Hotelzon's B2B content marketing plan

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This thesis follows a research-based structure. The objective of this research was to help the case company Hotelzon develop a practical business-to-business (B2B) content marketing plan to engage new customers. The research topic came up when the case company named Hotelzon started expanding its business to many other countries. Therefore, attracting new prospects has become a critical issue to B2B corporates in this online world and constantly changing business environment.

The first part of the project research covers the theoretical framework of content marketing. A clear definition of content and content marketing is presented to provide readers with background information on the research topic. This part is followed by the reasons why content marketing is important. Two different content marketing frameworks were compared and the final theoretical framework was developed specifically for the case company.

Qualitative research was chosen as the main method to collect and analyze data. Six interviews in total were conducted in order to gain the relevant and in-depth answers to build content marketing plan. One interview with the Marketing Manager helped reveal the current situation of content marketing at Hotelzon. Five interviews with potential customers were carried out to gain insights into their preferences over hotel booking tools, their most favorable content as well the best marketing channels to reach them. The study could serve as a cornerstone to help Hotelzon achieve its business goals by helping the Marketing Manager develop an applicable content marketing plan and help the sales team to acquire more potential customers in the future.

The results of the qualitative research revealed some interesting differences in preferences over information by target groups. On the other hand, business travellers are interested in receiving helpful information about their business destination such as business etiquette and cultural differences; the hotel bookers are more concerned with information about business trips such as hotel location and hotel restaurant and meeting venues. All of the interviewees were willing to receive helpful information in a short and visually nice looking form. Based on the information collected, the writer has built a practical and clear content plan for Hotelzon.

Keywords
Content marketing, B2B marketing, marketing communications, online marketing, buyer persona
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1 Introduction

Due to the advancement of technology, development of new media and changes in customer buying behaviors, various organizations have been facing serious challenges. Some are attracting new customers, creating good relationship and inspiring them to make a purchase, to name a few. In the past, to approach a new customer, a salesperson can visit a tradeshow or drop a brochure, then a customer can make a direct phone call to that salesperson and ask for information. Nowadays, before a buyer contacts a seller, there is a high possibility that he has spent time searching for information about multiple sellers, asking for others' recommendations or following sellers' social media. Therefore, in order to have one step ahead, a company now needs to create valuable and helpful content before a customer searches for them. Especially for business-to-business (B2B) corporates whose purchasing lifecycle is much more complicated than business-to-customer (B2C), content marketing is believed to be a cornerstone to generate prospects and increase sales.

B2B content marketing has been naturally developing for a long time in different forms such as brand storytelling, customer media and corporate publishing. (Pulizzi 2014, 15.) Not until the rapid development of social media have numerous organizations raised awareness of content marketing. In 2013, a survey conducted by Content Marketing Institute (CMI) and Marketing Profs showed that 91% of B2B respondents have used content marketing and over 50% said that they would increase their content marketing spending in the future.

Content marketing is critical, but not all corporates have developed proper content marketing plan to implement. No clear process, goals, etc. can easily lead to unsuccessful content marketing execution. Therefore, this thesis is created to address content marketing more properly in the future. The thesis topic is inspired by the case company Hotelzon Finland where the writer has been working for. Based on the company's requirements and the writer's purposes, only specific processes of content marketing plan will be chosen. The details can be found in the following chapters.

1.1 Research objectives, purpose of study and research question

Content marketing might vary amongst different types of businesses, depending on products or services companies offer, as well as the industry they are in. To be specific, B2B companies with stricter buying cycle and highly customized demand on products/services will require more specific schedule and technical content compared to B2C. Content used
to engage new customers versus maintaining relationship with existing customers, not to mention resources of a small-to-medium sized company versus of a big company will also lead to different content marketing plan. This research will compass content marketing plan for a B2B medium-size company with the focus on attracting new prospects as this is the most suitable approach for Hotelzon Finland – the case company.

In brief, the topic for this study is B2B content marketing plan for Hotelzon. The research problem, therefore, is determined to be formed as follows: Develop core B2B content marketing plan for Hotelzon to attract new prospects

The investigative questions (IQ) of this study are:

IQ1 – How to define Hotelzon’s buyer persona according to different groups of prospects?
The main purpose is to describe as clearly as possible what different groups of prospects Hotelzon are and how they look like in real life. This IQ will help the company and writer understand different requirements on products and information in each group, henceforth, picture them in the mind when investigating what kind of information captivate the prospects and which marketing channels suit them the most.

IQ2 – What are possible favorable contents and content types to reach Hotelzon’s prospects?
Based on the interviews with potential customers, the writer will find out the appropriate contents and suggestions of most practical content types to help Hotelzon achieve its business goals.

IQ3 – What is a recommended content plan for Hotelzon?
Based on collected information, the writer will build a content plan so that Hotelzon Finland can start considering implementing the plan. Content plan contains planning information of the marketing plan such as: date, content topic, content types, etc.

1.2 Demarcation

The scope of this research project is a B2B content marketing plan tailor made for Hotelzon. The first demarcation is theory and framework. In this thesis, the writer will focus on building content marketing plan, which directly related to “content marketing”. Even though content marketing has a strong connection with other theories such as integrated marketing communications and branding and social media marketing, those are not considered the main focus; therefore, will not be mentioned in depth.
The second demarcation is about the case company. Hotelzon has eleven different offices located around Europe. In this thesis topic, only Hotelzon Finland will be chosen as the case company. The target customers of the case company are predominantly corporate customers.

The third demarcation is about the purpose of this thesis: developing content marketing strategy to attract new customers instead of maintaining relationship with existing customers. Along with managing relationship with existing customers, the company is also aiming at expanding its business and approaching more potential customers. Content marketing is believed to be a critical instrument for Hotelzon to secure new customers.

The fourth demarcation is about the target customer group. Hotelzon has three main customer groups: decision makers who give the final decision of whether to purchase products; bookers who make hotel bookings for managers or other employees but not necessarily travel; and travellers who travel and make a booking on their own. As Decision makers are normally at the final stage of buying process and approached by Sales team, Marketing team hardly has access to this customer group, so marketing would have a little effect on them. Therefore, the writer has decided to spend relatively limited content marketing efforts on Decision makers group.

The last demarcation is about content marketing channels. This thesis will pay attention to online marketing channels only (e.g. company website, blog, etc…). In summary, demarcation criteria are mentioned in the Table 1 below.

Table 1. Demarcation criteria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demarcation criteria</th>
<th>Hotelzon</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Case companies</td>
<td>Language: both English and Finnish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geography</td>
<td>Finland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department</td>
<td>Marketing, Sales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research method</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phenomenal &amp; purposes</td>
<td>Content marketing to attract new customers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target customer groups</td>
<td>Hotel bookers and corporate travellers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing channels</td>
<td>Online marketing channels</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1.3 The case company introduction

This part will provide necessary information about Hotelzon so that the readers can have a good background of the case company, as well as understand the relevance between the research question and Hotelzon. The information was mainly collected from company websites, brochures and Hotelzon Intranet. Hotelzon’s company in-depth information such as Product value proposition and current marketing activities will be presented in the Case company analysis chapter.

1.3.1 Hotelzon establishment & development

The case company chosen for this research is Travelport Hotelzon, shortly called as Hotelzon. Hotelzon offers online hotel booking solutions and hotel distribution technology to business travellers, hotel partners and travel professionals. (Hotelzon 2015.) Its main product name is Corporate Online, which is an online hotel booking tool built for business travellers.

Hotelzon is an online hotel distribution technology provider for the B2B market. Hotelzon was first established in 1972, and then acquired by Berling Capital. After more than 40 years of operating in business travel industry, Hotelzon has grown bigger, becoming competent to offer a wide range of hotel reservation services for corporations, hotels and travel agencies with 24/7 online hotel booking availability. Some of its biggest partners are well-known brands in the field of business travel management: travel agencies such as Statesman Travel Group, Chelsea Travel Management, Carlson Wagonlit Travel/ Kaleva Travel, hotel chains such as De Vere group, Best Western and travel technology partner such as Pegasus Solutions. Until 2012, Hotelzon has four subsidiaries: Finland, Sweden, and Romania with the headquarters located in the UK.

Since June 2014, Hotelzon is acquired by Travelport, which is a leading distribution services and e-commerce provider for the global travel industry. With support from a parent global company Travelport, Hotelzon will be able to further enhance its product and service offering, as well as extend the business to new countries. By April 2015, Hotelzon has eleven subsidiaries around the world: Finland, Sweden, Romania, UK, France, Poland, Ireland, Denmark, Norway, Portugal and Spain. (Hotelzon 2014.) Hotelzon’s fast expansion has become inspiration for the writer to come up with the thesis topic. As the company continues to grow, there are two options Hotelzon might choose to attract new customers: investing on sales messages with strong emphasis on products benefits or
investing in useful information with deep understandings of customers. The writer has strong belief in the latter option (providing useful information to build trust and credibility); therefore, the writer has decided to build a practical content marketing plan to attract potential customers.

This acquisition has led to a number of changes regarding Hotelzon’s business strategies and its future development. Originally, Hotelzon offers five products: Corporate Online, Venues Online, Agent Online, Hotel Online and My Online to its four different groups of target customers who are corporate travellers, travel agencies, hoteliers and travel-related businesses. After acquired by Travelport, Hotelzon has set its business activities to be focused on selling Corporate Online product, i.e. the target group would become medium-to-large corporations whose business travelers make hundreds to thousands of hotel bookings per annum. With the main objectives of helping other businesses saving on hotel expenses and having ultimate control over hotel budget, Hotelzon has been trusted and used by more than 500 000 global business travelers. (Hotelzon, 2014.) Some of Hotelzon’s biggest customers are ABB, Metso, Tieto, Vaisala, H&M, etc. This part will be analyzed in more details in the Content marketing plan chapter.

Regarding company’s values, Hotelzon has strong belief in committed personnel, open-minded culture, agile operations and strong cooperation with partners. To maintain these strong values, Hotelzon has insisted on progressive personal development and determined to develop products and services with innovative methodology. These values are believed to help Hotelzon execute its strategy of preserving the long-term relationship with its partners and clients. (Hotelzon, 2014.)

1.3.2 Hotelzon Finland & financial figures

Currently, there are about 80 employees working full-time for Hotelzon. The company is positioned amongst the leading suppliers of hotel booking system in Finnish market. (Hotelzon 2014.)

In 2012, the company gained more than 2.5 million euros from corporate hotel bookings. However in 2013, the revenue has decreased by 12% due to the economic recession. Fortunately, in 2014, Hotelzon received new investments from Travelport to continue growing, expanding to the new market and hopefully make more profits. The graph below showed the revenue of Hotelzon from 2009-2013. (Fonecta 2014.)
This thesis is written when there are such huge changes happening at Hotelzon. There is no fixed business development strategy; there is only one clear business plan for the whole company: increasing number of hotel room nights made by existing customers and attracting potential hotel bookers and providing quality leads to Sales team. With this in mind, the writer hopes that this thesis would be able to contribute to Hotelzon's development and attract new prospects.

1.4 Key concepts

*Content marketing:* marketing and business process for creating and distributing valuable and compelling content to attract, acquire and engage a clearly defined and understood target audience – with the objective of driving profitable customer (Pulizzi 2014, 5).

