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Managing website development project in a business-to-business company

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Master's Thesis

DP in Communication Management

9.11.2014

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<p>The title of thesis</p> <p>Managing website development project in a business-to-business company</p>	<p>Number of report pages and attachment pages</p> <p>65 + 3</p>
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<p>Websites are one of the most important marketing channels for many business-to-business companies. However, very often company websites in the field of professional services look and feel very similar to each other. It seems that it is hard to stand out from the competition through a website even though the online solutions and technologies are constantly developing.</p> <p>This thesis describes a company website renewal project in a Finnish business-to-business firm that offers professional services to corporate clients. This research provides conclusions and recommendations for the target organization for website development in the future.</p> <p>First this thesis introduces the research question, the organization and the business environment it operates in. Relevant theories are presented in the framework of the thesis. Content marketing and content strategy are important parts of the theory of this thesis as well as brand management. It also addresses personal branding and emotions in the context of brand management and corporate websites.</p> <p>The data collection and the website renewal project plan are described jointly with the project management process. Project management analysis pinpoints the probable difficulties during a project and provides means to avoid them with proper project plan.</p> <p>Website content development is a continuous process and it is important that the content on the site serves its audience. Meaningful and valuable content is one of the key factors for any corporate website. In the conclusions of this thesis some suggestions are presented for creating engaging corporate website content to awake affection and engagement within target groups.</p>	
<p>Key words</p> <p>Website content development, Content marketing, Content strategy, Brand management, Project management</p>	

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1 Introduction

Company websites in business-to-business field differ from websites of consumer products both visually and content-wise. Company websites often communicate somewhat faceless and hard cold facts about the business, and based on the website content it is hard to tell the difference between two business-to-business professional services site within the same branch. In contrast, it seems that consumer product websites often tend to activate and involve consumers with campaigns and engaging content. (De Chernatony, McDonald & Wallace 2012, 294.) However, whether it is a website of a corporate legal services firm or a site of a refreshing soft drink for consumers, it is individual people who visit the Internet sites. Are there some features that business world could adopt from entertaining consumer websites, or is it just strictly business?

This thesis describes the aims and process of a company website renewal project in a firm that operates in professional services field providing legal services. My aim is to find out what are the important features and functionalities of a business-to-business company website. In business-to-business markets the client is organization rather than individual consumer (Brennan, Canning & McDowell 2011, 5.) The theory and case study in this thesis is viewed solely from the point of view of business-to-business markets.

As a researcher, I survey this website renewal project from the perspective of the firm's employee. As a part of my role at the firm's marketing and communications function, I managed the renewal project from the beginning until the launch of the website and continue to update and develop the site after its launch.

During this process I focused on the website development project and at the same time tried to find out what features are important in creating an Internet site that stands out from its competitors in the Finnish market environment. To find answers to my questions I have focused on theories regarding content marketing and content strategy, and brand management.

In this thesis I first present the context in which the study is conducted including the presentation of the firm and a description of the market environment within the Finnish legal industry. I also present the research question of the thesis. Then the thesis moves on to the theoretical framework where I discourse brand management, personal branding, content marketing and website as a marketing channel. I also describe the researched website renewal project and its goals and objectives and continue presenting my observations during the research project. In the final chapters I present my conclusions and recommendations for the further development of the company website researched.

2 Conservative business of trust

In this chapter I describe the context in which the study is conducted. I present the research problem of the thesis, and research settings, methodology and the approach of the research. I also describe the firm where this website renewal project is conducted and the market environment within the corporate legal services field in Finland. Needs and objectives for this thesis are presented at the end of this chapter.

2.1 Research problem

Internet sites are important marketing communication channels for business-to-business firms, including law firms. In my thesis I focus on a company websites content development especially from the viewpoint of a law firm marketing communications. What are the important elements and content on a law firm company website that engages and interests site visitors, and how can a business-to-business company differentiate through the content of its website?

According to Boake and Kathuria (2011, VII) for long, law firms have been able to lead their operations without much regard to transparent and process-based project management, whether it is a client work or internal development process. During the past decade clients have started to demand more structured processes, to be able to better evaluate the value and the pricing of legal services. This demand for efficient project management starts to reflect to law firms' internal processes as well. Developing the project structures is a long-term change process and requires new mind-set in different functions within a law firm.

This thesis is a case study that describes a website development project in a business-to-business company and the research problem is the following:

Managing website development project in a business-to-business company

Sub-problem connected to the main research problem is the following:

What is more important on a law firm's Internet site, the firm and its services or individual lawyers?

2.2 Research setting

Business-to-business markets consist of companies that operate in industrial markets acquiring goods and services from other companies to be used in their business operations (Kotler & Pfoertsch 2006, 20). This thesis work is conducted in a Finnish law firm that practices corporate law, and its clients are other companies from various fields of businesses.

Practicing law is defined as providing specialised professional services to clients. And again professional services can be defined as providing a specific and specialized service through people and that is not based on a tangible product. (Baschop & Piot 2005, 6.)

The firm, where this website renewal project is conducted, has strong position in the Finnish legal services field. It is founded in the late 19th century and is one of the oldest law firms in Finland. The firm employs approximately 80 professionals and is among the biggest law firms in Finland. Many of the firm's clients are international companies that operate in Finland or are opening or acquiring businesses in Finland. The firm serves also domestic businesses from stock listed companies to small and medium enterprises.

The firm provides legal services for other companies with wide expertise. Majority of the firm's matters involve mergers and acquisitions, finance and capital markets transactions, dispute resolution or general corporate law matters. In addition to the aforementioned the firm's practices provide legal services in several other areas, for example employment law and data protection matters. The firm specialises in particularly demanding matters, which require highly specialised professionals.

I work in the firm's marketing and communications function with the responsibility to manage and coordinate the firm's marketing and communication activities. Integrated marketing communications ties together all of the company's promotional mix and media communications messages, so that a consistent brand image and positioning are conveyed (Schultz, Tannenbaum & Lauterborn 1993). In practice the firm's integrated

marketing and communications function supports the firm in its everyday business by providing, for example, marketing communications materials and activities to support business and to help creating business opportunities. Among other things, marketing and communications function is responsible for the company website and in this role I was responsible for managing the firm's website renewal project presented in this study.

2.3 Legal services business environment in Finland

Among the biggest corporate law firms in Finland, business environment in the field of law practices is highly homogenous. Market Research Company Taloustutkimus' annual Business Image research that focuses in legal practices in Finland illustrates the situation. In the research made in 2013 the overall score of the 10 highest ranked law firms varies from 7,82 to 8,30 on a scale from 4 (poor) to 10 (excellent). The overall score represents the average that is formed from all the scores given for a firm in different sections of the research. In Taloustutkimus' research a difference of 0,20 units is seen as significant. The 10 highest ranked firms are actually positioned very close to each other: variance between the firms ranked between 1 and 10 is only 0,48 units. (Taloustutkimus 2013.)

