ARCADA

Marketing Planning: *Feeniks Koulu*

Biranjan Raut

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Abstract:

Degree Thesis "Marketing Planning: *Feeniks Koulu*" demonstrates structured marketing planning process with the help of case company "*Feeniks Koulu*". The central idea of Thesis is to come up with systematic marketing plan following structured process. Thesis employs qualitative research methodology following inductive reasoning approach. Thesis, initiates by outlining theoretical planning methods, which then is materialized into marketing plan with the help of empirical research. Discussion and Finding section illustrates the marketing planning from which case company can achieve its marketing objectives. Marketing planning process described in this paper incorporates modern dimension of digital media. In addition, the marketing planning process demonstrated in this paper may also be generalized to provide a guideline to come up with simple and efficient marketing plan for other similar companies operating in a similar environment.

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Table of Contents

1 RESEARCH TOPIC

1.1 Introduction

Globally about two out of every three products are destined to fail; furthermore, half of all global product launches will not sustain their year-one sales performance in the second year. (Nielsen, 2013).

A pressing question therefore arises from this data. Why is it that some products disappear into oblivion while a selected, unique few live on to tell their glory? In early 2000 the Microsoft PC tablet launch turned out to be a spectacular failure while Apple's I-pad, introduced nearly a decade letter; eventually became a multi-million dollar game changer that revolutionized personal computing. The question is why? How could one product with very similar features have such deviating responses to their market launches in the space of 10 years?

Many challenges arise when attempting to attribute a specific trait or quality for the success or failure of any new product launch. However, research does suggest that successful launches of a product possess some common traits that can increase the likelihood of success. Research carried out by Nielsen in late 2012 pinpoints: "products driven by a true, vs. perceived, consumer need or desire will likely increase the transaction value and offer advantages over other products in the marketplace". It is well known that identifying consumer need and defining value proposition fall under the wide scope of marketing. Indeed, it would not be an overstatement to state that marketing drives a deterministic role in the success or failure of a product.

Developing a compelling new product is only part of the battle. Ensuring consumers are aware of the product and can find it on store shelves is just as critical to new product success. There are several broad ways in which a marketer reaches potential customers through online and offline environments. All of these broad ways of reaching clients are fragmented. In order to have leverage with available platforms and deliver coherent and organized messages, all the differing ways of gathering clientele should be integrated.

This integration requires a great deal of planning before execution. It behooves a company to focus on a strategic marketing planning process.

> Apart from profitability, a company with an effective marketing planning system is likely to have: Widely understood objectives, highly motivated employees, high level of actionable market information and greater inter-functional coordination (McDonald & Wilson, 2011, Pg.69).

1.2 Research Aim

Marketing textbook literature today in nearly its entirety circles and focuses around old-school marketing approaches, which do not take into account modern technologies and the way that people in the 21st century interact with these technologies. There is a need to analyze modern realities while preparing for market planning. Furthermore, SME's (small to medium sized companies) commonly do not have sufficient resources at their disposal toward the running of traditionally flashy advertising campaigns in popular magazines or billboards. With this in mind, the thesis will attempt to look into market planning in the present digital age and the optimization of cost-effective digital media in order to reap maximum benefits. Research will have its primary focus on the case company "Feeniks-koulu" and guide the company in drawing up a structured marketing plan. Through this process, the thesis will be able to provide an example for other SME's in the planning and execution of their marketing plans following through the structured processes that are presented.

1.3 Research Question

The primary question that the thesis will attempt to answer is in which ways or by what means will it be possible to create a structured and effective Marketing Plan in the example of the case company, "Feeniks Koulu". In the process of answering the questions, the thesis will also provide marketing planning guidelines for other similar SMEs.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Good Marketing does not just come about by sheer coincidence; it is rather the result of careful planning and implementation. Financial success often depends upon marketing ability; Finance, operations, accounting and other business function will not matter if there is not enough demand for products and services (Koler & Keller Lane, 2006). In layman's terms marketing could be simply defined, as "meeting needs profitably" (Kotler & Keller Lane, 2006, p.44). Two large IT firms put this into practice. Facebook noticed the social need of people to stay constantly connected and similarly Google recognized the need for organized digital content. Both companies successfully solved the social and personal need profitably with their ingenious products. Marketing cannot just be limited within meeting needs profitably; it also covers a wide spectrum from development of product to disposal. The American Marketing Association offers the following formal definition: "Marketing is the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large" (American Marketing Association, 2008). Similarly, marketing planning is about determining marketing objectives, what a company wants to achieve and marketing strategies to help them achieve their goals (McDonald, 2008)

There has been much talk about digital marketing; however, it is challenge to properly define exactly what it is. Often the most cited definition across marketing literature as to the definition of digital marketing is by Reitzin (2007) in his marketing blog "mobile storm": "Digital Marketing is the practice of promoting products and services using database-driven online distribution channels to reach consumers in a timely, relevant, persona, and the cost-effective way".

Other key elements of digital marketing channels brought forward by Fenwick & Wertime (2008) are that digital channels are addressable and they enable marketers to have a continuous, real-time, two-way personalized dialogue with each consumer. It is about providing people with information about the product when a consumer needs it not according to some publication or broadcaster schedule (Halligan & Shah, 2009).

As the author described above, marketing planning is about determining the objective and finding the way to reach it. This definition is concise and easy to understand; however, marketing planning has various facets and incorporates various intertwined processes. Marketing planning also involves the assessment of resources and the marketing opportunity and threats, furthermore it also enables information, aims and ideas to be developed into a document that can be easily understood, evaluated and implemented (Donnelly, et al., 2009) .

2.1 Things to Avoid

Before jump-starting in planning details, it is prudent to learn from previous planning mistakes and learn how not to construct marketing plan before learning how to construct marketing plan.

Table 1: Marketing planning systems, design and implementation problems (McDonald & Wilson, 2011 pg. 70)

1. Weak support from the chief executive and top management
2. Lack of a plan for planning
3. Lack of management support
4. Confusion over planning support
5. Too much detail, too far ahead
6. Once-a-year ritual
7. Separation of operational planning from strategic planning
8. Failure to integrate marketing planning into a total corporate planning system
9. Delegation of planning to planner

2.2 Marketing Planning Simplified

Thesis uses "SOSTAC®" as a planning guide. "SOSTAC®" is a simple and logical process of writing a plan (Smith, 2011). "SOSTAC®" approach of planning brakes down planning process in to six simple processes. Author has decided to use the "SOSTAC®" approach because of its simplicity and effectiveness. "SOSTAC®" process starts from situation analysis, objective, tactics, actions and control. Author has added one additional dimension to the planning process that is mission. Figure (1) below depicts the graphical illustration of the "SOSTAC®" planning process.
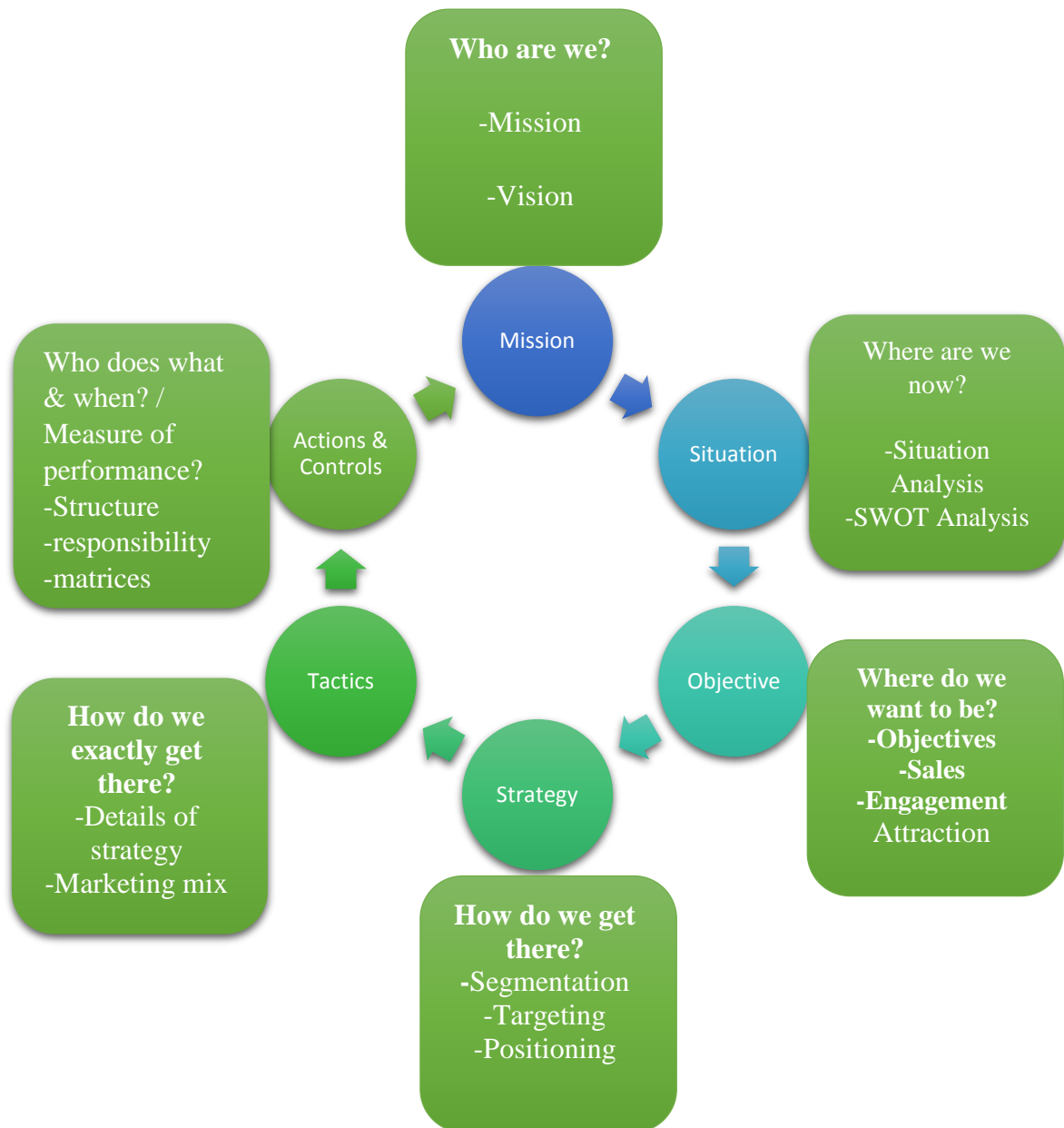
Figure 1: SOSTAC® planning guide (PR Smith, Cheff 2011)

2.3 Phase one (Who are we? Setting Mission and Objectives)

Marketing planning is not developed in isolation; instead, it is an integral part of a hierarchy of strategies at the organizational, business and marketing levels. If the objectives in the marketing plan are explicit and clearly connected to higher-level objectives and long-term goals, then plan is more likely to produce the desired performance. (Amber, 2002)

9

2.3.1 Mission

A Mission states a purpose of a company. In a cursory observation, it seems that invariably the sole mission of a company is to sell goods and earn a profit while performing business operations. However, this commonly held view is flawed. For instance, the primary aim of a hardware company that sell nails is not to sell a nail but rather to fulfill a customer's need of drilling a hole or stitching two objects. Selling a product is just a means to an end, a way to fulfill the company mission. Over time through the development of cutting edge technologies, nails may be obsolete to fulfill these underlying needs. Therefore, the company, which has a clear mission, can be dynamic and have a constant drive towards seeking better ways in fulfilling its mission.

