

Saimaa University of Applied Sciences
Faculty of Business Administration Lappeenranta
Degree programme in International Business

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Productization of a comic for a publishing offer

Thesis 2013

Abstract

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Introduction to ethics, 23 pages, 1 appendices

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When The author on this project started the work on this thesis, he had a lot of trouble over the topic. What should he write about? What business is of great interest and spurs motivation?

Out of this thought, author got the idea of combining my great interest for comics and their production and publication with business. Essentially, he wanted to see if it is possible to find a publisher for a product that is of own making- a comic, Requiem.

One of the aims of this thesis was to find out whether or not there is demand and opportunities in the Finnish market for a commercial success with a science fiction title that has a story for a more mature audience. For now, comics with similar themes have invariable been much on the fringe of the industry, at least in Finland, but have a longer history in the international market and most recently have had more and more success in Europe and the US.

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1 Introduction

This thesis is aimed to obtain information on whether there is a market for a sci-fi genre comic aimed at an adult audience in Finland at the present time. The work is divided into two sections, theoretical support for the potential of the comic to succeed in the current Finnish publishing environment, and the practical part, where the theoretical base is tested by marketing the comic for a selection of Finnish publishing houses. At the end of the thesis work, the results of the thesis are analyzed and conclusions drawn to answer the question whether there is a market for this type of product in today's market.

1.1. The main objective

The main objective of this thesis work is to acquire a publishing contract for the comic project, *Requiem: Part 2* and to research the possibilities for a Finnish comic artist to successfully publish a science fiction genre comic aimed at mature audience. This publishing contract would be from one of the bigger Finnish publishing companies, i.e. Tammi, Otava, Arktinen Banaani, Sanoma Magazines, Jalava, Like or Egmont. These publishers have been included due to their nature and the type of comics they have previously published, in this case they publish comics regularly and from Finnish artists (Manninen, 2011 p.10). It would include the layout of the book, printing as well as advertizing and distribution of the final product. The author's part in the process is to make a finalized product which could fulfill the requirements needed for a successful comic worth publishing by a national level publisher, meaning that it is financially a good idea to do. The marketing plan includes the details and analysis of marketing the finished product to the publishers.

1.2 Starting position

The project started from thought out patterns laid out in the first part of the comic. These starting positions laid out the style, choice of audience in making of Requiem: Part 2. The goals needed to be achieved by Requiem: Part 2 are steady continuity, advancing the story from the prologue face to the actual core phase of the story and getting the reader to have continued interest. These have been the most important aspects in scripting out Part 2, and also the subsequent parts.

All these aspects of storytelling and stylistic choices reflect on the productization part as well. There is a need to bring out these points positively in the final offering to be presented to the publishers. The plan is to be formed on a basic structure of answering these questions: to whom is the comic being marketed to? What are the selling points compared to competition? What new can this comic bring to the reader that they don't already have? What is needed for successful productization of this type of product?

1.3 Necessary actions to reach objective

First, the comic itself needs to be finalized. Approximately 80 pages of story, full color pages. During and after this process we move on to contacting the different publishers in this field and present the final product along with the script synopsis and a letter of introduction which introduces the artist and the product briefly(Manninen,2011, p.9). The entire offering in this case is two products- the first and second part of the series and the script for the next volumes to give an image of what is to be expected from the continuation.

1.4 The state of Finnish comics industry

To achieve these goals, it is necessary to take a look at the general state of affairs in the industry. The main companies in the sector are, as stated before: Tammi, Otava, Arktinen Banaani, Sanoma Magazines, Jalava, Like and Egmont. In addition to these, there are a large selection of smaller companies and non-company form publishers such as Suuri Kurpitsa, Zum Teufel Sarjakuvayhteisö Seitti to name a few. These are, however, small scale operations and many of them have a limited distribution potential and resources, so it is better to concentrate on the larger publishers for a better coverage and publicity.

From the list of Finnish publishers, the largest ones are Tammi, Otava and Sanoma Magazines. They are known mainly for their book publishings, and in Sanoma's case, their newspapers and magazines. This means that they are not mainly comics publishers, but they still have sizeable amount of different titles, making them prime targets for anyone aiming to publish comics on a national level. The other major companies in the industry are Arktinen Banaani, Jalava, Like and Egmont. Out of these, Arktinen Banaani and Egmont are solely comics publishers, having many popular titles. Jalava and Like operate mainly in the traditional books and soft cover sector, occasionally publishing comics.

All in all, the Finnish comics sector is small, publishes new titles fairly rarely and currently has quite few science fiction titles, let alone science fiction presented in a more adult taste. In this way, Requiem has a chance to find a place in the field, but it's up to the merits of the product itself to be successful in the end.