According to a survey conducted by the Finnish Bar Association (Asianajajatutkimus 2012), lawyers are confident towards the business in the field. Majority of the growth in business is seen among the biggest corporate law firms in Helsinki metropolitan area. Competition in Finland comes mainly from the domestic field and the level of competition is anticipated mostly to stay as it is (53 % of the respondents) or to slightly tighten (30 % of the respondents). In Helsinki metropolitan area the biggest competitors are other law firms. Legal services provided by banks, legal aid offices and big accounting and business consulting companies are not considered as big rivals within the industry. (Asianajajatutkimus 2012, 12.)

The business environment in the legal services branch has remained rather stable for years and not even the economic downturn that started around 2008 changed the settings remarkably in Finland. During the past 10 years the biggest corporate law offices

have constantly grown in size and some of them have expanded their office network in Finland and in Nordic and Baltic countries.

However, in the most recent years new development is seen in the field of Finnish corporate law business. Instead of pure organic growth of businesses, there have been some mergers and acquisitions and new law firms have stepped into the corporate law business with significantly different business models compared to the old players. So far the latest shifts in the legal services field have not set off big changes in the business, but they are definitely something to keep an eye on in this traditionally very conservative business branch.

2.4 Codes of conduct in law firm marketing

In the past, law firms' marketing communication has been widely regulated around the world by local laws and local Bar Associations' ethics rules. Although legal marketing has opened for advertising since the 1990's in many countries, it is still regulated to some extent and more importantly, the rather conservative trade tends to follow very subtle ways of marketing. (Dance 2007, 18.) In Finland, law firm marketing has increased during the past ten years, and it has become more open to the public. Law firms do not anymore uphold the mysterious prestige, unless they themselves want to.

The Finnish Bar Association's Code of conduct for lawyers (2009, 15) gives guidance on how attorneys can market their businesses. The code of conduct states, that advertising and other marketing of legal services shall be truthful, appropriate and in compliance with the values of the Bar. And also that a lawyer may with the consent of the client give public statements on matters relating to the client's case. Such communications shall be appropriate, and the publicity may not be used in order to promote the personal interests of the lawyer.

It is often said that law firms are in trust business. Maintaining the trust of clients is essential to law firms in order for them to succeed. The degree of trust a client feels towards the law firm will determine whether he or she will buy the service, Sean Larkan explains in his book *Brand Strategy and Management for Law Firms* (2012, 1).

Law firm sells its expertise in complicated matters, or better to say, its employees' expertise. This is why people are the most important asset of a law firm.

The above mentioned codes of conduct in marketing and the strong trust-factor in the business set some boundaries to the often very conservative legal business and its marketing. It seems that general attitude is 'better to be safe than sorry'. And after all, that is something the law firms offer: safety and assurance, not to mention advise in the situations when something has gone unexpected.

Corporate legal services marketing target group is easy to define but hard to reach because of variety of positions the decision makers represent (Dance 2007, 18). For example only the biggest companies in Finland have legal departments, yet, in-house lawyers are not always involved in legal services buying decisions. The decision makers often are Chief Executive Officers and other executive board members. Other marketing target groups, besides existing clients and prospects, are future employees, that is mainly students, international and domestic law firms, and institutional organizations, such as courts of justice, regulators and trade associations. Also current employees are often counted in as one target group. This wide spread of target groups requires great effort in targeting key messages and content to the right audiences.

2.5 Methodology

This study is a qualitative action research. Qualitative research methods aim to help researchers understand people and their actions (Myers 2013, 5). Action research is one of the qualitative research methods and it aims to find solutions to current practical problems and at the same time generate scientific knowledge. Action research method is often used in studies that aim to develop something in an organization, for example management processes. In action research the researcher collaborates actively with the organization and people who work with the problem under scrutiny. (Myers 2013, 59-60.)

Researcher's standpoint in the research process needs to be clearly pointed out to the audience of the research, so they are able to evaluate and decide what kind of effect

this has to the research and its outcomes. In my research I have many roles, besides being a researcher. I am an employee of the firm where the research is conducted. I am also a project owner of the website renewal because of my position in the firm's marketing communications function; I manage the project and actively participate in it throughout the research. This kind of involvement is typical in action research.

Marketing communications research can be either quantitative or qualitative, or combine both research methods. It is good to remember that research is always guided by the research objectives and perceptions and this steers the selection of the research method. Often, when researching organizational communication, the researcher's interest is in the perspectives of stakeholders, and other people such as employees engaged in the subject. With this kind of perspective, qualitative methods often provide an appropriate approach to understand the subject as something complex, diverse and human, and as it is experienced by people in social and historical context. Qualitative research aims to find and understand perceptions of the research participants from their point of view. Qualitative methods are suitable for research with the aim to gain an in-depth, holistic understanding of the subject in question. (Daymon & Holloway 2011, 3-6.)

Myers describes Susman's and Evered's (1978) model on how the action research process proceeds. Action research can be viewed as a cyclical process that has five phases: diagnosing, action planning, action taking, evaluating and specifying learning. This cyclical action research process is described below in the figure 1. (Myers 2013, 61.)



Figure 1: Model on how the action research project proceeds (adapted from Sussman and Evered, 1978)

I have included the phases of this particular website development project in the model. The first phase is diagnosing the project, it includes the triggers of the project: why this project is needed, it also includes the conception of the final goals of the project: a well functioning website that serves the company’s needs. In planning phase the project goals are defined and the actual project plan is created. In acting phase the project plan is implemented and the actual work to create the website is done. In evaluating phase the final output is being evaluated. The last phase reflects and specifies learning and in this particular project, implements the learning to future development needs of the website and the cycle starts again from the beginning.

In quantitative research the researcher is an investigator looking at the research from a distance, whereas in qualitative approach the researcher is an active observer who sees the research process as a way to generate knowledge together with research participants (Daymon & Holloway 2011, 9). This is exactly the case in my research, where I actively participate in developing the company website through and alongside with my research.

In quantitative research, according to Daymon and Holloway (2011, 9) “the relevance of the researcher is excluded. This ignores how an investigator’s subjectivity influences

both the design of enquiry and the eventual knowledge that is produced. -- Your subjectivity therefore can be a valuable resource in qualitative research, enhancing rather than distorting the credibility of your study.”

Qualitative research has been criticised of being too subjective and lacking transparency, difficult to replicate and hard to generalize in larger context. However, each of these points of critique can also be seen as strengths of qualitative research. The researcher’s subjectivity can bring in-depth knowledge to the research and, hence, be a resource to the research. Due to this risk of high subjectivity, transparent documentation of the data and research process is expected. Like in this thesis work, qualitative research often focuses in a specific setting, and therefore it is very difficult to replicate. It is also difficult to generalize to a wider context; this is why rich data is important in qualitative research, it helps to highlight important factors. (Daymon & Holloway 2011, 10-11.)