The corporate mission is a statement of as to what an organization is aiming to achieve through the conduct of their business operations. Setting a mission gives a company a focus and direction. There is no golden rule regarding how to make a mission statement. It depends on a variety of factors such as an organization's history and culture. Moreover, a company mission statement should try to answer the following questions.(Ennew, 1993)
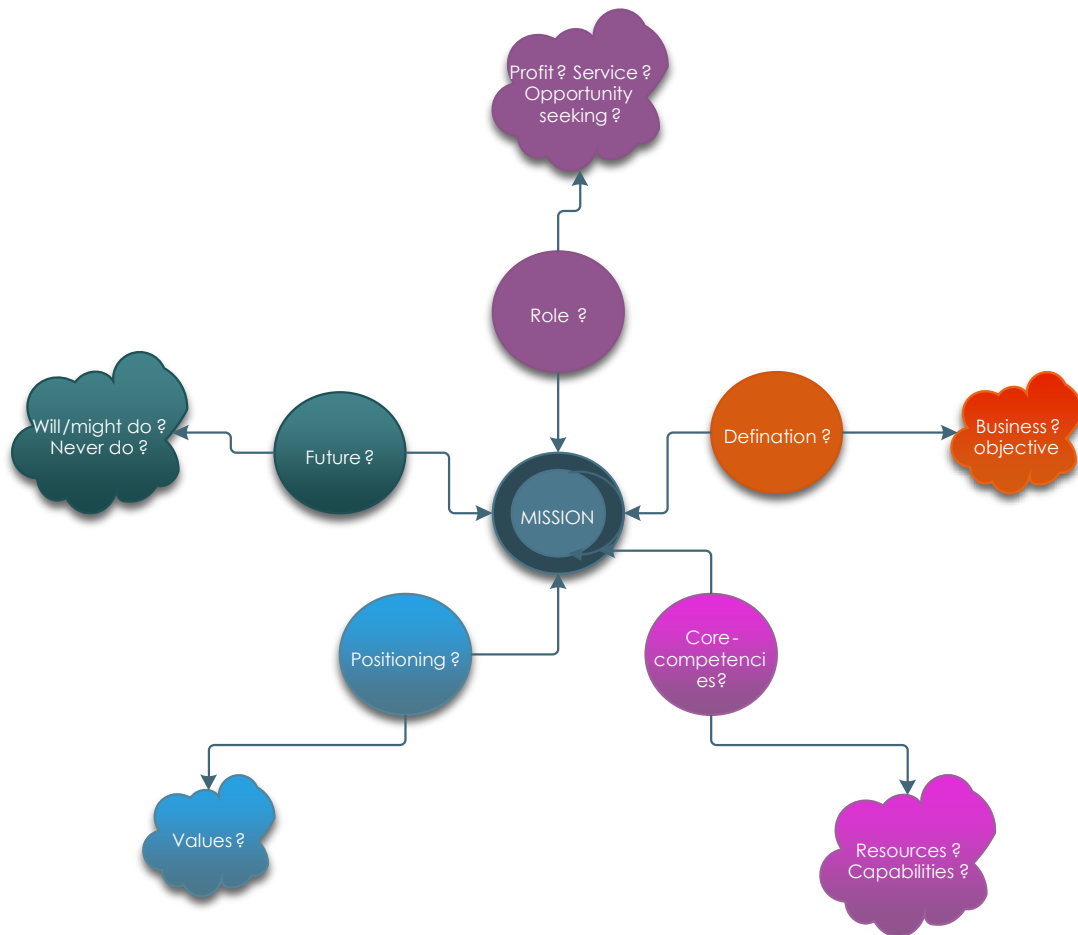
Figure 2: Setting Corporate Mission (see Ennew, 1993)

2.3.2 From Mission to Strategic Objectives

Strategies for each department has to be built to translate mission into its operation. For example, a company involved in the soft beverage industry does not say that its mission is to produce a soft beverage. Instead, its mission is to "satisfy your thirst". This leads to a systematic hierarchy of objectives, including business objective and marketing objectives. The Mission of satisfying the thirst leads to the company's business objective of researching better ways of satisfying thirst, which obviously needs research and profit to fuel its research activity. So improving profits becomes another key business objective. Profit can be increased by either increasing sales or reducing cost. Sales improve by increasing market share in domestic marketing or entering into new foreign markets. Subsequently this goal becomes the company's current marketing objective. The objective to

"increase market share" or better quantitatively stating the objective to "increase market share by 15 per cent in a year". The mission states the philosophy and direction of the company, whereas the strategic objectives are measurable goals. (Kotler, et al., 2005) (Kotler & Armstrong, 2009)

2.3.3 Formulating Right Strategy

One aspect of strategic planning is the development of specific strategies for achieving company objectives. Organizations face a unique combination of internal and external factors, where the strategies developed by any one organization are unlikely to be entirely adaptable to any other organization. However, it is possible to distinguish recurring patterns in the strategies adopted by the organization and these recurring patterns are called generic strategies (Hollensen, 2006 p. 96).

One of many matrices that help to point out generic strategies is the Ansoff Matrix. Developed by Igor Ansoff, the Ansoff matrix helps business structure a strategy, by clearly categorizing four options for growth as shown in figure(3).
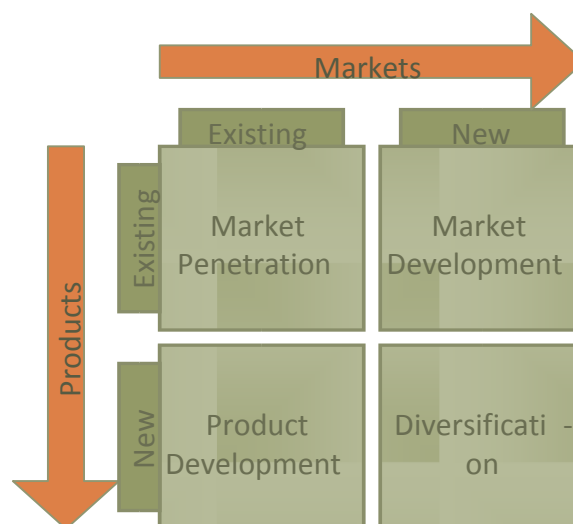
Figure 3: Ansoff Matrix (Goldman & Cecile, 2006)

The Ansoff Matrix helps to categorize options but managers still need to know how these options affect cash and human resources since too little of either could starve a potential winning product of the resources it requires for successful growth. (Smith, 2011)

2.4 Phase two (Situation Analysis)

Having laid down broader strategies and mission now the company should do a reality check. In order to know where it wants to go, the company should know where it is. Any plan will only be as good as information on which it is based upon and situation analysis organizes the information for planning.

Unlike the traditional market, a company operating with a digital platform transcends boundaries of geography, time and language. A digital platform offers a unique environment with unique challenges and opportunities. This challenges and opportunities should be studied along with how the company at present is coping with those challenges and opportunities, and what could be improved over time.

"Half of the plan is focused on situation analysis which is the foundation for a great plan" (Smith, 2011 p. 208). In addition, in-depth situation analysis makes the rest of the plan easy to write. This could also be understood as marketing audit. Kotler (2000) defines marketing audit as an independent examination of the entire marketing effort of a company, or some specific marketing activity, covering objectives, program, implementation, and organization, for the triple purpose of determining what is being done, appraising what is being done, and recommending what should be done in the future. (see Grocutt, et al., 2004)

2.4.1 Marketing Environment

The marketing environment is a phrase used to describe range of external and internal factors that affect the way in which an organization operates in the market.

Understanding the nature of the marketing environment is a key component in the development of any strategy; since, the ultimate aim of such strategy is developing a match between the organization capabilities and the environment in which it operates (Ennew, 1993 p. 51)**.**

The figure (4) shows that there are two components in the marketing environment. The macro environment is typically of much greater relevance when considering the development of broad strategies while the micro environment (or market environment) will be much more beneficial when considering the development of specific business/product strategies (Ennew, 1993).
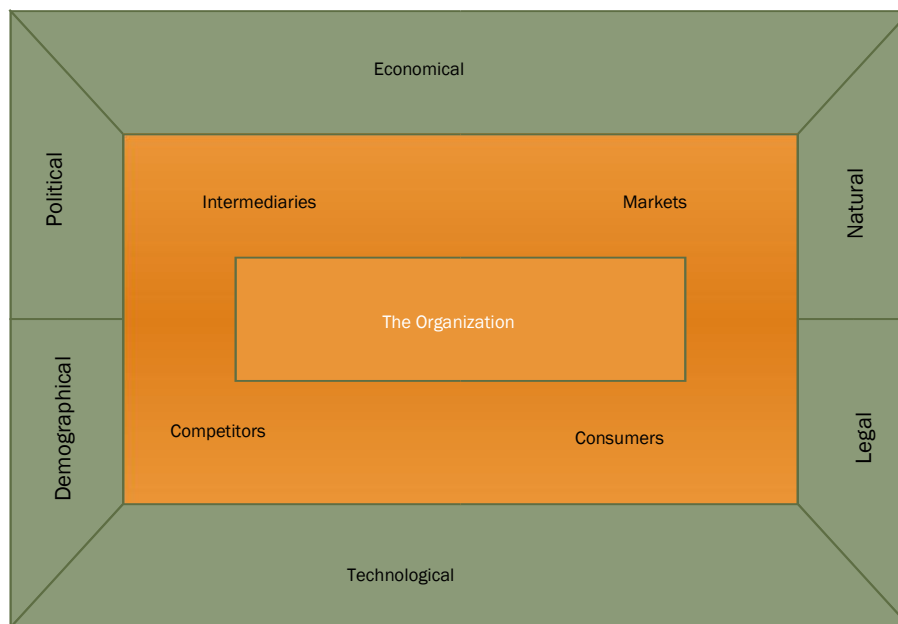
Figure 4: Marketing Environment (Kotler & Keller Lane, 2006)

An internal environment includes all the factors that play a direct impact on a firm and its operations in relation to a particular market or set of markets in which it operates. Those factors are elaborated further below.