2 Productization

2.1 What is productization?

Productization is a process which aims at making a complete product offering for a customer. It is related to R&D, marketing, PR and developing business processes, and is a part of all of them (Lahti-Nuuttila, p.9, 2009.) The end result should be a product which can be sold to potential customers to use or sell to further customers without any necessary extra work on the product itself. An example of a productized service are restaurant franchising- chains, where all solutions and the product itself has been carefully made so that it can be easily handed down to the entrepreneur who wants to set up a restaurant.(Parantainen, p.19, 2010) Similar concepts can be applied to comics industry, where the comic is the complete product offered to the publishers.

So, how to determine if productization is done well? There are several indicators:

- Patterns emerge from the process, things that remain the same for each new project
- The product has been given a name and it can be assigned a fixed price
- The process for making the product can be taught to others and they can continue to produce in the same fashion even though the original expert has quit (Parantainen, p.21, 2010)

All of these points are an indication to a well- productized article. The standard quality, fixed price and predictability of the delivery are staples to this. By confining to these principles as to what the finished product should look and sound like, one should be able to determine when a product is well productized.

On the contrary, defining a bad productization can be detected from several indicators as well:

- The price of the product cannot be named easily
- The contents of the product offering are hard or impossible to name and are even random
- It is unknown who is responsible for the different sections of the product

The process of productization is another thing, it encompasses different phases of product development which determine the finished package (Lathi-Nuuttila, p.20, 2009).

First one must analyze the demand for a product and the research costs and material costs that the development of the product needs. Once it has been established that the resources are sufficient and demand high enough, the product itself can be designed and the complete service package can be established.

Second, the contents of the product and the offering can be planned out, meaning that the function of the product is clarified in terms of which of the customers problems it solves. At this point it is also decided whether the product is a part of a product family or a bigger product package. What extra services and support are included should be planned in this phase as well.

Third, the working processes for making the product should be planned and refined. This is crucial for the speed of delivery and conservation of key resources during the production process, since both are factors of competition between your own and other product offerings. The production process of the product should also be well connected or completely assimilated with the research and development since both have significant impact on each other.

Finally, pricing for the product offering must be decided. This is dependent on several factors such as supply and demand, material and working costs, manpower and expertise needed, the market situation and smaller, product-related issues. The limits of the prices are determined by the production costs

which are the lowest limit for the price, and the market demand for the product, which in turn decides the highest price which can be set for a given package.

2.2 Basic framework of art productization

There are many ways of productizing art products such as books, commercial art services, and comics. In Noora Virta's way (2009), the process of productization can be divided into eight parts, which are as follows:

- target groups, customers
- core service
- customization or standardization of the product or offering
- means of concretization
- selection of products and services
- ratio of cost and quality
- brochure
- branding

Target groups and customers mean the identification of groups and/or individuals that the product or service is meant for. This is the most important issue to handle when productizing art and must be well thought out, since it can mean failure to choose the wrong customer or customers for this type of product- often mixing tangible and intangible values within the same product or service, such as the ideas conveyed in an artwork and the actual sales value of the product.

Core service in this framework means the central product or service offering which is sold presented and marketed to potential clients. There is also a need to customize or standardize art products and services, as it is rarely the case that different customers would want the exact same piece or service- though some essential parts may be very similar such as the style in which a work is made.

Means of concretization in case of an art product are the means by which the idea or a concept is brought into reality as a tangible product. These might include such means as computer generated graphics (CGI), painting and other techniques of traditional art, animation and composing. The means are dependent on the wishes of the client and the requirements of the work at hand.

Selection of products and services is the range of different services available from an art company. The range is determined by the field in which the company specializes in, as well as their target customer groups. An art company has the added benefit of being able to change a product line with relative ease, as due to the nature of their products.

Ratio of cost and quality is essential in art business as well- although selecting a price for something that might have many very intangible values such as the mood which a piece creates or the novel creative approach can be hard. The ratio between cost and quality is at best hazy when talking about art products, as there might many different perceptions of a single product, especially in some fields such as high art and animation. In determining a price for an art product it is important to see if the product itself is a good fit for its intended purpose, and if the technical quality matches that of the industry standard.

Brochure and branding are both promotional aspects of productization. The first, brochure, is a promotional tool which has the task of informing and convincing the possible customer of the services of the company in question and the benefits of using their services. Branding is the process by which a company or other entity establishes a distinct image, a lasting and indelible impression of their own products or their own quality (Clifton and Simmons, p.15. 2003). They are both an important part in making an impression to customers, both when meeting them and even before a customer has had any direct connection with the company when they are aware of the brand through other means.

2.3 The requirements of the publisher

The Finnish publisher usually requires three elements to a publishing proposal: the synopsis of the story of the comic, some examples- maybe a previously published volume of the comic or printed out copies of the pages as they would be in an actual publication. In addition to these two elements, a cover letter is included for the whole set or materials explaining you as an author and why they should publish this comic in particular. Sometimes it is required to present yourself to the publisher in a meeting as well as providing the mentioned materials. This, however, usually happens only after positive interest has been shown from the publisher after evaluating the potential for a good product (Koskela, p.126-131, 2010.)