*Buyer Persona:* composite picture of real people who buy or might buy products/services (Odden 2012, 66). Buyer personas are customer profiles that represent consistent characteristics of current customer base and prospects (Handley & Chapman 2012, 126).

*Buying process:* is the process or a series of steps of how the customers buy from you or make a purchasing decision (Pulizzi 2014, 107).

*Content types:* Content does not have to be limited to text and images; indeed it can appeal to diverse types of people and serve a variety of purposes such as blogs, eBooks, images, infographics, webinars, and white papers. It can be called as media types, which are distinguished from media channels (such as LinkedIn, or website) (Odden 2012, 108; Pulizzi 2014, 159.)
**Marketing channels/ Content promotion channels:** are marketing channels, which are used to promote content across those different channels e.g. a blog post can be promoted in different marketing channels such as LinkedIn, Twitter, direct email, press release, etc.

**Content marketing plan:** a calendar or table with clear goal, target audience, content topics, content types and marketing promotion channels.
2 Content marketing theory

In this chapter, the relevant theory will be reviewed and adapted to meet the requirements of the case company Hotelzon. Firstly, different content and content marketing concepts are explained to give readers a clear overview of content marketing. After that, two content marketing strategy models are presented and compared to declare the most suitable one for the case company. Lastly, the writer elaborates the chosen components to build applicable content marketing plan.

2.1 Content & content marketing

Content marketing is not a new concept. Since the advent of the Internet, many companies have been familiarizing with drafting, creating and distributing their content in order to attract new prospects and to retain existing customers. Some examples of newly born content marketing forms have been noted since 1900s such as Michelin Guides, Jell-O recipe book, Lego magazines, white papers and articles from professionals. During that time, content marketing was regarded as customer publishing, corporate publishing, brand journalism, customer media, etc. (Pulizzi 2014, 15.)

Many people assumed that content marketing is entirely about text and copyright, which is an opposite term of visual marketing (containing visual elements such as images and graphics). To avoid this common misconception, it is necessary to understand what “content” in “content marketing” is. According to Handley & Chapman (2012, 6), content is a broad term that refers to “anything created and uploaded to a website: the words, images, tools and other things that reside there”. Handley and Chapman specify that not only all pages of the website (such as the Home page, the “About us” page, etc.), but also part of those pages (such as videos, blogs, photos, white papers) are called content. Besides, other information posted which is off the company’s sites, such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, etc. are forms of contents. Jefferson and Tanton (2013, 24) also provides the similar examples of content such as a copy on the website, a blog posted or images shared by the company, and summarizes that whenever “content” is mentioned, it presents “words, knowledge and information”.

If “content” is any word, knowledge and information created, “content marketing”, as a combination of “content” and “marketing”, is meant to make use of the content for business purposes. Pulizzi (2014, 5), founder of Content Marketing Institute, defines content marketing as follows:
Content marketing is the marketing and business process for creating and distributing valuable and compelling content to attract, acquire and engage a clearly defined and understood target audience – with the objective of driving profitable customer.

According to Pulizzi, content marketing consists of “five pillars”, which are considered the five most important components:

- Editorial-based content: content must be informative, educational or entertaining. Content should tell a relevant and valuable story to its audience.
- Marketing-backed: content must be created based on marketing, sales and organizational objectives
- Behavior-driven: information must empathize with recipients’ interest and behavior.
- Multi-platform: a variety of form such as print, digital, audio, video, events, etc. can be, but does not have to be, integrated.
- Targeted toward a specific audience: content must be focus on targeted customers.

This formal definition is widely accepted by other content marketing specialists. It mentions the importance of three factors: targeted audience, business-driven goals and valuable content.

To begin with, it is compulsory for a company to clearly define a targeted group of audience before drafting their content marketing. Pulizzi (2014) asserts that if a company cannot name their audience, it is not called content marketing. The reason is that the lack of understanding the wants and needs of their audience can lead to uninteresting or unnecessary information for the audience itself. As a result, the audience will possibly ignore the messages and refuse to reward us with their business and loyalty. (Odden 2012, 6.)

Secondly, content marketing must be created and implemented based on organizational business goals, either sales or marketing objectives. Both Amanda (2014, 5) and Odden (2012, 99) agree with Pulizzi, describing content marketing as an approach of developing and sharing relevant content with the goals of attracting new prospects, leading them to a decision of buying and/or sharing, building good relationship and increasing sales with existing customers. More details of setting content marketing goals will be presented in the next chapter.

Finally, content generated must be relevant, helpful and engaging, that is, to have a power of attracting, acquiring and/or appealing the target audience. In other words, if content
does not bring outstanding values to its customers, it will be blended with tons of other dull sales messages that customers are bombarded with every day.

Regarding quality of the content, different authors have certain set of criteria on evaluating how content can be considered as valuable to its customers. Green (2013, 24) asserts that to be valuable, content must bring uniqueness and meaningfulness to its audience. Jefferson and Tanton (2013, 24) state that the content which customers appreciated should consist of five attributes:

- Useful – it educates, informs or entertains
- Focused – it is relevant and meaningful to its target audience
- Clear and compelling – it tells a story that people understand and respond to
- High quality – it is interesting and well produced
- Genuine – it is written from the heart by people who care

These qualities combined will form the content to educate and inspire customers; the content with these attributes will easily get read, shared and acted upon the company’s wish. Calacanis (2014, 79) adds that a perfect content product should be a real-time story by using current trends and news. Given that different content marketing specialists have different criteria on valuable and relevant content, there is no distinct definition of valuable content. The attributes mentioned above are only considered guidelines for content marketers whenever content is made. An important point to remember is that the content generated should be useful in a way that it helps customers recognize their problems, and later discover that the company’s product/service will help them solve those. (Robert & Pulizzi, 2011.)

Many people are also confused content marketing with social media marketing. Indeed, content marketing heavily involves social media, as content marketers need to use these social channels such as Facebook, Twitter, etc. to deliver their messages to their target customers. However, there are three main differences, which clearly differentiate these two terms: focal points, type of content and objectives (Pulizzi 2014, 8). These differences are summarized in the table below (Table 2):

Table 2. Content marketing vs. social media marketing (Pulizzi 2014, 8)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Social media marketing</th>
<th>Content marketing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focal point</td>
<td>Focus of social media marketing activities is located within the social network (e.g. Facebook, Twitter)</td>
<td>Focus of content marketing is a brand website. Social media channels are used as distributor of links back to the brand website</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Types of content</td>
<td>Content is built to fit the content of the social platform (e.g. only 140</td>
<td>Content is created with longer form and in a variety of form (e.g. blog</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objectives</td>
<td>post, e-book, video, Infographics, etc.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand awareness (e.g. generate discussion around the brand)</td>
<td>Demand generation and bring prospects to a brand website</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer retention &amp; satisfaction (e.g. open forum to discuss)</td>
<td>Develop relationship and nurture them towards a lead conversion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In short, it can be said that even though there are many overlaps between content marketing and social media marketing, these should be treated as two distinct marketing terms. Pulizzi (2014, 9) also comments that while social media is the natural first step in the evolution of online marketing, it is content marketing that forms the natural progression from the evolution. At first, a short form of content is used, since communication with customers is more direct and publishing process is relatively easier. However, as the audience becomes more familiar with brands, a company should be ready to produce long-formed and higher-quality content to show their expertise and efforts towards their customers. Thus, by driving the customers to engaging content, a company has a greater opportunity to increase lead sales as well as increase business with existing customers.

2.2 Why content marketing

In the previous part, the writer has presented the definition of content, content marketing, as well as attributes for valuable content. In this part, the writer would point out why many businesses are driven to content marketing, as well as present what benefits a company can gain from content marketing.

According to Jefferson and Tanton (2013, 15), there are three important trends that have transformed buyer behavior: the Internet, trust issues and the social web.
In the past, were a customer to have more information about a product/service, he needed to go to the fair trade, collected brochure and/or contacted a salesperson requesting for more information. He might feel doubtful about information given, but there would not be any other source of information for him to choose. On the contrary, nowadays, a customer can do research on various channels: Googling to find his answers, asking for recommendations from his network, and comparing different alternative solutions from different websites, etc. As information has become transparent on the Internet, a prospect customer has given a critical control over what kind of information he wants to access. In other words, there is an urge for a company to provide relevant and accessible information so that their content can be easily found on the Internet and customers can easily approach them among a sea of disrupting competitors.

In addition to the easy accessibility of the Internet, it is the explosive growth of the web applications has changed the game (Jefferson & Tanton 2013, 16). Nowadays, a company no longer needs to pay for media or web developers to create and publish content. User-friendly content management systems for website such as Wordpress, Joomla, social websites such as Youtube, Vimeo have given huge opportunities for any businesses, including small-to-medium size companies to share their expertise and solutions with customers for free. Pulizzi and Barret (2009, 17) describe this situation as “the shift into the technological balance of power away from media giants”. They pointed out three core components of this shift:

- the ability of create sophisticated online publications such as websites, e-newsletters
- the ability to manage huge amounts of data relating to current and future customers
- the ability to do both of these simply and inexpensively.

Pulizzi and Barret (2009, 17) also state that with this change, even small businesses may be able to provide better and more relevant content to its customers due to their creativity and high focus on the targeted audience. Therefore, if any businesses, including small businesses, disregarding content marketing, they are losing their competitive advantages of saving marketing costs and attracting new prospects over their rivals.

Second, the growing lack of trust in sales and marketing messages also bringing businesses and organization to facing serious challenges to impress potential customers, build a relationship with them and persuade them to do business. Jefferson and Tanton (2013, 17) explain that nowadays, customers have been so “oversold” that they tend to
ignore most promotional messages, reject direct salespersons and turn down cold callers. At the same time, as mentioned above, today customers can easily do research on the Internet comparing prices, reviews, qualities, specifications, etc. The more informed the customers are, the more selective they become towards information and the more challenging it is to make them purchase businesses. Therefore, smart marketers are those who make customers better understand the problems / solutions, helping them make better decision.

This change in buyer attitude towards credibility of content is partly because of the Internet, but also because of buyer mentality in content sources. Pulizzi and Barret (2009, 10) mention that today’s buyers do not care where the content comes from as long as the content provide them with appropriate answers. They are open to any highly relevant content no matter where the content comes from – whether from a well-known international media sources such as CNN, Forbes, etc. or from local websites and favorite blogs. In other words, any businesses have an opportunity become the thought-leadership content provider and gain trust from potential customers.

Thirdly, according to Jefferson and Tanton (2013, 18), the rise of social webs such as Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn is believed to be one of the three factors transforming buyer behaviors. Agreeing with Jefferson and Tanton, Pulizzi and Barret (2009, 9) emphasize that traditional media such as advertising in the magazine, on the TV, etc. is not enough to reach the potential customers any more. The first reason is due to the changes in time spent on consuming messages. In the US, according to McKinsey Global Institute research (2012, 32), since 2005, time spent on traditional communications media such as print and TV has been falling, whereas time spent on recently-developed media such as mobile phone, SMS and social networks has dramatically grown. This results in significant growth for social platform and new technology.

The second reason is the ability of social websites to help companies and customers with direct and interactive communications. If a customer shows his interest in the product/service but cannot find valuable information from a company’s site, it is the company’s losses in building a relationship with that potential customer. Also, the social websites helps customers and customers stay connected regardless of their locations. Before making a purchase, a customer might want to ask for advice and recommendations from his network (coworkers, friends, family, etc.) or check reviews and feedback from other product/service users. These social websites offer them great opportunity to communicate with both his close and distant network, then explore the information desired. According to a research by McKinsey Global Institute (2012, 32), this trend of consulting social sources
can have huge influence on shopping decisions, and those with greatest online social presence has the highest level of online sales.