Customers (Understanding digital consumers)

People is the single most prominent element in any form of marketing. A Company needs to understand people and their behavior. This is where the notion of digital consumer does carry some weight because of the pervasive, evocative and enabling nature of digital technology. (Ryan & Jones, 2009)
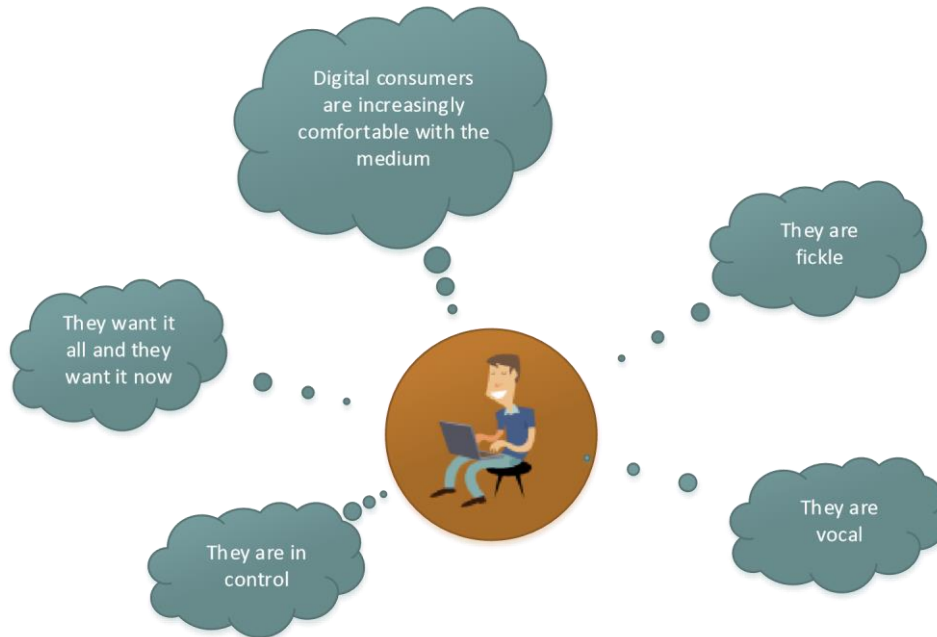
Figure 5: Digital Consumer Analysis (Ryan & Jones, 20099

Understanding Market (defining the market)

It is essential to phrase the market definition in terms of the overall need that is to be satisfied, and not the product that is being currently supplied (Croft, 1994). There are two important aspects to defining the market: needs not products, and end users, not customers. Having an accurate marketing definition is necessary in terms of identifying target users and their overall needs. A clear definition also helps to identify relevant competitors and market shares, both of which will be pivotal in subsequent stages of a marketing planning process.

Competitors

The marketing concept states that to be successful organization must provide greater customer value and satisfaction than its competitors do (Donald & Keegan, 2001). Thus, marketers must do more than simply adapt to the needs of target customers. Organization also should gain strategic advantage by positioning its offering strongly against competitors offering in the minds of consumers.

Michael E. Porter has suggested four diagnostic components to a competitor's analysis (see figure 6): future goals, current strategy, assumptions, and capabilities (Porter, 2008). Most companies develop at least an intuitive sense for their competitors' current strategies and their strengths and weaknesses (shown on the right side of Figure 3-1). Much less, attention is usually directed at the left side, or understanding what is truly driving the behavior of a competitor – its future goals and the assumptions it holds about its own situation and the nature of its industry. These driving factors are much harder to observe than the actual competitors' behavior, yet they often determine how a competitor will behave in the future. This basic framework will help to get an insight into competitors.
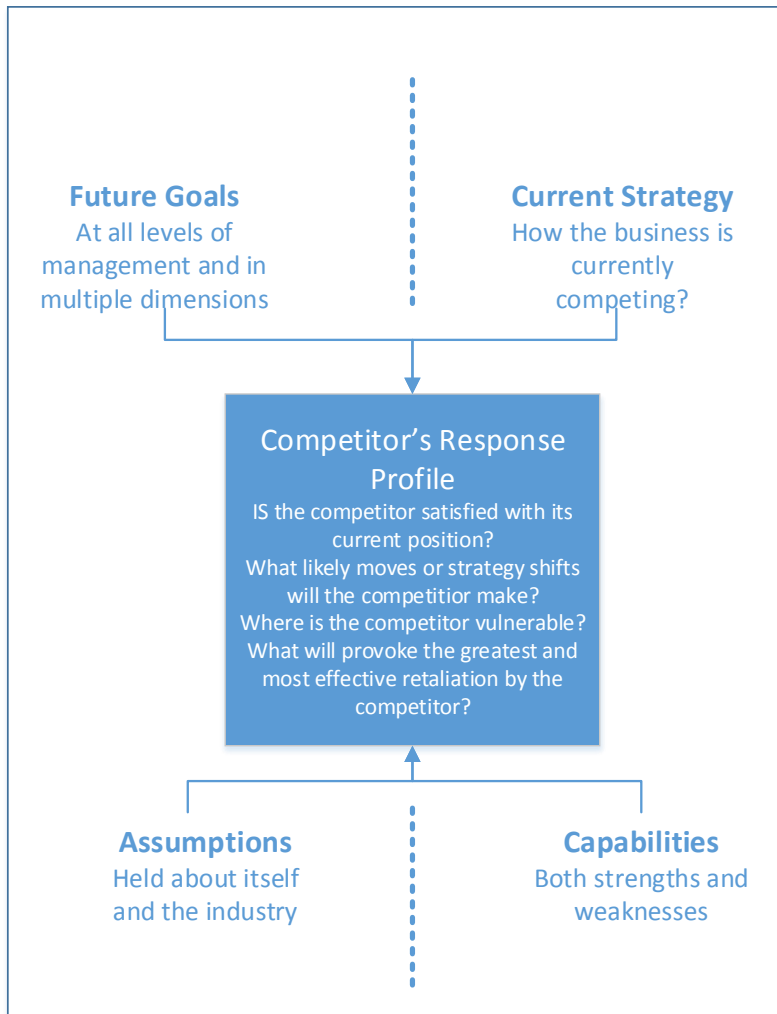
Figure 6: Competitor's Analysis (Porter, 2008)

2.4.2 Internal Analysis

After evaluating marketing environment analysis, only then company should turn inward and look into its own capabilities (Smart Insights; Marketing Intelligence Ltd, 2012).

Core competencies are internal capabilities that can be traced to the organization's human, financial and supply resources as shown in Figure (7) (Hollensen, 2006). Since the resources are limited, an organization needs a fair deal of planning on allocation of resources in order to gain competitive edge. This is the starting point for identifying any resource gap and determining how best to allocate resources in support of the marketing plan. Outsourcing, strategic alliances and supply chain realignment are three ways that an organization can gain or supplement resource arrangements to bridge a resource gap (Hollensen, 2006).
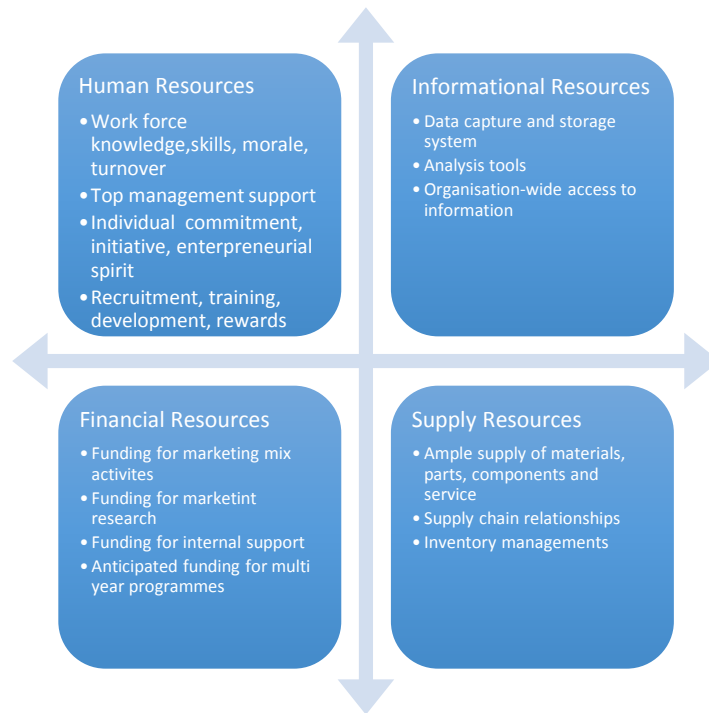
Figure 7: Internal Situation Analysis

2.4.3 Summarizing Situation Analysis

Now, at this stage all the relevant information has been accumulated, evaluated and distilled into a critique reflecting the organization's primary strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, known as the SWOT analysis (Hollensen, 2006). Figure (8) below illustrates this process.
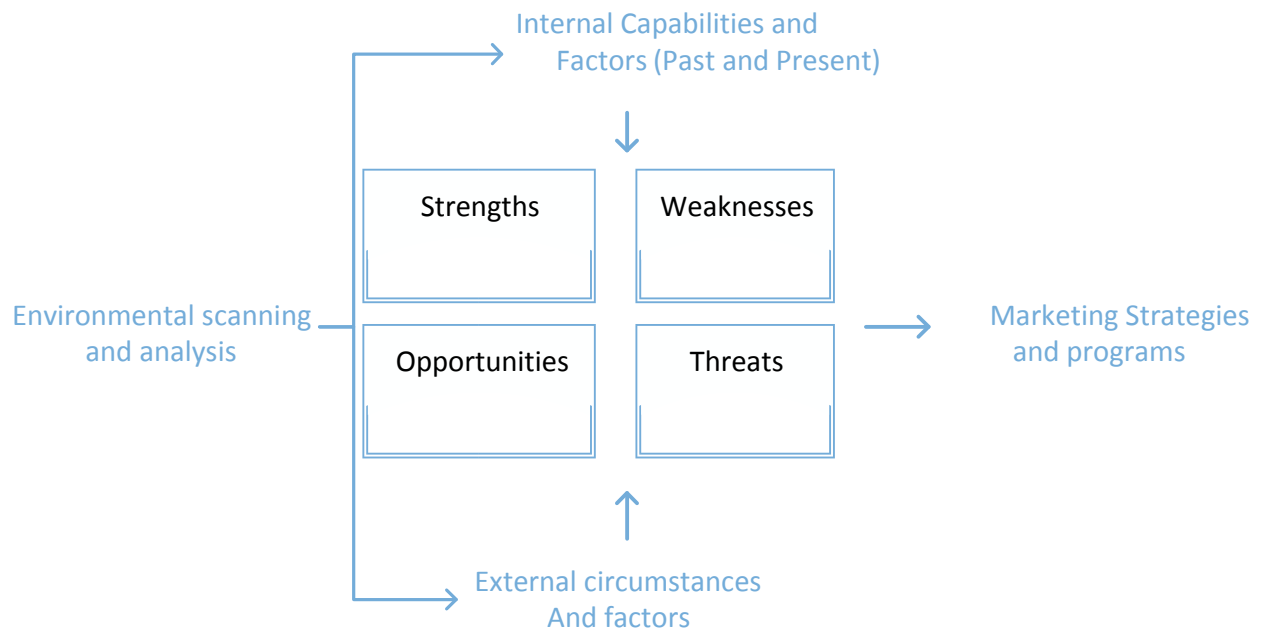
Figure 8: SWOT overview (Hollensen, 2006)

2.5 Phase 3 (Setting Objectives)

Setting objective is mandatory steps in the planning process. An objective will ensure that organization knows what its strategies are expected to accomplish and when a particular strategy has accomplished its purpose, without objective, strategic decisions and all that follows will take place in a vacuum. (McDonlad & Dunbar, 2012)

In addition, it is important to realize that marketing objectives should be derived directly from corporate level objectives and, in turn, reflect both quantitative and qualitative criteria. Lastly, objectives must be actionable, achievable and measurable; otherwise, the accomplishment of marketing strategies cannot be accurately assessed in the time scale of plan (Lancaster & fassingham, 2011).