2.4 What the comic has to offer to the publisher

The first, and the biggest offering the comic has to offer as a product is profit potential for the publisher (Koskela, p.128, 2010.) As with any other type of business, it always needs to be profitable- and if the product offered isn't seen as a chance to turn out a profit, it's value to the publisher is very limited if not completely useless.

Second, the comic has to have a long shelf-life. With a longer shelf-life the comic can be in the bookstores and internet shops for a longer time and therefore have a chance to sell more than a comic that would be on sale only for a limited time. These limitations may be due to the nature, topics or storyline that are handled and depicted in the comic, and they can limit the time the comic can be on sale effectively.

Third, the comic must fit the publisher's image. By this is meant that the comic doesn't have too hard subjects or such imagery that it could be considered insulting to potential customers and other people and thus lead to negative publicity, drop in sales and other bad effects to the publishing company (Shapiro, p.5, 2003.)

2.5 Interviews of publisher staff

To gain additional information on the preferences of the publishers, two interviews were conducted with chief publishing directors of Sangatsu Manga and Arktinen Banaani publishing companies, Mr. Antti Valkama and Mr. Vesa Kataisto respectively, which are among one of the leading publishing houses in Finland. A standard question template was used on both interviews with same or similar questions presented to both interviewees. Both interviews were conducted in May, 2013. The questions were selected on the basis of points of interest regarding the author's work, Requiem.

The first question that was presented concerned with the publishing amounts of comics, and I asked about the print amounts are placed on new publication. To this Mr. Kataisto answered

"Before the printing amounts were measured by the amounts pre-bought by bookstores and other retailers. Now we are living in a change, as Internet stores have come and the sales from regular shops have decreased rapidly. Only sure sellers are bought into stock to wait for retail, such as Fingerpori and Viivi and Wagner."

This is an indicator of changing markets and customer habits. More comics are being sold through the internet, and making sales more difficult for publishers. This, however, does not seem to be the case with larger ones such as Sangatsu Manga, as Mr. Valkama commented that

"If we are talking about completely new publications, when talking about a big publication, it can exceed 10000 copies. It varies when talking about a short series or a longer series, in longer ones the print amounts tend to be bigger. The actual circulation amounts are however smaller, as the comics are sold to magazine stalls in bulk, meaning some 40% will end up as waste paper even with good sales."

The situation in terms of numbers of comics sold seems to be steady for larger publishers, whereas smaller ones like Arktinen Banaani struggle to get by. Even so, the amounts sold by all publishers in general cannot be considered high, so

from what can be gathered from this that the industry in general is either in slow decline or it has stagnated to a standstill in terms of sold products. Mr. Kataisto said,

"A few years ago any comic book would sell at least 500 copies. To get to a thousand copies, it would require serious effort, and if the piece sold 1500 copies or more, it was a hit. Small publishers only make 500- 1000 copies per piece, and even the larger ones don't necessarily make mass printings, even if they order copies as an international joint printing."

From this, it is assumed the smaller publishers which do not sell their comics to the magazine stores, kiosks, supermarkets etc. in bulk, and order quite small batches of comics. This would make it financially unviable to get along just by making comics in Finland, and as Mr. Kataisto said

"Currently, an unknown author's comic can be expected to sell only around 100 copies in bookstores and other booksales."

This information means you would need a second job for financial support to be able to produce the comics full-time. In the author's current situation this would be extremely hard, if not impossible without the quality and level of product severely declining. Therefore it is up to the contract amounts declared by the publishers whether it is possible to be an author in Finland regardless of whether any of the publishers agree to publish Requiem.

The second question dealt with the general requirements of the industry and it was about the general requirements to accepted comics. Both of the executives agreed that the technical criteria for a publishable comic must be fulfilled, such as good readable text, art quality and any such factors, as Mr. Kataisto said

"Good art quality is an advantage, also handling the "grammar of comics"- so that the comic is both images and text, and those two are in good balance. Also the font should be chosen so that it does not conflict too much with the imagery."

Valkama and Kataisto also agreed on the non-tangible values of the product, such as the entertainment value emphasized by Mr. Valkama. Mr. Kataisto also said, that

"The second most important factor is uniqueness- no one is interested in Garfield-copies, nor autobiographies which hardly ever generate interest in anyone else, if even the author himself."

In addition to these points, Mr. Valkama added his opinion on the length of a series, which is a factor with larger publishers doing long series.

"The second requirement is to have a good fitting length, it is a risk to start publishing a 50-part series without knowing whether it will be a hit or not. Shorter series are usually easier on the risk and can be published with more risks involved, as the total risk to the company is lesser. Also, the publication schedule must have a place for the new series."

