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EVALUATING CORPORATE SOCIAL MEDIA USE

– On Facebook, Twitter and blogs



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The thesis aims to find successful models of corporate social media use other companies can adopt in their social media strategies.

The methods of the thesis are interviews and examining the existing social media sites of chosen companies to find examples of well-working examples. The interviews were sent via e-mail to six social media experts to gain background on the field.

The companies chosen were on Facebook Taco Bell Canada, Starbucks USA, SEOmoz, JetBlue Airways and Nutella Australia and NZ. For Twitter the companies were Starbucks USA, Fly.com, Zappos, Burger King and JetBlue. The blogs chosen were Starbucks USA, Fiskars Fiskateers and Southwest Airlines. These platforms were chosen because at the time of writing they were among the most popular social media sites used among companies and individuals. The companies were chosen for their ability to engage the audience in a conversation and to use social media in an innovative way.

Social media optimization was also examined as a way for companies to gain visibility and followers.

The findings were that there are many successful examples for others to learn from. Some companies are using Twitter for customer service or Facebook for content marketing and image building, for example. All the results of social media use are not directly related to monetary returns but sales can also be done on social media channels.

There are key considerations like legal matters to take into account in social media strategies. The existing models cannot be copied straight but they have to be changed to fit companies' goals and strategies.

All in all, there are many unharnessed possibilities in social media for companies to take advantage of.

KEYWORDS:

Social media, media management, advertising, sales, engagement, Facebook, Twitter, blogs.

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EVALUATING CORPORATE SOCIAL MEDIA USE – ON FACEBOOK, TWITTER AND BLOGS

Opinnäytetyön tarkoituksena on tarkastella muutaman esimerkkiyrityksen tapaa käyttää sosiaalista mediaa ja löytää niistä hyviä esimerkkejä, joita muutkin yritykset voivat ottaa käyttöönsä.

Opinnäytetyön tutkimusmetodeina ovat kyselyt ja valittujen yritysten sosiaalisen median sivujen tarkastelu toimivien esimerkkien löytämiseksi.

Valitut yritykset olivat Facebookissa Taco Bell Canada, Starbucks USA, SEOMoz, JetBlue Airways ja Nutella Australia ja NZ. Twitteristä valitut yritykset olivat Starbucks USA, Fly.com, Zappos, Burger King ja JetBlue. Valitut blogit olivat Starbucks USA, Fiskars Fiskateers ja Southwest Airlines.

Nämä sosiaalisen media kanavat valittiin, koska kirjoitushetkellä ne olivat suosituimpien sosiaalisten medioiden joukossa yritysten ja yksityishenkilöiden keskuudessa.

Yritykset valittiin koska ne olivat hyviä pitämään yllä asiakkaiden mielenkiintoa, mutta myös niiden innovatiivisen sosiaalisen median käytön takia.

Sosiaalisen media optimointia tutkittiin myös yhtenä tapana jolla yritykset voivat hankkia näkyvyyttä ja seuraajia.

Opinnäytetyön lopputulos on, että on olemassa monia menestyksekkäitä esimerkkejä joista ottaa oppia. Jotkut yritykset käyttävät esimerkiksi Twitteriä asiakaspalveluun tai Facebookia sisältömarkkinointiin. Kaikki sosiaalisesta mediasta saatavat hyödyt eivät ole laskettavissa rahallisena arvona. Sosiaalista mediaa voi käyttää myös myymiseen.

Sosiaalisen median strategioiden suunnittelussa on asioita joita on syytä ottaa huomioon, esimerkkinä lainopilliset näkökohdat. Olemassa olevia malleja ei voi kopioida suoraan vaan en pitää muuttaa vastaamaan yritysten tavoitteita ja strategioita.

Kaiken kaikkiaan, sosiaalisessa mediassa on paljon käyttämättömiä mahdollisuuksia yritysten hyödynnettäväksi.

ASIASANAT:

Sosiaalinen media, medioiden hallinta, mainostaminen, myynti, sitoutuneisuus, Facebook, Twitter, blogit.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|----------|---|
| Meme | Internet meme is a concept, picture or sentence that spreads from person to person in the internet. |
| HR | Human resource. |
| PR | Public relations. |
| ROI | Return on investment. |
| SEO | Search engine optimization. |
| SMO | Social media optimization. |
| SoMe | Social media. |
| Tag word | The most important or most used word in a text in accordance with content. |

1 INTRODUCTION

You're in marketing for one reason: Grow.
Grow your company, reputation, customers,
impact, profits. Grow yourself.

-Mark Schaefer

Mark Schaefer is one of the most acclaimed and accomplished marketing consultants in America. He puts a lot of emphasis on social media marketing. He has written several books on the topic.

Mark Schaefer's comment reveals in many ways what marketing – and social media (SoMe) marketing specifically – is all about. There might not be a way to convert the success in social media straight into sales but with social media a company can achieve many other things.

SoMe can be used in traditional brand building, making the company more visible in the internet by search engine optimization and advertising, but SoMe can also be used for many other things. With SoMe companies may keep in touch with their customers by discussing with them for example in Facebook. Companies can also use SoMe for other purposes not directly related to selling: promoting their upcoming webinars where they help customers, for example.

Some companies use their social media sites in order to promote open innovations or to broadcast their knowledge of the field.

The scope of this paper is to research why some companies are successful in SoMe and how the success can be defined by other means than sales figures. And what can be learned from these examples? The imperial thing is to find is how smaller companies with smaller resources can take full advantage of SoMe in their businesses. In other words: "How can those examples be applied for other companies?"

Social media optimization (SMO) is another subject to consider for social media. SMO is a way for a company to maximize their presence in SoMe in a meaningful way. SMO enables a company to generate traffic and awareness towards their web page and products.

SMO is close to viral marketing in the sense that the idea behind it is to create a buzz to market virally a certain brand, product or event. When using more than one SoMe channel, the company can send out different kinds of messages to different kinds of audiences at the same time. This also makes it easy to measure the effectiveness of these marketing methods.

All in all, the meaning of this paper is to come up with a suggestion that makes it easier for companies to focus on a SoMe plan that suits their goals and that is easy for them to implement. There is no single answer that will suit for everyone, but looking at the ways others have done things (with success and failure) will give a clearer picture of what methods are the most suitable in different circumstances.

2 BACKGROUND

Corporate social media use is without a doubt a hot topic at the moment. It seems that most of the companies use some social media platforms or are interested in them. There has also been a rise in the number of blogs and advertising agencies that give advice on how to build and upkeep a social media site and more importantly, how to make it popular.

According to a study conducted by Center for Marketing Research at the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth in 2011, Fortune 500 (F500) companies are quite slow to adopt social media in their business practices. But despite their slowness, even those companies do have quite high presence in social media. According the study, 16% of F500 companies had a blog in 2008, in comparison to 23% in 2010 and 2011. The number of Twitter accounts has also risen slightly from 60% in 2010 to 62% in 2011. In 2010, 56% of F500 companies had a Facebook page, and 58% had it in 2011. (Barnes and Andonian. 2011.)

The findings of the research are that first of all, F500 companies are late adaptors to social media when compared for example to 500 fastest growing companies (INC 500) list. For example, 37% of INC 500 companies had a blog in 2011.

Another finding is that social media use of F500 companies seems to have stagnated to the same numbers for years 2010 and 2011. The results of the study may show evidence for change in new adoption of these tools by companies and seem to be a clear sign that social media tools are not a part of their communications strategy. Given that the F500 are the biggest in business all over the world with the most resources in use, we may be seeing the slowdown in business adoption of social media. At the very least, the F500 seems to have slowed their adoption of the three most prominent tools: blogging, Facebook and Twitter. (Barnes and Andonian. 2011.)

Introducing a study that shows stagnation in adoption of corporate social media use may seem counter effective to my point at first. It may seem that companies

are no longer interested in increasing their presence in social media and are pulling back to more known media. Even though corporate social media use may seem like a passing phenomenon, it is here to stay (Wollan et al. 2010, x).

But looking deeper under the surface, a question that rises is why the numbers are stagnating. My own opinion is that many companies have found SoMe not to be the golden eggs laying goose they were looking for and are pulling back from using it. The strategies for effective SoMe use are not clear yet – and sometimes even the goals companies want to achieve from SoMe are not clear to them.

Even before reading the study introduced above, I have found myself wondering the same questions. Watching the growing number of companies that want me to "like" them on Facebook or "follow" them in Twitter has gotten me curious. I have wondered what the companies expect to get out of their social media presence and what they actually gain out of it.