Because of this active involvement, I am able to listen carefully individuals’ opinions and to observe very closely the emotional factors this website renewal project awakes within internal stakeholder groups, which I believe, brings in-depth to this research. At the same time this research benefits my work and my own understanding of it, and it also benefits the firm I work for.

I chose this approach because I participate in the company website renewal project both as a project group member and as researcher. In action research the researcher takes an active part in the research and he or she often is a part of the community where the research is conducted. The aim of this research is to develop a company website, find best practices, provide new knowledge and finally to implement findings of the research. The data I collect during the process is based on qualitative research methods, such as, interviews with project stakeholders and employees of the firm, and qualitative surveys, as well as on my personal observation.

2.7 Trigger, goals and objectives

The first phase of action research process is diagnosing the project (Figure 2). In this first phase I include the triggering event that indicated the need for website renewal as well as the goals for the project.

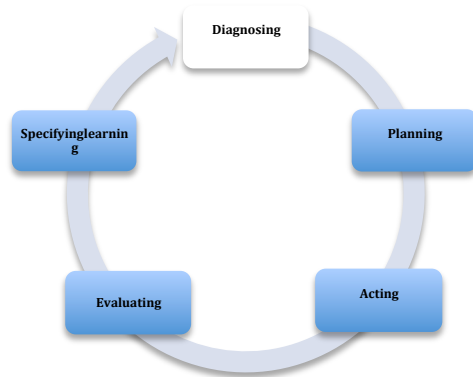


Figure 2: Model on how the action research project proceeds, phase 1: diagnosing

The website of the firm faced technical difficulties due to aging platform and this served as a trigger for website renewal project. The firm's IT and Marketing & Communication functions strongly recommended that the company website should be moved to technically more secure and up-to-date platform and this would be a good time to renew the visuals and content of the site.

The decision to renew the website was justified; the technical platform was old and unsecure, and difficult to update. Secondly, content update for the site was planned to be done in the near future, so there were basically two valid reasons to start the project.

Project goals and objectives define the final outcome of a project. Project goal is the outcome of the project and objectives are the activities needed to reach the goal. Every project must have one or more objectives that define the process. Project objectives have to be clearly communicated to everyone who participates to the project so everyone has the same interpretation of the project and unnecessary conflicts during the project can be avoided. Project objectives need to be specific yet simple, measurable, tangible and verifiable, appropriate level, realistic and attainable, established within resource bounds, consistent with resources available or anticipated, and consistent with organizational plans, policies and procedures. (Kerzner 2013, 296.)

The core team of the website renewal project defined goals and objectives and a preliminary timetable for the project. Project goals were set based on triggers of the project and complemented by goals regarding the quality of content and visual image of the site. Goals were also defined keeping the firm's target audiences in mind that is business-to-business companies' General Counsels and executive management, International law firms, domestic law firms and domestic interest groups, and students and future employees.

Project goals

- Communications channel that provides insightful and useful content for the targeted site visitors (good contact information and useful content for the firm's target groups, e.g. articles and information on seminar events organized by the firm);
- Modern visual image; and
- Technically secure and advanced company website.

Project goals were defined based on the triggers and needs of the firm. Also the firm's target groups were taken into consideration when defining the goals, which is important, since they are the ones who the content is meant for. The defined goals are in line with the firm's long-term strategy and support the firm's goal to be insightful law firm partner for its clients.

The objectives of the project were defined as follows:

- Short term objectives
 - To select the right platform for the site (technically advanced, easily updateable and secure);
 - To define and create logical site hierarchy that supports the goal for quality of the content;
 - To re-write the contents of the site;
 - To renew visual identity for the company website (imagery, colours); and
 - To develop and launch website in given timetable.
- Long-term objectives
 - To create engaging and insightful content that interests firm's target

- groups (easy to navigate, logical site hierarchy, frequently updated content, and easily accessible contact information); and
- To renew visual identity of the firm that will be consistently adopted to all marketing communication materials.

The defined project objectives supported the goals of the project and they are concrete. Goals and objectives also supported the firm's strategy emphasizing communicational and marketing efforts to raise the level of how well the firm is known in the markets.

The renewal process of the company website can be seen as fine-tuning of something that already exists; It addresses and improves the fit between strategy and involves policy and process changes. The process also involves incremental adjustment: relatively modest changes around the organization in the light of external drivers for change and shifting the scale and scope of the operation. (Green 2007, 22.)

During this project, when planning and developing the new website, new visual identity was designed. Internally visual and website renewal was considered as a significant change. Renewed website offers new ways to publish content on the site and hopefully it will encourage the heads of practices to produce content more actively: short news, selected references and testimonials, and newsletters. Finding the firm's key contacts will be made easier than on the previous web-site, this also required a change in mindset, even it is a change that have been requested earlier; The questions that needed to be addressed were who are presented as key contacts and what information is available.

Gap analysis (Table 1) is a tool that helps to identify what needs to be done to meet project's objectives by defining the gap between the current situation and the hoped future state. (MindTools 2013.)

Table 1: Gap analysis of the website renewal project

Future State	Current State	Next actions
Informative company website.	Not enough information available for site visitors (e.g. contact persons for all practices).	Increase and improve the information available on the website and change the mind-set of the professionals: they must be easy to reach.
Engaging and up-to-date company website.	Mainly static information, the updates are mostly short headline news updates on front page.	Developing new processes and mind-set for creating website content, renewing the website's visual image.
Technically up-to-date and stable website.	Technically out-dated and unstable website.	Selecting a new platform for website.

2.8 Project plan

The second phase of action research process is planning of the project (Figure 3). In this phase I defined the project and the tasks that are required to reach the goals and objectives set for the project.

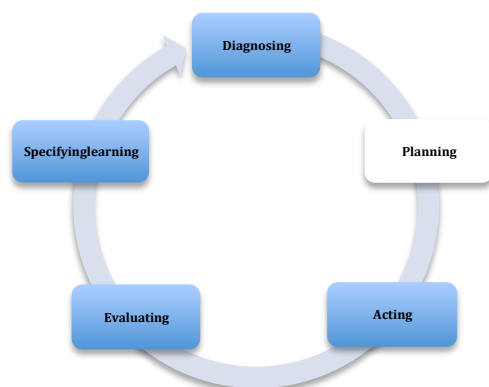


Figure 3: Model on how the action research project proceeds, phase 2: planning

Project plan for the website renewal includes both internal processes and joint processes with advertising agency. No sub-project plans were created, since the project itself is rather short-term and the team involved is small.

First step of this project was to define budget for website renewal and select a suitable advertising agency to design the site. The firm was looking for a long-term advertising agency partner that is able to provide services after the site renewal.

I sent offer requests to several advertising agencies. Received offers were then evaluated by their content and pricing and I met with the most suitable agencies to discuss their offers. After narrowing down potential advertising agencies the project core team met with the agencies. Agency for the project was selected based on their knowledge on web-design.