In the author's case, this will not be an issue, as the comic itself is not long by the industry standards.

The general opinion on the requirements among the publishers seems to be similar to that found in the reference materials, unique product with good quality in both story and text is key. Both of these requirements are filled by Requiem to some degree, as it has already been published on paper. The main issue which is on both director's mind seems to be the interest the comic generates in the public, how much interest would Requiem generate is yet unknown, as there has been no large publication or audience concerned with it, and it can only be known through further involvement with the publishers.

The third question was on the topic of the publishing process and the time spent on it, other phases of the process and indeed what the different phases are on both of these publishers. These processes had similarities on some accounts, but were different because of the areas the publishers were specialized to, and their sizes. In the case of Arktinen Banaani, the process is very straightforward as Mr. Kataisto said

"First one should send a few sample pages, and also a synopsis of characters and the storyline. If the decision is made to go forward with publication, a contract is made and timetables are chosen. Selling the actual printed copy will begin at least half a year before it arrives from the print- the further the author can work technically, the better- meaning the creation of a publication quality PDF-file, etc. This side can also be done by us as well."

But in the case of Sangatsu, Mr. Valkama describes the process as

"Usually in our case, the agent of the other publisher/author is contacted, and an offer is placed on the publication of the series. This may take from one month to six months, depending on the other party. After this, the materials are sent to and from between the parties and contracts are established and the work begins on the printing of the comic here."

The process of publication is therefore very different when it comes to Sangatsu and Arktinen Banaani according to this information. As Arktinen Banaani is a smaller publisher with very different publishing line mainly concerned with domestic series, their publishing process is much shorter and has less stages and official correspondence included in it. Sangatsu however mainly deals with foreign series, so their processes are usually much more official, dealing with agents of other publishing houses or occasionally the author himself/herself.

The next question was on the focus of the publishers towards what is the main focus of attention when selecting new series for publication. Mr. Kataisto explained, that

"The aforementioned style/uniqueness, and that the entirety, story and images fit together into a package. So, a good balance between image and text is key."

On Mr. Valkama's part this question was skipped as he answered it in most part when he was answering question two. Deducting from Mr. Valkama's answer on that question and Mr. Kataisto's on this one, the main focus is on the general

quality of the product as is logical when looking at the process from a publishers standpoint- meaning that the comic has to make money.

The next question deals with the different types of comics and their sales, the best and worst selling comics were discussed. According to both answers, the key to success is finding the proper customer segment and providing a product which will activate audiences with no previous experience in reading comics other than the "traditional Donald Ducks", as Mr. Kataisto said

"Good art quality and good story don't necessarily predict good sales. The word must go around. The most important are the readers "who don't read comics", even though they read Donald Duck and Viivi & Wagner.

Also from Kataisto's answer we can conclude that the staple of their product lines have been stripcomics as he said

"Best sellers are the comics published in newspapers which are made into collections, such as Fingerpori. Each stripcomic in the days paper is like an advertisement to the comic itself. These type of comics are the backbone of Arktinen Banaani's publications."

This is a class of products to which the author's project, Requiem most certainly does not belong to. This can predict a negative outcome on the part of Arktinen Banaani when it comes to the publication offer presented to them about Requiem.

Slightly concerning information came from Mr. Valkama, as he describes the worst selling comics in his company's publication schedule to be the ones with mature audiences as a target customer group:

"The worst sellers are the series meant for a more mature audience, as it generally a smaller segment in our customer base."

As Requiem is a comic meant for mature readers mainly, from this information can be assessed that my product would not do very well as a part of similar

publishers product line- this would mean all the larger publishers on the target publisher list such as Tammi, Otava, Egmont and Sangatsu itself.

Other points that came up was the external recognition of the author, as Mr. Kataisto put it

"Other separate issues are in play as well. if Ville Valo should want to publish a comic about HIM, it would sell 10000 copies in a heartbeat easily."

This is also a field which would not help my project much, since the author of Requiem is not a known figure in any field.

The next question was about the genre in which my own project was made in, science fiction. The prospects of science fiction as a genre was discussed. Science fiction as a genre is, on the part of Arktinen Banaani a steady one in Mr. Kataisto's words

"Sci-fi and fantasy are selling as usual, round 300 copies per piece. Translated science fiction maybe around 1000- 2000 copies. For comparison, the circulation of Tähtivaeltaja(a Finnish sci-fi publication) is around 1600 copies."

Steady as it is, it sells fairly low amounts. In Mr. Kataisto's perspective, the Japanese comics have made very well in this field, as he said:

"Around ten years ago, manga sold 5000- 7000 copies per series. Now the supply is so extensive, that those amounts have dropped for sure."

This was confirmed by Mr. Valkama as he said

"From that genre, we had Planetes, which was a part of this genre meant for a more mature audience, and it did not sell very well, although it was well praised all around. Also other series in this class have made it fairly poorly, and we don't expect many hits from this type of comics."