Right now it seems to me that many companies have a presence in almost every SoMe outlet there is, but the people in charge of those sites do not know what to do with the sites and how to get people interested in the content they release.

There are many good examples, like Coca Cola's Facebook page, where the company has 52 856 400 likers but seems to only get likes from 11 to some 40 000 on their updates. It also seems that the number of people liking Coca Cola's updated has decreased continuously. In my opinion the reason is that many people like Coca Cola just because they like drinking it, but do not like the Facebook page or the content on it. That way Coca Cola loses on a very potential influencing channel.

The aim of this thesis is not to satisfy my curiosity on what companies expect from their SoMe pages or what it is they benefit due to them, but to take a broader view and clarify what kinds of companies have succeeded in their social media strategies, how and why. I also clarify what methods have been successful and the reasons for success. In the conclusion chapter I give some

advice for companies on how to make their SoMe presence more interesting to consumers in order to gain more followers.

In this thesis I aim to take a look at how companies can be more interesting in SoMe, where to look for examples and how success is defined.

Another aim of this thesis is to study how a company's possibilities, image and web presence can be increased by using many social media platforms – or social media optimization.

2.1 Companies

The social media platforms I chose to examine in this thesis are Facebook, Twitter and blogs. The reason for choosing those platforms is simple: they are among the most used social medias in Western countries. (Brown. 2010, 40; Safko. 2012, 31; Wollan et al. 2012, 551.)

LinkedIn is also one of the most popular social media platforms used by companies, but it does not suit to my purposes in the sense that it is meant and mostly used for recruitment and networking (Brown. 2010, 52).

The criteria for choosing the companies may seem a little arbitrary because there is no single method behind it. Before starting this thesis I already knew some companies that seem to handle some of their social media web sites very well. In addition to that I have also run into some articles where companies have been ranked on their social media usage. I also asked for recommendations from those friends who work in marketing and know the industry. In short, I have researched in advance companies on Facebook, Twitter and blogs to find the corporate social media sites that have an example to set.

The attributes to a social media web site I was looking for were high follower rate with many active followers paired with engagement with the followers.

Engagement is shifting from one-time events to an ongoing conversation. Rather than a broadcast to be dumbled by an authority, the conversation must

include interaction and dialogue with a community of interest. (Bunzel. 2010, 33; Evan. 2010, 204.) So, with engagement I mean the company being active, answering questions and sometimes making comments on a post.

One important factor in this thesis is also to evaluate the goals of SoMe usage for the sites chosen and compare it with the outcomes. Companies may have different goals they want to achieve and without knowing what those goals are it is impossible to know if they are successful in their SoMe tactics or not.

Following companies were selected to be analyzed:

The Facebook sites chosen from companies are:

- Taco Bell Canada
- SEOmoz
- Starbucks USA
- Jet Blue
- Nutella New Zealand and Australia.

Twitter accounts from companies:

- Fly.com
- Zappos
- Burger King
- Jet Blue
- Starbucks USA.

Companies chosen for their blogs:

- Starbucks USA
- Fiskars
- Southwest Airlines.

The companies chosen are B2C companies except for SEOmoz, which sells mostly to other companies but also to individual customers. The reason for excluding B2B companies from the list is simple: the ways SoMe is used among B2B companies is different from that of B2C. Even though it would be very interesting to compare the differences between those two, B2B selling companies are out of the scope of this thesis.

The companies chosen are all also quite big ones, with a lot of resources in their use. I did not choose the companies by their size but only by the interesting position they have in SoMe platforms. Because big companies have a lot of resources in use, they can invest in social media more than smaller companies do and try out new things. From the example, trial and error of the big, SMEs can find the best practices for SoMe use.

One company that is listed on every platform is Starbucks USA. There reasons for that are: the company excels in all three categories and it also seems that one of their strategies is social media optimization (SMO). There are many benefits Starbucks USA achieves with optimizing and using several social media platforms. I will get more into SMO later in this thesis.

3 LITERATURE REVIEW

As mentioned before, social media is a very interesting and current topic at the moment and there seems to be a lot written about it. The emphasis of this literal review is not to go exhaustively through everything written but to scan the parts that are relative to the specific areas of this thesis and important to it. I also excluded all the older sources from my research because SoMe is such a new topic and has been changing so rapidly that only the newer books contain up to date information.

3.1 Market segmentation

When segmenting markets in social media, the old models are no longer valid. Contemporary segmentation approaches include variables like psychological, attitudinal and behavioral characteristics. Those can be further divided into personality traits and geographical variables. (Kimmel. 2010, 75.)

With social media companies there can be also recognized and reached new segments of customers that have been hidden from the existing customer base (Wollan et al. 2010, 10).

The younger generations' purchasing and information search habits are different from those of older generations' but that does not mean that only younger people should be targeted on social media sites (Kimmel. 2010, 77). Also older demographics can be reached through social media (Kimmel. 2010, 79).

3.2 Goals for social media use

There are several reasons why companies use social media. For example, companies can promote advocacy among their followers, getting individuals to

support their products, brands or organizations without having any official connection to it. (Lovett. 2010, 13; Kimmel. 2010, 293.)

Another objective for using social media can be facilitating support to customers, customers' customers and even suppliers (Lovett. 2010, 6). Spurring innovation can be an objective from the start or a byproduct of SoMe engagement. Organizations that are truly listening to their customers take notice of SoMe comments, suggestions and conversations and use them to identify product needs, service requirements and other opportunities (Lovett. 2010, 20).

From SoMe it is easy for companies to gain market insight and intelligence. Social media gathers information directly from users and companies can enter SoMe to tap into channels for market analysis or competitor data. (Brown. 2012, 78.)

3.3 Choosing the right venues

Marketers and companies in whole need to make the right decision with the key aspects of social media and determine how to measure its effectiveness. Companies also need to ensure that they are allocating investments optimally across the media channels, including social media. (Powell et al. 2011, 8.)

The way for a company to choose the social media platforms to utilize is to get to know target customers and what SoMe platforms they use, how and when. Facebook is very widely used but Twitter, for example, is used by different audiences in different countries. (Strom Moon 2012.) According to Sheddon, it is also good to know what kinds of messages companies want to see on those platforms.

The value of a social media platform can also change over time, as users change their ways of using social media (Strom Moon. 2012).

One way to find out how a company's target audience uses social media is by asking them. Contacting existing and potential customers in order to ask what

they would like to see on SoMe or setting up a questionnaire for people can give a company valuable information on how their target customers use SoMe. (Agresta. 2010, 143.)

3.4 Measuring what works

With different measurement tactics they can improve their use of SoMe channels, target activities to customers and users and give them the right kind of information. Giving the right information to the right groups will lead to more community participation, grown value of the brand enables more return on investment (ROI) in social media marketing. (Powell et al. 2011, 13; Lovett. 2011, 127.)

Counting ROI for social media includes many aspects. Cost reduction in marketing and customer service staff or acquiring customer feedback and reviews for example. (Wollan et al. 2011, 25.)

The only way to measure social media success is not ROI, even though it seems to be the measurement that interests companies most. The unstructured nature of SoMe and goals companies have when using SoMe require companies to define new metrics and use new kinds of analyzing methods to ensure that their goals are met. (Wollan et al. 2010, 93.)

One of these new ways to analyze social media success are examining the buzz – or public interest – surrounding the social media updates a company posts on their social media sites. A good way to measure buzz is to count the number of mentions about the brand before and after updates in SoMe sites, for example. (Wollan et al. 2010, 94.)

Another thing to monitor or measure is the sentiment of customers' discussions about the brand, products and services. Strategically, a company can emphasize those elements that are well received in the public. (Wollan et al. 2010, 97.)

Social influence is another way to measure SoMe presence. It includes not only counting the number people reading the post but more importantly, what kind of action the reader has taken on it: forwarding it to others, voting on it, citing it on another post, responding to it or even buying the product mentioned in it.

Collecting data about the most influential people spreading most information around makes it possible to give them the most attention when posting in social media. (Wollan et al. 2010, 98.) It is good to remember all fields of business and consumer segments have their own influencers and that it is not necessarily enough to reach only one influencer.

Analytics also make it very easy to monitor competitors. Companies can use the same analytics tools they are using to see what their competitors are doing in social media. (Safko. 2012, 593.)