In addition to these three factors transforming buyer attitudes, Pulizzi (2014, 9) points out another important reason, which is the influence of search engines like Google on company’s online visibility. According to McKinsey & Company (2011, 2), more than 90% of online users use search engines. At the same time, Google, one of the largest search engines, has stated that credible, unique and helpful content will be the key for a company to be found in search. Therefore, in order to be found on the Internet and accessed by potential customers, it is essential that a company should develop a solid content marketing strategy (Pulizzi 2014, 23).

In brief, there are many reasons why content marketing is critical nowadays; some of the most important reasons are: no technology barriers, trusting issues, content acceptance, the rise of social websites and the influence of content on Google ranking. Acknowledging how buyer behaviors and technological influence can have a great impact on marketing strategies, some companies might still wonder what the specific benefits of content marketing can bring. Handley and Chapman (2012, 8) has listed some of the great results content marketing can bring:

- Attract customers
- Educate buyers about a purchase they are considering
- Establish credibility, trust and authority in the industry
- Build buzz via social networks
- Build a base of fans and inspire customers
- Etc.

The authors suggest that if the content marketing is done right, it will likely help a company position “not as just a seller of stuff, but as a reliable source of information”. They also agree with Pulizzi and Barret that “The one who has the more engaging content wins, because frequent and regular contact builds a relationship” (2012, 7). The good news is that unlike other types of marketing, content marketing does not have an “expiration date”. This means no deadline for content to be created and published. Whenever content is created, it will be searched indefinitely in search engines, which helps generate website traffic. If content created by a company is unique and valuable, the online visibility of that company will be increased.

Jefferson and Tanton (2013, 28) also list five things every business needs which valuable content can deliver:

- A spotlight – so a company gets found.
- Star quality – so a company can stand out from the crowd.
- Buzz – so people talk about and refer a company.
- Shelf life – so people remember a company when the time comes to buy.
- Personality – so people learn to like and trust a company.

Valuable content will offer huge benefits to a company: positioning a company as an expert in industry area, generating newer and warmer sales leads, building networks on social websites, motivating referrals and boosting the search engine performance. The authors also suggested that content marketing should be considered as a long-term “investment” where marketing efforts will be paid back in the future. As long as useful content is published online, it will stay there for long time and generate interest for the business gradually. (Jefferson & Tanton 2013, 33.)

2.3 Content marketing plan theory

In the previous chapter, several foundational content marketing concepts and reasons for content marketing have been discussed. In this chapter, two content marketing strategy models by two different authors would be shortly introduced to explain the big picture. After that, the author would give deeper explanation about content marketing plan and what part of the plan would be the focus of this thesis. Given that different content marketing specialist can establish content marketing process in different processes, it is imperative to keep in mind that there is no absolutely right content marketing plan. Instead, these models can be changed, combined and optimized to best suit the case company. Therefore, after two different frameworks are compared, a final content marketing plan will be chosen.

2.3.1 Content marketing strategy models

The first content marketing strategy model is introduced by Pulizzi in 2014. He divides the whole content marketing strategies into three big steps as the graph below:

Table 3. Content marketing by Pulizzi (2014)
The framework is presented in detailed with steps that a business should follow in order to establish and implement a successful content marketing. The first step is to prepare for content marketing with needed information about business goals, target audience, buying/engagement cycles and content niche. The next step is to decide on content wisely, including an editorial calendar, content types and content platform. The last is to implement the plan and measure the impact of content marketing.

Another content marketing strategy to take into consideration is developed by Odden (2012, 55). According to the author, the content marketing strategy should consist of six steps:

1. **Objectives**: identify overall business goals and content marketing channels goals
2. **Audience**: research customer segments and develop profiles that represent consistent characteristics (i.e. buyer persona)
3. **Content plan**: identifies relevant content mix, topics and desired outcomes (content marketing goals)
4. **Promotion**: expose brand messages to new and relevant audiences
5. **Engagement**: grow social networks and community to enable advocacy and reinforce sharing behaviors.
6. **Measurement**: measure how business goals are achieved through content marketing efforts, and then refine future content marketing efforts accordingly
From two framework presented by Pulizzi and Odden, the writer has combined both of these frameworks developed by Odden. Compared to Pulizzi’s, his content marketing strategy model contains smaller but clearer steps so that the content marketer can easily follow the whole process. Therefore, the writer would create an overview content marketing plan with six bigger components as in Odden’s model; meanwhile, maintaining detailed components of Content plan as in Pulizzi’s model.

As the main purpose of this thesis is creating an applicable content marketing plan for the commission company, the writer would mainly focus on finding the necessary parts for content plan. After considering carefully the whole content marketing strategy model, the writer has decided to focus on the first three steps of the created content marketing model: Objectives, Audience and Content plan. These three steps will be explained more in the following sub-chapters.
2.3.2 Content marketing - Objectives

For many marketers, when creating a content marketing plan, the first thing they often consider is about content, e.g. what content to write, which source of information to use and which marketing channels to promote. They might visualize the post content and layout accordingly. However, if there are no specific goals for a strategic plan, a content marketer is easily prepared to fail. That is why the first step should be about setting objectives. The clearer the business goal outcome is defined, the easier it will be to track the process and performance.

According to Pulizzi (2014, 84), there are number of business goals that content marketing which a marketer can aim at:

Brand awareness and reinforcement: content marketing is an authentic and organic way to start driving engagement to the company with your brand. No spamming and excessive exposure of advertisement is used; therefore, content marketing is believed to be more effective in creating awareness for the company services or products.

Lead conversion and nurturing: From content marketing’s perspective, lead conversion is where a customer is encourage to give up enough information of themselves in exchange of engaging content. Once a company has a customer’s permission to “market”, they will reach and lead a customer to buying stage by using relevant and helpful content. Lead conversion goal normally includes a variety of registration form e.g. newsletter subscription, demo sign-up or event registration.

Customer conversion: Content marketing is also used critically to convert a prospect into the customer. At this stage, a customer requires more focused content with high expertise such as case studies, white paper, etc. A marketer’s role is to provide a good content in order to prove that the company solution is well matched to the client’s meets.

Customer service and customer retention: content marketing is not only used for prospects. Indeed, content marketing is very helpful in creating values and reinforcing relationship with customers after sales. Options are varied: e-newspaper, a print or table magazines.

Indeed, many organizations have taken advantages of content marketing and measured their marketing goals. According to a research done by Content Marketing Institute/MarketingProfs, North America in 2013, top three organizational goals for B2B content mar-
Marketing are: brand awareness, lead generation and customer acquisition. In other words, brand awareness is cited as the top benefit, which content marketing, can deliver to a company.

**Organizational goals for B2B Content Marketing**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brand awareness</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lead generation</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer acquisition</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thought leadership</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagements</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Website traffic</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer retention</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lead nurturing</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5. Organizational goals for B2B Content marketing (Content Marketing Institute/MarketingProfs 2013)

Having a little different view from Pulizzi, Odden (2012, 41) divides content marketing objectives into three smaller objectives related to content marketing: online marketing objectives, online public relation objectives, and customer services objectives. He believes that setting relevant goals by different functions within an organization is the best way to leverage content strategy.

**Identifying online marketing objectives** is considered to be the top relevant objectives for a firm. Online marketing objectives are unique to each company’s situation and different by departments (e.g. marketing, public relations, customer service, etc.). The most common online marketing key performance indicators are:

- Search visibility
- Web page links
- Social shares and social links
- Visitors to the company web or certain company social destinations
- Blog and social content subscribers and followers
Still, these marketing objectives should be tied to overall organizational goals. Therefore, it is imperative to start setting online marketing objectives by acknowledging the current business performances and understanding the overall organizational goals in long-term period. Odden suggests that any specific goals a marketer wants to accomplish should eventually lead to business goals, namely brand perception elevation, customer engagement, improved services provision or customer retentions gain. As long as businesses understand the overall business goals, they can easily map them to support marketing objectives and vice versa.

**Online public relation objectives** are also issues to be examined. According to Odden (2012, 45), some of the most common public relation objectives are building relationships with influencers and the media, occupying search results with positive brand content and inspiring brand awareness and engagement. As content is viewed as the currency of influence, creating objective such as making useful and discoverable content is one of the prime ways to reach analysts, journalists, and bloggers, hence, spread the influence.

**Customer service objectives** are mainly meant for existing customers, such as increasing online customer care visits, reducing calls to the call center, etc. These objectives can be met by making customer service content easy to access by both searching tools and social media.

### 2.3.3 Content marketing - Buyer persona

In order to develop a good and useful content, it is ultimately crucial to understand the target groups and have a clear view on the aim of the company. One of the best ways to research those customer segments is developing “buyer personas”, which are profiles that represent consistent characteristics of current customer base and prospects (Handley & Chapman 2012, 126). To an extent, “buyer persona” is similar with “target audience” or “customer segment” in a way that these concepts are about a group of people within the certain market at which businesses aim at delivering the marketing messages. However, different from the latter concepts, “buyer persona” is more precise and detailed as it is a “composite picture of real people who buy or might buy products/services” (Odden 2012, 66).

Buyer persona is developed based on the understanding of collective prospects and buyer characteristics regarding demographic, behavioral, preferences for content topics, etc. There are several personas depending on where that group falls in line with the business goals. When assembling personas, the customers are becoming more “real” in ones’ mind
and marketers should empathize with the customers’ need. The deeper an insight into customers is, the more relevant and effective the content approach will be. Pulizzi (2014, 94) adds that buyer personas are vital as it provides context to different content writers. As content is created by not only internal staffs but also marketing agency or freelancer blogger, clear and pertinent customer profiles are created to keep all the writers on the same page with the targeted people. According to Pulizzi, to know about specific persona, there are three basic questions which need to be asked “Who is (s)he? How does this person live the average day?”, “What’s the person’s informational needs?” and “Why does this person care about us?” (What is information needed to grab attention of the prospects). The more specific the questions are, the more relevant buyer personas would become; so Handley and Chapman (2012, 126) suggest some other additional questions a content marketer should try to answer:

- What work issues keep the person up at night?
- What motivates the buyer to take action?
- What sources does this person turn to for information and daily news?
- What specific words or phrases does he or she use to describe the issues (s) he is facing?
- What are this prospect’s content preferences?

It is important to mention that buyer persona is developed to support the buying process for a product or services. AIDA is the best well-known model to visualize four buying stages where customers normally go to before making the final purchase.

