexpo is not making excuses, I believe that they had a valid reason for not continuing the social media marketing, and that was the lack of support and resources. The lack of support derived from the authorities' belief that social media marketing is not professional enough. I hope that will change in the near future and perhaps this study is able to prove them wrong.

It also seems that when Viexpo first started social media marketing they did not make a clear strategy and they did not define their goals and objectives. By looking at the content Viexpo posted to the social media sites in the beginning, it seems like they treated social media marketing as a traditional marketing channel, which it clearly is not. Viexpo used self-promotion instead of engaging the audience and using the social media for two-way communication. Viexpo did not do research on what is interesting content for their customers to read about and how would they be able to engage their customers in these different social media outlets. These are the reasons for Viexpo not succeeding in engaging the customers.

When Viexpo makes the strategy for social media marketing, chooses the right social media outlets for them, starts posting right kind of content in regular basis which is interesting for the audience and adding value for the audience, Viexpo can succeed in engaging their audience. Viexpo just needs to overcome their current challenges in order to do the above mentioned.

7.2 Reliability and validity

The reliability and validity of the research results depend on the study, and they can be evaluated by using different kinds of methods of measurements. The *reliability* means the repeatability of the study. If the results are not arbitrary, the

study is reliable. The reliability can be stated, for example, if two assessors end up with the same results, the study can be considered as reliable. Another example is if the same person is being examined in two different time periods and the results are the same, the study is reliable. (Hirsjärvi;Remes;& Sajavaara, 2009, s. 231)

This particular study could be considered reliable, if some other assessor would conduct the same study at this time. But if this study would be repeated, for example, a year from now, the results might be different if Viexpo decided to improve their social media marketing.

Validity means that the method of research is able to study the matter what it should study. The measurement and methods of research do not always respond to the reality (theoretical vs. empirical study), that the researcher had envisioned to study. For example, the results of a questionnaire might be understood differently by the respondents. And also the researcher might interpret the answers differently that the respondent had intended. (Hirsjärvi;Remes;& Sajavaara, 2009, ss. 231-232)

The results of this study correspond with the theoretical framework and answer to the research questions, so the study could be stated as valid.

8   CONCLUSION & SUGGESTIONS

This chapter includes the final conclusions of the study, suggestions for Viexpo and suggestions for further research. It is summarily explained how B2B companies can engage their audience in the main social media outlets, how Viexpo has tried to do it and why Viexpo has failed to engage their customers in the beginning.

8.1   The conclusions

After conducting this study I truly believe that social media is here to stay and businesses should make the most out of it. Even though B2B marketing differs from B2C marketing, social media marketing is proven to be suitable for B2B companies as well. There are many different ways of engaging the audience, depending on the social media outlet. As mentioned earlier, the most important thing in B2B social media marketing, is to remember to find the people behind the companies, because in social media it is people-to-people marketing, not business-to-business. In short, by posting regularly about interesting industry happenings and educating the customers, adding value to the content while being visual and inviting, B2B companies can succeed in social media marketing and in engaging the audience. It is important to create a relationship with the potential and current customers, and social media is perfect for that. If you are able succeed in social media marketing, it will lead to customer satisfaction and shorter sales cycles, which results to increase of ROI. But this is a long process and it is essential to be patient, because there are challenges to overcome, for example, lack of support by executives and co-workers, lack of employees who could be responsible for the social media marketing, and having no idea how to get started. To my surprise, Viexpo could really relate to those challenges mentioned in the theoretical part.

Having said this, I believe that I have found the answers to the research questions. I found an answer how B2B companies can engage their audience in the main social media outlets. I also came to the conclusion that Viexpo is not engaging their audience in a successful manner at the moment but I also believe that this

study will help Viexpo to understand social media marketing better, avoid some of the mistakes in the future, and ultimately to create a social media marketing strategy.

My suggestions for Viexpo are to hire an employee who is responsible for social media marketing, improve the appearance of the social media sites and company website, start posting about important industry topics and communicate with the customers, find the people behind the companies and get feedback from the customers through social media outlets. I am glad that Viexpo has already joined Facebook and LinkedIn, now they just need to follow the advice given in this study and improve the presence in social media to make the most out of social media marketing and be successful. The more they have presence in social media the more they will have e.g. search engine optimization, but it is definitely the only reason to be present in social media outlets. Facebook would be ideal for "humanizing the company", LinkedIn Groups are good for industry discussions, and Twitter can also be professional and idyllic for sharing links and short messages.