3.5 Metrics

There are several ways of collecting data. Some social media platforms like Facebook or Twitter offer data on trends, user growth and other metrics. There are also available commercial monitoring tools as well as free tools like Klout or Google analytics. (Lovett. 2011, 134; Safko. 2012, 590.)

The used metrics should be developed in accordance with specific objectives the company has. That way the metrics are far more likely to be useful and used. (Lovett. 2010, 8.)

I will not get any further into data or metrics collecting because those are not within the scope of this thesis. The noteworthy fact is that metrics are needed to both: knowing where a company's target audience is and how they use SoMe as well as keeping track on what works for them and what doesn't.

3.6 Social media optimization (SMO)

At the time of writing this thesis there were no books written directly about social media optimization. Many books cover the topic briefly, but there were some blogs written on the topic that I have used as reference material as well.

The idea of SMO is to reach as big as possible an audience to view the content a company releases and to drive increased traffic to the company's web page. SMO also leads to improved search engine optimization (SEO), meaning the company's visibility on search engines increases. (Tobin. 2010.)

According to Webopedia, social media optimization can be used to increase awareness of a product, brand or event by using a number of social media outlets and communities to generate viral publicity.

3.7 Inbound marketing

The idea of inbound marketing is to get the company recognized by customers, instead of the company finding them. The trick to be found is to create content that truly excites and engages internet and social media users, and keeps them coming back to a company's web site and eventually buying from them. Inbound marketing is a pulling technique. It uses search engine optimization, social media platforms and other tactics to make sure that potential customers find the information they are looking for when making for example a purchase decision and get interested in the company and what they have to offer. (Halligan and Shah. 2010, 21; Lovett. 2011, 202.)

4 METHODOLOGY

My aim is to describe the successful and unsuccessful methods found in social media sites, examine the strategies behind them and to evaluate if the strategies are working. The ultimate goal of this thesis is to see if there are things other companies can learn from these examples.

The research questions are:

"Why and how are some companies successful in social media?" "How is success defined?"

"What can other companies learn from their examples?"

Aim of this thesis is not to survey the number of companies using social media, or the revenue they gain from it but to research certain companies' existing social media use to find working models for other companies to use. Therefore, my research method is qualitative.

Qualitative research methods are concerned with collecting and analyzing information in many forms, mainly as non-numeric as possible. Qualitative research tends to focus on details or examples that are seen as interesting. It also aims to achieve depth of data instead of wide spread (Blaxter 2010, 65).

In addition to scrutinizing social media sites of companies and their social media presence, one of my research methods was also to send a questionnaire to specialists on the field. The people I interviewed were either researchers of social media or working with social media in their everyday work.

4.1 Conducting the research via questionnaires

The steps taken when designing the questionnaire contained determining the information needed, selecting the types of questions that collected the data

needed, developing the questions and sending them out (Phillip and Stawarski. 2008, 2). I designed the questionnaire

(Appendix 1) to get answers to the questions proposed in a larger scale. There were no questions about specific companies or their way of using social media. The aim was to get an expert view of how much companies are benefiting from social media, what should be done differently in the future and reasons for that.

There were some restrictions to the study: because I was sending the questions to social media experts, the possible people to answer the questions were quite scarce. The people answering the questions have to really know the field of corporate social media at the moment and be able to give a bigger picture of what is going on.

I also wanted to use open-ended questions to retrieve as much information as possible with as few questions as possible. Because the people who received the questionnaire were extremely busy, I wanted to make answering as easy as possible: answering should not take lot of time or disrupt their activities. (Phillip and Stawarski. 2008, 143.)

The questionnaire was sent via e-mail to six people, all of whom had good a knowledge of social media, some due to working in marketing or some studying SoMe. The responders were all contacted beforehand via social media or by phone to ask for their willingness to answer the questions. All the people answered the questionnaire within ten days.

4.2 Collecting data from SoMe sites

The second part of the research covered examining the SoMe sites of the companies chosen. The challenges when selecting the sites to study were defining the platform, determining an appropriate sample and learning enough about the sites to make choices before collecting the data (Glenn. 2010, 200).

The problem with this approach is having to decide beforehand what are successful or unsuccessful examples of corporate SoMe use in order to border the information available.

In order to avoid the need to go through hundredths, if not thousands of social media sites during this research, I made the tradeoff of predetermining what kinds of success factors I was looking for. Namely, audience and company engagement, number of audience reached and new goals and implementations for SoMe use.

In practice data collection from SoMe sites meant going through the chosen companies' social media pages to identify their goals and strategies when analyzing what seems to be successful.

4.3 Analyzing the data

Because the data gathered in the questionnaire and the social media sites is not numerical and there is no need to code it into a numerical form, statistical methods of analysis don't apply. Instead, I searched for similarities in the answers in the questionnaire and social media web sites.

When analyzing qualitative data, it is important to familiarize with the data well. When reading the data, themes and patterns rise that need to be identified. (Taylor-Powell and Renner. 2003, 2.)

When reading the questionnaire answers and social media sites, I looked for answers to my preset thesis questions but also found emerging topics that evolved from the data.

According to Taylor-Powell and Renner it is also important to identify patterns and connections in the data. They go on explaining that the interpretation step means attaching meaning to the data to explain the findings. (2003, 5.)

4.4 Validity of the research

By definition, validity estimates if the test or data set actually measure, reflect or produce what it is supposed to (Glenn. 2010, 145). In other words, outcomes of this research and their usability can be straight derived from the methodology and sources used.

The validity of this thesis relies on the expertise of those who answered the questionnaire and my choice of social media sites and on my ability to analyze and generalize the results.

5 ANALYSING RESULTS

The new critical question for the majority of companies is no longer whether to be in social media but to know *how* to engage customers in it. SoMe gives companies a venue to create loyal, repeat customers – fans -, build their organization to be more customer-oriented and possibly to build new revenue streams. (Wollan et al. 2010, 4.)

I take a closer look at the SoMe sites of the chosen companies and analyze their social media tactics, goals and success. The posts chosen are from year 2012 because I'm examining the situation at the moment of writing this thesis. One or two companies seem to have also changed their SoMe tactics along the way.

I include into the research only the new social media usage and ignore the old models for those companies that have changed their tactics. Going through all the posts of companies would be redundant because there would be too much material and it would not reveal new information for the purposes of this thesis.

I also go through the answers to the questionnaire and analyze the data from them. Later I scrutinize the different tactics companies can adopt for different situations in SoMe use.

5.1 Social media sites

5.1.1 Facebook

Facebook is a social media platform that is widely adopted in the Western world. The idea of Facebook is to connect individuals and companies through personal interests, to share content and to network. Among the possibilities in Facebook for companies are building trust, getting feedback from customers, customer service, creating communities of dedicated fans and reaching possibly big, international audiences. (Bunzel. 2010, 78; Wollan. 2012, 31.)

On the other hand, straight selling and advertisements are not tolerated very well in Facebook (Bunzel. 2010, 78). The company also changed its EdgeRank, or the way companies' post show to fans, making it more expensive for companies to reach their fans on Facebook. Now a company has to pay to reach the same audience it reached for free some months ago. (Bedy. 2012; Edwards. 2012; Valtari. 2012)

Facebook metrics can be measured by number of page fans, discussions or comments and likes but also other metrics can be reached with tools like Facebook Insights. Facebook Insights is free but there are several companies that offer tools for Facebook metrics like SEOmoz or EdgeRank Checker. (Lovett. 2011, 132; Brown. 2012, 24.)

The Facebook company sites I included into my research were Taco Bell Canada, SEOmoz, Starbucks USA, JetBlue Airways and Nutella Australia & NZ (Table 1).

Taco Bell Canada

The company has 148,919 likes in their Facebook page (Consulted 15.11.2012) and the number seems to be rising all the time (147,525 on 15.10.2012). Engagement on the page is high – every post on the site gets likes and comments. The staff also answers posts in a humorous way, making the company visible on other web platforms. Personally I have encountered screen shots of the content on two separate web pages, one of them being Cheezeburger, a web site that presents humorous content from all over internet.

The tactics of the Facebook site is to make the content funny and easy. There are many colorful pictures and texts are short. Content generated by users, like internet memes and fan pictures, are used frequently. There is a new posting approximately every three days and the content is a mix of straight selling, outbound marketing and image building material. The content cover news of

offers and new products mixed with funny pictures and comments about "craving for taco".

In my opinion Taco Bell Canada is very successful in its SoMe utilization. There is no way for me to find out how the Facebook site has affected their sales but at least the image is affected positively and the company has gained visibility in internet.