![AIDA Model](Image)

**Figure 6. AIDA model (Hanlon 2013)**

Hanlon (2013) explained the roles of AIDA models in her blog posts as follows:

- Awareness: content marketing helps create brand awareness of the product and services and serve as information source
- Interest: content marketing helps generate interest in product and service, encourage potential customers to do further research on products.
 Desire: content marketing creates emotional “connection”, create an “urge” or “want” the product or services

 Action: content marketing helps potential customers to interact with the company, taking the final step e.g. register for an event, making a purchase

To match buyer personas with the buying process and AIDA model, Pulizzi (2014, 106) has introduced "the engagement cycle" where a certain group of customers can be matched with each stage of buying cycle, based on their behaviors and motivation to purchase products or services:

- **Contacts:** these are people who know nothing or little about the company; the company should contact and provide certain level of introduction
- **Leads:** these are people who have active interest in the product or services
- **Qualified opportunities:** these are people who have interest and budget and supplier who they might make a purchase
- **Finalists:** these are qualified opportunities who have shortlisted their list to one or two options
- **Verbal agreement:** the company is chosen as a product or service supplier in the negotiation process

It is important to mention that there is no certain way to name these groups of customers; a company might have more generalized groups of customers throughout the buying process depending on the complexity of the business. However, content marketers should bear in mind these certain groups of customers when matching them with the sales process. The marketers need to know which content should be delivered to a group at a specified stage of buying process. As stated in the research question “Develop core B2B content marketing plan for Hotelzon to attract new prospects”, this research will cover only the first two stages of AIDA model “awareness” and “interest” because these stages are believed to closely relate to new prospects. The content plan in the following chapter, therefore, would mainly serve the buyer persona as "Contacts" and "Leads" at these two stages.

Now that a content marketer has the idea of the questions to be asked in order to build relevant persona’s profile, a marketer should find different data sources to collect prospect and customer’s information. Odden (2012, 70) mentions that there are six different sources for data collection as shown in the graph below:
Hubspot, one of the well-known marketing software companies specializing in social media marketing, email marketing, content management and web analytics has created its own personas as below.

Figure 8. Example of Hubspot personas (Customerthink.com 2012)
2.3.4 Content plan theory

With an understanding of the business, marketing goals and buyer persona, building a content plan, being the main focus of this research, is the next step of content marketing strategy. The outcome of content plan is an editorial calendar for content marketing purposes, which normally consists of Audience, Goals, Topic, and Content type/media.

According to Odden (2012, 103), the first step of content plan is to review and leveraging all existing online content. The existing inventory of content such as website, social presence, and other media helps content marketers understand better the current situation of content marketing, as well as become aware of the gap between those topics already covered and those which have not been adequately. The content plan is created to addresses the gaps and ensures that the content is compatible with the overall organizational business goals.

Odden (2012, 104) points out six basic steps to create an editorial calendar: determine topics of interests, create content categories, assign content types, establish timeline, chart a publishing schedule, incorporate other marketing plan and continue the process. Due to limited resources of Hotelzon at the initial stage of content marketing plan, these steps are well adjusted as in the graph below:

Figure 9. Content plan for Hotelzon’s prospects

Determining topics of interest means that content marketers should be able to decide which content is of customers’ interest, answer their questions and motivate the customers to return visits or perform certain business actions (e.g. subscribe, register for an event, etc.) The sources of the topics might come from researching into customer segments, persona’s portfolio or keyword research. The topics might be divided and categorized as primary and supporting topics.

Creating content categories relies on the available platform for publishing content and editorial direction for customer segments. It is suggested that content categories should provide connection and organization to chosen content. Some of typical content categories are breaking headlines, industry news, ongoing series, feature stories, in-depth product or service reports, polls, promotion, events, tips and lists.
**Assigning content types** is an important task to represent different content categories according to customer preferences. Some content might stay in company’s website such as blogs, articles, long-form content, some might live on the social platform such as tweets in Twitter, video in Youtube, etc. Odden (2012, 105) emphasizes that even though there is a wide variety of formats for a marketer to choose, the most important thing is “relevance”. Whatever the content types are, they should be relevant to the customers, to company brand, to search engine (such as Google, Yahoo, Bing) and to social community.

Regarding content types, there are varied alternatives, which are not limited to text and images. Different types of content can appeal to different groups of people and serve varied kinds of purposes. Odden (2012, 107) has listed 20 different content types in his book, which are presented in the table below.

Table 4. 20 different content types (Odden 2012)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Articles</th>
<th>Email</th>
<th>News releases</th>
<th>Social</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Blogs</td>
<td>Images</td>
<td>PDFs</td>
<td>Traditional media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case studies</td>
<td>Infographics</td>
<td>Podcasts</td>
<td>Video</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-newsletters</td>
<td>Microsites</td>
<td>Research</td>
<td>Webinars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-books</td>
<td>Mobile</td>
<td>Slide shows</td>
<td>White papers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Establishing a timeline** is essential to ensure that content marketing plan can take full advantage of marketing resources to reach business goals by certain deadlines. Content marketer can schedule content publishing by sales cycles or seasonality. Questions such as “is the product/ service offered is popular at a certain time of the year? Is a holiday approach suitable for your business and positively affect target customers?” are of common courtesy. However, it is important to give flexibility to the schedule in case of unexpected changes.

After collecting all needed information such as content categories, content types and timelines, the last step of content plan is to chart a publishing schedule. Odden (2012, 105-108) asserts that no matter the chosen content types and publishing methods are, a schedule should be designed to keep up certain regularity and cross-promotion content through various channels. A well-planned and adaptable content plan will contribute to successful marketing strategy and overall business performances.
2.4 Theoretical framework

After comparing different content marketing models and content plan, the writer has developed the best applicable content marketing plan - theoretical framework for the case company Hotelzon.

Figure 10. Theoretical frame of reference

As can be seen from the figure 10, the first step is to identify Hotelzon's overall business goals and define Hotelzon’s content marketing goals by investigating the current situation of content marketing. The two following steps are determining target audience (or creating a buyer persona), the topic of interest and relevant content types, which will be generated based on the help of potential customers. The result of the research will provide valuable information for the next step, that is, to create content plan with timeline, content topics, content types and other needed criteria. The three last steps (promotion, engagement and measuring) are not a part of content marketing plan in this research; therefore, will not be analyzed as the previous parts.
3 Research method

This chapter introduces the research design as well as described in detailed how the research was implemented. There are three sub-chapters in this section, presenting the whole process of researching. Initially, a research design was defined to acknowledge the suitable research methods for the thesis. Qualitative research method was taken as the main methodology. After the method had been selected, certain data collections tools were listed. The writer collected secondary data from online resources as well as her own observation and analysis while working for Hotelzon. The writer then collected primary data from five semi-structure interviews with potential customers in total. Finally, after all of needed data had been collected, the writer presented the data analysis process.

3.1 Research design and methods

The aim of this research is to develop successful content marketing strategy framework based on the most valuable content and suitable channels. The focus of the thesis will be creating compelling content to attract new customers and ensure of their comebacks to Hotelzon website. Therefore, the research is considered as "exploratory studies", which serves the purpose of finding out what is happening, seeking new insights and clarifying the understanding of a problem (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009, 139). The authors suggested three principal ways should be used to conduct exploratory research: a search of literature, interviewing "experts" in the subject and conducting a focus group interview. (2009, 140.)

Based on the purpose of this research, the writer chose qualitative methods as the approach to collect and analyze data. Qualitative research method refers to any data collection technique or data analyzing procedure that generates or use non-numerical data. (Saunders et al, 2009, 258). There are two main reasons behind the choice of qualitative research method. First, the main purposes of this research are to build customer profiles and to find out the customer's interests. Qualitative research method serves best when it comes to obtaining a deeper understanding of the customers' opinions, preferences the reasons behind the selected content or channels. Second, it definitely takes time for customers to express their actual viewpoints and explain their preferences for certain information and marketing channels. Qualitative interviews are effective methods to convey the answer from the interviewees, getting richer and deeper information.

The research is conducted in two parts: marketing manager interview and potential customers' interviews. At the same time, the writer will show her observation and analysis
thanks to her access to Hotelzon intranet when working for the company. Interview with marketing manager has revealed an overview of Hotelzon’s marketing activities and objectives. This provides an internal company viewpoint to the research and prepares the very first step of content marketing plan “Analyze current situation”. Interviews with potential customers provide a subjective and external viewpoint of what information and marketing channels are expected by the prospects. These interviews will help answering IQ1 and IQ2. Finally, after data were collected from all interviews, the writer will establish a content plan and answering IQ3. The research plan can be seen in the figure 11.

The research plan can be seen in the following graph:

![Research plan diagram]

Figure 11. Research plan
3.2 Research implementation

This subchapter introduces the tools that the writer used to collect data for this research project. The reasons for each option are also explained.

The writer decides to use both secondary research and primary research for this project. According to Saunders et al (2009, 259), there are three different types of secondary data: documentary, multiple source and survey. Documentary secondary data is chosen for this research project. The main reason for this option is that the writer has been working for case company, which grants her access to company data, company Intranet and other marketing materials. The main sources for secondary research are related books, online sources, company website, company Intranet and company's marketing materials.

Qualitative interviews, being the main method to collect primary data, are categorized in three types based on the level of structure and formality: structured interview, semi-structured interviews and in-depth (unstructured) interviews. Structured interviews used questionnaires based on a set of predetermined and identical questions, while semi-structured and in-depth interviews allow for more flexibility in collecting primary data. In this project, the writer chose semi-structured interviews to collect primary data. With this interview method, the writer would need to have a list of themes and questions to be covered. During the interviews, the writer would be able to to change the order of the questions, omit etc. depending on the flow of the conversation. Also, the writer could ask additional questions to better explore the interviewees' viewpoints and preferences (Saunders et al, 2009, 320).

The interviews for this research were conducted in Finland where Hotelzon Marketing team and corporate customers are located. First, the interview was conducted with marketing manager Mona Laaksonen via an electronic form email. The reason for this interview form was that the Marketing manager would like to have more time to reflect and prepare for the questions. Also, she mentioned that as a Hotelzon's employee, the writer could have an access to non-confidential marketing materials. These materials would support her answers; therefore, there was no need to have a separate face-to-face interview section. The set of questions was divided into two sections: the former mainly concerned about marketing situation, marketing objectives and marketing channels; while the latter section was aimed at sales-related matters with buying process and "Decision maker" customer group.
Second, the writer conducted several interviews with potential customers. In total, there were five prospects participating in this research: three were potential business travellers and the rest were potential business hotel bookers who make hotel bookings for others. All interviewees requested to have their full name and company names undisclosed in the research. Three potential business travellers were selected based on three criteria as follows:

- Interviewees have a business trip, and make a hotel booking at least once a year
- Interviewees are working for medium to big companies which have offices located abroad
- Interviewees are interested in making a hotel booking for their own travel

Two potential hotel bookers were selected based on three criteria as follows:

- Interviewees have experiences or are responsible in making a corporate hotel booking for others (e.g. other employees, managers, partners, etc)
- Interviewees are aware of business travel and hotel making process of the company
- Interviewees are working for medium to big companies (more than 20 employees)

Table 5 below shows the profiles of the key interviewees.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Brief company information</th>
<th>Job title</th>
<th>Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zahraa</td>
<td>American multinational computer technology company, there are nearly 100 employees working in Finland</td>
<td>HR recruiter</td>
<td>Traveller 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pirjo</td>
<td>International company with over 700 partners worldwide; offices located in Finland, Latvia, Estonia and Russia</td>
<td>Account manager</td>
<td>Traveller 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dana</td>
<td>Nordic-based financial services company operating in Northern Europe, the total number of employees are 3500.</td>
<td>Digital communicator</td>
<td>Traveller 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johanna</td>
<td>Finnish multinational communications and information technology company</td>
<td>Secretary for a Vice president</td>
<td>Booker 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Piia</td>
<td>SME event-organizing company</td>
<td>Project manager</td>
<td>Booker 2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data collection was carried out within two-week frame at the end of March. Interviews with travellers were conducted via face-to-face meeting, with the duration of approximately 30 to 45 minutes. Meanwhile, interviews with bookers were conducted via phone and emails for their most convenience. According to Saunders et al (2009, 349, 351), email interview's advantage is to allow both interviewer and interviewee to "reflect on the questions"
before providing any thoughtful responses. Phone interviews offer the advantage of collecting data with speed, low cost, not to mention the capability of consulting an interviewee without a face-to-face interview. The writer prepared two different sets of questions for these two target groups. For travellers group, the focus is to find out their own preferences over a hotel booking system, marketing information and marketing channels. For bookers, the main concern is to understand the criteria for purchasing a new hotel booking system from a user’s viewpoint. To ensure that the interviewees did not feel overwhelmed with the questions, the writer carefully designed only five to six questions, including background information. Any further clarification could be handled by follow-up emails or phone calls.