In Sangatsu Manga's case science fiction is not a very profitable genre, even though they have had many publications in it. Most of the titles they have had in

this genre have been outside of their usual audiences and have had difficulty in finding readership from the small market area that Finland is. Therefore, it can be said that the topics and storylines of science fiction are not strong in what comes to running the business side of a publishing house. This also predicts a negative outcome from the larger publishers, at least.

The next question was presented to Mr. Kataisto only, as Mr. Valkama predicted *Requiem* would not get through is *Sangatsu*, at least. It was on the viability of publishing *Requiem*. Mr. Kataisto's opinion, was slightly different, though with similar tones:

"For now, I would say publishing on paper is not affordable, a better solution would be to offer it as an e- book to international markets- maybe even using crowd sourcing to get the money necessary. The authors of *Pikku Närhi* used this to publish their comic in the US with this technique, although the print was only for 1000 copies."

From this answer it was gathered that in the current publishing and economic situation the international and e-markets are the best possible aims in what comes to offering a comic to. Also the new techniques of acquiring assets for project, such as crowd sourcing could be used for this type of projects- although integrating them to this productization process would be quite hard as it is meant for acquiring a publishing contract instead of assets. This could be a new direction for the future, however.

This next question was presented only to Mr. Valkama, as all authors of *Arktinen Banaani* are Finnish, and I asked about the nationality of the authors they have had. To this, Mr. Valkama answered:

"Currently we have one series, with multiple artists working on the same series."

With this information, the prospects of gaining a publishing contract is still not entirely negative, but as a part of a larger publisher, having to compete with more resourceful foreign artists it seems highly improbable that the author would do well as a part of such company. Smaller publishers seem better at

bringing in contracts, but their lower payments could be an issue in what comes to the efficiency and quality of work, as mentioned previously.

The next question was on the current and future trends in comics industry. Mr. Kataisto was concerned, as in the previous answers, about the Internet and speculated on the themes which would interest international audiences:

"Internet is the way, although taxation, monetary issues and publication platforms are problematic. By content, humour driven series will stay on top. Internationally people might be most interested in a long, Finnish themed- series, but even though grant systems have been improving, it is much too hard to apply for a grant to make a long series such as that. For example Kristian Huitula and Hannu Lukkarinen have made international success due to their own effort. Otherwise getting published internationally is great, but there's not much money in it for the author still. For example the publications of Ville Ranta's French albums are around 2000-3000 copies."

The trend environment is therefore in favor of going global in the Internet, or then making comics aimed at larger groups of people, such as humor series and strip comics. In Mr. Valkama's perspective, Sangatsu was steady on its course due to their product line:

"What comes to manga, we are pretty much the only one publishing in Finland, so we make the trends in that field. But we have come from publishing a small number of big titles to a more broader spectrum of smaller series with less copies per series. To sum up, we are constantly trying to find big successes, but also series that will have even some success."

He also speculated on the direction of the Finnish market, as he said that it would

"Either decline slowly, or rise, but it can pretty much go either way depending on various elements- there is a large customer base which can read comics, but we just have to find the right appeal and right titles to wake them up. If we can find a series that will also appeal to those reading the "normal" comics- Donald Duck, etc. we will have a big success."

Concluding from this answer Mr. Valkama gave, a wider customer segment seems to be the key to finding any success in the field, and with a limited reader interest in a series, or a completely new author such as me, it can be concluded that chances of being published by domestic publishers are weak. Chances for commercial success seem to be in the field of digital comics and one man Internet operations and e- book dealerships.

The last question concerned the personal effort, branding and marketing of one's own comic is required for new authors, should they be published by either company. The views from the companies differed slightly, mainly due to the size difference of the companies with Sangatsu being much larger player in the industry. In the case of Arktinen Banaani, Mr. Kataisto said the resources at their disposal to help a new author in marketing were limited:

"Everything you can do by yourself for the improving the circulation and awareness is a plus. For a single publication we have only very little marketing support to spare."

In Sangatsu's case, however, Mr. Valkama said that they would include themselves in the marketing effort as much as possible:

"From our side we will do a quite a large amount of marketing, and much of this will be informing the press and magazines about the new series, rather than buying newspaper ads and such. Interviews and social media are also good tools which have worked well, but those depend heavily on the personality of the author, if they like this sort of publicity."

Therefore, chances given by a larger publishers marketing effort are still only slightly better than the ones by a smaller one.

From this final question, it can be deduced that smaller publishers have less support to give to authors, and less chances of success in general- but even with the backing of a larger publisher such as Sangatsu, the chances are limited by the small markets.

To conclude the results of the interviews, smaller publishers have better chances of bringing positive results in terms of publishing contracts for the type of product the author has, but lack the resources to pay any considerable wage, meaning the quality would suffer in return. Also, the chances of getting published in this current economic situation and trend environment are even further limiting this small chance.