2.6 Phase Four (Strategy)

The key elements of the digital strategy involve revisiting and aligning the main thrust of marketing strategy in an online context. At this phase, one does not need to go into details

that would be drawn in the next step that is Tactics. Instead, draw a clear line as to where, how and with whom it will compete.

2.6.1   Segmentation, Targeting and Positioning (STP approach)

From the definition of marketing drawn in situation analysis, now it is time to divide the market into homogeneous groups of potential customer and decide on how to serve these homogeneous groups.

"A market segment is a group of actual or potential customers who can be expected to respond in a similar way to a product or service offer" (Vishwanath & Mulvin, 2001 p. 76). That is they want same types of benefits or solution to the problem from the product. In the other hand, targeting refers to selecting one or more segments to serve, based on organization's strengths and capabilities.

Segmentation is best viewed as the first step in a three-step process of segmenting, targeting and positioning (STP) (Lilien & Rangaswamy, 2002). Segmentation determines groups of customers with similar wants, needs and responses.
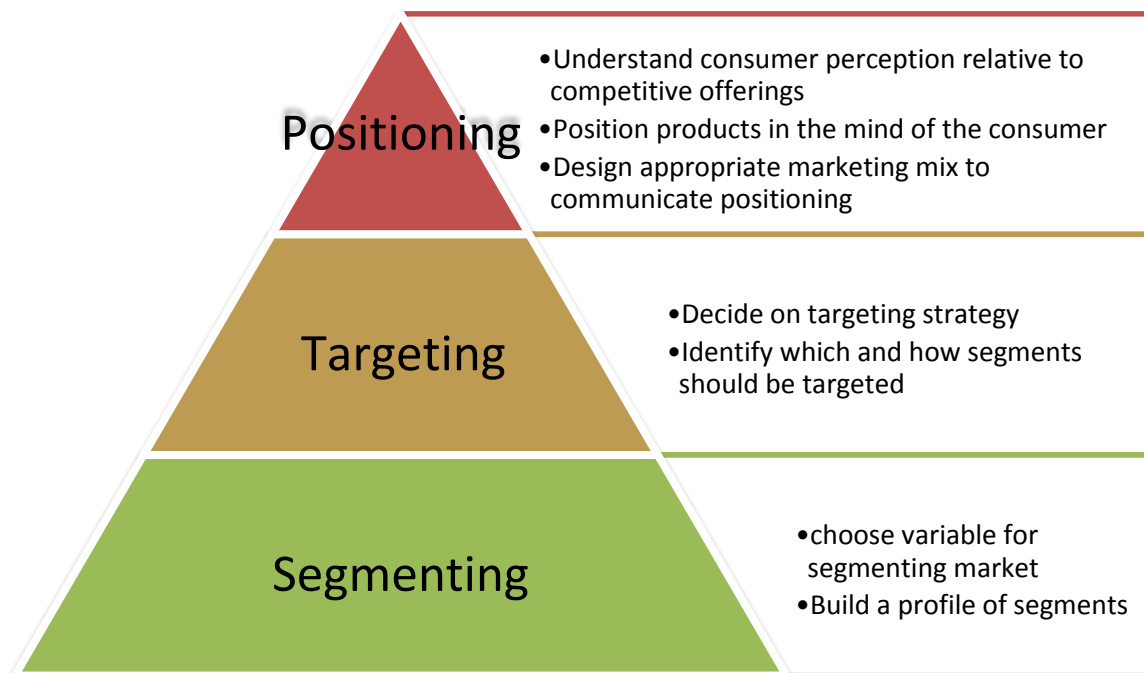
Figure 9: STP approach (Hollensen, 2006 p. 67)

20

2.6.2 Positioning Strategy

There are number of positioning strategy that an organization may use independently or together. Figure (10) illustrates these strategies.
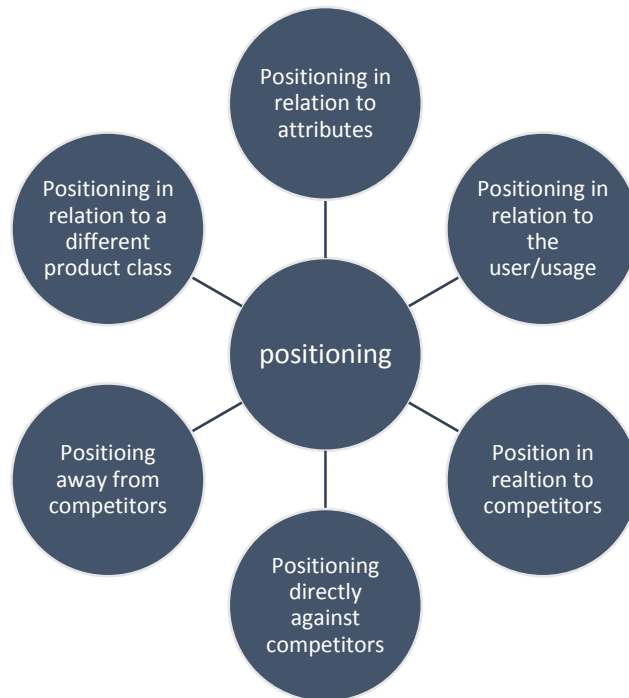
Figure 10: Positioning Strategy (Ennew, 1993)

2.6.3 Product Strategy

Product differentiation seeks to provide unique value proposition to its customer. Levitt (1996) has suggested that products and services can be divided at least on four main levels, namely; core product, expected product, augmented product and potential product (see Figure 13). Differentiation is possible in all these levels.

In the past, organizations had concentrated attempts to differentiate their offering based on core and expected product by providing reliable, durable and comfortable offering. However, at present this would no longer be adequate. There should also be greater emphasis placed on the augmented product and potential products as ways of adding value, creating customer delight and hence creating competitive advantage. (Lilien & Rangaswamy, 2002)

The core/basic offering

The expected offer(Additional benefits normally provided with the core offer

The augmented offer (Benefits normally offered)

The potential offer (Additional benefits not currently offered, but that could be used to differentiate from existing competitors offering)
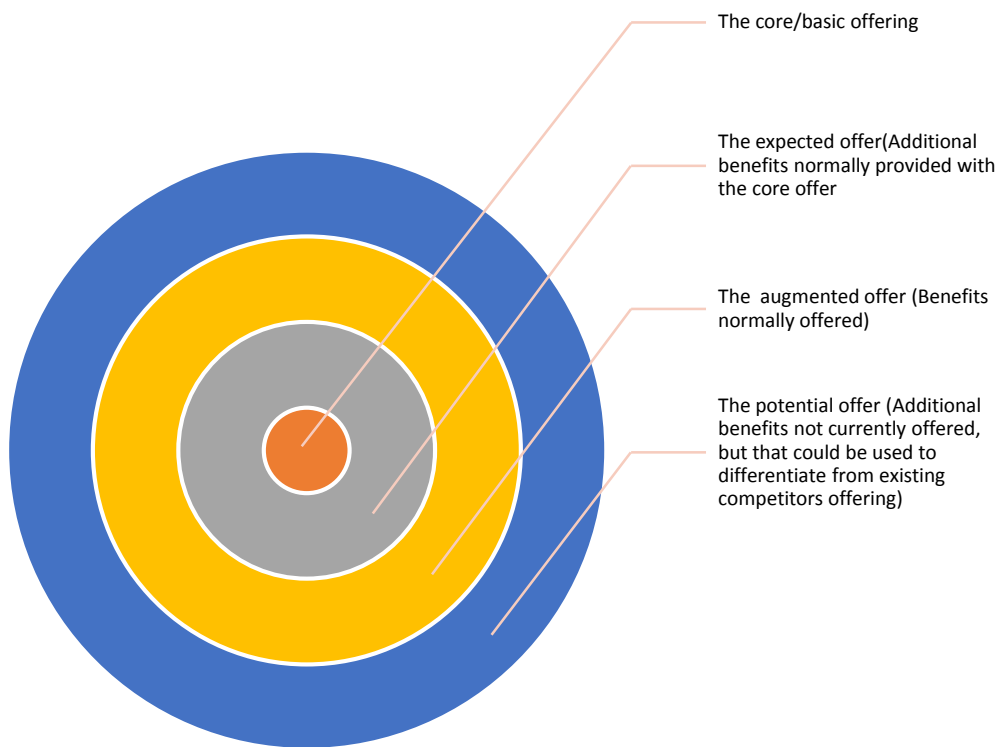
Figure 2: Product levels (levitt, 1986)

2.6.4 Pricing Strategy

Pricing is the only marketing variable that directly affects the revenue. Therefore, it is salient to the achievement of corporate and marketing objectives. It is essential that the pricing objectives and strategies are consistent with and supportive of overall strategies.

Figure 12: Pricing Strategy (Ennew, 1993)

2.6.5 Integrated Marketing Communication Strategy

Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) involves coordinating content and delivering marketing message in all media to ensure consistency. Regardless of the chosen tools, messages or media, IMC strategy should fit in with other marketing-mix strategy to ensure consistency and a sense of unity throughout the entire marketing plan. (Wood, 2004)

All the marketing channels illustrated below can be integrated with each other to ensure consistency and support the positioning and marketing objectives.
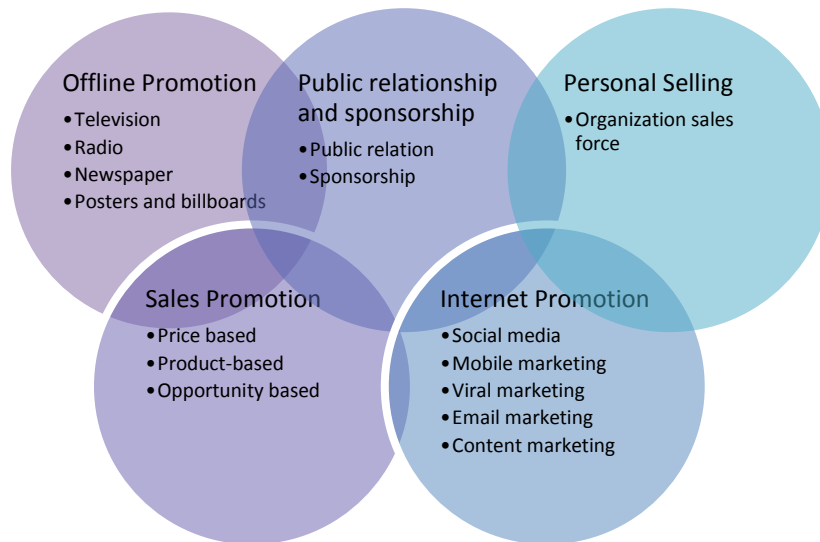
Figure 13: Integrated marketing communication (wood, 2004)

2.7 Phase Five (Tactics)

So far, the discussion has been based on the essential analysis that precedes the development of detailed marketing programs designed to meet corporate and strategic marketing objectives. In this section, one needs to define how a marketing strategy will be implemented in the real world. This includes implementing price, place and promotion strategy. The details of implementing strategy should be laid down in this phase depending upon company's unique environment, in which it operates.

2.8 Phase Six (Action Budget and Control)

2.8.1 Actions

Each tactic has to be managed and executed. This is the "Action" stage. This also includes planning all the processes – who does what and when. Actions can be planned as a mini project e.g. a critical path analysis or a Gantt chart.