After collecting data, the writer had to start organizing and analyzing data. The first step was to fully and accurately transcribe the interviews records into written form. This step helped remind the writer of the context and interviewees' responses without confusion or bias. Also, when reading the answers again, the writer was able to develop a system of similar keywords, preferences as well as differences in their viewpoints. Finally, these groups of data were further clustered into smaller themes with the purpose of gaining deeper understanding and generating key findings for the research questions.
4 Hotelzon’s content marketing plan

This chapter presents the results from my research, together with my creative ideas for developing a content marketing plan for Hotelzon. For the case company Hotelzon and its Marketing team, this chapter is highly recommended to read and studied thoroughly. First, general overview of Hotelzon's business and marketing goals, its core product and value proposition, as well as the current digital marketing activities and content are revised. This analysis part was done based on the writer's observation when working for Hotelzon. In addition to the observation from marketing viewpoint, the writer also has analyzed and combined the data from Hotelzon's intranet materials available for internal Marketing team members. B2B target customers are segmented and three buyer personas for three different customer groups are demonstrated after that. An exhaustive study about potential engaging content to new prospects will suggest the most suitable content and marketing channels to be delivered to the customers. Finally, this chapter ends with a clear and concise content marketing plan for Hotelzon that can be applied as soon as possible.

4.1 Case company status analysis

Before building any new content marketing plan, reviewing current business situations as well as existing marketing activities is essential. Therefore, in this chapter, the writer will present the most pertinent and important information regarding its current content marketing activities for Hotelzon when considering building a new content marketing plan. This includes Hotelzon's marketing goals, content marketing goals and current digital marketing channels.

4.1.1 Hotelzon’s marketing goals

As mentioned briefly in chapter 1 Company introduction, Hotelzon's Marketing team has taken up a new challenge after being acquired by Travelport: increasing number of hotel room nights booked via Hotelzon from existing customers and attracting potential hotel bookers in order to provide qualified leads to Sales team. As the focus of this thesis is new prospect attraction, the writer has interviewed Mona Laaksonen, Hotelzon's Marketing manager for the number of leads the Marketing team should aim at for each month. Mona has confirmed that the figure required to provide to each Sales managers is 100 leads per month. At the moment, Hotelzon has 2 Finnish Sales managers, 2 British Sales managers, 1 Sales manager and 1 Sales manager for each other eight subsidiaries; therefore, the total number of leads required are up to 1 200 leads (Mona, 23 March 2015).
Concerning marketing budget, the expense is normally calculated within the first two months of the years and should be used to directly generate leads for Sales team. There are certain marketing activities that the budget might be spent on such as organizing networking events, participating in Trade Show, running marketing tools to reach potential leads, etc. Otherwise, marketing fees, which are spent on indirect marketing, should be limited as possibly.

After reviewing marketing goals by Hotelzon, below are three suggested content marketing goals that Hotelzon can take into account before building a content marketing plan:
- Increase awareness and acquisition
- Increase the number of new visitors/bookers to Hotelzon
- Increase lead quantity and quality

These objectives would be used and integrated in the final product: content plan in chapter 4.3.4.

4.1.2 Current digital content marketing practices

Overall, at the moment, Hotelzon has been performing a variety of content marketing practices in order to communicate with its customers. The main marketing communications channels are: Hotelzon brand website, blog, Social Media (Twitter and LinkedIn) and email campaigns. In this section, the writer would review the first two marketing communications channels based on her observation when working for Hotelzon as well as the available access to online Hotelzon website. Email campaigns are not executed to communicate with new website subscribes or first time travellers and bookers. They are used only to support Sales managers to warm up the provided leads. Therefore, the writer would exclude email campaigns from the analysis part below.

**Hotelzon brand website**

Hotelzon has been using its brand website as the main marketing channels to reach both potential and existing customers. There are several important details, which can be noted from the first time visits.

First, Hotelzon offers a number of location sites and website language options according to its first four established subsidiaries: UK, Finland and Sweden. Even though the language and locations offered are quite varied (e.g. English for Hotelzon International and Hotelzon UK, English and Finnish for Hotelzon Finland, etc.), it can be seen that there are
many local language options missing given that Hotelzon has expanded to eleven subsidiaries.

Second, the hotel-booking tool (or the "Book a hotel" box), which is located at the right hand side of the webpage, is not very noticeable or visually attracted to the first time hotel booker.

Figure 12. Hotelzon branding website 1

Third, all Hotelzon's products are listed in the first page of home page. Only a couple of short words are written to introduce about six different products, which might cause confusion to first time visitors. It provides little information about Hotelzon core value, product and customers.
However, the website info is quite well organized with each section of the top bar menu having a clear name. It is quite convenient for first time users to understand the info content included. Also, clear and consistent brand colors (dark blue, grey) throughout the webpage generate a professional and business-like feeling to the visitors.

According to statistics collected from internal Google Analytics tool (2015), Hotelzon website attracts approximately more than 10,000 users every month. To Hotelzon, high season months are from January to April and from September to November, when there might be up to more than 13,000 visitors per month. Among these, 31.3% of the total number of website visitors is new users. The average time they spent on Hotelzon website is 3:27 with the bounce rate as high as 56.67%. Graph 13 shows the overview of total number of visitors, sessions, page views, bounce rate, and returning visitor vs. new visitor from Google Analytics - the statistics tool that Hotelzon has been using from March 2014 - March 2015.

Figure 13: Hotelzon branding website 2 (continued)

Figure 14: Hotelzon’s website traffic March 2014 - March 2015 (Google Analytics)
According to the graph of Hotelzon's Google Analytics in 2015, there are only two significant issues. First, the bounce rate is 57%. Bounce rate is the percentage of single-page visits (i.e. a person left the site from the entrance page without interacting with any other page); high bounce rate shows that the landing page does not meet the visitor's expectations. The reasons for high bounce rate might be unappealing visual design, non-user-friendly layout, lack of navigation (e.g. lack of clear call-to-action) or irrelevant keywords. These reasons are indicators for Hotelzon, should the company want to lower the bounce rates. Moreover, the number of new visitors account for 30% of the total number of visitors. It suggests that Hotelzon website is an attraction spot to new customers at the moment. However, it is advised that this figure be improved in the future in order to draw more prospects and gain leads. One of the reasons for this 30% rate might be the lack of utility of paid search for relevant keywords.

Those keywords are essential for potential customer’s wanted products and services. Indeed, when checking top ten organic keyword search as seen in Graph 14 (organic search is opposite to paid search, the results would appear in the Google results page because of the relevance to the search terms), the results are mainly Hotelzon brand name, which possibly originated from existing customers. Any other keywords describing Hotelzon business or helping a new customer to search for Hotelzon, such as “business hotel booking” are not found in the list.
However, it is hoped that the number of website visitors and bounce rate will be positively changed in the future when a new website is ready for publication. Mona Laaksonen (23 March 2015) confirmed that Hotelzon is in the transition into its new official website, with new brand name "Travelport Hotelzon" and a new set of brand colors. This new website is expected to play an important role in engaging new prospects and supporting lead generation for Marketing and Sales team.

**Hotelzon blog**

Hotelzon has a separate section called "Blog" where Hotelzon experts and other guest bloggers express opinions about the business travel sector, insights into the hotel industry and other personal experiences of various business travel professionals. Hotelzon Blog is maintained only in English. The topics found in the Blog show a wide variety of expertise in Business travel industry such as: hotel expenses saving for corporates, cloud computing technology in business travel industry, hotels and hotel guest's sustainability monitoring. The blog section used to be more active in 2012-2013, and then the number of blog posts started decreasing gradually in 2014. There were only five blog posts were published in Hotelzon blog section in 2014 and the latest blog post was in last October 2014. This can be partially implied as Hotelzon downward trend in creating new content to attract potential customers and provide valuable content to existing customers. One of the reasons is the new focus on providing leads to Sales team instead of generally maintaining the blog for potential customers. It is apparent that even though there are quite many blog posts, there is no place where a new prospect might subscribe for Hotelzon blog. In other words, Hotelzon blog does not provide a direct value in providing leads at the moment.
Hotelzon Social media

At the moment, Hotelzon has only kept LinkedIn and Twitter as its main social media channels to communicate with its customers.

Regarding LinkedIn, Hotelzon has 471 followers with nearly 30% of total followers are at senior level. The LinkedIn analytics show relatively good results of "impressions", "click" and "engagement" regarding the recent updates of Hotelzon (graph 8). As can be seen from Hotelzon LinkedIn homepage (https://www.linkedin.com/company/hotelzon), the most common content posted in LinkedIn are:

- Hotelzon's News release and Product updates
- Hotelzon's upcoming event and webinars
- Latest news related to business travel, corporate travellers and hotel partners

The top clicked content with high engagement rate is mainly news and upcoming news related to Hotelzon. The reason, which might best explain this situation, is the fact that most of Hotelzon's followers are from Finland, Sweden and the UK. As these three countries are the first three subsidiaries of Hotelzon, there is high possibility that they are well aware of Hotelzon business and they expect to know more news related to Hotelzon.
Figure 17. Hotelzon’s LinkedIn Analytics updates - updated in April 2015

Regarding **Twitter**, Hotelzon has tweeted more than 1,600 tweets since its establishment in 2009, attracting more than 1,100 followers around the world. Different from LinkedIn, Twitter followers are diversified: the follower might be an individual or might be a travel magazine; he might be a hotelier, a leisure traveller or a corporate traveller; he might come from any different countries in the world and not limited to Finland, Sweden, and the UK. Therefore, it can be seen that the content and writing style is more varied, interactive and informal compared to LinkedIn. Still, it is important to note that Hotelzon has tried to keep consistent content with news about Hotelzon, business travel and hotel partners.
Hotelzon's Twitter account

Hotelzon's Youtube channel is also an active social media channel with around 3,777 views since the first video was published in 2011. However, due to limited resources to control and maintain this channel, Youtube has been mainly used for storing and sharing videos instead of being used as a social video community for customers to have interactive discussion with Hotelzon. Figure 19 below shows the overview of Hotelzon's Youtube channel.

Figure 18. Hotelzon's Twitter account

Figure 19. Hotelzon's Youtube channel overview
Finally, Hotelzon has no active Facebook page to run at the moment. The main reason is also limited resources, while there is not outstanding and direct value from the Facebook page for Hotelzon.

4.2 B2B target customer segmentation and buyer persona

This chapter analyzes Hotelzon target customer in terms of B2B segmentation in order to create a handy buyer persona and an applicable buyer journey. Also in this chapter, the writer reviews Hotelzon's core product value proposition to know how different target group might appreciate different benefits from Hotelzon's core product.