In the case of the larger publishers they do have better mechanisms in what comes to the process and marketing, and on one hand have resources, but the risks involved in bringing in a new domestic artist are very notable, and therefore it doesn't happen very often, not at least in the case of Sangatsu. Also, the issues with the genre selection and publishing timetables and rushing works are considerable in both cases. The limitations of time and the certain drop in work quality might be a decisive factor in the customer's buying decision. This fact is also most probably known by the publishers themselves, which further limits the chances of gaining a contract from either the smaller or the bigger publishers. In any case, certain answers to these issues and questions can only be attained from the publishers through further inquiry and by sending the offerings in the implementation part.

3 Implementation

3.1 Productization choices on the comic

In accordance with the framework presented before, this part focuses on the following points in the design of the comic as a product and in the productization process as a whole. The list of points will be examined in sequential order and clarify what has been done on each one of the points.

Target groups, customers are in the case of the comic few- mainly the publishing staff of the different publishing houses. Though they are few, they have significant weight in the success of the whole project, since they are the ones making the publishing choices for their company. They need to be convinced well enough that the requirements for a successful business venture are present in the publishing of Requiem. To ensure this, a package of materials has been prepared to each company which has in it the samples and information in form of the cover letter and synopsis.

Core service in this case is simply the offering of work and the finished comic which is sent to the publishers. It includes the work done previously on the two albums of the series, and the further albums that have been planned. Also, other related products that can possibly be made such as posters, advertisement and web services are included. As a part of a comic collective the author has already much experience of this sort of works, which is a plus. An example of promotional material that might be included in the finished package, a poster which includes many of the character in the comic:



Fig.1 Example of promotional material.

Such material could be used by the publisher as a side extra to an article or as material for festival sales or other events. Developed to larger sizes, such posters can be used as partials as well as full-size posters to back up a sales desk in an event or sales location for example.

Customization and standardization are key to this project, as the publishers will eventually, provided a successful publication contract is achieved, want a part in the development process of the comic itself. Steering the scriptwriting, styles and ways of storytelling will bring added value to the product offering- though it has to remain limited to preserve the original feel of the comic.

Selection of products in this case are few: Requiem Part 1; and Requiem: Part 2 and the subsequent chapters. This is also a deciding factor for the publishers, because a successful good feedback and positive publishing choice leading to a publication will involve the company further to the development process of the rest of the comic, giving them some power on to what style, way of storytelling etc., which type of product they want it to be, as explained.

Ratio of cost and quality in case of this product is a very flexible subject, as this ratio can only be assessed individually by each person who reads the comic. The publishers have to decide if the quality of the comic is sufficient to advocate the cost of publishing it, so that is where the ratio will come into play.

Means of concretization for Requiem are both traditional and computer-based art techniques. Traditional tools and methods are used to make basic work, and computer programs to do the color work to finish the pages. This also makes it easier to change the colors and other details of the pages if need be, which increases the customizability of the product.

In place of a brochure the offering has the cover letter and the synopsis of the storyline, which are sent to the publishers in order for them to make a publishing decision. The contents of these elements are to be carefully decided, as they are the only sources of information directly available to the publishers in their respective companies. The main task for these materials is to sell the comic to the publishers and help them gain a positive view of it as a successful product choice.

Branding, to the project has already been a continuous process for a long time, starting from the first publication and even the first sample pages made over two years ago. The unique feel of the story give out a certain quality to the name of the comic giving it a brand- this has so far been achieved through viral

marketing, Internet marketing, reviews in magazines and festival presence. The most prominent on-going activities in this field are the festival appearances, regular posting to comics forums and my account on DeviantArt, which is an Internet art community site. These activities provide a continuous publicity to a group of several hundred followers to a few thousand occasional visitors, which all gain information of the project through these means. All this branding activity for Requiem is backing the offering process to the publishers and building a name for the comic.

3.2 To whom is the comic meant for?

An essential part of any productization plan is to identify the target audience and to answer these essential questions: What are we offering, to whom, and how? (Oikkonen, p.16, 1992).

What is being offered to the publishers is Requiem, a science fiction comic meant for adult audience interested in well-made science fiction story with action/thriller elements. The finished product would be two albums, first part which is a 60-page album and a second, 92-page album both containing a part of a story arc which would advance the story further to its ultimate conclusion in the latter parts of the series, the amount of which is yet to be determined.

The typical customer profile for this type of comic would be over 18 years old, typically male who is interested in science fiction stories. This type of customer is usually more predictable in terms of buying behavior, i.e. more committed to buy the next part as well, than children and pre-teens which are another major group of comic consumers.