2.8.2 Control Budget

Organization needs a marketing budget to deliver marketing objective and strategy. Several different methods can be used to calculate marketing budget. Some of the prominent budgeting method is shown in the figure (14) below
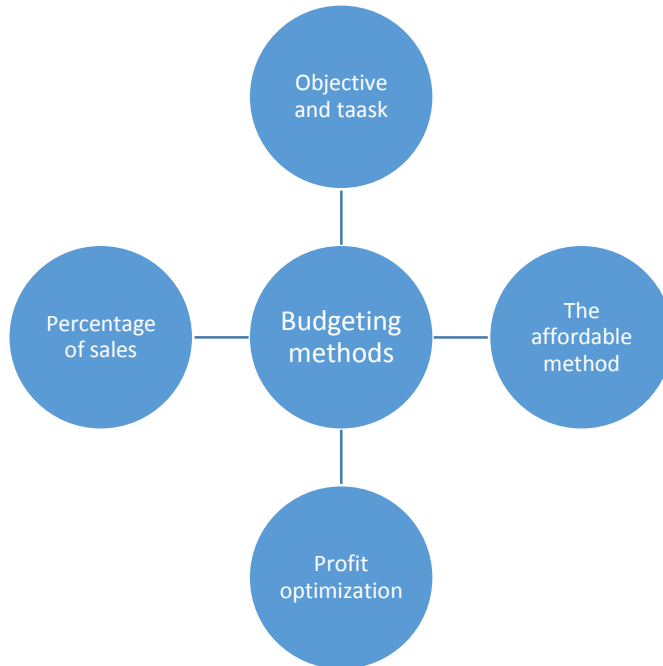
Figure 14: Prominent Marketing Budgeting Methods

 The ideal method could be "objective and task approach" where one establishes clear objective and then works out what exactly need to be done and how much will it cost to do. Lastly, it can be checked against the percentage of sales method as this creates a sense of control. (Lilien & Rangaswamy, 2002)

2.8.3 Metrics (GAP analysis)

Metrics allows measuring the outcomes and activities that genuinely contribute to performance. To do so an objective has to be clear and the measurement of the matrix accurate.

Similarly, the firm can also do the GAP analysis by looking at the existing sales and comparing these with total served market and the market potential; company can illustrate

'planning gap' and move the company to the desired curve or position in the market. The single firm can increase market share by filling the '4ps gaps', by using one or more P's in combination. (Lilien & Rangaswamy, 2002)
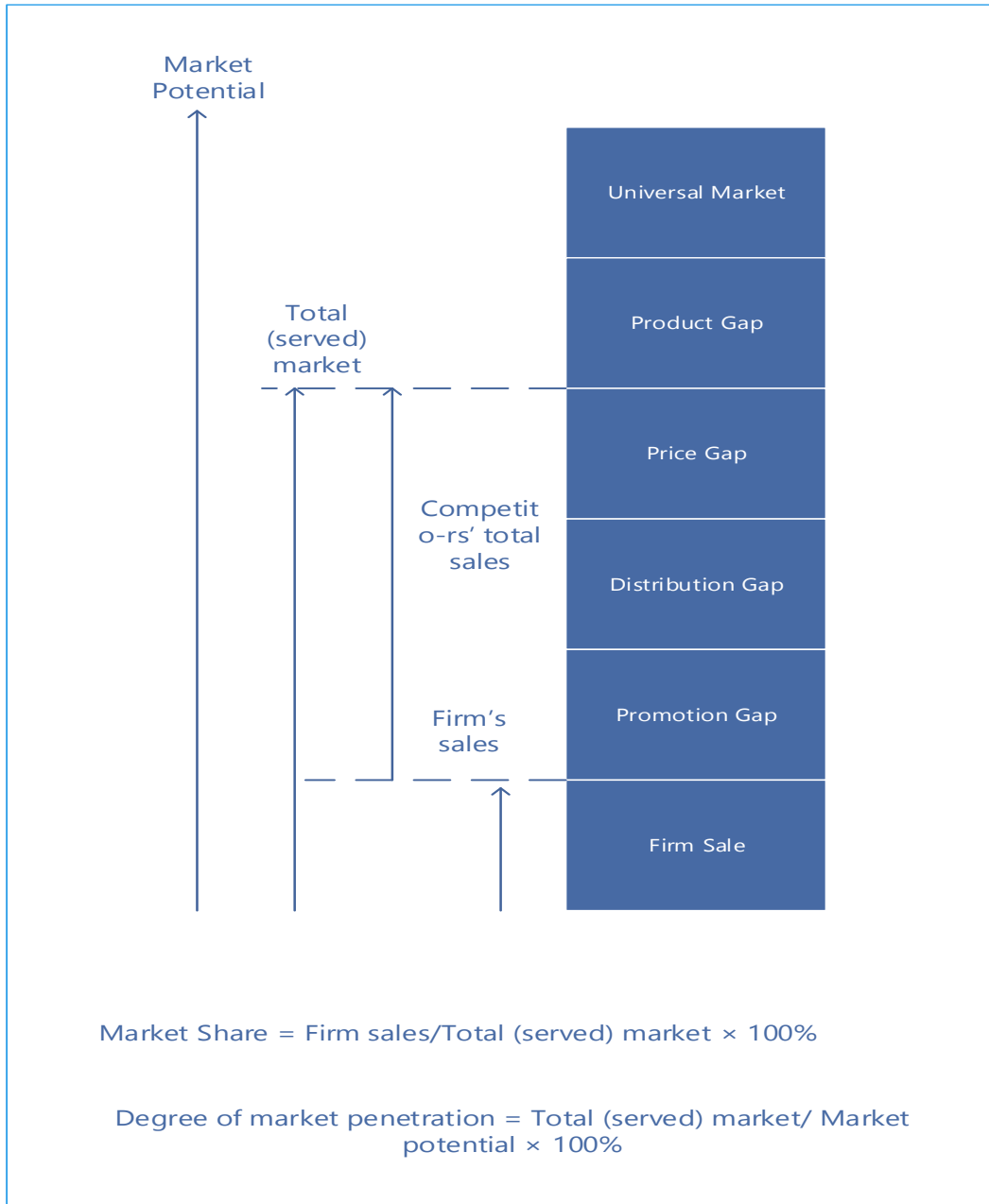
Figure 15: 4 P's GAP analysis (Hollensen, 2006)

3   RESEARCH DESIGN

3.1 Method

This thesis uses qualitative research methodology, which involves a researcher describing kind and characteristics of people, events and processes without comparing them in terms of measurement or amounts (Thomas, 2003, p.1). Qualitative research uses numerous method of inquiry, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means qualitative researchers study things in their natural setting, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them (Mann & Richard, 2011).

> Qualitative research involves the study, use and collection of a variety of empirical materials – case study, personal experience, introspective life story, interview, observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts – that describes routine and problematic moments and meaning in people's lives. (Denzih & Lincoln, 1994, p.2)

3.2 Approach

Often the scientific research methods uses deductive or inductive reasoning approach. According to Oxford, English Dictionary (2013) inductive reasoning approach refers to the process of inferring a general law or principle from the observation of particular instances. In contrast, deductive reasoning approach is concerned with drawing valid conclusion that must follow from a set of premises. (Feeney & Heit, 2007)

Furthermore, often qualitative researchers may not, on the whole start with a theory, which they aim to test, instead they seek to generate theory from the data (Woods & Pratt, 2006). Likewise, this paper will first obtain the facts thorough observation, theoretical review of literature, and finally come up with marketing plan.

Induction approach is considered because it fits in research situation where decision-making involves persistent cognitive activity. Induction approach is considered suitable to respond to probabilistic, uncertain, approximate reasoning, which corresponds to everyday reasoning (Feeney & Heit, 2007). Since marketing planning is not an exact science where answer could be quantitatively measured; in addition, all the variables

involved in decision making is capricious, thus inductive approach suits the best. Lastly, inductive reasoning approach is simpler compared to deductive as inductive approach often includes qualitative data, which requires a smaller data sample compared to the deductive reasoning quantitative data gathering.

3.3 Data Collection

Data collection methods used in the preparation of this paper are observation, case study, content analysis and interview. This method of data collection can be termed as qualitative method in the sense that they provide valuable information about the phenomenon in qualitative descriptive and unstructured form. (Kumar, 2008)

During this research, the author also conducted one primary research regarding the case company by having an interview with the founder of the company. Furthermore, author relied on secondary research for the information gathering relating to the market, industry, geography, demography from reliable sources. These includes the World Bank, IMF, statistics Finland etc. Author also conducted a semi-structured interview. Semistructured interview is conducted by having number of interviewer questions prepared in advance but these prepared questions are designed to be sufficiently open that the subsequent question of the interviewer cannot be planned but must be improvised in a careful and theorized way (Wengraf, 2004). The Semi-structured interview approach was chosen because of its apparent flexibility, which combines both structured and unstructured interviewing methods.

4   EMPIRICAL STUDY

4.1 Case Company *Feeniks Koulu*

Feeniks-koulu is an Internet based educational service provider. It provides customized study curricula based on individual student needs. It is based on democratic principles of learning and is a member of the European Democratic Education Community. The whole system is based online. *Feeniks-koulu* commenced operations in 2005; however, it has

evolved by leaps and bounds since its launch and is now in a more developed stage than it has been in previous years. The school has completed the test phase of its new internet-learning environment and boasts a truly interactive and flexible service on offer. The company primarily serves the educational needs of students from an elementary to high school level following a government recommended school curriculum. Currently, the school is ready to jump-start its marketing campaign.

4.2 Company Mission Vision and Objective (who are we?)

Feeniks-koulu's vision is to provide an easy alternative to help parents make the move to homeschooling and to come up with cutting edge educational software. Its current mission is to provide a student-centered schooling alternative, network homeschoolers with alternative schools and lastly provide an education platform; that will allow children to fully develop their skills and talents. (Marko Koskinen 2013, interview)

In order to fulfill the purpose and keep up with the company vision, *Feeniks-koulu* needs a consistent income stream, which comes through individual student enrolments. In order to fulfill the company's mission personnel must constantly pursue the increase of the number of students subscribing for their services. Thus, the current objective is to increase the student number by two fold, while being aware of the company's mission of serving current customers with superior customer service. (Marko Koskinen 2013, interview)

4.3 Situation Analysis (where are we now?)

4.3.1 Market Analysis

According to its founder Marko Koskinen, the company sees itself operating in the online education market and serving a need for alternative education.

The Internet is an ever-expanding market and the best way to reach a potential customer base of billions. E-commerce sales are expected to surpass 200 USD billion in 2012; furthermore, E-retail will grow to 9% in 2016 up from 7% in 2012. (The Wall Street Journal,

2012) Therefore, at a macro level e-commerce is a sprawling industry, with huge potential.

At a micro level, recent study suggests that Finnish people are adapting to online shopping rapidly as well. Online shopping is continuing to be more popular among young adults than any other age group. Two-thirds of those aged 25 to 34 had bought something over the Internet during the past three months (Statistics Finland, 2012). The online market as a whole has been growing at a rate of around 13-18% annually for several years depending on the research and year of observation (Maksuturva, 2013). The turnover of E-commerce in Finland was approximately 10.1 EUR billion in 2011 (Verkkokauppatilasto 2011; TNS Gallup Oy, ASML, Federation of Finnish Commerce). However, paying for education in Finland is a relatively novel concept and the company faces an Achilles heel with having paid subscribers for its service. According to Statistic Finland (2011), Finns primarily use e-commerce for leisure and travel related products such as Holiday/leisure travel.