The reason why Viexpo was not able to engage their audience at the first time was (among the other challenges) the fact that they treated social media as a traditional marketing channel, which is one of the biggest mistakes one can make in social media marketing.

All these are suitable social media outlets for Viexpo, but in my opinion the best option for Viexpo is blogging. Viexpo could blog about e.g. the Fact Finding trips, create sort of a "travelogue", and tell about the trip, tell about the customers that joined the trip and add pictures and videos. This would be good promotion for Viexpo as well as the customers and this is exactly what Cisco did in their Facebook page, they included customers to their posts and promoted them. This could possibly help Viexpo to engage their customers because they are benefiting from it too.

The most important thing for Viexpo is to get more resources and get all the employees and authorities to understand the importance of social media marketing. Viexpo needs to learn better ways of engaging their customers, because at the moment they are not succeeding in any of the main social media outlets. Hopefully this study helps them find those ways.

8.2 Suggestions for further research

Suggestions for further research would be studying the future predictions of social media marketing. Viexpo was interested to get an answer to this question and I believe other companies would be too. I would have been glad to find an answer to that question but the study would have become too extensive.

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10 APPENDICES

10.1 Appendix1. Questionnaire

1. What social media outlets are you using at the moment?

2. Why did you choose those social media outlets?

3. How are you utilizing those social media outlets as part of your marketing and networking at the moment?

4. How would you improve your social media marketing?

5. What kind of challenges have you had with your social media marketing in the past?

6. What challenges are you expecting to face in the future?

7. How do you think you can overcome those challenges?

8. What are you expecting to achieve with social media marketing? / What is your aim with social media marketing?

9. What kind of resources could you use to maximize the potential of your social media marketing? / What are you willing to do in order to achieve the full potential of your social media marketing?

10. Do you see social media marketing and networking as a useful tool to engage your customer and improve customer satisfaction?

10.2   Appendix2. Viexpo customers in social media

Viexpo was also interested if their customers could be found from the social media sites. By finding if the Viexpo customers are present in social media the study actually becomes more useful. In other words, there is no point at shouting in the woods if nobody is listening.

For this research, the Viexpo customers were selected randomly and categorized by industry. The chosen five industries were: forest and agriculture industry, crafts/gifts and interior design, boats/marine industry, clothing/fashion industry and metal/construction industry. All the five groups included approximately 30 customers which total to ca. 150 customer companies. After the customers from the industries were listed, it was possible to log into Facebook and LinkedIn and check if these companies can be found from these two social media sites. Below you can find a figure which displays the findings.
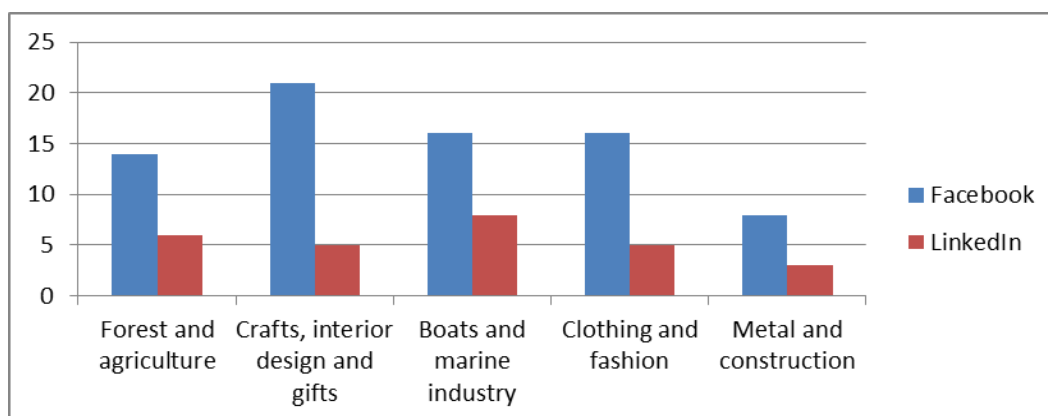

Figure14. Viexpo's customers in social media

In every industry group, except metal/construction industry, more than half of the companies had a Facebook Page. And ca. 1 out of 4 companies could be found in LinkedIn. These results were very surprising, in a positive way. But as mentioned earlier, you have to find the right people behind the companies, preferably the CEOs or export managers from the social media sites, because in social media it is people-to-people communication, not business-to-business or business-to-consumer.