The selling points, or how we would get the readers to buy Requiem: Part 2 are the mature elements such as combat scenes and fast-paced storytelling and visual style that appeal to this particular, small, but well-defined audience sector. The objective of these choices in storytelling and visual style are to attract a stable customer base in this type of readers. One of the most major selling points of Requiem is the mix of qualities it has: a long science fiction story of a more mature type and good quality art. These are qualities that are usually associated with foreign comics, as Finnish comics are often shorter and

concentrate on "less-mainstream" and "artistic" style stories which concentrate mainly on the visual aspects of storytelling rather than the traditional union of text and image associated with comics (Huitula, p.20-21, 2010). This is therefore a good selling point, being a unique product offering in the Finnish comics market.

Choice of audience

Current trends in storytelling and topic field

In the world of comics and more specifically sci-fi-comics there have been few new developments over the course of recent years. Two most major ones are the emergence of influences from Japanese comics of the same genre and the introduction of more foreign titles to the Finnish market. Competition has therefore become more intense over the past decade. Now the trend is for longer comics and series which have done well in foreign markets, though the publishers in Finland have to be very careful in choosing a science fiction titles, as the market is still more limited than in larger countries.

Why go for adult audience?

There are three good reasons for shaping the comic to appeal to an adult audience: the financial capability of adult audience to buy the finished product, and increased freedom with the topics and illustrations included in the comic. Better buying capacity of the adult consumers helps with the making the buying decision easier for them, as they have the money to spend to hobbies and past-times readily available. The increased freedom on the storytelling, topic and illustrations allows for more interesting, mature topics to be included in the comic- just as has been done with scriptwriting of Requiem. More mature topics mean more interest from this particular consumer group that has buying power at hand, so both of these aspects support the decision to go for an adult audience.

The third reason for going adult audience is the lack of titles in this type of comics, in Finnish at least. Aiming for adult audience is therefore logical, as there is a lack of titles aimed for this group of potential consumers on the market. This point however, only applies for Finnish publications, as there are

numerous publications in this genre in different languages, most prominently English. If *Requiem* were to be published by a Finnish publisher, the language would be Finnish and the marketing effort for it more concentrated to the Finnish market, giving it an edge to foreign publications.

Choosing style

In the case of *Requiem*, the style of the comic was determined by three factors: The author's taste and drawing style, the taste of the audience and the examples given by foreign science fiction titles and games of different origins. These titles are for example *Ghost In the Shell*, *Ground Control*, *Hitman* and *Deus Ex* series. All of these titles have been great international successes, and they have had specific elements which contributed to their appeal. My aim was to seek models for storylines and artistic elements from these and various other successful titles in order to make a unique mix to boost my own comic's appeal.

Stylistic choices can be clearly seen in this sample page from the comic:



Fig.2 Sample page of Requiem.

From this sample, different main points can be seen: dark storyline, detailed art quality, and colored art. All these points serve to reinforce the image of a hard science fiction comic, which in turn will be beneficial in reaching the target customer group. The better the product is in fitting the tastes of these potential customers, the better chances it will have in the publishers side as well. Although, coloring is more of an optional extra than a requirement, it serves to increase the appeal to the possible customers.

Publishing format

The publishing format of the comic is a standard A5 album, with page lengths from 60 pages on the first part to 92 pages of the second part.

Competition from other titles

The most obvious competitors for Requiem: Part 2 are all the non-Finnish comic books of the science fiction genre. To date, the biggest competitors available from the same genre and similar style visually and story-wise are Sillage, Ghost in The Shell, Appleseed and Dogs, for example. Their advantage lies in larger publishing houses and the resources they provide, and of course in the larger publicity they already enjoy as a part of being an internationally known titles.

SWOT-analysis on the comic

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sufficiently good art quality • Colored art • Specific genre • Appeal to others than just comic fans through other sci-fi culture • Adult audience and themes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shortcomings in storytelling • Specific genre • Possibly small audience due to region • Not originally written in Finnish, may be an issue for some publishers • Adult audience and themes not providing enough customer base
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of competition in the Finnish comics market for sci-fi titles • A place in the market is possible due to the lack of Finnish sci-fi titles • Publishers looking for something new for their publishing lines • Language used for scriptwriting and current published state, English, provides a potentially larger audience in other countries • Yet unknown potential in Finnish markets for this type of story 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foreign titles of the same genre • Situation of the business • Sudden emergence of Finnish competition in the genre • Overbooked publishing schedules leading to big losses for the publishers and subsequently less chances for Requiem (Peltola, 2012)

Table 1: SWOT-analysis on the comic.

3.3 Finding out information on the target publishers

The best way to find out information on where to present your product and how is to check from the publishers web pages or by calling the chief publishing director by phone, an information which should also be found from the web. The information may vary and some publishers might have outdated information on their pages, so emailing their information services is also advisable if no answer is heard from other sources.