Budget for the project was drafted at the same time when requesting for offers and it was taken into more details when meeting with the possible advertising agencies. This approach gave me the possibility to finalize budget at the same time as the preliminary project plan was taken into more details when discussing with different agency candidates.

After the advertising agency was selected, we defined the project together and created detailed project plan for website renewal project. This detailed plan included roles of the team, timetable for project, and it defined internal tasks for the firm and joint tasks with the advertising agency, and it also defined technical, content and visual requirements for the site.

Main points of the project plan

- Budget of the website renewal project;
- Selecting advertising agency to develop the site;
- Roles of the team members and people resources for the project (internal and external);
- Timetable for the project (website launched approximately 6 months from starting the project);
- Joint tasks with the advertising agency (definition of work processes, definition

- of the website, timetable for different parts of the project); and
- Internal tasks (content creation, people involved in the project in addition to the core team, internal communication).

2.9 Project definition

The project was conducted by using agile development methods, which means that the product and process evolves and is defined more thoroughly during the project. As defined in the Agile Manifesto, set by international information technology developers, the work methodology highlights the following aspects:

- The highest priority of agile development method is to satisfy customer through early and continuous delivery of valuable software, shorter the timescale, the better;
- Agile development method welcomes changing requirements, even late in development; and
- Agile processes harnesses change for customer's competitive advantage. Client and developers work actively together throughout the project and trust each individual to do their job timely.

(Agile Manifesto 2001.)

I, personally, find this approach beneficial for buyers of information technology projects who often are not familiar with technical aspects of a project. Agile method proved to be a good choice as for the project model of this website renewal project, since possible amendments could easily be made during the process. Also both, the client and the developer knew exactly in what stage the project is, because of active discussion throughout the entire project.

Project steps were defined and documented as follows:

1. Project definition; output: terms of reference
2. Concept design; output: content plan, site map, wireframes for the site, site layout, graphic elements
3. Technical solutions; output: ready-to-use website platform, website editor training and instructions
4. Content creation and import; output: website launch; and

5. Technical support.

Initial timeframe for the actual development part of the website renewal project was 15 weeks, a bit over 3 months. For the whole project from the start with advertising agency to the launch of the site is reserved 6 months altogether.

2.10 Needs and objectives for the thesis

A company website is an important marketing channel for businesses. A website can be seen as a shop window into a business-to-business company's service offerings and brand. It can provide information on the firm, its staff and give a promise to the firm's clients and potential clients. A website aims to differentiate a company from its competitors. Company website represents the firm.

When compared, corporate legal firms and their service offerings are often very similar with each other. This goes to the company websites as well, both in Finland and abroad; the structure of websites is very similar as well as service descriptions and lawyer biographies provided on the sites. The question is how to stand out in homogeneous environment like this?

This research provides important information for the firm on how to create an Internet site that engages site visitors: clients, prospects, students and other interest groups, by creating customer value and stand out from the competitors. It also gives guidelines on how to manage website renewal, and how to maintain and further develop engaging content on the site.

Also, in Finland, there is only a number of studies on business-to-business website communication, and majority of those concentrate on e-commerce and services, or platform solutions, for example Johanna Gummerus' research on customer value in e-service (2011). This thesis will provide new approach to the studies made on business-to-business website communication.

3 The theoretical framework

In this chapter I present the framework of the thesis. I present the theories used in this research and I refer to some recent discussions for example in blogs and other publications related to the subject. I address brand management because a company brand is an essential way to differentiate from competition, and in legal business personal branding has a great impact to the company brand and image. I also cover content strategy and content marketing which have an influence on what the website offers to the site visitors. The aforementioned are the elements that are communicated through the website. At the end of this chapter I focus on more detailed level to the websites role and position as a marketing channel, and website development and design.

3.1 Brand value of professional services firm

The company brand is valuable asset to law firms. Philip Kotler and Waldemar Pfoertsch (2006, 3) define brand as something that facilitates “identification of products, services and business as well as differentiates it from the competition”. They continue, that brands are also “effective and compelling means to communicate the benefits and value a product or service can provide, -- a guarantee of quality, origin and performance, [and] thereby increasing the perceived value to the customer and reducing the risk and complexity involved in the buying decision”. According to them, branding is also “taking something common and improving upon it in ways that make it more valuable and meaningful”.

De Chernatony & al. (2012, 63) define a successful brand as follows: “A cluster of functional and emotional values, which allow an organisation to make a promise about a unique and welcomed experience”.

Sometimes it is argued that business-to-business buying is more rational than consumer buying; yet emotional factors still play an important role in decision-making. Strong brand is really important asset for business-to-business firms. It helps to build relationships with customers and differentiates the firm from its competitors. De Chernatony & al. (2012, 156-157) suggest that managers making the purchase decisions are consid-

ering how the images of the purchased product will reflect upon them personally and, I believe, also how they reflect to the image of the firm they are working for.

Branding is an effective way for a business-to-business firm to differentiate itself from competitors in a field where there are often many firms with a similar service offering. For example legal services provided for corporate clients are very similar from law firm to another, but the firms offering the legal services have different brands. However, it is still a great task to differentiate from others in a way that makes difference to clients and positions the firm just to a right spot.

The importance of intangible assets in business is growing, as De Chernatony & al. (2012, 17-19) present that “it is not factories which make profits but relationships with customers; and it is company and brand names which secure these relationships”. A successful brand has a name, design that identifies it, and it has proven results in superior profit and market performance. Financial brand value “measures the price premium the brands can command over their competitors and the earnings attributable to the brands strength” (Kotler & Pfoertsch 2006, 196).

In business-to-business professional services field customer relationships play important role in business. Since the product that the firm sells to its clients is intangible the marketing of the product also lies on intangible assets such as the firm’s ability to maintain and develop client relationships, the firm’s reputation, and its brand.

Brand is a representation of what clients and other external parties think of the firm. And these ‘others’ are influenced by what the law firm offers to the market, for example, its lawyers, services, the firm’s infrastructure, the quality of service, client satisfaction etc. A firm must ensure it offers quality to the market. If the experience of the firm is good, it will start building trust and, eventually, a strong brand. This cycle can continue and enhance the brand and, over time, improve the value of the brand. However, brands can change and they are adaptable, this means that brands require constant attention and discipline. Figure 4 presents how a brand is established. (Larkan 2012, 3.)