4.3.2 Competitor Analysis

Presently, school operates in a niche market with relatively little to almost no competition. *Feeniks-koulu* is focused on providing homeschooling, and it is the only well-organized provider of cloud-based homeschooling in Finland. However, the company intends to sell or distribute its learning environment to other educational institutions so that their students also may have a cloud based homeschooling system; in this frontier, the company faces challenges from numerous well-established commercial providers of internet-based learning environments.

At a macro level, there are plenty of free cloud-based learning platforms. Some of the successful free online learning platforms are Udacity, Coursera, EDX, and Khanacademy.

The previously mentioned organizations are technologically advanced, mature companies with thousands of users subscribed to their services and at present, some of them offer all their services freely. Khan academy runs totally on donations and is a not-for profit organization (Khan Academy, 2013); similarly, edx.org is also a non-for profit organization and relies on donations (EDX, 2013). In contrast, the other two online education providers Udacity and Coursera are for-profit organizations backed primarily by venture capitalist firms (Empson, 2012) (Perez, 2012). These two companies are facing challenge to earn revenue from their services. This has led to the introduction of premium services on top of their core service in order to commercialize their offerings, such as study credit certification, tutoring, tuition fees and sponsorships. These companies have recently started their commercial offering and the success of their offering is yet to be determined. Following figure (18) present their pricing/business model.

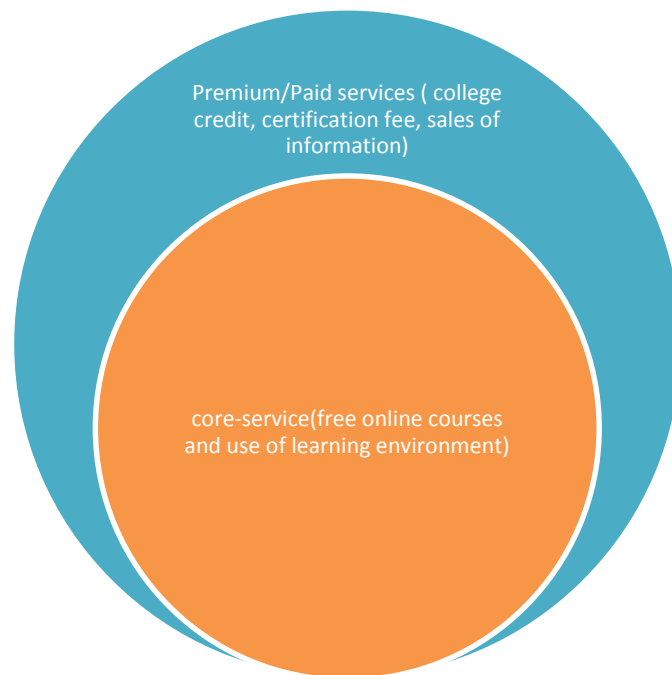*Figure 16: Pricing model of Udacity and Coursera (Udacity, 2013) (Coursera, 2013)*

In contrast to the offerings of Udacity and Coursera, *Feeniks-koulu* does not provide its core online courses and learning environment free but charges flat monthly fee for its service (Feeniks Koulu, 2013). This companies do not pose any threat in near future as *Feeniks-koulu* operates in niche market and serve Finnish customer through highly

31

customized services. However, in long-run if this companies keep on expanding they might pose a threat to niche market where *Feeniks-koulu* operates.

4.3.3 Intermediary Analysis

Feeniks-koulu actively tries to work with other similar educational institutions and democratic schools around the world (Marko Koskinen 2013, interview). The founder of the company, Marko Koskinen, actively attends international seminars and meetings related with Democratic Education. The most recent effort was with Suomenverkko-Opisto, which also provides online education, to integrate their services in one online platform. However, due to various reasons the integration was not possible. Presently the company is seeking to work with local schools and communities in small towns in Finland, which has seen recent closures of government schools. Many of its negotiations are ongoing, and the company is open for cooperation with various stakeholders (Marko Koskinen 2013, interview).

4.3.4 Macro Environment Analysis

Finnish government in general actively encourages local entrepreneurs and the expansion of the business community. In addition, there are various active organizations and associations working as a catalyst for the growth of small companies. (Marko Koskinen 2013, interview)

However, *Feeniks-Koulu* has had challenges with government officials whom are a bit antagonistic to the company's approach with education, particularly with the company's paying model of education and its democratic educational values which counter the Finnish government model of education. In Finland, children are allowed to be homeschooled but their parents must go through formal obstacles and some general negative stereotypes against homeschoolers, such as that they come from overly religious backgrounds. The company has obstacles to overcome from the current political environment. Overall political environment possess both opportunity and challenge. (Marko Koskinen, 2013, interview)

From a societal standpoint, the company has received a mixed response. Some people do understand the need of homeschooling and democratic learning. Whereas some people have a contrasting viewpoint, and the rest is neutral. The school sees potential in converting the undecided community into believers of the school's philosophy. At present, the school serves children from varying backgrounds whom are mainly students who due to various reasons cannot attend regular schools. Thus, the company sees that there is a

"need for alternative education" (Marko Koskinen). Furthermore, technology is accepted as part of daily life, so there is no learning curve associated with learning to use technology. (Marko Koskinen, 2013, interview)

4.3.5 Internal Analysis

Company is constantly evolving and seeks to develop its resources. *Feeniks-Koulu* seeks to allocate one tutor for every twenty students. Therefore, the school seeks to attract more tutors, increase the number of courses and have the site operating in different languages. From a human resources point of view, the company lacks proper human resources primarily due to a lack of funding. However, at the current level day-to-day activities are not hindered by a lack of a particular human resource; furthermore, the school's human resources personnel are tremendously enthusiastic about their product and company (Marko Koskinen, 2013, interview). Following figure (17) summarizes the internal analysis of case company.
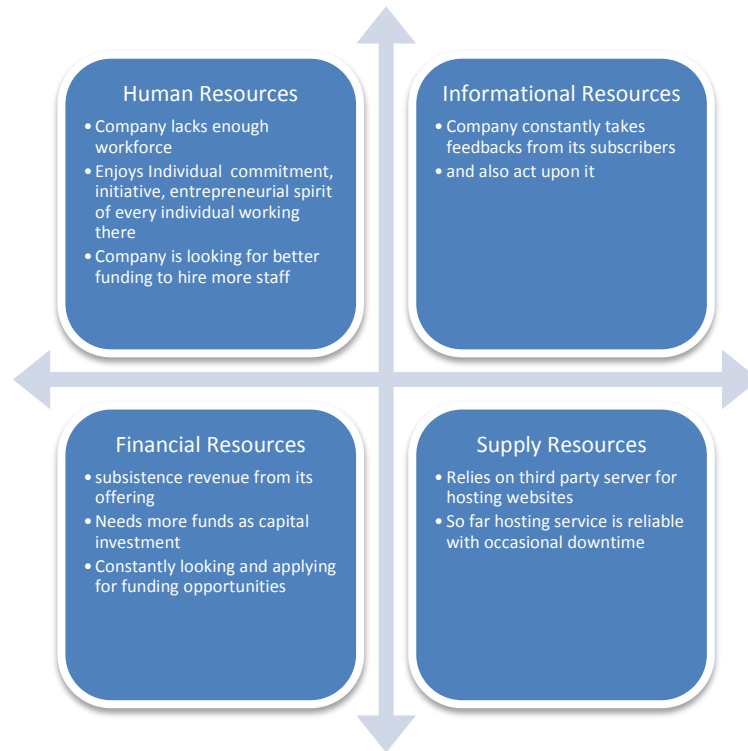
Figure 17: summary of internal analysis (Feeniks-Koulu, 2013)

4.3.6 Summarizing the situation analysis via SWOT

From the above situation analysis, the author has summarized the key opportunities, potentials and weaknesses in the following table.

Strengths- S	Weakness – W
1. Unique and Innovative learning system 2. Easy and fast to create study material (Flexible system) 3. International network 4. Low-cost alternative 5. Enthusiastic human resource 6. Existing brand 7. Existing customer base 8. Existing distribution	1. Lack of consistency 2. Lack of proper funding 3. Entirely new system 4. All the courses cannot just be taught over internet 5. Brand perception 6. Intermediary use 7. Technology/skills 8. Cross-channel support
Opportunities-O	Threats – T
1. Cross-selling 2. New markets 3. New services 4. Alliances/Cobranding	1. Stereotypes against home scholars 2. Threats from mainstream educational institution 3. Internet security 4. Customers choice(price) 5. New entrants 6. New competitive products 7. Channel conflicts 8. A Social Network

4.4 Objectives (where we want to be?)

At the moment, the company has four key areas that it would like to improve:

4.4.1 Sales

Company would like to have more students subscribing to its services then it has now. Company has its sales target of around 100 students every year. *Feeniks-Koulu* is also trying to provide its services to institutions such as private or government schools within Europe. (Marko Koskinen, 2013, interview)

4.4.2 Customer Satisfaction and Retention

Company is also working towards constantly improving its customer satisfaction rate and reducing the dropout rate. *Feeniks-Koulu* wants the dropout rate to be below 10%. (Marko Koskinen, 2013, interview)

4.4.3 Customer Engagement

Customer engagement is another matrix that the company would like to increase. As students are using the system to learn, their productivity directly depends on their level of engagement with the learning system. Therefore, it is a high priority to keep the customer engaged. Increasing the time they spend on the system, for instance, is one way that the company hopes to engage customers. Internal messaging is one of the matrices that the company would like to improve as part of customer engagement. (Marko Koskinen, 2013, interview)

4.4.4 Developing Internal Resources

The challenge is not just to attract customers but also talented human resources and potential partners. *Feeniks-Koulu* would like to develop its internal resources in terms of the work force. Additionally, it also seeks to attract potential partners. (Marko Koskinen, 2013, interview)
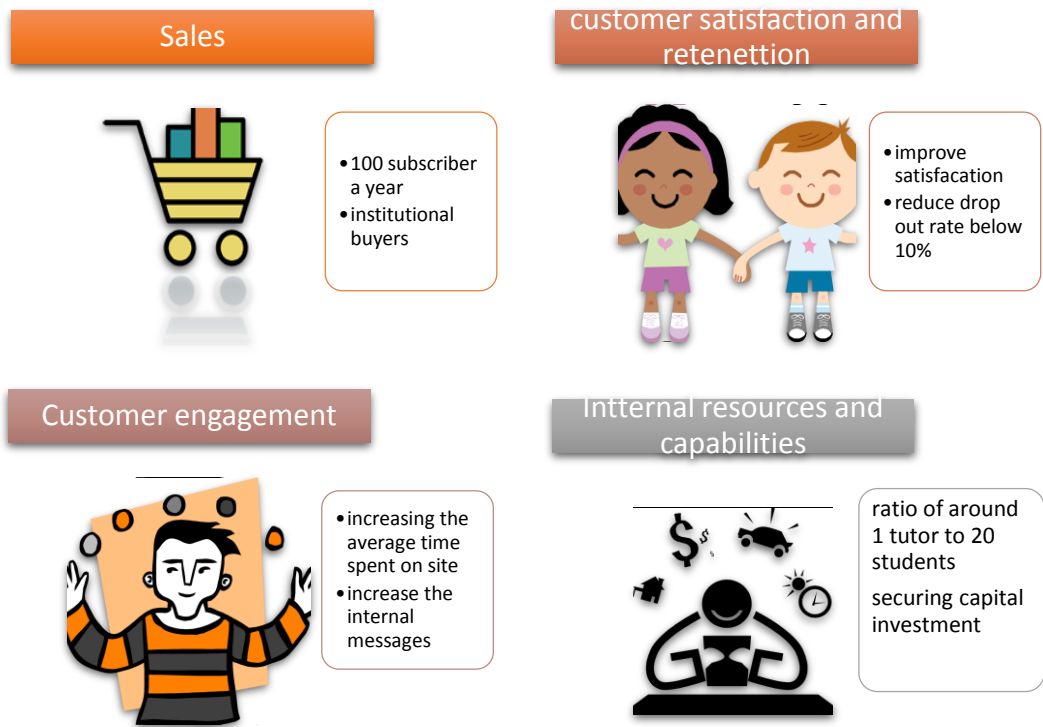
Figure 18: Summary of company objectives (Marko Koskinen 2013, interview)

5 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

After analyzing the situation analysis and objective, with the help of a theoretical framework following strategy is recommended in order to achieve company's objectives that was discussed in the empirical research section.