3.4 What to take into consideration

There are many things to take into consideration before and after having submitted the comic to the publishers. Before sending the materials one should carefully examine that they are of the best possible quality and offer clarity and brevity in explaining what type of storyline and style the comic has. It also has to explain why exactly this particular comic would be a good addition to the product line which the target company has. Also, targeting the right publishers by finding out information on their product lines beforehand will save time and effort when making the choice to offer your comic to a publisher, as publishers tend to be more favoring towards the type of styles they have already experience with.

After the sending of the materials one should be prepared to wait for considerable time before results are to come, because the publishers generally take between 3-6 months to deliver a definite answer. To cut down on waiting times, it is good to personally deliver the script and other materials to the publishers, so one can ask for opinions and observe the general attitude towards the offering first hand.

4 Results

The end result of this thesis work, and answer to the questions presented at the beginning, it can be said there has been both positive and negative results from the side of the publishers.

Positive results are that the general attitude towards Requiem was good and the offerings to different publishers generated a lot of interest. The negative news is that most of the companies involved in this study were not interested in publishing Requiem, mainly out of two reasons: Topic, story and publishing format of the story and the economic situation and the risk involved in taking on new series. Out of the different publishing companies, outright refusal due to the publishing format and the story came from Tammi, Sangatsu Manga, Egmont, Sanoma Magazines, Otava, Like and Jalava companies, as their lines of series are mainly focused on either strip comics popular in Finland, different styled comics with different readership or foreign translated titles.

The results are, that out of the seven publishers selected, none were interested in the comic in a publishing sense. Even if there was a publishing offer which yielded positive results, there would still be many unsolved issues that involve the feasibility of making a color comic with the very tight schedule and on the other hand the low payment which is inevitable for a comic of this sort which is has only limited reader interest. Also, in the current market situation it would be better to aim for larger, international markets, maybe in e-book business mentioned by Mr. Kataisto- which is the author's new aim, as the comic is already scripted in English.

4.1 Conclusions and recommendations

From what has been learned from this project, based on the results received, it would be advisable to others taking up this kind of task to consider three things.

First of all, their patience and work ethics; making a comic and then presenting it to the publishers takes a lot of time and effort, if one wants to be successful. In this case, the author did well on all aspects, although given the small markets and different publishing lines of the different companies was bound to give also negative results, no matter the level of preparation given to the materials. In terms of the quality of the product it can be safely said it has been on a good level- adequate enough to gain positive attention and sales from the comics community, based on previous experiences with the sales work in festivals and other events.

Sheer logical thinking in formulating the comic to be a good seller and thus a good offering in the current economic situation and trend environment. One should take greatest care in finding a good balance in what comes to the actual production of the comic, to pay equal amount of attention to the storyline, art and aesthetics which sell the comic to the potential publishers or buyers in general. The best selling point in any offering process is to have the best product, or at least a good one.

Extensive knowledge on the field in which the productization is being implemented to. In this case the field was comics and the publishing business, but in any case and with any other area of business it is advisable that the person entering a project of this scale should first carefully examine the theory of productization and the possible beneficial implications to their own business projects. Using the tools and lists is easy, and they are good especially for finding out weaknesses and flaws in the products and processes.

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Figures

Figure 1: Example of promotional material

Figure 2: Sample page of Requiem

Tables

Table 1: SWOT-analysis on the comic

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päiväys 01.01.2013

Yritys
Osasto ja kustannustoimittaja
Lähiosoite
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AIKUISILLE SUUNNATTU SCIFISARJAKUVA

Hei!

Otan yhteyttä teidän kustannusyhtiöllenne tarjoamani sarjakuvan, Requiemin takia.

Requiem on länsimaistyylinen albumipohjainen, moniosainen science-fiction sarjakuva joka on suunnattu myöhäisteineille ja aikuisille. Requiem kertoo tulevaisuuden maailmasta jossa tähtienväliset suuryritykset kamppailevat vallasta Maassa sijaitsevan hallituksen kanssa. Päähenkilöinä tarinassa on Maan hallituksen salamurhaajat jotka joutuvat ongelmiin viimeistä tehtäväänsä suorittaessaan ja sotkeutuvat erään yrityksen johtajan juoneen joka tekee heistä maanpettureita. Samalla päähenkilöille alkaa valjeta tämän juonen todellinen tarkoitus, joka koskettaa koko ihmiskuntaa.

Juoni on tarkemmin selostettu yksityiskohtineen synopsiksessa, jonka löydätte tämän kirjeen liitteistä.

Uskon Requiemin olevan erinomainen lisä yhtiönne kustannuslinjaan, koska tämän tyylistä kotimaista, suurisuuntaista science fictionia ei aiemmin ole julkaisulistoilla näkynyt.

Liitteenä on myös Sarjakuvayhteisö Seitin julkaisema toinen osa sarjakuvastani, 92 sivua väreissä.

Terveisin,

Juuso Laasonen