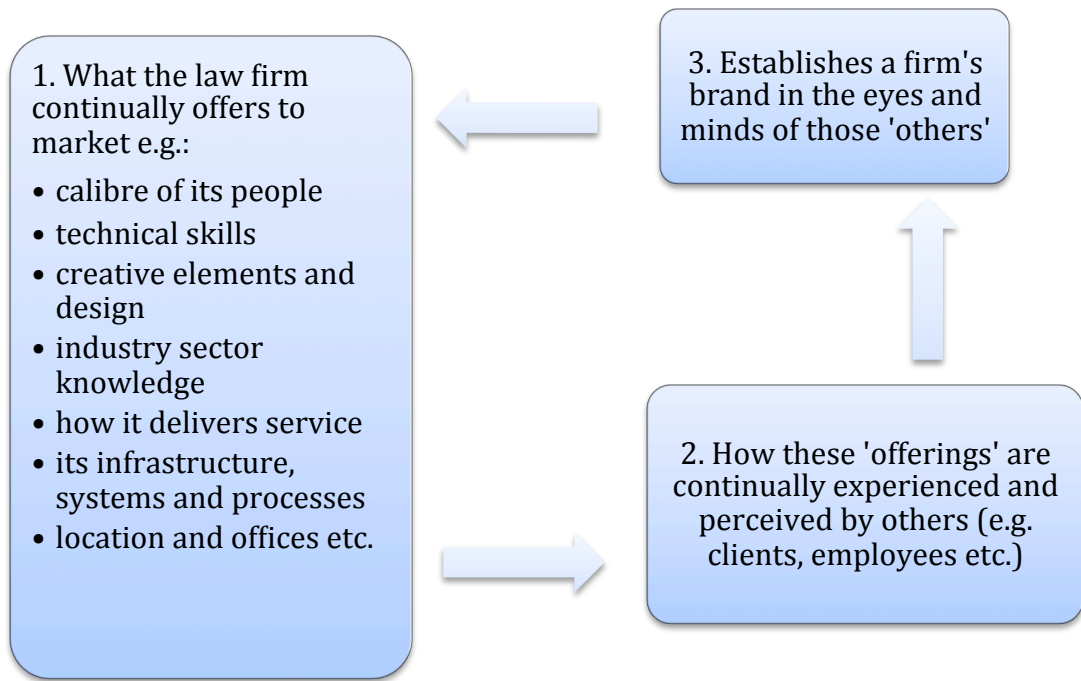


Figure 4: How a brand is established – the continuous evolutionary brand cycle (Larkan 2012, 3)

Thomson Reuters' and Hubbard One's survey to the Global General Counsels, the chief lawyers of organizations, researched how firms can use targeted content to engage new clients and maintain current client relationships. According to the survey, law firm's reputation in the marketplace is crucial as most General Counsels ask for recommendations and referrals from trusted sources when looking to select a law firm. (Peekna & Bullett 2012, 11.)

The product that a law firm sells is professional service, which is often unique and case dependent. The final outcome and quality of specialised service that law firms provide is not always possible to be evaluated beforehand. To clients professional services entail great possibilities and, on the other hand, great risks and the outcome of the service is not always imminent. In marketing legal services the aim is to convince the client on the firm's expertise in handling legal matters. (Sipilä 2000, 2-6.)

Company brand, image and reputation play significant role in professional services marketing in legal business. It is important that the company brand is visible on the law firm website as well.

The reputation of law firms is a good business for some international media houses that focus on the niche market ranking the law firms. These rankings are published annually and they are typically based on questionnaires sent to law firms' clients and data gathered from the law firms. Successful law firms often use this ranking information in marketing purposes for example on their websites.

The value of a brand comes from the fact that clients base purchasing decisions around their perception of a law firm's brand (Larkan 2012, 2). Larkan explains that, in deciding which law firm to use, clients take into account a large number of variables and attributes comprising the firm's brand and how potential clients 'feel' about the firm before making a decision to use a firm. Emotions are an important factor in decision-making and they lead people to action. A strong and compelling corporate brand adds a sense of continuity and, hence, reduces the risk involved in a complex buying process (Kotler & Pfoertsch 2006, 58, 81).

The firm's brand is not determined by the firm itself or its personnel but by others including existing and potential employees, clients and other parties. To some extent, brand is out of the direct control of a firm. If a law firm recognises its brand and the value of it, and the brand is properly strategized and managed it can efficiently differentiate one firm from another. (Larkan 2012, 2.)

But how to differentiate a product or, in this case, a law firm service, from other providers who have similar service offering? Because the needs and expectations of the clients often are similar, altering the service offering is not the key unless the firm wishes to concentrate on certain niche market.

De Chernatony & al. (2012, 19) present the importance of a strong brand as follows: A genuine brand provides added brand values and customers believe that the product:

- is reliable,
- is the best,
- is something that will suit them better than product x; and
- the product is designed with them in mind.

Successful brand has to be earned by investing in service the firm offers so it meets the needs of clients and matches their emotional needs by providing concrete and rational benefits – in other words, added value. In short, brand is a promise. It is also something that is reflected in everything the company and its employees do or do not do, and this makes it hard to manage. Brand requires constant attention.

3.2 Personal branding

For law practices individual “star lawyers” are important, whether the firms wish to emphasise them or not. Individual lawyers make an impact to the whole company image, since they are the ones who win lawsuits in courts, provide impeccable solutions to matters at hand or otherwise give insightful advice, and they represent the professional expertise of the company. Thus, people brands have an impact to the business.

Nicola Laver has come to this same conclusion about the importance of people brands within legal industry in her book addressing legal marketing and website strategy. She states that people respond emotionally to other humans and placing individual lawyer profiles on a law firm website is a good strategic decision to make. She also indicates that lawyer profiles are among the most visited pages in many law firm websites. (Laver 2012, 15.)

Very often law practices are partnerships which means that individuals make an agreement to cooperate and agree to share the business profits, losses and risks. Partners are the owners of the firm. Traditionally the partners of the firms always have had strong personal brands. Today personal brands are more easily enhanced and even built through social media regardless the status of the individual.

Since the law business is very strongly based on trust, lawyers’ personal brands have great value in the business; for example, often in partner moves there are clients that follow the partner (lawyer) to a new firm because they value and trust the lawyer’s expertise and wish to continue to work with him or her instead of staying with their current law firm. Larkan (2012, 71) states that through building a strong client following,

the partner who has a strong personal brand makes a significant contribution to the firm's well-being and strength. The more partners there are who build strong personal brands, the stronger the firm will be.

I think it is also important to remember that the personal brands should be aligned with the firm's vision, strategy and brand. Otherwise this might lead to inconsistency with the firm brand, and after all, the partnership should benefit all of its members.

People are one of the most valuable assets of a law firm. Therefore the employees should be considered as an important target group of a law firm marketing. They should also feel ownership of the firm brand in order for them to live by it. In this context, the personnel, whether the individual is an employee or a partner in a firm, forms a co-operative partnership when they work for joint purpose. Each member of the personnel also acts as a brand ambassador who transmits the brand image of the firm in every encounter with the target groups.

Finnish journalist, Saska Saarikoski (2011) has studied journalists' personal brands in his research in Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. In a context of personal branding there are similarities between professional services field and journalism. Some individuals can achieve certain status and awareness among their audiences that brands them as a person and a professional over the organization they work for.