5.1 Strategy (how to get there?)

5.1.1 Growth Strategy

Market penetration is one of the strategies from the Ansoff Matrix (see figure 3). "Market penetration is the name to a growth strategy where the small business seeks to increase its market share for current service offered through marketing efforts, for example, through promotions channels and price" (Goldman & Cecile 2006 p. 86). This strategy suits the school best. Since the school has been operating since 2005 and knows the market and

customers relatively well; now company needs to capitalize on that with its growth strategy. Market penetration seeks to achieve four main objectives:

Maintain or increase the market share of current products

This can be achieved by a combination of competitive pricing strategies, advertising, sales promotion and more resources dedicated to personal selling. (Goldman & Cecile, 2006)

Secure dominance of growth markets

Restructure a mature market by driving out competitors; this would require a much more aggressive promotional campaign, supported by pricing strategy designed to make the market unattractive for competitors. (Goldman & Cecile, 2006)

Increase usage by existing customers

Company could do this by incorporating a promotional strategy and adding engaging audio-video features. If the existing customer uses the current offering at a high rate, this could lead towards brand loyalty. (Goldman & Cecile, 2006)

To summarize, market penetration strategy is very much about "business as usual". The business is focusing on markets and products it knows well. The school has decent information on competitors and customer needs. Therefore, it is unlikely that this strategy will require much investment in new market research, which perfectly fits into the *FeeniksKoulu* business situation.

5.2 Segmentation Strategy

Feeniks-Koulu can prepare for segmentation considering various variables, such as psychological, demography, usage, and product. The key question that should be considered while segmenting is who will use these services? Why do they use it? How do they use it? (Ennew, 1993). The following recommendation is laid down based on theoretical background and company's customer analysis.

Distant People

Finland covers a large geographical area with remarkably scant population. Therefore, mainstream education institution faces an enormous challenge in providing consistent service in all the places. That is why the company with its flexible model could reach out to the children where mainstream education cannot reach. Through close cooperation with small communities, *Feeniks-Koulu* can provide its services to these communities. *Feeniks-Koulu* could use geographical segmentation and customize services accordingly.

Busy Bee

Busy bees are the segment of the people who are busy in other task and cannot attend regular schools. For instance, some children might give priority to their professional careers such as singing, dancing and sports. Therefore, they do not have adequate time to attend a school from 9 to 5 on weekdays like other kids. By offering easy to use material and intuitive course design, the website could attract this segment. Here, *Feeniks-koulu* can use behavioral segmentation and serve them accordingly.

The disadvantaged

There are also children who cannot attend regular schools due to various physical and psychological reasons. *Feeniks-koulu* could also attract this segment by addressing their needs and having various accessibility options and an easy user interface designed for them.

Free Thinker

These are a group of people whom may be parents or children, who like the philosophy of democratic education. In other words, people who dislike the present form of one-way, monotonous, repetitive, traditional educational systems. Though not large, there are a growing number of people disgruntled with the present form of education. The company needs to communicate its democratic values and illustrate how it implements its democratic principles into its system in order to attract this segment

Experimenter

People whom are curious about new things in the market, especially with things relating to technology and internet, are experimenters. In order to attract this segment there should not be many barriers in entry; however, it could be challenging to get a hold on these users permanently. This segment could be demanding.

5.3 Targeting Strategy

In this phase, the company needs to bring all segments under thorough scrutiny. Upon weighing and examining the company's competitive advantage, capabilities and resources with segment attractiveness, the following strategy is recommended.

5.3.1 Multi Segment Strategy

Feeniks-koulu with its present resources and capabilities can attract more than one segment. This strategy has several advantages, including diversification of the firm's risk and the ability to pick the most attractive opportunities (Ferrell & Hartline, 2011). At present, it would not be a daunting task for a company to serve segments such as "Distant People", "Disadvantaged" and "Busy Bees". All these segments have one thing in common that they are all in search of easier and less time-consuming forms of education. Therefore, they might be willing to pay through slight persuasion.

5.4 Positioning Strategy

The development of any marketing mix depends on positioning; how company would like to be viewed by its customer. *Feeniks-koulu* likes to position its product as a viable alternative way of education with democratic principles of learning (Marko Koskinen 2013, interview). In other words, school seeks to position itself with relation to its product. Since the company is relatively new, there is not much of consumer's perception of the

product. Using communication channel *Feeniks-koulu* can achieve its positioning objectives.

5.5 Marketing Mix Strategy

Marketing mix is essentially a blend of product, place and pricing strategy, designed to produce a mutually satisfying exchange within a target market (Lamb, et al., 2010). The strategy of all four components must be blended together to achieve optimal results. In the context of *Feeniks-Koulu*, the optimal result is to get 100 or more than 100 new users subscribing for its services in a year.

5.5.1 Product Strategy

At present, the company offers a core product with some extra offerings. The company could further expand its offering depending on the special needs of target customers. For instance, "the disadvantaged" segment may possibly require intensive learning than other segments. Thus, it could be arranged through a potential future offer. The product strategy is illustrated below.
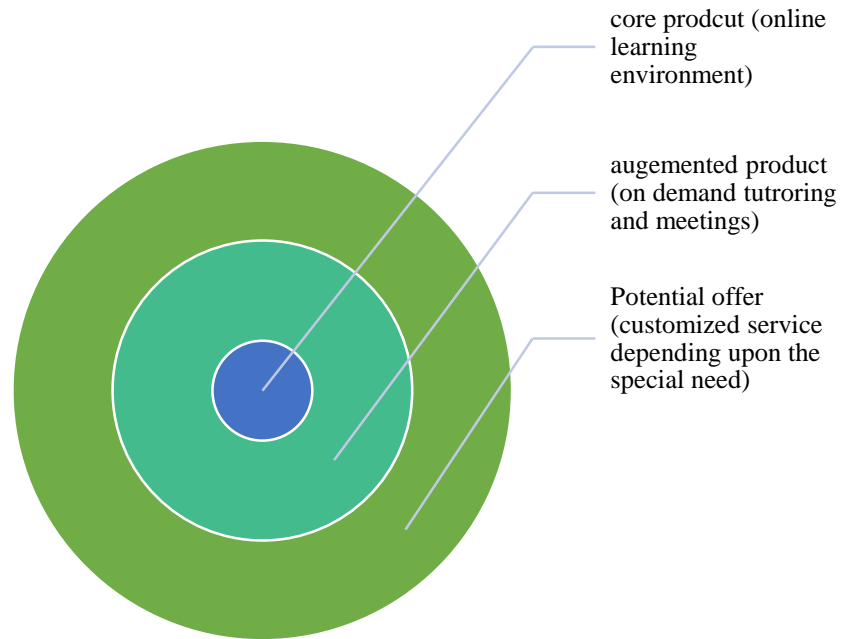
Figure 19: Product Strategy (Feeniks-Koulu, 2013)

5.5.2 Pricing Strategy

Different target groups have a different set of needs and sense of urgency, which directly affects their price sensitivity. At present, the company has a differentiated pricing strategy. The company offers core service with the price of €30 per month as a subscription fee and charges extra if the subscriber wants to use on-demand tutoring services and home visits. This model of pricing is appropriate with the present situation. Similarly, the company could also experiment with promotional pricing to lure other undecided customers. In the short term, a differentiated pricing model is adequate; however, in the long term, the company could think of a premium-pricing model. As an economy of scale sets in, it would not cost much to serve additional customers. Thus, core services could be free, and the company could make money primarily through offering premium services such as online tutoring and home visits.

Present Pricing

Basic — Offer 1 — Minimum subscription charge

Premium — Offer 2 — Additional charge on top of subscription

Promotional Pricing

Basic — Offer 1 — Free subscription for limited time

Premium — Offer 2 — Additional charge on top of subscription

Potential future Pricing for growth strategy

Basic — Offer 1 — Free subscription charge

Premium — Offer 2 — Charging for only the use of premium srevice

Figure 20: Suggested Pricing Model

5.5.3 Promotion/ Communication Strategy

The purpose of marketing communication is to add persuasive value to a product for customers (Kitchen & Pelsmacker, 2004).The company should adopt an integrated marketing communication strategy. There are visible benefits of this strategy as the company could reiterate and reinforce its message through various channels toward its targeted customer.

The company could plan and integrate communication tools through different social media, sales promotions, public relations, personal selling and direct marketing to reinforce the positioning message of the school.

5.6 Tactics (details of strategy)

5.6.1 Product

The company might need to add complimentary offerings in addition to its present offering to meet the needs of its target customer. According to the founder of the school, they are already working on various updates such as adding audiovisual elements in the learning environment and different language options. Furthermore, the school should actively take feedback from present subscribers as to how they use the product and make further adjustments accordingly

5.6.2 Price

A pricing strategy has already been implemented. The company has a differentiated pricing strategy. In order to sustain this strategy, the company needs to have a visible difference in its offering and a visible advantage for subscribing to premium services.

5.6.3 Promotion

After clearly identifying marketing objectives and its positioning strategy, now the company needs to achieve these objectives through its promotional program. The company needs to decide on the message to communicate, media through which to communicate and how to integrate all of these communication media to reinforce messages and call to action.

Personal Selling

So far, *Feeniks-koulu* has been conducting it activities through personal selling. Personal selling is the most effective promotional means for growth strategy and comes with the advantage of delivering a personal message with a high level of interaction. However, it is extremely hard to reach a large number of customers through personal selling. At present, the founder of the school has been taking part in various seminar, workshop, and press conferences promoting the school. Therefore, the company should take personal selling as a strategic tool to deliver its positioning message. The company needs to

allocate budgets and set a yearly target to attend seminars, workshops, exhibition and discussion programs relating to education

Social Media Plan

Feeniks-koulu has a number of options with social media. Since the company operates in the internet, it is wise for the company to get hold of social media marketing. It is one of the cheapest ways to reach a large number of potential customers.