Starbucks USA

The fan base of Starbucks seems to be declining from 35,534,008 likes on 15.10.2012 to 32,749,180 likes on 15.11.2012. The main reason seems to be an article posted on the wall stating that Starbucks has avoided paying taxes in the UK for several years. After the article was posted, there are several comments made to many postings about the issue. Starbucks has not answered the postings and the company doesn't answer matter-of-fact questions on their Facebook site either. The engagement is strong from audience side but weak from Starbucks.

Because Starbucks does not take part in the conversations the audience is talking amongst itself and there are some rumors, wrong and even malice information spreading. Some writers have also commented that they wish Starbucks would read their comments, making it obvious that the people engaged in the conversations feel that the company is not present in their Facebook site.

Even though some of the material on the site is aimed more on image building like pictures, the fact that the company is absent makes it feel more like a top-down marketing effort than a conversation. The company also endorses its own blog on the Facebook site.

In my opinion Starbucks is absent from its Facebook site. It should be commenting on posts, answering questions and correcting false information on

its site. It seems that the passive approach has in part contributed to the loss in likes.

SEOMoz

The number of likes on SEOMoz Facebook page is increasing. Currently there are 68,947 people liking the company (compared to 65, 752 on 15.10.2012). The audience in the page is very engaged to the content: liking it, commenting and even relinking their links to others.

The page is dedicated to inbound marketing, meaning that there is no information on products or prices anywhere. Instead, there are competitions to take part in, links to interesting articles written by the staff and also links to their webinars, called Whiteboard Fridays. There are also funny pictures posted about the employees of company. SEOMoz updates its Facebook very often, sometimes releasing several posts a day to keep the content fresh.

In my opinion SEOMoz is very successful in executing what seems to be their strategy. The inbound material increases their image and credibility as an expert organization while creating value for people visiting their site or reading their posts. They have created content that is interesting, waited for, followed and redirected frequently. The people liking the company on their Facebook page can be depicted as true fans – people who do the marketing for SEOMoz because they truly like their content and products.

JetBlue Airways

JetBlue has some 672,177 likes on Facebook on 15.11.2012 and rising (667,801 on 15.10.2012). The site has good engagement from audience and the company – many people ask questions on the site and the company answers them promptly. The site is also used for bulletins on important current topics like how weather affects flights and other customer service. Besides

customer service, the idea of the Facebook site is to enforce their marketing campaign, release advertisements for cheap flights and to endorse their mobile app. There are same content posted many times to remind customers.

An exceptional factor about JetBlue Facebook presence is that there is a copycat page with an official looking logo. The page comes up in Facebook search as JetBlue Company and can very easily be misunderstood as the official web page of JetBlue Airways. Many people seem to have done that mistake because the Facebook site is full of customer complaints, thanks and questions.

The unofficial JetBlue Company -page looks very bad from the perspective of being full of negative comments that the company does not answer to in any way. The page is not authentic and there is no obligation for JetBlue to answer the contacts made there but it would be better for the company if the page did not exist.

In my opinion JetBlue has been successful in fulfilling their goals. They seem to have transferred customer service into Facebook and found a way of posting news and advertisements that are interesting to the audience. They have also tied Facebook with their other marketing campaigns. The only downside is the copycat page that makes the company look bad.

Nutella Australia & NZ

There are some 271,188 likes on Nutella site (15.11.2012), a slight rise from a month ago (257,635 on 15.10.2012). The engagement is one-sided, audience comments on posts but the company does not answer or comment back. Nutella does post outside content like fan pictures or memes on their site, making it seem youthful and fun.

The feel of the page is very international: there are Nutella stories from all over the world but the main idea of the site is selling, advertising and image building

in Australia and New Zealand. The Facebook page is tied with other media used for advertising: there are posts encouraging people to watch their newest TV advertisement posted on the wall, for example.

In my opinion Nutella is somewhat successful in their Facebook use. They use youthful content that creates a good image of the product, lots of colorful pictures and very little text. One oddity is that even though there are pictures of baked goods in their Facebook page, none of the recipes are published. Engagement is also somewhat one-sided and the company could take more interest in the conversations held.

| Company | Customer service | News | Sales material | Content marketing | Image building | Several accounts | Several tweeters | Job advertisements | Engaged audience | Posts retweeted |
|---------------|------------------|------|----------------|-------------------|----------------|------------------|------------------|--------------------|------------------|-----------------|
| Starbucks USA | | x | x | | x | x | x | | | |
| Fly.com | | | x | x | | x | x | | | |
| Zappos | x | x | | x | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| Burger King | | | x | | | x | | | | |
| JetBlue | x | x | | | | | | | x | |

Table 1. Features of company Facebook accounts.

5.1.2 Twitter

Twitter is a so called micro blogging tool with 140 character long messages sent and received between account holders. It has grown very popular in the United States and used in almost all Western countries.

The advantages of Twitter are high speed correspondence, networking, the possibility to answer questions in real time, make reviews, to create an image or identity, create buzz and links to other material, among other things. (Bunzel. 2010, 109; Brown. 2012, 46.)

It is easy to get started on Twitter by creating an account but harder to gain followers or the message be spread – retweeted. It is also very easy to opt-out and stop following a Twitter account that is not interesting. There are many tweeters and tweets and it is difficult to stand out in the crowd. The key is to create content that is interesting, informative or catchy in some way.

Twitter is also an easy way to see what is being said about a brand or a product by using the search function. (Halligan and Shah. 2010, 105; Safko. 2012, 293.)

The possible metrics for Twitter are number of followers, conversations to a username and retweets. It is also possible to track clicks to links using tools like bit.ly and to measure influence by tracking who is the audience of your followers and do they see your tweets. (Brown. 2012, 23.)

The companies chosen for Twitter accounts are Starbucks USA, Fly.com, Zappos, Burger King and JetBlue (Table 2).

Starbucks USA

Starbucks has many Twitter accounts like Starbucks jobs or Starbucks coffee. Some of the accounts are country specific like Starbucks UK, Starbucks Canada and Starbucks Argentina. Each account has different tweeters.

@starbucks is aimed towards consumers in USA with 3,064,580 followers and 13,316 tweets (16.11.2012). The other accounts have less followers.

Starbucks coffee is an active account that has three tweeters. The tweets are on current affairs, offers, news, competitions and funny pictures. The Twitter account is aimed to build image, handle PR and advertise.

In my opinion Starbucks uses the Twitter account versatile, including PR material with sales promotions. There are many conversations going on but the company does not take part in them or answer any tweets, which makes the accounts seem one-sided.

There is also a vivid conversation going on under headline "Starbucks tax" that shows in search results for Starbucks and is bound to make the company look bad.

Fly.com

Fly.com has many accounts, one for UK and several for different tweeters. @Fly_com has the most followers, 8,273 with 803 tweets released (16.11.2012). The other accounts have less followers.

The tagline for Fly.com's Twitter account is "Your source for the latest airfare deals and travel information", setting the tone for the account. Most of the tweets are deals on flights, advertisements for competitions and links to articles about flying.

In my opinion Fly.com has been able to build a twitter account that suits its purpose for advertising and sales. The links to articles are tied to the theme of flying and add interesting content for followers. It is difficult for me to know how much sales the tweets generate but it seems obvious that people in hunt for bargain flights would keep a close eye on Fly.com's Twitter account.

Zappos

Zappos has many Twitter accounts build on topics, such as Zappos Stylists, Zappos Couture, Zappos wedding and Zappos Insights, which each have their own taglines. There is also an account for the CEO of the company.

Zappos has created a huge following for @zappos with 2,657,903 followers and 2,272 tweets. @zappos_service has 14,985 followers with 96,323 tweets (16.11.2012). The other accounts have less followers.

Among the tweets there are job advertisements, customer service tweets, endorsements and thanks from customers, ads for upcoming events and news.

Zappos engages with tweeters, answering and thanking them. There are also retweets of content created by Zappos and their ideas get put on tweets, no matter where they are from.

In my opinion Zappos has been smart by creating many distinctive accounts that tweet different kind of content. That way they reach a bigger audience with people getting to choose what kind of information they want to follow and many people probably following several accounts.

Zappos has built a big presence in Twitter, gathering followers and visibility. The accounts also work as an inbound marketing tool, building the brand and corporate image.