Saarikoski (2011, 36) names social media as a powerful tool in today's personal branding: "By the force of their [journalists] talent and personality, skilful use of social media and industrious self-promotion they have made themselves strong personal brands -- Social media favours individuals over institutions."

"Newspapers need character and personality. And that's where people come in." Saarikoski writes (2011, 52). In my opinion this applies also for professional services, including law firms. People make the business easier to approach; they make complex business easier to understand when they interpret it to the audiences in seminar events, articles or through social media – and at the same time they make themselves familiar

to their audiences and brand themselves. People also give faces and character to a firm and on their behalf build the brand of the company.

Saarikoski states that individual employees and employer should openly discuss the aspects of personal branding and together build a personal branding strategy that serves both, the individual and the organisation. However, the ownership of personal brand has to be on the individual, otherwise the brand is not authentic and lacks personality. Also it is good to remember that an individual with a valuable personal brand might someday leave the firm, so it's better to keep the personal brands happy than to push boundaries. (Saarikoski 2011, 56.)

Business consultants Kati Keronen and Katri Tanni state in their book about content strategy that personal brands benefit both, the employee and the firm. Today, personal brands are often built and maintained via social media channels such as LinkedIn and Twitter. Through employees' personal brands and their contact networks a firm can expand its networks and awareness within target groups. Personal brands help to make the firm approachable and make it more interesting (Keronen & Tanni 2013, 34).

Social media is a brilliant tool for personal branding. By being active, participative, and a source for good content and perhaps even thought provoking ideas, one can build him or herself a personal brand and even achieve a thought leader status. I see this as an interesting opportunity for both individual lawyers and law firms to enhance their brands and support each other in brand building.

3.3 Content marketing

Marketing is changing; traditional push marketing which emphasizes one-way marketing communications such as TV-commercials and telemarketing to reach the target audiences is losing its effectiveness and is even starting to annoy the audiences. Today businesses and knowledge is specialising in small niches and the clients' need for information is increasing. Also, audiences are more scattered and use various different media channels, such as newspapers, television, and the Internet, which makes it harder to reach the right targets through impersonal mass communication. The importance

of interesting, wanted and valuable content in marketing communications is increasing. And clients value most the one who can provide insightful advice to guide through complexity. (Keronen & Tanni 2013, 10-15.)

Content marketing is a form of marketing communication that is based on creating and broadcasting content that engages, educates and connects people with the aim to create and maintain customer relationships. Customer communications can be transmitted via different channels such as print media, brochures or the Internet. Content marketing is an effective way for professional services firm, such as law practice, to demonstrate its expertise to clients. In itself content marketing is not a new thing but, because of the Internet as an easy-to-access communication channel, the meaning of content has been taken into a new level. The content that is being communicated can be delivered in different forms for example through articles, newsletters, blogs, microsites, FAQs, presentations, podcasts, videos and social media (Matthews & Furlong 2013, 5).

In business-to-business field, marketing is addressed to carefully targeted people, who are very time-constrained. Competition within the field of professional services firms is basically competition over clients' time and attention. This leads to that marketers need to be more involved in the client's strategy in order to be able to offer added value to them also in their marketing efforts. (De Chernatony & al. 2012, 156.)

Today anyone can easily create and distribute content via Internet in various ways and the amount of content on the web is vast. Law firms publish articles and other content to support the sales of legal services by demonstrating the expertise of the firm and its lawyers to attract attention of clients (Matthews & Furlong 2013, 6). Managing the content and its distribution is important in order to use it effectively in marketing. Efficient content strategy helps a firm to manage the content and target it to desired audiences, otherwise the efforts of providing content are easily lost. Content strategy connects the content to the firm's strategy. It defines the goals of delivering the content and its audience, the ways of creating and distributing the content, and the measurement of the achieved outcomes. Most of all, content strategy keeps the content marketing of a firm consistent. (Matthews & Furlong 2013, 1; Keronen & Tanni 2013, 10.)

Thomson Reuters' and Hubbard One's survey to the Global General Counsels (Peekna & Bullett 2012, 11) focused mainly on content delivered via law firm websites. According to them demonstration of expertise, including reputation and referrals, is information that potential clients are looking for. Most useful communication methods with law firms among General Counsels are e-mail alerts, industry briefings and seminars, industry reports, and whitepapers and webinars. Extranet and other web portals, blogs and video material is not considered very useful. However, many business-to-business websites that I have browsed during the website renewal project, suggest that video content is gaining popularity even in business-to-business field. Taking into account how fast web technologies are developing and web user behaviour is changing, I see video as potential rising star among content marketing channels. For example many international business-to-business professional services firms already provide short informational videos highlighting topical issues within the branch or present webinars, web seminars, for their audiences.

When asked about most utilized social media channels, General Counsels use most law firms or lawyers' blogs. Professional business social media platform LinkedIn is also popular channel. Podcasts and videos are mentioned as third and also social media platform Google+ and Youtube have some importance as a social media channel among General Counsels. (Peekna & Bullett 2012, 12). Today Google Inc. owns online video service Youtube. This might bring some synergies in increase of video content in law firm business communication. I find surprising that Facebook is not mentioned among the most utilized social media channels. This might result from the fact that Facebook is more focused on personal connections in private life, not in business connections. Facebook is used among business-to-business firms but often the company pages are targeted for example to students as future employees.

Keronen and Tanni (2013, 14-15) present some key points in business-to-business firms' online content marketing strategy:

- Specialized knowledge-intensive content targeted to strategically important client segments;
- Wider spectre of measures: changes in site visitor profile and engagement, importance of (online) content in sales opportunities;

- Online content tells how the firm understands the needs of its clients to help them to enhance and focus on their business;
- Key message for the strategically important client segments is insightful knowledge;
- Valuable, well targeted and thought provoking content;
- Content consistency throughout the channels supports sales opportunities and benefit existing clients; and
- Shift from marketing campaigns to holistic and strategic sales support.

What is it then that business clients are looking for from a law firm websites? For General Counsels the most important features when selecting a law firm are legal experience and expert knowledge of a client company's sector and industries. Brand reputation and the firm's efficiency in managing legal matters are also important. Pricing is relevant, however, it often is case sensitive and thus it would be hard to present comprehensible on a website. (Peekna & Bullett 2012, 6.)

Content marketing increases the importance of a firm's online channels, such as company website and social media channels, and connects them consistently together. This also relates to the lawyers' personal branding in social media, which is discussed in chapter 3.2, and ties it to the firm's content marketing strategy.

3.4 Website – the marketing channel of choice

Company website is the main marketing channel for Finnish law firms, according to the Finnish Bar Association's 'Asianajajatutkimus 2012' survey. The survey shows that big law firms (over 20 lawyers) use regularly other marketing activities, such as e-newsletters, seminars and events in their marketing – in other words, content marketing. Besides the company websites, other digital channels, such as social media and web-banner advertisements, seem to be gaining space in the firms marketing. However these outlets still form a rather small sector in the marketing mix. Traditional print advertising, which has never been very popular among the legal practices in Finland, is declining. (Asianajajatutkimus 2012, 17.)