Business market segmentation is one important stage for any marketer before communicating with a real group of customers. The reason is that segmentation enables marketers to research the needs and behaviors of specific groups so that marketers can know how much marketing efforts should be spent differently on each group that can help maximize the investment. Also, segmentation will help a marketer decide wisely about target market; establish distinctive competitive positions and outperform other competitors (Brennam, Canning and McDowell, 2007, 149). There are different ways to segment customers group such as Demographics (e.g. industry, customer location, customer size), Operating status (descriptions of what customer companies can do), or Situational factors. At Hotelzon, customers are segmented based on their Purchasing or Usability function inside the organization (Brennam, Canning and McDowell, 2007, 158).

There are three different groups of customers with the key criteria being their functionality in using and purchasing Corporate Online. Table 6 below shows the main B2B customer sections that Hotelzon categorizes at the moment. After reviewing each segment, the writer would build a buyer persona for each target group.

Table 6. Hotelzon's B2B segmentation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hotelzon B2B segment</th>
<th>Job titles (sample)</th>
<th>Short description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Travellers**        | Project coordinator, Account manager, HR recruiter, Sales manager, etc. | • Might be any business employees who need to make a booking for a business trip.  
• Does not directly participate in travel management process |
| **Bookers**           | Executive secretaries, | • Mainly make a booking for senior man- |
### Travellers

The first target group is Traveller, which is considered the biggest user groups of Hotelzon. According to Hotelzon Intranet materials (2015), Traveller customers are those who make hotel bookings for their own business trip; and, traveller group consists of any job functions as long as their work requires travelling. Some sample job titles are HR recruiter, Sales manager, Project coordinator, Account Manager, etc.

Normally, these business travellers are given instructions on hotel bookings process as they are recommended to follow company's travel policy. They neither participate in buying process nor having good understanding of travel management travel. In fact, they are supposed to follow the directive given from senior managers about hotel-booking procedure. Therefore, it is important that content marketing should reach this customer group. If information is not communicated properly to Traveller group, there is high possibility that they will make a hotel booking in other booking systems and Hotelzon will lose its potential profit.

There were three Travellers who were interviewed for this research: one was a HR recruiter from a big company (Traveller A), one was an Account manager from a small-to-medium size company (Traveller B) and one was Digital communicator from a big company (Traveller C).

Upon being asked about the traveller’s expectations for benefits and values from a corporate hotel booking system, all three travellers emphasized system functionality, visual design and hotel location. First, regarding the system usability, the travellers expected the system to run smoothly so that the booking process would be fast and efficient. "I want the system to be smooth. As the booking process is taking our working time, I expect it to be a
quick process; it should not show a lot of questions and so on" (Traveller 1). The traveller 2 confirmed that "Easy to use is the most important. It (the system) has to be simple". Second, regarding the visual design, all interviewees expected the system to be "visually nice looking" (Traveller 2) or "visual clarity" (Traveller 3). Visual clarity included clear photos of hotels and hotel rooms. Both traveller 2 and traveller 3 said that in addition to photos provided by a hotel, they had more trust on photos taken by customers as these photos show how a room looks like in reality. Third, the interviewees unanimously signified the importance of location. They expect the hotel booked to be convenient for their access. "The best hotel location would be close to the company or the meeting venue" The traveller 1 confirmed.

Two among three travellers raised the issue of having feedback or hotel rating in the booking system so that they could have a better overview of visitors' experiences. Two among three travellers claimed that they did not care for hotel prices in business travel as much as in leisure travel; however, they still expected the price to be reasonable for business expenses. Even though these opinions were different due to personal preferences, they had common interests in feedback system and hotel deals. It is recommended that Hotelzon should consider this when marketing hotel-booking tool for potential clients.

Based on three interviews with potential travellers, the writer has built a brief buyer persona for Traveller group as follows:

Table 7. Traveller buyer persona

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dana Bilan - Digital Communicator</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Background</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age:</strong> 40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Location:</strong> Metropolitan area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education:</strong> Bachelor's Degree (Corporate Communication)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Job title:</strong> Digital communicator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Communication:</strong> Email, phone calls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Goals</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Quick and easy to use, efficiency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Top 3 preferred benefits (hotel booking related)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Smooth and easy to use hotel booking tool</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Hotel options available 24/7 for comparing and booking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Confirmation synchronized with calendar for quick and easy access</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Objection          | • Bad user experience, bad visual looking  
                      • Slow booking process |
|-------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| Influencers       | • Peers, coworkers; senior level managers  
                      • Promotional and informative hotel offers |
| Proof points      | Hotel booking should be made easy and smooth. You can make a hotel booking in 1 minute! |

**Bookers**

The second important target groups are Bookers. According to Hotelzon Intranet materials (2015), Bookers are those who do not necessarily travel, but make hotel bookings for other employees or senior managers. There are two main reasons why this is a very important customer group from Marketing viewpoint. First, the Bookers group both directly and indirectly participate in the Purchasing process (Buying process), thus, have an impact on the Decision makers group. Throughout Buying process, Bookers are those who search for different hotel booking tool options and have certain understanding of hotel booking system and business travel issues. In this case, Hotelzon's Marketing team would have a wide variety of opportunities to showcase the hotel booking tool to the Bookers group such as offering a free trial period of using Corporate Online, sharing brochures, slideshows and blogs to start building trust and expertise among these Bookers. After gaining their trust by providing reliable and useful information, Hotelzon might have a positive impact on the Booker when they consider drawing up a final shortlist for Decision makers. Second, the Bookers group can be considered to be the representative of travelers, as they know what to expect from a hotel-booking tool as a professional hotel booker. Therefore, it might be easier for Hotelzon Marketing team to give educational information of how hotel booking tool will improve the travel management of the whole companies. In brief, even though the Booker group does not directly participate in the final Purchasing process, the writer believes this is the group that the Marketing team should put most marketing efforts into in order to attract potential customers and score points in the Decision maker group.

Two Booker group representatives were interviewed: one was working as secretary for a Vice-president in a big company (Booker A) and one was working as a Project manager for a small-to-medium size event marketing company (Booker B).

When asked about the circumstances in which the interviewees might want to look for alternative corporate hotel booking system; two different answers were given. Booker A
answered that it was not her own responsibility to search for alternative hotel booking system. The travelling system in her company was so strict that she had to follow the travel policy. As there was indeed a different Secretary group who took charge of secretary's responsibilities such as schedule management, flight and hotel booking, meeting booking, etc., Booker A will only receive the instruction from that group and did as instructed. On the contrary, Booker B had a clear vision of the condition for an alternative corporate hotel booking system: when she received customer brief about the event, meeting, etc. and when she wanted to browse for best possible options available. From this interview, the writer becomes aware that the company size partially affects the roles of a booker in a company. In the case of Booker A, she had a very limited influence on the Buying process while Booker B has much stronger decision power on deciding the hotel booking system.

On the question of what specific benefits of the alternative system that a booker would appreciate over the current one, both Booker A and Booker B mentioned quite similar the same features such as reasonable prices or deals from hotels, meeting facilities, good information about the hotel and venue (e.g. breakfast, wifi, etc.)

Based on information collected from the interviews with two bookers, the writer has built a brief buyer persona of a Booker group as below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 8. Booker buyer persona</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Charlotta Kalla - Executive secretary</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Background</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age:</strong> 40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Location:</strong> Metropolitan area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education:</strong> Bachelor's Degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Job title:</strong> Executive Secretary; is in charge of administration issues in the company (including travel) and participate in Buying process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Communication:</strong> Email, face-to-face meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Goals</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Quick and easy to use, efficiency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Top 3 preferred benefits (hotel booking related)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Good hotel and venue information; and different options available for comparing and choosing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Hotels with the best rates and/or negotiated prices; secure payment methods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Smooth and easy to use hotel booking tool</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Objection</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Not the one who gives final decision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influencers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time-consuming and not user-friendly</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Influencers**
- Peers, professionals in business travelling
- Brochure, educational and informative email

**Decision makers**
Last but not least, the most important group of customers, naturally, is Decision makers. Purchasing manager, Travel manager, CFO or CEO are normally those who give the final decision whether to purchase a new hotel booking system, to establish a travel policy and to apply the travel management process to the whole companies. According to Mona Laaksonen, there are certain benefits from the hotel booking system that the Decision makers would expect to have:

- Best available rates and negotiated rates for the hotel booking
- Easily compare different hotel rates and maximize hotel savings
- Ultimate control over travel policy (hotel options and maximum price)
- Real-time and automatic hotel spend reporting, in-depth travel analysis
- Possibility to track travellers in case of emergency

The marketing channels they prefer to communicate with Hotelzon are networking events, business and finance magazines, direct contact (via phone call or personal emails). Based on the information collected, the writer has built a brief buyer persona of Decision makers group as below:

Table 9. Decision maker buyer persona

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Heikki Tuominen - CFO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Background</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age:</strong> 47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Location:</strong> Metropolitan area, normally outside Helsinki, Espoo and Vantaa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education:</strong> Master’s Degree (Finance)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Job title:</strong> CFO; has financial responsibility for firm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Communication:</strong> Email, phone call, networking events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Goals</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Efficiency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less expenses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proven Return-On-investment ROI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top 3 preferred benefits (hotel booking related)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influencers</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Proof points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Even though Decision makers can be viewed as one of the most important customer group, it is a fact that at Hotelzon, Marketing team normally does not have direct access to these decision makers. Most of potential Travel Managers, CFO and CEO neither actively search for information related to Corporate Online or hotel booking process for corporate travellers, nor spend time searching, comparing and shortlisting different hotel booking options. These decision makers usually collect information either from bookers such as executive secretaries, office managers or directly from Hotelzon's Sales manager, asking in-depth questions about the system and the implementation. They tend to avoid marketing and sales materials about the hotel booking system. Therefore, even though this is one of the most important target groups, there should not be too many marketing efforts made to attract these groups. In this thesis, the writer would not focus on this group but only mention very briefly about this group.

Based on the information collected from the theory part, from different books as well from the interview with Hotelzon’s Marketing manager, the writer has developed the Buying process as follows:
AIDA model

Marketing target prospect
- Travellers
- Bookers

Sales target prospect
- Bookers
- Decision makers

Figure 20: Hotelzon’s Buying process, Marketing & Sales target prospect
4.3 Content topics and content types for Hotelzon’s customers

This chapter would review the values propositions and content Hotelzon should maintain and offer to its new prospects. Also, based on the interviews with representatives from Bookers and Travellers group, the writer would suggest a number of content topics and content types to be used, as well as a certain marketing channel to reach these potential customers.

4.3.1 Hotelzon’s product value proposition

Before providing content to new prospects, it is essential to review the existing value propositions Hotelzon has and what values Hotelzon can offer to its customers. Skok (Forbes, 2013) has explained "value proposition" in a simple way that it should explain what benefits or solutions a company provide and how that company might do it distinctively better than the alternatives. Good value proposition will best describe the target audience; the problem a company can solve and how the company might do it uniquely well.

Hotelzon’s core product is Corporate Online, which is a hotel booking channel and self-booking tool for medium-to-big size companies. The tool is designed specifically for companies that want to make savings on corporate hotel reservations and integrate hotel bookings reporting with their current administrative systems. According to Hotelzon's product proposal template (2015), Corporate Online has three outstanding value propositions: “Easy to use”, “Cost control” and “Time and money saving”.