Burger King

There are several accounts to Burger King for different countries like Burger King México and Burger King Vzla (Venezuela). There is also one account for Burger King lovers. @BurgerKing is aimed for USA customers and there are 72,543 followers and 1,134 tweets (16.11.2012). Other accounts have less followers.

The Twitter account are aimed to advertising products. All the tweets are about products and sales promotions.

In my opinion the one-sided sales content makes Burger King's Twitter accounts seem very uninteresting. The content is repetitive and there are no conversations going on between the company and followers.

JetBlue

Even though JetBlue's tagline is: "@JetBlue doesn't respond to formal complaints on Twitter. For official customer concerns go to jetblue.com/speakup or call 1-800-jetblue", it has built its Twitter account to serve customers. The company has several accounts like JetBlue Cheeps that releases deals on last

minute flights every Tuesday and an account by CEO. @JetBlue has 1,695,019 followers and 47,782 tweets. The other accounts have less activity.

JetBlue also gives advice to customers, updates information, answers questions and releases bulletins.

In my opinion JetBlue has created a well-working way for customer service. There is a public conversation between the company and customers and it leaves a natural trace of how the company deals with customers. Customers don't have to wait on the phone but customer service calls them after being notified on Twitter.

The company has been very successful in building an approachable image and engaging in conversation with audience.

| Company | <i>Customer service</i> | <i>News</i> | <i>Sales material</i> | <i>Content marketing</i> | <i>Image building</i> | <i>Several accounts</i> | <i>Several tweeters</i> | <i>Job advertisements</i> | <i>Engaged audience</i> | <i>Posts retweeted</i> |
|----------------|-------------------------|-------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|
| Starbucks USA | | x | x | | x | x | x | | | |
| Fly.com | | | x | x | | x | x | | | |
| Zappos | x | x | | x | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| Burger King | | | x | | | x | | | | |
| JetBlue | x | x | | | | | | | x | |

Table 2. Features of company Twitter accounts.

5.1.3 Blogs

A way for a company to start communicating with customers and an extended audience is to start a blog. Blogs are essentially online journals. Blogging is an easy way to release press material, news, launch new products or campaigns, build image, create brand awareness and so on.

The potency of blogging is that a company blog can be held by many employees, each writing about their own area of expertise. Companies can also be in charge of their own content and space and load new content on their own schedule. (Kimmel. 2010, 186; Brown. 2012, 42.)

Blogs usually contain text, images, video and links to other sources that make them interesting and easy to read. Because of links and other content, blogs also create more traffic onto companies' web sites and increase their ranking on search engines or SEO. (Halligan and Shah. 2010, 35; Safko. 2012, 148.)

Blogs can be difficult for potential readers to find and if the content is not interesting enough, readers abandon them quickly. In order to be interesting, blogs may contain only little direct selling or advertising. The idea is to get readers interested with brilliant content that delivers value, educates or entertains readers. Blogs should also contain engaging parts like questions for readers to discuss, a possibility to order the blog to e-mail and a heading that spikes interest. (Halligan and Shah. 2010, 43; Safko. 2012, 159.)

The possible metrics concerning blogs are number of subscribers, web views, comments, trackbacks, reports, likes on Facebook or Google +1's and volume of conversation. It is also good to be noticed by Technorati, an internet search engine that indexes blogs. (Brown. 2012, 23.)

The blogs chosen to be viewed in this thesis are Starbucks USA, Fiskars' Fiskateers and Southwest Airlines (Table 3).

Starbucks USA

Starbucks blog is written by many individuals, from CEO to project managers and outside partners. The topics range from product introductions to politics and climate change. The audience of the blog is engaged and there are lengthy conversations on topics and some writers stand up for the company in their posts. Unfortunately Starbucks does not take actively part in the conversations.

The blog does look inviting with big pictures and clear headlines but it is not updated frequently.

In my opinion Starbucks blog does seem to work for them in building brand image and engaging audience but the company needs to be more involved with the discussions after posting a writing.

Fiskars Fiskateers

Fiskars blog is an unusual way of inbound marketing. The blog was started by Fiskars by gathering together keen hobbyists who do crafts and then post the directions with pictures to the blog. There are few mentions of Fiskars products on the web page and even though the Fiskateers do use Fiskars products. Fiskars holds no must for them to endorse their products and also tests new products on the Fiskateers group. The bloggers get no salary for their work with the blog.

The blog community is built on passionate hobbyists, writers and followers and there are thousands of Fiskateers and probably more people who read the blog regularly. Instead of forming a blog to endorse and sell products, Fiskars has created a commune and a long-term sustainable movement. The joy and passion is obvious from the posts and the blog looks colorful and inviting.

In my opinion Fiskars has been able to create a community that engages audience and does some brand awareness building. The blog does not aid the company in selling the products to individuals who have no interest in crafts and it does not make Fiskars more visible to a bigger audience.

Southwest Airlines

The bloggers on Southwest are from all functions in the company and so the topics of blog posts vary. The posts are done many times a week and they are fairly short, sometimes humorous and sometimes serious. There is some content that is published regularly like Meteorology Monday and Flashback Friday and readers know to expect those posts. Even though the content varies, all posts have to do with the company and the way it works.

Outlook of the blog page is matter-of-factly with some fun details like Halloween decorations in fall.

In my opinion Southwest has been able to build their blog to enhance their corporate image and to connect with a broader audience, posting news and other interesting content.

| Company | <i>Company engagement</i> | <i>Audience engagement</i> | <i>Several writers</i> | <i>Sales content</i> | <i>Content marketing</i> | <i>Connected to other social medias</i> | <i>News</i> |
|--------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|---|-------------|
| Starbucks USA | x | x | x | x | x | | x |
| Fiskars Fiskateers | | | x | | x | x | |
| Southwest Airlines | | | x | | x | x | x |

Table 3: Features of company blogs.

5.2 Questionnaire answers

In the answers there were themes and ideas that rose time and time again. The most important point all the answers were unanimous about was that companies are not harnessing the full potential of what social media has to offer. SoMe is not only about being liked on Facebook and continuing the same top-down one-model-fits-all advertising companies have done so far. The answers also emphasized that most of buyers already are using SoMe for decision making and thus companies can't afford to stay away from those platforms their clients are using.

According to the answers, there are many possibilities that go unused. SoMe could be used for customer data collection to know better who the existing customer are and where the potential lies. Advantaged targeting of information and advertising is also easy using SoMe. Other uses for social media are internal communication, using outside sources for product innovation, cheaper and faster customer service and competitor analysis.

Different social media platforms can be used as channels to achieve many different goals: saving money on advertising, internationalization and reputation building becoming easier, trust creating, image and brand building for cheaper and faster, easier opportunities for exposure, sharing information among stakeholder groups and encouraging information sharing.

The tricky part is that social media is that it's not something to be handled on the side. The focus of the whole company has to change to make social media tactics work. The answers brought out the need for companies to attribute resources to SoMe use and to plan ahead to determine objectives, measurements, capabilities and responsibilities to make sure that there are results and monetary returns.

Smaller companies with fewer resources should pick one or two platforms which customers use and where the most potential lies and execute their plan there perfectly instead of spreading too thin and having a vague presence on all social medias.

The last but in my opinion the most important thing for companies to understand that rose from the answers is that in social media "content is king". This means that the old tactics of PR, selling and marketing simply don't work on social media and companies need to start letting go of their traditional way of conversing with its stakeholders. Instead, it is essential to build relationships and deliver value other than selling material.

5.3 Summary

According to the experts interviewed, companies are not taking full advantage of social media. There are numerous advantages and different tactics to take into consideration when building a presence in SoMe.

There are examples of successful practices in the companies' SoMe accounts examined. The examples of successful SoMe tactics are dependent on the platform used. The most important thing is to engage to the conversations and to deliver content that gets audiences interested.

For Facebook, the best tactics seemed to be using it for customer service, tying the account to other media outlets, using it for content marketing and to release sales material.

In Twitter the success has been built with using it for customer service and news, releasing sales material, content marketing and image building. Zappos has used Twitter to release job advertisements, which shows that there are no definite rules to what can be done on SoMe platforms as long as it is done smartly.

Blogs are most suitable for sales content definitions, content marketing, delivering news and connecting to other social media sites like Instagram.

When a company has decided the way they want to build their SoMe presence, it is worth while to take a look at the way others have built their accounts. The accounts presented previously are very well worth taking examples and practices from.