Nowadays Facebook is cluttered with lots of brands making it harder for new brands to be visible, so the profile pictures and the cover page should stand out from the crowd. After all, the company provides alternative education, which stands out from mainstream education. Therefore, the company should leverage this positioning strategy by having a standout profile and cover picture. The company could also integrate various features of Facebook such as likes and comments into its web system. Facebook has the possibility of developing various apps and a customized landing page. With an investment of time, the company can develop apps that can lure young student to its Facebook page.

Here, persistence is the key. The company should provide Facebook update in line with its positioning and branding strategy. The company should have a schedule for a week regarding what to post/share through its Facebook page and other social media outlets. If done in a consistent manner, the message can eventually reach its targeted segments and can build desired positioning and acquire paying customers.

Optimization and Google Ad words

Optimization should be done in line with its positioning strategy and with the words with which potential users will search homeschooling in the web. The company likes to be known for its alternative education and as a provider of homeschooling. Therefore, the company could optimize its website for key words such as 'homeschooling' and 'alternative education', which could also well be the key words potential users are likely to search via the web. There are various ways to optimize the site. One way would be by using key words throughout the site in a contextual manner. Another way is by publishing

various forms of information about homeschooling situations and alternative education and actively blogging about it. This will bring a steady flow of traffic into the website. If done consistently, these are the best ways to optimize the website and is known as organic optimization.

Similarly, the company can also make use of Google Ad words. Google Ad words are a comprehensive marketing tool from Google. With Google Ad words, the company can do different types of banner advertisement across various Google platforms such as Google search engine, YouTube, Blogger, etc. With Ad words, the company will be targeting certain people whom are searching things using key words such as 'homeschooling' or 'alternative education'. This is also an effective and cost efficient way to reach a potential customer.

Sales Promotion in line with enhanced payment terms

At present, *Feeniks-koulu* can opt for a price based sales promotion. It can extend a limited one-month free subscription offer to two months free subscription. In order to lockin a customer for a longer time, the company can offer payment terms such as a one-year subscription with slightly less charges than combined consecutive monthly charges. With this offer, the company can provide a visible benefit to its subscriber who opts to subscribe for a longer period rather than for a shorter period.

E-mail Marketing

Feeniks-koulu can send monthly email newsletters to subscribers who have not signed in for the service but have signed up to receive email from the company. The Company can give a sneak-peek into its system, updates and offerings so that undecided customers can make decisions. Direct (Snail mail) mail is delivered to the people whom have some interest in the company so mail should be persuasive with a clear call to action.

5.7 Control and Action

Now the company needs to decide upon matrices that it likes to measure in order to get the idea of how its marketing offer has had an effect on sales, customer engagement, awareness, and so on. Furthermore, the company also needs to decide upon the human resource that will be responsible for carrying out various program mentioned in planning.

5.7.1 Action

Each plan has to be implemented for that there should be a clear mention of who does what. The company can have excel, MS project or other similar tools for tracking tasks and resources allocated. One such action plan for selecting Google Ad words is illustrated below.

Table 2: Action Plan for selecting Google Ad-words

Name	Start	Finish	Scheduled Duration
list possible words and phrases	Mon 4/1/13	Mon 4/1/13	0.1 hrs.
Add other word or phrases	Mon 4/1/13	Mon 4/1/13	0.2 hrs.
Review website copy	Mon 4/1/13	Mon 4/1/13	0.2 hrs.
Check website analytics	Mon 4/1/13	Mon 4/1/13	0.2 hrs.
Check competitors site	Mon 4/1/13	Mon 4/1/13	0.3 hrs.
Check google trends and twitter	Mon 4/1/13	Mon 4/1/13	0.2 hrs.
Ask customer and prospects	Mon 4/1/13	Mon 4/1/13	0.3 hrs.
Broaden key phrases	Mon 4/1/13	Mon 4/1/13	0.5 hrs.
Check popularity	Mon 4/1/13	Mon 4/1/13	0.2 hrs.
Highlight competitive words	Mon 4/1/13	Mon 4/1/13	0.1 hrs.
Key word effectiveness index	Mon 4/1/13	Mon 4/1/13	0.5 hrs.
final selection	Mon 4/1/13	Mon 4/1/13	0.3 hrs.

5.7.2 Controls

Key performance indicators have to be determined in context with an objective, strategy and tactics. Some matrices schools could be interested to find are daily organic traffic, ad word visits, visit duration and number of subscribers. The school can build key performance indicators dashboard, set up a weekly or monthly targets, and measure the performance. Figure (22) below is the illustration of such dashboard.
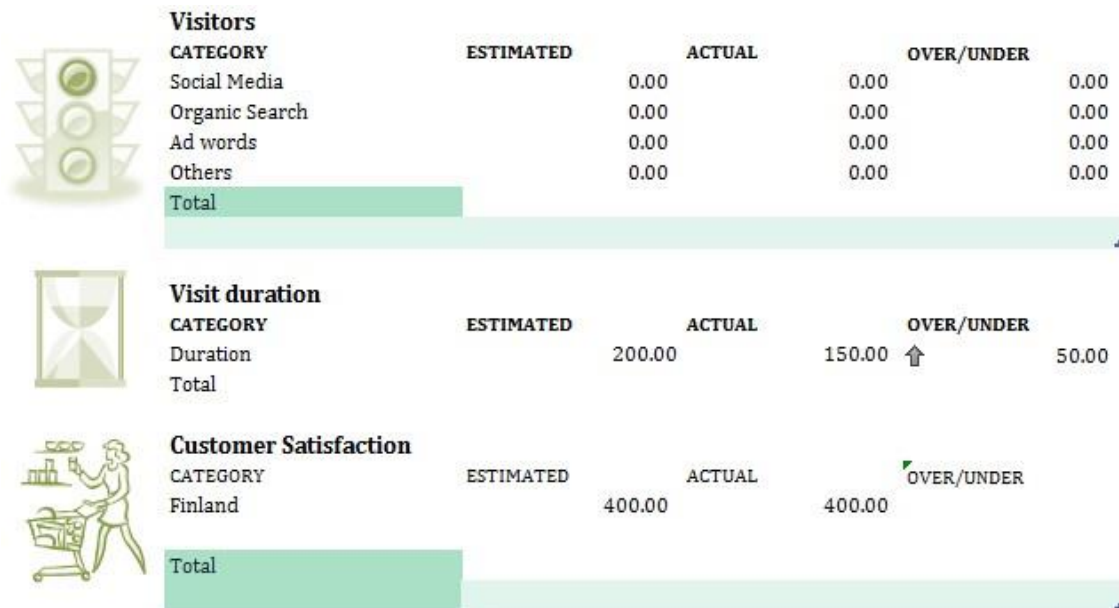

Visitors

CATEGORY	ESTIMATED	ACTUAL	OVER/UNDER
Social Media	0.00	0.00	0.00
Organic Search	0.00	0.00	0.00
Ad words	0.00	0.00	0.00
Others	0.00	0.00	0.00
Total			

Visit duration

CATEGORY	ESTIMATED	ACTUAL	OVER/UNDER
Duration	200.00	150.00 ⬆	50.00
Total			

Customer Satisfaction

CATEGORY	ESTIMATED	ACTUAL	OVER/UNDER
Finland	400.00	400.00	
Total			

Figure 21: Example of KPI Dashboard in Excel

5.8 Budgeting and Governance

Feeniks-koulu can use a variety of budgeting methods as mentioned in the theoretical review section. At present with remarkably little financial resources to spare, the company can opt for an objective and task method whereby budgeting starts by identifying objectives, then breaking these down into specific task and calculating the budget accordingly. Following is a specimen of such budgeting

Objective

Increasing the number of subscriber by 100%

DATE

June 14, 2011

Required Action

Promotions		COSTS PER Adverts	BUDGET AMOUNT
Categories	Numbers	Cost per ads	Total
Google Ad words	4	50.00 €	200.00 €
Facebook Ads	3	45.00 €	135.00 €
Personal Selling	2	100.00 €	200.00 €
Total	9	Avg. $65.00	535.00 €

Governance is another aspect of an effective implementation program. The company needs to decide who would be responsible for carrying out tasks depending upon the skills needed to carry out those tasks. There should be a clear structured system to get things done and keep the company agile.

6   CONCLUSION, RECOMMENDATION AND FEEDBACK

6.1   Recommendation

General Strategy	Market Penetration; as the company is operating in existing markets with existing customers this strategy will help maintain and increase the market share of the current products in the existing market.
Segmentation	Targeting multi segment customers by flexible product offering to each segments
Positioning	In relation to its product as company have unique offering
Product	Adding more augmented products on top of a core product as a premium offering, so people can get more if they pay more
Pricing	Going towards a premium model of pricing so that customer acquisition could be increased and support penetration strategy
Communication	Emphasizing personal selling giving way for more personalized and clear messages to potential customer. And also pushing social media promotions along with personal selling

6.2 Feedback

The company is genuinely enthusiastic about its product and its promotion. It has been given positive feedback about the marketing plan and the recommendations laid down within the plan. However, the company says that at the moment they are focusing their time and budget in product development. The company has considered some recommendations such as changing pricing plans and adding layers of product on top of a core product. The company has a plan to invest in social media advertising in the future and at the moment the company is mulling personal selling vigorously with a presence in difference seminars, programs and press releases within Finland and outside Finland.

6.3 Conclusion

In this thesis, the "Feeniks-Koulu Marketing Planning" author embarked on an investigative journey to find the best way to reach the marketing objectives of the case company *Feeniks-koulu*. With the help of empirical research, the author has come up with a comprehensive marketing plan for the case company. Overall, a marketing plan is not just the means to achieve a marketing objective but also to make significant strides towards achieving overall organizational goals.

The comprehensive marketing plan of the case company is laid out with the help of literature research, interview and a case study. The suggested marketing plan follows a structured path; step-by-step approach from who we are, where we are, where we want to be, how to be there, tactics, and control processes. The marketing plan starts by formulating a company's mission down to the details of executing every single campaign and focuses on cost effective integration of digital marketing channels. The crust of the plan lies in the process of formulating a plan and following a simple, structured method. Any other company with a similar size and in a similar situation can use this simple structured method.

This research has some limitations, which comes invariably with the qualitative research technique. It is hard to quantitatively attribute the success of the company to its marketing plan. Similarly, the significance of the marketing plan in itself could be questioned, as there has not been significant quantitative research on this field as of the writing of this thesis. Furthermore, there are no black and white answers to formulating a perfect plan; however, it is moreover a trial and error process. Most of the above outlined strategies and campaigns are cost-effective and incorporate digital channels; however, they are time intensive. If done right, it could result in sustainable but slow growth with a strong customer base. Moreover, it should be noted that it might take a while from a couple of months to year to see visible and significant results.

Lastly, the author would like to emphasis that planning provides a framework and guidelines to carry out a certain tasks in organized and optimized manner. Often, things might not work as planned as the variables and assumptions considered while making a plan may not hold true; however, this should not be the reason for not having a plan as an anonymous quotation goes "not planning is planning to fail". Planning is a constant process, and it improves over time.

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