![Figure 21. Hotelzon's top three value proposition](image)

Many people might wonder what makes a corporate hotel booking tool, or Hotelzon's Corporate Online different from other options. Indeed, Corporate Online has been developed in consultation with Hotelzon’s corporate customers so that its features can specifically meet business requirements such as:

- Booking a hotel with negotiated rates (between a company and a hotel)
- Booking a meeting venue (integrated in the same hotel booking system)
- Tracking travellers in case of emergency
- Steering bookings to chosen properties to support company travel policy
- Benchmarking hotel expenses and maximizing savings
- Controlling cost through real-time report
- Multiple payment options for travellers and bookers to choose

In addition to this, Hotelzon is actively updating new product features. The latest product update allows the travellers to see the latest booked hotel for quicker search (Hotelzon, 2015). Hotelzon also offers Loyalty Club program, which gives points for each hotel booking; and any Hotelzon users are able to exchange those points with gifts such as movie ticket and cruise vouchers.

The content marketer’s task is to match these unique value propositions of Hotelzon with customers' need and deliver the correct messages as well as information to the correct target groups.

4.3.2 Suggested content topics for Hotelzon

Content topics were studied through the interviews with two target groups: travellers and bookers. After considering the interviewees’ answer, the writer would consider suggesting relevant and interesting content to Hotelzon customers.

The first question to travellers was to ask about information needed from a hotel booking system other than the hotel information (What additional information or services do you expect to receive in addition to the hotel booking). It is noted that for this question, the interviewer had to give more suggestions to the interviewees, as they barely thought of additional content, which they wanted to receive immediately. This gave a hint that the customers might not familiar with receiving more information from the corporate hotel booking providers other than hotel prices and booking information. Therefore, the interviewer tried to suggest some ideas of information, which was business travel related and might interest them: some tips for comfortable business trips, some must-have items for business trips.

After the suggestions, the interviewees started reacting to the questions and sharing their wish for receiving the useful information for their trip. Traveller 2 showed an interest in receiving the content in the future:

That information goes beyond selling hotel and marketing how good the system is - really interests me. If I receive that kind of information, I would be very interested in booking a hotel via that system because it would make me feel that they understand
what I want and where I go for. I think it is how it should be in the future. (Traveller 2, 23 March 2015.)

The traveller 1 shared that she expected to receive some list of information about "cultural differences" and what she should behave in the destination country:

I think it is important to receive information about stuffs that we might expect to happen, so there will be no surprise and the travellers are prepared for travelling and local behaviors (Traveller 1, 23 March 2015).

For this kind of information, she emphasized that it should be sent after the hotel bookings were made. The reason was that the hotel booking made for business trips are work related and she wanted to have the booking process to be quick. Therefore, any additional information received during hotel booking process might act as distractors.

The traveller 2 and 3 had the same expectations on receiving additional information. The traveller 2 was very clear of what information she wanted to receive from the hotel booking service provider and gave several suggestions: "Dos and Don'ts" at the local countries, how to take on the airplane for a long time, checklist of things you should bring with, top great travel apps (e.g. apps for hotels, apps for taxi, etc.). The traveller 3 shared the same interest in tips about places to see and correct behaviours in a foreign country, as a traveller might not have much time to do research about the country. In addition to that, she mentioned it would be exciting to know some information related to leisure travelling such as touristic buses, top ten sites of the cities; and how to get to the hotel from the airport.

Based on the interviewees' answers, it is suggested that Hotelzon should start developing content related to business travel and cultural differences to the top most popular business travel destinations. The content should be informative and helpful for their upcoming business trips. Therefore, some favorable content topics are:

- Tips for a comfortable business trip
- Top must-have items for business trips
- Useful travel apps for business travellers
- Dos and Don'ts of local business etiquettes

The writer has tried to create a sample text featuring some useful tips for a comfortable business trip, which can be seen in the Attachment 4. In addition to business-related topics, Hotelzon should consider using some location-based content and leisure-related information. Regarding the former, it is suggested that Hotelzon choose the most visited cities by customers, then build relevant content in connection to those cities. The data of
the most visited cities can be taken from the database, or from updated referential sources such as online business traveller magazines. The writer has come up with the following content below that Hotelzon might consider writing about:

- Top things to know about London (local working hours, currency converter, etc.)
- Top places to visited in Stockholm
- Best transportation methods to go from the airport to your hotel

The second question to traveller was "If the corporate hotel booking site wants to keep you coming back to make a booking, what kind of information you want to receive". While the first question emphasized on the information appealing to customers, the second question shifted focus to their continuation of booking at Hotelzon booking system. This information is expected to be sent personally to each traveller. According to the Traveller 1, price, updated special hotel deals, reviews and hotel pictures are the top concerns for her coming back. Also, she expected the hotel booking system might save her previous destination cities and preferences for the booking process in the future. Traveller 2, on the other hands, showed her care most for rewards program:

I would be interested in what kinds of rewards I would receive if I book a certain number of hotels; if I would be able to set a certain target for myself, then I would sometimes go there and check if I have achieved those targets and rewards or not. (Traveller 2, 23 March 2015.)

She emphasized that she would like to see different prizes based on her travel frequency, so that she would be motivated to come back for hotel booking. The whole hotel booking process should be engaging, not only the hotel booking activity.

Based on this information, the writer suggests that Hotelzon should present more of its relevant value proposition with its potential customers. It seems that based on the previous chapter Hotelzon's value propositions, the company has been able to meet most of the potential travellers' requirements such as rewards program, last-booked hotel options. Hotelzon should be active in delivering these benefits to its customers, hence, attract these customers to come back for hotel bookings.

Unlike travellers, bookers were asked more about their evaluation on which information might attract them to the new corporate hotel booking system and which benefits they expect to have over the current hotel booking system. It is interesting to note that both of the travellers shared the same preferences of special offers, local events, restaurants, meeting facilities, transportations and leisure opportunities. Moreover, they both put emphasis on the importance of meeting room booking options. This is the value proposition
Hotelzon possessed as mentioned in the previous section Hotelzon’s value proposition. Therefore, it should be communicated to its potential bookers such as secretaries.

4.3.3 Content types and favorable marketing channels

In this chapter, the writer would sum up the content types and the most favorable marketing channels based on the interviews with both travellers and bookers. In general, all interviewees are in favor of short-form content. Traveller 1 mentioned that a short list of any good information described in bullet points would be the ultimate options for her, as she preferred short forms. The service providers should not make it complicated.

Both traveller 2 and 3 were more specific about the content types as they both prefer emails as the text form. The traveller 3 said that newsletter or email is a convenient form type for her to consume every free time:

   Newsletters easily attract me. I spend my lunchtime to go through newsletters such as travelweekly just for my interest (Traveller 3, 27 March 2015).

The traveller 2 agreed about the convenience of email types; still, she emphasized that the email should be engaging:

   Emails are quite convenient; but the email should be different, unique, visually good looking and creative - that engage met. If it is interesting, then I might want to read it every other day; but if it is not targeted for me, I will unsubscribe (Traveller 2, 23 March 2015).

Therefore, it is suggested that any specific tips, reviews or news related should be in short form and sent via emails. Besides, there are certain preferences on the content types. Texts should not be the only options for the customers. Other helpful marketing materials nicely written in appealing visual looking forms such as video, blogs, infographics would be attractive to the readers as well, the traveller 2 and 3 confirmed.

When asked about the favorable marketing channels, all interviewees showed the interest in receiving direct email marketing, as long as the content is relevant and targeted for them. In addition to emails, the booker 1 showed her interest in website content.

Based on the interview questions regarding the content types and marketing channels, it can be summarized that the potential customers are interested in short-form, easily-consumed text such as emails, nice looking visual materials such as blog, video. These content types should be sent directly to the customers via email marketing. As Hotelzon already has had a number of existing marketing channels and content, which were men-
tioned in the chapter 4.1.1, it is recommended that Hotelzon should take better advantages of these contents, as well as its own value propositions to communicate with its customers.

4.3.4 Hotelzon’s content plan

Based on the objective set in chapter 4.1, buyer person or customer profile built in chapter 4.2 and suggested favorable content topics and content types in chapter 4.3, the writer has combined all necessary information and applied it to content marketing plan.

Table 10. Content marketing plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Target Audience</th>
<th>Audience Goals</th>
<th>Content channels</th>
<th>Content topics</th>
<th>Content frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Travellers</td>
<td>Build brand awareness and reliability</td>
<td>Email</td>
<td>Tips for business etiquette at travelling destination</td>
<td>Once a month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Increase number of booking from travellers</td>
<td>Blog</td>
<td>Tips to have comfortable and efficient business trip</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Increase new visitors to our website by 15% in 12 month</td>
<td>Social media</td>
<td>Useful travel apps for business travelers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Dos and Don'ts of local business etiquettes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Top visited places in Stockholm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bookers</td>
<td>Build brand awareness, trust and expertise</td>
<td>Email</td>
<td>Promote upcoming helpful events and webinars</td>
<td>Twice a month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Get bookers to start the trial of Hotelzon</td>
<td>Blog</td>
<td>Use references from existing cus-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Event</td>
<td></td>
<td>stomers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide educational info of corporate hotel booking to improve lead quality</td>
<td>Introduce how corporate hotel booking tools can help increase work efficiency and save costs</td>
<td></td>
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5 Conclusion

This chapter summarizes the most important information for Hotelzon when planning content marketing in the future. First, a recap of content marketing strategies significance and important steps of content marketing for Hotelzon would be presented. After that, the writer would briefly describe the key results from qualitative research. Due to limitation of time and scope, the writer has presented some suggestions for further research so that Hotelzon can take better consideration to implement and measure this content marketing plan in the future. The research project ends with the writer’s reflection on self-development during thesis writing process, both personal and professional.

5.1 Key findings

In order to attract new customers and increase the number of hotel bookings, content marketing is one of the long-term marketing strategies to be planned and implemented at Hotelzon. The reasons for using content marketing are due to three important trends that have transformed buyer behavior in recent years: the Internet, trust issues and the social web (Jefferson & Tanton, 2013, 15). First, the Internet has given customers opportunities to seek information about the product/services. At the same time, the Internet also has given huge opportunities for all businesses to share their expertise and solutions with customer for free or with low expense. Therefore, if any businesses miss content marketing, they are losing their advantages over other competitors. Second, with the growing lack of trust in sales and marketing messages, content marketing can be used as a powerful tool to change buyer attitude towards credibility of the content. Content marketing should be informative and compelling in order to gain trust and help customers make better purchasing decision. Lastly, the social web has become a bridge to connect service providers with customers regardless of their locations. The wide reach of digital communication channels such as social media would help the company expand faster and reach more potential customers.

There are different content marketing strategies and planning models. Two content marketing framework chosen in this thesis are Content marketing developed by Pulizzi (2014) and Content marketing strategy introduced by Odden (2012). Both framework emphasized on defining objectives, target audience, content plan, content promotion and measurement. The uses of content marketing plan vary by different factors such as company size, business strategy and organizational cultures. At Hotelzon, a simple and application content marketing would be the ultimate solution for marketing activities. The writer has chosen four first important steps for Hotelzon to take into consideration: define content mar-
keting goals, define buyer personas, define favorable content and content types and build content plan. Many companies tend to ignore defining goals and start writing content at the beginning. It is recommended that Hotelzon start with analyzing current activities and defining clear content marketing goals. Some suggested goals to start with are: increase brand awareness, increase the number of new visitors and return bookers/travellers to Hotelzon.