6 DISCUSSION

What seems to make SoMe difficult for companies is that there are many different expert advices on how to make and implement SoMe plans but there are very few rules of best practices in place. Social media also forces companies to take action based on imprecise information and to give up control of their material or image building. (Wollan et al. 2010, 5.)

In my opinion the risk of losing control is worth taking. There are so many advantages to corporate social media use that every company is confident to find their own way of benefiting from it. There are issues to be taken into consideration, both internal and external to a company but with good planning and strategies those issues can be minimized.

6.1 Strategizing for SoMe

Because there are so many ways to use social media, it's important for a company to plan for strategies before starting actions. If a company already has a SoMe account, it is worthwhile to reexamine and update the existing strategies once in a while. (MOAC Staff. 2011, 66.)

The social media strategy development should start with listening to the existing conversation on SoMe platforms. A company has to understand the audience and conversations on SoMe before deciding on a strategy and a platform to engage in. (Brown. 2012, 20; Wollan et al. 2012, 29.)

Good ways to see what is being said are services like Google Alerts, Twitlert, Radian6, etc. (MOAC Staff. 2011, 161; Gain. 2012).

The second phase for the strategy is to define the goals. Examples of possible goals are ROI, increased audience or awareness, image or reputation building, getting information and audience engagement. (Brown. 2012, 22.)

It is important to set monitoring and measurement plans before taking action. Success in social media analytics require planning and premeditated actions.

The foundational measurements of success are interaction, engagement, influence, advocates and impact. As an example, the way to measure attention, audience interaction and behavior is measuring engagement. Engagement is a vague metric because it aims to quantify intangible information. The mathematics for the measurements can be complex. (Lovett. 2011, 139; 209.)

There are different calculations models available in the internet and in books but they usually have to be tweaked to fit companies' objectives and to offer meaningful data. Analytics should be an ongoing process that modifies practices whenever necessary. (Brennan and Schaefer. 2010, 245; Lovett. 2011, 172.)

Creating a crisis management plan is an important part of the strategy. When there is a ready plan for ways of reacting to bad reviews or other situations, reactions can be timed more suitably and employees responsible know how to handle those situations. (Wollan et al. 2010, 163; Brown. 2012, 21.)

When developing a social media strategy, it's important to ensure that employees are aligned with company's goals and objectives. There have to be guidelines and advice available to make sure that employees know exactly what their responsibilities are. (Bunzel. 2010, 41.)

Social media use affects company culture and management. Companies need to consider new skills and employees when they hire, train and reward them. New skills needed are for example content creation for different platforms and web analytics.

Company culture and rules can hinder social media adoption. Collaboration and trust must be built into the culture to make social media tactics work. Social media rules should be simple, easy to remember and short to make sure that they are easy to follow. Information sharing among employees and to audience

should be encouraged, not hindered. (Halligan and Shah. 2010, 169; Wollan et al. 2010, 236; Brown, 2012, 82.)

A situation may arise when an individual gains a big following in social media and rises to be known in the industry or among customers. A company should be happy to have a SoMe superstar who promotes their products and rises their image and visibility. Customers are also happier to know more about the company than just the logo. (Agresta et al. 2010, 21; 100; Brown. 2012, 143.)

All texts, passwords, usernames, etc. in the name of the company belong to it. If a company lets employees use accounts under their own name, there is a risk that an employee takes the account and followers with them when they change company. Therefore, it's a good idea to create company accounts for everyone who is interested in taking part in social media. These employees can still have their personal accounts that they use privately. Transparency is crucial and the difference between corporate and personal accounts has to be made clear. (Brown. 2012, 86.)

6.2 Downsides to SoMe

Companies should be prepared to deal with possible risks for reputation damage, weakening of brand image, decrease in sales and even falling stock prices due to the social media use. (Brown. 2012, 74; Wollan et al. 2010, 11).

In SoMe bad news travels fast and customers are not afraid of broadcasting their good and bad experiences for others. The discussions held in SoMe are out of companies' control and moving on fast. Therefore it is important for companies to form a strategy for those situations in order to be ready and take action when needed.

When encountering bad reviews or other negative material, it is the wrong reaction for a company if it tries to exercise control over the discussion or other materials in SoMe and starts to delete or ignore them. Arguing with the

customer and material might make things worse. These actions can lead to rapid image loss and possibly to a loss of customers.

It is noteworthy that it is impossible for a company to take part in discussions or comment on every single piece of material available about it on SoMe sites. There are also individuals who want to engage companies into negative conversations. Once the complaint has been addressed, continuing a conversation with those individuals is fruitless. (Wollan et al. 2010, 163; Brown. 2012, 75; Safko. 2012, 580.)

There are good practices when handling negative feedback on social media sites. First of all, it must be responded to quickly, appropriately and effectively. A company has to know how much they are willing to engage with audience but they also take into consideration the impact of the complaint. If the complaint is visible on several SoMe platforms or concerns a potentially hazardous situations, it should be answered as soon as possible. All remarks posted on a company's SoMe site should be answered on the same medium they were originally posted on. (Agresta et al. 2010, 119; Wollan et al. 2010, 164; Safko. 2012, 163.)

Creating a working, popular social media usage model takes time. The payback period for SoMe efforts is usually longer than in more conventional marketing or customer service. It will take time for a company to build credibility and trust among its audience. Setbacks are almost inevitable. It takes trial and error for companies to get to know their target audience well enough for them to optimize their platforms and content. (Wollan et al. 2010, 136.)

One possible disadvantage with social media for companies to consider has emerged in the questionnaire answers. If a company does not reserve a SoMe username under the company name someone else may do it and use the company's name to post whatever content. So, even if a company is not interested in all SoMe platforms, they should reserve the usernames for future use in order to avoid informal usernames to be associated to them.

6.3 Possibilities

There are numeral possibilities SoMe brings to companies and it is up to the individual companies to decide what they want to achieve. I will go through examples of what are in my opinion the most important possibilities for companies to keep in mind when building their strategies in the following.

Companies should use social media to listen to their customers. Such old channels to converse with customers like e-mail and phone need to be incorporated with SoMe to reach the best outcomes. (Wollan et al. 2010, 73.)

Internet users are talking about companies, products and services in SoMe. Companies can gain valuable information by following the conversations and taking part in them (MOAC Staff. 2011, 23).

By listening companies are able to change their products or services to match customers' demand, warnings about problems or opportunities and tips for customer service and better ways to make SoMe work for them (Evans. 2010, 7).

Some of the possibilities social media opens for companies are related to sales. Those are generating exposure, increasing traffic and subscribers, building new business partnerships, generating qualified leads due to better efforts, selling more products and services and reducing overall marketing expenses. (Neti. 2011.)

With SoMe it is easier and faster for consumers to acquire information other than official marketing material about companies, products and services. It is also easy for them to compare prices and get advice for problem situations.

Companies can adopt those techniques and make it possible for customers to write reviews and questions on their SoMe sites or web page. (Wollan et al. 2010, 123.)

SoMe selling requires broader strategies than conventional selling tactics is able to offer. SoMe selling tactics include introducing promotions that people

want to forward in SoMe, like a possibility to get products cheaper when there are many buyers.

Twitter is a good tool for creating urgency for buyers by broadcasting sales that are available for a very short time. JetBlue Cheeps advertisement for last-minute flights is a good example of creating must-buy sentiment. (Collier. 2010, 13.)

Word of mouth is also linked to growth in sales and it is therefore wise to market to influencers – those individuals who mold opinions and affect buying habits - whenever it is possible. (Wollan et al. 2010, 124.)

With SoMe, sales and customer service can be unified in a new way. For companies looking to keep their customers satisfied and good image up it's no longer enough to react slowly. (Agresta et al. 2010, 35.)

SoMe offers a channel for customer service that is fast, provides a possibility for conversations and leaves a track of happy customers. One big advantage is that customers don't have to wait on the phone for problems to be solved but customer service can contact them.

In SoMe it's also possible to respond without giving actual customer service or answering a complaint. A good example is a tweet aimed at a company thanking for a function held or service rendered. A tweet builds the image of the company as one that is present and interested in customer relations. (Agresta et al. 2010, 40; Brown. 2012, 136.)

In the best-case scenario for tuning into customers' reviews and questions companies get ideas for product development and get advance warnings for future possibilities (Neti. 2011).

Product development and innovation take a new angle when SoMe is involved. The process can be as simple as holding a contest to harvest new ideas or span to include suppliers, SoMe audiences and even competitors in the process.