Personal face-to-face communication, such as meetings or seminars, is an important means of maintaining client relationships within business-to-business industries but it is also a rather expensive way of communication. One reason for companies to use websites for business communication is that it is cheaper than other communication tools. Website communication is not remarkably labour intensive and it is relatively inexpensive for example compared to printed brochures. One of the website assets for companies is that they are easy to maintain and keep up-to-date and they offer a possibility to efficiently reach a wide audience. (Golik Klanac 2008, 29)

According to the Thomson Reuters' and Hubbard One's survey (Peekna & Bullett 2012, 8), General Counsels value fast and straightforward access to relevant information on law firm websites. This is only natural, since in business interaction, information exchange is one of the core processes (Golik Klanac 2008, 23). As presented in Table 2, the most important features of a website are clear and usable navigation, relevant and valuable content, and quick and easy search function on the website. Interactive user experience and attractive visual design are not considered as important features on a website among General Counsels.

Table 2: Most important features of a law firm website (Peekna & Bullett 2012)

Clear and usable navigation	34%
Relevant and valuable content	31%
Quick and easy searches for information	29%
Interactive user experience	2%
Visually attractive design	1%

Most often viewed sections of a website, according to the study for Global General Counsels (Peekna & Bullett 2012, 9), are staff and lawyer profiles, practice areas and service offerings, legal experience, and contact information (Figure 5). All this information they look for from a website is rather static and basic information on a firm and its staff. Content marketing materials, such as news and publications, blogs, and events and seminars play a very small part in this picture. However, they are not often the content that a site visitor specifically aims to find when first navigating to the site, but might be found useful when browsed further on a website. Websites that enable

content individualization, that is wikis or extranets where a user can log in and get customized content based on his or hers interests, awake mixed emotions among General Counsels. They feel that providing personal details in order to log in and customize the content is too time consuming and intrusive and they felt that the content would not be useful. They are also worried about data security of the site.

In my opinion content individualization features on a website depend on a stage of business relationship. When a client relationship is formed and it is on-going, extranet services might be a part of client service and serve as a database related to the client relationship, offering real time information on matters and invoicing, and other valuable content tailored to the exact needs of a customer. Without client relationship highly customized content is easily too time consuming for both potential clients and a law firm.

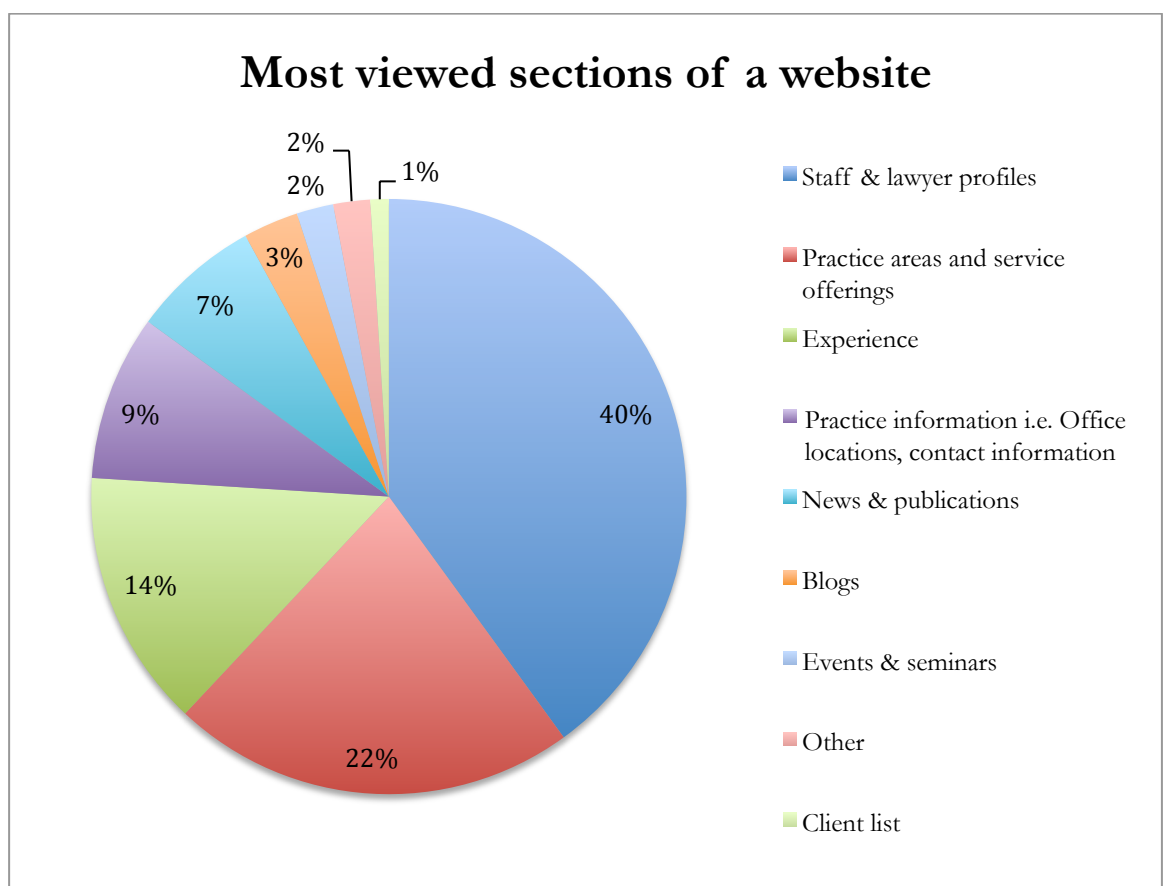


Figure 5: Most often viewed sections of a law firm website (Peekna & Bullett 2012).

Even the General Counsels do not consider website's visual design as an important feature in the aforementioned study, it does not mean that it is insignificant in brand-wise. The study quotes one of the respondents who says "It does give you the comfort that this company has the resources to put into their website; they care about their reputation" (Peekna & Bullett 2012, 14). Brand is a valuable asset to every firm, and everything the firm does or does not do influences it. A company website is one of the many tools for building a company brand; it provides a visible and very public image of the firm. (Larkan 2012, 86.) A website is also very visual element of a company's brand, and it should be designed according to the company's visual guidelines. A powerful and consistent visual image builds a company a long-lasting image that connects customers with the brand (Kotler & Pfoertsch 2006, 99). Company website, and especially the home page, is often the place to make a great first impression. This impression determines whether the site visitor stays on the site and browses further.

Law firms' business landscape has changed during the past decade, among others, because of reduced marketing restrictions, globalization, and worldwide recession that begun in 2008. According to Robert Algeri (2011), a web consultant specialised in law firm marketing, law firm websites are going through some significant changes due to this changed business landscape. He expects law firm websites to 1) become more important in business development; 2) provide more content; and 3) focus more on lawyers' personal brands.