Developing buyer persona, favorable content and content types is the next vital things to Hotelzon. The data was collected from six interviews in total: one with Hotelzon Marketing manager, two with potential hotel bookers and three potential business travellers. Also, there have been numerous observations and analyses conducted by the writer during the process thanks to the access to internal Hotelzon materials. The results show interesting different concerns and preferences by target group over a hotel booking tool.

Regarding travellers, who have a business trip and make their own hotel booking, nice visual looking, smooth booking process, hotel description and location and feedback system are their top concerns. Price is a controversial issue as some might be more sensitive to hotel price than others. However, in general, all travellers agree that hotel price should be reasonable and within company travel budget. Coming to information they want to receive, travellers seem to signify local cultural details and business etiquettes. Therefore, they would prefer any valuable information that helps them understand the business destinations better. Other tips for more comfortable trips are welcome to be share. It is important to note that the content to be shared should be concise and easy to consume. Emails, along with other visual channels such as video and infographics, are chosen as the most convenient forms for travellers.

Regarding bookers, who do not necessarily travel but frequently make a hotel booking for senior managers or other employees, smooth and simple booking process is their ultimate preference. Compared to travellers, bookers seem to care more for all-in-one deals when making a hotel booking. They hope to receive as much information related to business trips as possible: hotel description, hotel location, hotel restaurant, meeting venues, etc. Therefore, if Hotelzon approaches these groups, it is recommended to show Hotelzon efforts to make booking with ease and different solutions to smoother their work. Their preferences over marketing channels are emails, website and face-to-face meetings.
5.2 Validity and reliability

In this research project, the writer has organized the thesis structure so that the company introduction, theoretical framework, research design and final research results were well organized and answer the research questions. The research project started with providing background information of content marketing: content marketing definition, content marketing importance and content marketing model preference. The research designed closely followed the content marketing framework developed for Hotelzon. The first step was analyzing current situation and defining content marketing goals. The second step was building buyer persona based on B2B segmentation. The next step was to find out which content is of customers’ favor and which marketing channels should be used to approach them. Lastly, a content plan was built using information collected from the first three steps.

When collecting data for the research process, both secondary data and primary data were made full use of. First, the secondary data was collected from reliable updated books, online articles from well-known sources as well as Hotelzon home page. In addition to that, the writer has an exclusive access to Hotelzon internal marketing materials and Hotelzon intranet. Based on the writer’s experiences as well as the connection to internal marketing materials when working in Hotelzon Marketing team, the writer has shown strong observation and analysis on Hotelzon’s current situation. Second, the primary data was collected from six interviewees, including both internal staffs and potential customers. The potential customers were chosen carefully based on certain criteria such as experiences in business travelling and working at a medium-to-big size companies.

Moreover, the interview questions were also carefully written with consideration about the differences in target groups. As the interviewing questions were quite general, these questions were sent before the actual interview to ensure that they have time to prepare for the answers. As a result, the interviews were conducted smoothly with an average length of 30 minutes.

Some challenges emerged during the data collection stage. The interviews with Hotelzon Marketing manager and bookers were conducted via an electronic form and phone interview. The limitation of these data collection methods was that the interviewer couldn’t observe the interviewees’ expressions and hardly asked for more information by sending the second or third emails. At the same time, the written information was quite short and hardly drew deductive conclusion from the written text. Therefore, the research project seemed to put more emphasis on the bookers’ interview results.
5.3 Suggestions for further research

Because of time and scope limitation, the thesis has left some parts for the further research in the future. This research has provided background information for content marketing implementation, such as content marketing goals, target customer segmentation and buyer personas, suggested content types and most favorable marketing channels. The results and ideas mentioned can be used as a good preparation for Hotelzon Marketing team to build content for the marketing campaign. For further development, more marketing channels not mentioned in this research should be studied more thoroughly. Even though the interviewees might only prefer direct email marketing, it is crucial to offer them different marketing channels and expand the reach to more people, not only interviewees. Also, content marketing management research is very essential in developing content for potential customers. It includes assigning who will be in charge of writing content, developing content and distributing content. Lastly, the research of measurement on how content marketing is implemented to Hotelzon marketing strategy should be conducted. That research should cover the evaluation on the success of the content marketing execution and future potential improvement in order to make the best out of content marketing.

5.4 Reflection on professional development

During the process of conducting this research, I have had chance to learnt and improved both of my professional knowledge, as well as other soft skills. First, I had an opportunity to find out the most recent marketing trends in the marketing field and study deeper the professional area that I am excited to learn about (content marketing). I strongly believe that the literature reviews I have learnt and content marketing models I have presented will support to my expertise and future career. At the same time, researching, analysing, critical thinking and summarizing skills have been significantly improved during the process. All the data collected were studied, summed up and presented with careful thought and logic. In addition to the improvement in marketing expertise, I have gained experiences in my communications skills when carrying out the interviews with my Marketing manager, potential bookers and travellers. I have learnt to negotiate and succeeded in conducting the interviewees with planned schedule. Lastly, this project research has taught me the whole process of planning, implementing, managing and measuring an independent project from the beginning until the last step. I have learnt the importance of setting specific goals and meeting the deadlines in order to get the project executed successfully.
References


Hotelzon Intranet. 2015. URL: https://hotelzon.sharepoint.com/sites/hznet/_layouts/15/start.aspx#

Johanna, 27 Mar 2015, Vice president secretary. Interview. Helsinki


Photo 3: Communicator URL:
Appendices

Appendix 1: Interview question - potential travellers

Interview – potential individual travellers
These questions below are part of a thesis research project to find out what kind of information and marketing channels should be used to attract potential corporate hotel bookers.

I highly appreciate your willingness to help and would like to thank you in advance for your time.

1. Your demographic info (e.g. job title, responsibility, company name, company size)
2. Does your work require you to go for business trip? If yes, how often?
3. When going for a business trip, what is your procedure of booking a hotel?

Case: Assuming that your company does not have a hotel booking system and you need to book a business hotel on your own:

4. What kind of aspects and benefits do you expect from a corporate hotel booking system?
5. If you want to know business travel and hotel related information, from which resources and media channels are you going to search for?
6. What additional information or services do you expect to receive in addition to the hotel booking?
7. If the corporate hotel booking site wants to keep you coming back to make a booking,
   a. What kind of information do you want to receive? / What kind of information is most interesting and useful to you when booking a business hotel?
   b. In which form do you want to see it?
   c. By which marketing channels and how often would you like to receive the information?
8. What keywords do you normally use to search for corporate hotel bookings (in English)?
Appendix 2: Interview question - potential bookers

Interview - potential bookers
These questions below are part of a thesis research project to find out what kind of information and marketing channels should be used to attract potential corporate hotel bookers.
I highly appreciate your willingness to help and would like to thank you in advance for your time.

A. Background information:
1. What is your job title and company name?

B. Assuming you’re looking for alternative corporate hotel booking systems for your company:
2. In what sort of circumstances are you looking for alternative corporate hotel booking system(s)?
3. When you look for information, which resources do you use as help? Please list >3 sources.
4. *What kind of information attracts you to the new corporate hotel booking system?*
   a. What particular information and benefits of alternative systems that you would appreciate over the current one?
   b. By which marketing channels and how often would you like to receive the information?
   c. What keywords do you normally use to search for corporate hotel bookings (in English & Finnish)?
5. Please describe briefly your company’s process of purchasing a new corporate hotel booking system and your role in it.
Appendix 3: Interview question - Marketing managers

Interview – Marketing manager

1. What are the marketing objectives for Hotelzon regarding potential prospects at the moment?
2. What kind of information (i.e. content) and marketing channels has Hotelzon already had and been using to communicate with potential customers?
   - Information (e.g. company info, product info, etc.)
   - Marketing channels (e.g. website, blog, brochure, SoMe, etc.)
3. How do you evaluate the use and advantage of the content in general?
   - Quality of content (Variety? Reach different target groups?)
   - Content promotion (How do we promote content?)

Sales-related questions:

4. What are some common characteristics of (ideal) potential prospects?
   - Job roles, concerns, etc.
   - Companies they are working for: company size, revenue
5. What are the customer buying cycle stages at Hotelzon?
6. Regarding decision makers (e.g. CFO, Travel manager)
   - what are the most important benefits of Hotelzon that they concern?
   - what are suggested content and marketing channels for them?
Appendix 4: 6 tips for comfortable business trips

"Travelling in business can be stressful and exhausting. These practical tips from travel experts will help you make your business travel run more smoothly."

6 TIPS FOR COMFORTABLE BUSINESS TRIPS
Reserve time for everything and prepare for unexpected situations

Plan your schedule with plenty of extra time between your check-in and the flight departure, between your expected arrival and your first meeting etc. Adding extra time into the schedule will help you reduce stress and avoid getting into a panic.

Sometimes, an unexpected situation might happen: flight delays or lost/stolen luggage. In any case, keep your business partner's contact information e.g. name and phone number with you, so that you can inform him/her if needed. Also, keep all photocopied versions of your passport saved in your email in case it's lost.
Pack smart

Keep all your important possessions (passport, laptops etc.) in a carry-on and always keep it with you. If possible, pack everything you need in one carry-on luggage. This helps minimise the stress and maximises your flexibility in case the airline loses your luggage or if flights are cancelled.

Also, remember to bring laptop/phone chargers and appropriate electrical plug adapters. If you are not sure which adapter you need to bring, check out this consulting website: Countryplug.com.
Reservation confirmation

A printed copy of the reservation confirmation is quite handy and convenient for travellers. In addition to the printed version, Hotelzon has also provided reservation information via text message, email and through calendar integration systems (e.g. Outlook, Lotus IBM etc.).

It’s good to have both soft and hard copies of the confirmation, but if you want to promote sustainable hotel bookings, Hotelzon highly recommends you to use our text message/email/calendar integration reservation system.
Choose the hotels that meet your needs

Before choosing the hotel, keep your company's travelling policy in mind, and make sure to select the right booking channel in order to take advantage of your own corporate rates.

Location is one of the most important factors when choosing the hotel for your business trip. The hotel should be easy to access and close to your meeting. It's also practical if the hotel or the hotel room is located in a quiet area so that you are able to get a good rest after a busy working day.
Transportation

Plan ahead how to travel between the airport, hotel and the meeting location, and prepare for traffic delays.

- If you are familiar with the destination, take advantage of public transportation (bus, metro etc.) to save time and money.
- If you have never been to the destination, it’s recommended to go by taxi or have someone to pick you up in order to avoid any unwanted surprises.

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It's highly recommended to have a direct or non-stop flight, even though it might be more expensive than indirect flights. Saving a couple of euros might cost a lot of time and cause more stress (because of delays, transits etc.). If you have to go by transit, choose the most convenient way and the least time wasting process.

During the flight, try to drink a lot of water and get up and walk around a few times for better blood circulation.

HOTELZON
Make the best of it

HOTEL ZON

Regardless of which industry you are in, business travel will usually be necessary as it brings out more business opportunities for your company. Focus on the long-term benefits, take responsibility and make the most of your trip. By planning ahead, you'll reduce the chances of unexpected problems, increase your personal enjoyment and enhance your professional image.

Bon voyage!