By listening to the customers and users of products and services is a good way to stay ahead of competition. The trick is to truly listen to ideas, execute the good ones and to credit the people involved to make sure that audience keeps interested and spurs new ideas to be used. (MOAC Staff. 2011, 41.)

In SoMe audiences can easily opt out of content offered (Powell et al. 2011, 264). Therefore, it's important for companies to engage with their audiences and aim to build advocacy. When the message of good products and services or interesting companies comes from other users rather than from the companies, audience members are more ready to listen to it. Those individuals advocating for companies are therefore important because they can get also other audience members to engage. (Lovett. 2011, 151.)

With SoMe, customer engagement can be built with frequent, ongoing conversations rather than customer touch points that happen once in a while. When done right, customer engagement feels less like marketing and sales campaign and more like a mutually beneficial relationship. (Lea. 2012.)

Recruiting in SoMe presents a possibility to find more about the candidates and to obtain a bigger audience for the job advertisements (Brown. 2012, 120). If a company is looking for a SoMe savvy employee, it makes sense to post job advertisements in social media like for example Zappos does on Twitter.

In addition to external communications, SoMe can also be used in a company internally. SoMe brings companies the same benefits in internal use as it does in external: spreading information is easier and faster through it. For example, Twitter is a good tool for brief and fast information distribution. A company can set a separate group for employees to send status reports, reminders, holiday information, HR benefits or thanks for work well done. (Safko. 2012, 312.)

By allowing employees to talk freely about their work and what they are passionate about can improve company morale and build a more open company culture. If employees are allowed to be in contact with customers and users, they can be reminded of whom the work is done for and give new meaning to the process. (Agresta et al. 2010, 136.)

6.4 Social media optimization – case Starbucks

With social media optimization (SMO) companies can attract more visitors to their web page much like SEO does. SEO is also about improving the spread of messages by using different platforms to reach audiences. (Lovett. 2011, 202.)

There are several rules by different people formed for SMO. The rules are designed to make sure that content is spread. The rules can be reduced to cover a few main ideas: create sharable content, make sharing easy, reward engagement, participate and encourage people to remix and comment on the content. (Lovett. 2011, 204.)

There have to be measurements in order to make sure that the results are desired. One way is to measure SMO reach of posts. Reach doesn't simply mean the amount of Twitter followers, Facebook likers or blog readers. Some of that audience might not read the posts, whereas others may repost the content for even bigger audience to see. A good example of usable tool for monitoring the reach is Google Alerts that tracks where and when the set keywords are used. (Lovell. 2011, 207.)

Designing for SMO takes planning, ideas, resources and time. Companies need to create interesting content for it to be found and shared. The aim should be for continuous optimization and constant content building to reach larger and larger audiences. Starbucks has been very clever in the way it has built the SoMe sites and content to attract numerous people visiting every day.

Starbucks is well-known for its success in social media. The company's strategy for SoMe is engagement, relationship building and product development. One goal is also to be present on every platform customers are using. (Brennan and Schaefer. 2010, 55;62.)

Currently, Starbucks is present on several SoMe platforms like Twitter, Facebook, blogs, Foursquare, Youtube and so on. The company has successfully incorporated SoMe into its marketing and customer service and among its followers there are such SoMe superstars like Lady Gaga and

President Obama. The most interesting thing about Starbucks' SoMe use is that the posts are not about coffee or other products at all. They have turned the situation around and want to know how their coffee makes customers feel. (Jones. 2010.)

Starbucks has been able to grow customer base, reach new audiences and grow sales through SoMe presence. (CNN. 2010.)

There are no numbers available on how much monetary benefits SoMe use has brought to Starbucks but it is obvious that it has been able to reach new markets and bring in new customers through versatile use. Because of increased visibility, SEO and larger audiences gained in a short time, Starbucks has also been the topic of many stories in traditional media, giving the company even more exposure.

6.5 From strategy to execution

Companies' SoMe plans should always start with auditing what is done in the past and what kinds of goals are set for the future (Brown. 2012, 21).

Going through what has been done in the company or how other companies have managed their social media accounts show what has been effective and what not. It's worth while to make a list of expectation, tasks and efforts in order to make it clear what should be achieved. It should also be clear how much resources there are to commit to SoMe management and everyday functions. The amount of time and people there are to execute plans determines how extensive the plan can be and how many SoMe platforms should be included. (Brennan et al. 2010, 239; Safko 2012, 577.)

SoMe strategy should not be isolated but tied with the company's existing strategy. Once there is a plan to engage stakeholders and other audience with SoMe, it should be kept in mind what it is the company wants to achieve and what the core message is. (MOAC Staff. 2011, 28.)

An important part of planning is choosing metrics to be measured and aligning them with set goals. The measurements should include multiple levels of metrics to represent different audiences and platforms. At the most tactical level, analytics can include such minutia of user data as bookmarks, trackbacks, likes, clicks, views, friends and so on. The important fact to remember is that more metrics isn't always the better and the numbers presented should give valuable information to build tactics further. (Lovett. 2012, 162.)

There are two ways when approaching SoMe platform choice. First, a company can choose the platforms based on their goals to reach.

The company needs to first evaluate what the SoMe is used for. If there is a demo product to introduce, Youtube is a good venue. If the information changes rapidly, Twitter is a better tool than blogs. If the goal is to share information, corporate blogging is a good idea, whereas Facebook can be used for customer advocacy. Blogs and Twitter are a good tool for creating communities. (Brown. 2012, 26.)

Another way is to select what SoMe platforms based on platform the target audience uses. By understanding target audience behavior and the kind of content they are looking for, companies are able to engage with the right people at the right time and in the most relevant manner. Without the insight into audience behavior companies run a risk of trying to engage in ways of communication and on platforms the audience is not present on or listening to.

Understanding what kind of content and what kinds of tones of conversation are appreciated is part of an effective SoMe strategy. If the company culture and image are fun and youthful, all the SoMe updates don't need to be. A proper tone set for the audience and situation creates more engagement than sticking to the same model of converse no matter the situation. (MOAC Staff. 2011, 29.)

There are several details that should be taken into account when making the strategy and starting to implement it. When setting up accounts on SoMe sites and publishing a brand, all SoMe account names should be similar, easy to

understand and connect to the company. The visual image of those sites should also be tied to the brand image. (Brown. 2012, 116.)

Content in itself should be SEO ready, with titles and tag words relevant to the content (Halligan and Shah. 2010, 62).

The updates should be consistent and regular. If employees have an easy day or many ideas, they can write several tweets or blog posts and schedule them to be released at different times. That way there is a consistency with publishing times and the audience will be engaged better.

The content should be appropriate for different audiences and released at times when people are the most interested. International audiences at different time zones can appreciate getting updates on their time, for example. (Brown. 2012, 17.)

There are syndication tools that enable content to be advertised on several platforms at once. Twitterfeed will update Twitter and Facebook every time a blog post is released and Hootsuite can post updates on several different accounts at once. (Brown. 2012, 103.)

In my opinion those tools should be used very seldom to make sure that Facebook and Twitter feed do not contain only advertisements of other content, possibly not even relevant to other audiences.

In social networks, transparency is crucial. Account holders should let audience know who they are and what they use SoMe for. If a person is being paid to publish content about a company, it should be made clear. Making up false product endorsements and customer testimonials is seldom tolerated when found out. (Brown. 2012, 73.)

When starting to broadcast messages, companies should not wait for others to find them but start being social, commenting on others' posts and taking part in conversations (Brown. 2012, 124). The content created should be good enough for others to get interested, spread the word and link the posts to other SoMe sites (Halligan and Shah. 2010, 29).

Following competitors or other well-known SoMe users to see what makes them successful can give new ideas to customer engagement (Brown. 2012, 124).

When building a network, it's important to know who are the influencers and advocates among the audience. Influencers are those people who are networked over several groups and have many followers. Advocates are those who promote ideas and products in their circles. It's clever to target those people in the networks in order to spread the message far and be endorsed by influencing people. (Brown. 2012, 99.)

It's important to be able to demonstrate results from SoMe use to determine success and to build new tactics if nothing seems to be happening. However, calculating outcomes in ROI or monetary sense is often difficult with SoMe, especially when the goals set are intangible like brand awareness. (Lovett. 2011, 235).

In addition to soft metrics for intangible goals, accurate data can be quantified. The crucial data contains such information as revenue earned, dollars saved and overhead costs spent. The executive report on SoMe should contain metrics like cost per satisfied customer, cost per qualified lead and direct revenue per specific campaign. (Lovett. 2011, 241.)

If there are several platforms in use, the metrics should be designed to show actions separately on those platforms. Return on interaction on Twitter can be counted by the number of @replies between audience members and company representatives. The number of @replies or mentions on Facebook or Twitter can also be counted as engagement. (Lovett. 2011, 244.)

If more sophisticated surveillance is needed there are programs like Radian6, SocialMention and Google Analytics for monitoring purposes (Safko. 2012, 591). Getting deeply into metrics and results driven from them is a broad topic and mostly out of the scope of this thesis. There are several books written on the topic that offer substantive knowledge.

The future of SoMe is mobility. Wireless, mobile connections to internet and different SoMe sites will be increasingly used in the future. Because the infrastructure for mobile devices needs to be different and SoMe is used differently on mobile devices, the applications work differently. (Powell et al. 2011, 267.)

The possibilities and threats to mobile SoMe use are different from traditional use. Mobility offers companies a possibility to bring the store and services to the customers' pockets. Customers can be reached in real time where ever they are. The biggest advantage mobility has is the location-based marketing opportunities it offers. (Brennan and Schafer. 2010, 41.)

The security issues with mobile devices are different from desktop computers and should be managed differently. Mobile phones can easily be stolen, there are viruses spreading among them and if the passwords are saved on the phone, hijacking SoMe accounts becomes easy. (Wollan et al. 2010, 218.)

A good example of taking mobility into business and sales planning is Starbucks, which is building an application for recognizing customers and their preferences when they walk through the door. The aim is also for the customers to be start paying with their phones. (Magid. 2012; Newman. 2012.)

The crucial thing to understand about SoMe use and audience engagement is that change is continuous. Therefore, companies need to have practices in place that improve SoMe monitoring and resolution habitually in order to keep audiences content and practices working.

There are companies that are using SoMe to continuously improve products and services, proactively warn customers about pending issues, alerting them so that they can change plans and so on. These companies create customer satisfaction by using the fast pace of SoMe and the fact that more and more people are available to receive information in those venues.

Staying ahead of changing demands and competition in the fast pace of SoMe is difficult but necessary for companies to succeed. (Wollan et al. 2010, 153.)

7 CONCLUSION

In this thesis I have researched the reasons why some companies are successful in social media and how the success can be defined. I have also aimed at finding models and practices that other companies can learn from and adapt in their social media use.

The research methods were examining existing SoMe sites of the chosen companies that seem to have well-working means in their use as well as sending a questionnaire to six SoMe experts to get their opinion on what works.

The social media sites scrutinized were from Facebook, Twitter and blogs. From Facebook the sites were Taco Bell Canada, SEOMoz, Starbucks USA, Jet Blue and Nutella New Zealand and Australia. The Twitter accounts included were Fly.com, Zappos, Burger King, Jet Blue and Starbucks USA. The company blogs were Starbucks USA, Fiskars Fiskateers and Southwest Airlines.

Starbucks is present on every SoMe platform and the company is a good example for social media optimization. In SMO companies aim to use social media to be present in all the platforms in order to generate publicity and increase awareness on their products, services or brand.

Based on the study, I am convinced that without their SMO plan Starbucks would never had grown as big as it is now.

Even though SMO is a usable tool for reaching as many people as possible, it is wiser for small companies with fewer resources to stick to fewer SoMe platforms and maintain those well.

The questionnaire answers showed that many companies are not seeing the full benefits SoMe is able to offer. Companies also need working models for ways to reach, retain and ultimately engage audiences in SoMe. Companies need to realize that the old fashioned way of mass advertising does not work on

social media. The best way to build visibility is by creating content that delivers value to audiences. With meaningful content, companies can reach more people than with mass marketing tools.

There are indeed several good examples companies can take from others and adapt to their own aims and needs. There are more ways to use social media than just direct selling and advertising. Many of the companies researched used their SoMe sites for inbound marketing: delivering interesting content that spreads among audience members, grows the image of that company as an expert on the field. Content marketing does not grow the sales right away but serves as a means of keeping the audiences engaged with the company, getting them to spread the word and eventually going to that particular company when they are looking for products.

It is noteworthy that there are tactics to make SoMe marketing and selling scalable. Even though SoMe is mainly about individual conversations with customers, straight selling in SoMe can be aimed for bigger crowds.

Additionally the example companies took advantage of their SoMe sites by building their customer service on a level that exceeds competitors. Making bulletins about current issues with products or services on time is easy on SoMe. When customers get the news of changes beforehand, it's easy and convenient for them to adjust.

Customer complaints and the solutions leave a trace in social media and thus happy customers with good experiences build the good image of a company.

One, quite unused potential SoMe has to offer is a channel for internal communication. Social media offers a fast and easy way to exchange information and to connect employees with one another.

If a company wants to use social media for selling, there are some good tactics. Creating a sense of urgency with deals that are on offer for short amounts of

time is a good way to get customers to react to the offers. Another tactic is to create group discounts: when enough people have agreed to buy the product, they get it for cheaper. Therefore the message of the discounts spread on SoMe platforms.

A good way to make people wait for the deals to come is to make them regular: if a company has a super discount Tuesday, for example, audiences know to look for good deals on that day and log on to the site regularly.

One outcome of this thesis is that success in SoMe can be defined in many ways according to the goals a company has. Sometimes success has very little to do with ROI or other monetary benefits. Instead, success has to do with spreading and gathering information, exceeding in customer service, building engaged audiences - fans - and selling without pushing.

Companies can also use social media to gather information on new markets, or segments to sell to, get alerts on future possibilities as well as open innovation to improve their products.

The recommendations for companies stemming from this research range from detailed matters to remember to the big picture to take into consideration when building and up keeping a SoMe presence.

The limitations to this thesis is the fact that it's quite impossible to give examples and models that work for every company. The advice given is thus quite general and leaves room for companies to work on models that fulfill their objectives for SoMe use.

On the other hand, because there are no strict rules or do's and don't's offered in this thesis, companies can use it to find ideas and examples that they can refine further to their own use. In the fluctuating world of SoMe, there are only few definite rules and even those can be broken if broken smartly.

The most important things for a company to consider when starting a social media account or renewing their social media use is to know what social media platform the wanted audience is using. There is little need for a Facebook account when current and potential customers are using Twitter or something else. The platform choice is also dependent on the content a company has to offer and the way the social media platform is meant to be used.

After defining what platforms to use, a company should create a policy for SoMe use. It is a good idea to involve employees other than just customer service into the conversation with audiences. An employee working on the design of a product can have many interesting points to make that interest the audience more than marketing content can.

The policy helps employees know what is expected of them and what the goals of the company's SoMe use are.

There are problems to social media use that should be taken into consideration but many of those can be avoided with a good plan and policy. Preparing for negative or even hostile comments and coming up with a way to answer helps the employees involved in SoMe. Good planning and training beforehand create a template that is easy to understand and to use when needed.

Creating metrics is crucial. Without knowing what to measure, the success is impossible to demonstrate. There are many ways to count audience behavior in SoMe. Programs and services also exist to collect data. With the help of those same programs, the data can then be transformed into usable information.

Among the smaller details to remember are legal matters concerning the accounts, texts and passwords. If an account is based on the person using it, it might happen that the employee takes their followers with them when they change companies.

All in all, SoMe is a factor hardly any company can dismiss. Companies, their products and services are already discussed and rated in the internet and social media and it's a good idea for companies to once in a while to take a look at what is being said about them.

Even though a company might feel it gets no benefits from having a social media account, it should reserve the accounts on its name before someone else uses those accounts.

The future of social media is mobility. Companies should make an effort to adapt to the ways their customers use social media and offer them a mobile outlet if they use one.

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Questionnaire answerers

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Raskauskas, Nancy. Online marketing specialist, freelance journalist. (USA)

Schaefer, Mark. Marketing consultant, college educator and author. (USA)

Valtari, Minna. Someco SEO and founder, social media consultant and trainer. (Finland)

Appendix 1: Questionnaire

1. Do you think that companies are benefiting from using social media in general?

(No benefits / Some benefits / Big benefits)

If you think there are benefits, what kinds of benefits are companies seeing?

2. What kinds of other benefits *could* companies be getting from social media?
3. Would it make sense for a medium or small size company to try to use every social media platform or to concentrate on a few?
4. What kinds of strategies have you seen that work?
5. What would you like to see happen in corporate social media use in the future