I believe, the above mentioned will lead law firms websites to become important brand tools and publishing platforms for different types of content. Websites will become hubs directing site visitors to and fro other communication channels that the firm uses, such as social media platforms. Website can also be active two-directional platform for building and maintaining relationships by linking it to social media channels or internal discussion forums. At the moment, from my experience law firms are not using their websites very efficiently, or innovatively, as content repositories or hubs to other sources of professional content.

A business-to-business website can be harnessed to attract and inform all the company's target groups and to create, maintain and develop client relationships. The oppor-

tunities that the Internet offers to branding is vast, yet it appears that not many business-to-business companies have grasped these opportunities. A website that only presents the firm and lists its services is not particularly engaging. According to Kotler and Pfoertsch, the Internet is “one of the most important sources for collecting information and reference material”. Decision makers prefer to search products and services online. (Kotler & Pfoertsch 2006, 141; Keronen & Tanni 2013, 47.)

A company website can enable a one-to-one brand experience with every site visit, and the benefits of providing an emotional experience to the visitors can be notable. According to Kotler and Pfoertsch (2006, 142–144) “-- emotional appeal combined with relevant and interesting content is -- the most important component to capture a visitor to a website”. I find the idea of an emotional appeal of a business-to-business website very intriguing, since the world of business-to-business interactions is very often perceived as cold, formal and fact-based. However, these conceptions do not exclude emotions or interesting and valuable content, which, I believe the business-to-business website visitors would be pleased to find.

A good website is powerful marketing channel. Laver (2012, 6) refers to Adam L. Stock’s writing about using technologies in ‘Marketing the Law Firm’. Stock lists some questions to evaluate technologies that can facilitate law business. Technology should help firms to win new clients and increase business with existing ones. It can help building brand presence and deliver better service and this way also help to differentiate from competitors. More and more people use the Internet via their mobile devices, such as mobile phones and tablets, this is why responsive design should be implemented when designing a website. Website’s responsiveness means that the site adapts to the resolution of the device that it is viewed from and the user experience is pleasant whether the site is viewed from a small screen of a mobile phone or from a desk top computer. (Algeri, D. 2013.) When evaluating a website in this light it certainly is a powerful and strategically important marketing platform.

As Kotler and Pfoertsch (2006, 141) say “The possibilities in the online world are almost unlimited.”

3.5 Website content strategy – what’s in it for me?

What makes an engaging website content for a business-to-business firm? According to Keronen and Tanni the key is providing insightful knowledge via valuable content that answers clients’ needs: “customer experience online is a combination of the encounters, impressions and affections that a client forms of the firm based on the content provided by the firm” (Keronen & Tanni 2013, 60). A firm needs to understand what is important to its clients, prospects and other target groups and what they are looking for from the firm’s website. When the firm knows its target groups’ needs, it can create web content that engages them. (Safko & Brake 2009, 141.)

Instead of designing a website that merely tells about the firm and its services, the site should tell how the firm can help and provide insightful advice to its client. It is important to think and create the content from the client’s point of view. The firm should also define the audiences that a website is targeted for in the first place and create the content keeping that target in mind. Trying to create a website content for everyone, eventually serves no one’s interests.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, company websites become hubs that are both content repositories and they lead site visitors to other channels of information. These other sources can be the firm’s own channels, for example in social media or links to external information sources, for example partners or institutions within the industry that may provide valuable information to target groups. The media channels of a firm can also be designed keeping different audiences in mind, for example the firm’s Facebook profile can be primarily targeted for students.

In their content strategy book Keronen and Tanni (2013, 53) state that the visual image and the imagery of a website should support and visualise the textual content and show the outcome of working with the firm. This again is creating the content from the client’s point of view; besides using elaborative info graphics, background imagery could represent environment that is familiar to client; for example picture of a construction site on a background for real estate law or airplanes or other vehicles for transportation matters. However, in the business-to-business professional services industry, this ap-

proach is not necessarily always very elaborative. Keronen and Tanni suggest that showy brand building imagery is irrelevant when it comes to content strategy. I am convinced this is the case, in content-wise they are not relevant. However, sometimes it might be difficult to find relevant and concrete imagery for every occasion for a business that operates with immaterial issues, such as law. Though, imagery should be carefully selected to avoid clichés. I see that consistent, brand supporting imagery benefits content strategy and enhance the overall web experience.

Visual identity is formed from brand elements such as name, logotype and slogan and they should reflect the brand essence, brand personality, and corporate culture of the business. Visual identity of a brand should be long-term and consistent, and clearly defined in visual guidelines so it is easy to implement. A consistent visual identity reduces the risk of diluting or weakening the brand. (Kotler & Pfoertsch 2006, 92.)

User experience, that is, how easy it is to navigate and find the right content on the website, is important on any Internet site. If the visitor can't find easily what he or she is looking for, there are other service providers to turn to. According to Keronen and Tanni (2013, 62) user experience design often starts from using common sense and reflecting real life situations (e.g. meetings with a client) to a website context. Content design is planning client's actions and leading it. Good content leads client forward on the site. Customer research will bring some valuable insights to the matter, however it is not necessary in order to create good user experience. Often, discussing about the web content with sales people or those who really work with the clients helps to get reflections from clients' needs, according to Keronen and Tanni.

From my view, Keronen and Tanni's suggestion to approach the client responsible can be a two-headed sword. It provides a seemingly easy way to gather information on what is interesting content to clients. But it also requires great in-depth knowledge of the business and good marketing communication skills to facilitate and interpret the client responsible's views into customer needs. I think, in highly specialized professional services field the professional's point of view is closer to the firm's point of view on what they believe is what client needs instead of what the client feels that he or she

needs. The view of needs might be the same for both, but clients might express it differently, and here wording is the key.

Any aforementioned efforts are useless if the website is hard to find through Internet search engines. People use Internet search engines to find information. A company website has to be easy to find from the colossal amount of information on the Internet. People use search engines, such as Google or Bing, to find sites that match certain keywords, for example “data protection, legal services”. Search engine optimisation (SEO) helps to position the website so it matches the searches. (Kotler & Pfoertsch 2006, 144.) Today, the importance of key words has declined because search engines browse key words directly from the site content, and this makes the wording of the content even more important. It should be readable for both, clients and search engines; you have to decide whom to bow.

3.5.1 Wireframe

Wireframe is a content and structure map of a website (Figure 6). It is used to illustrate and define site structure and how text and images are placed on the website. This is important part when designing user experience since it shows on paper how the website structure works and that the content is logically placed on the site.

Wireframe also serves as a plan for visual design of the website. In addition to website structure, wireframes can demonstrate visual layout of the site (Figure 7) where all the elements of the page are placed as they would appear on actual website.

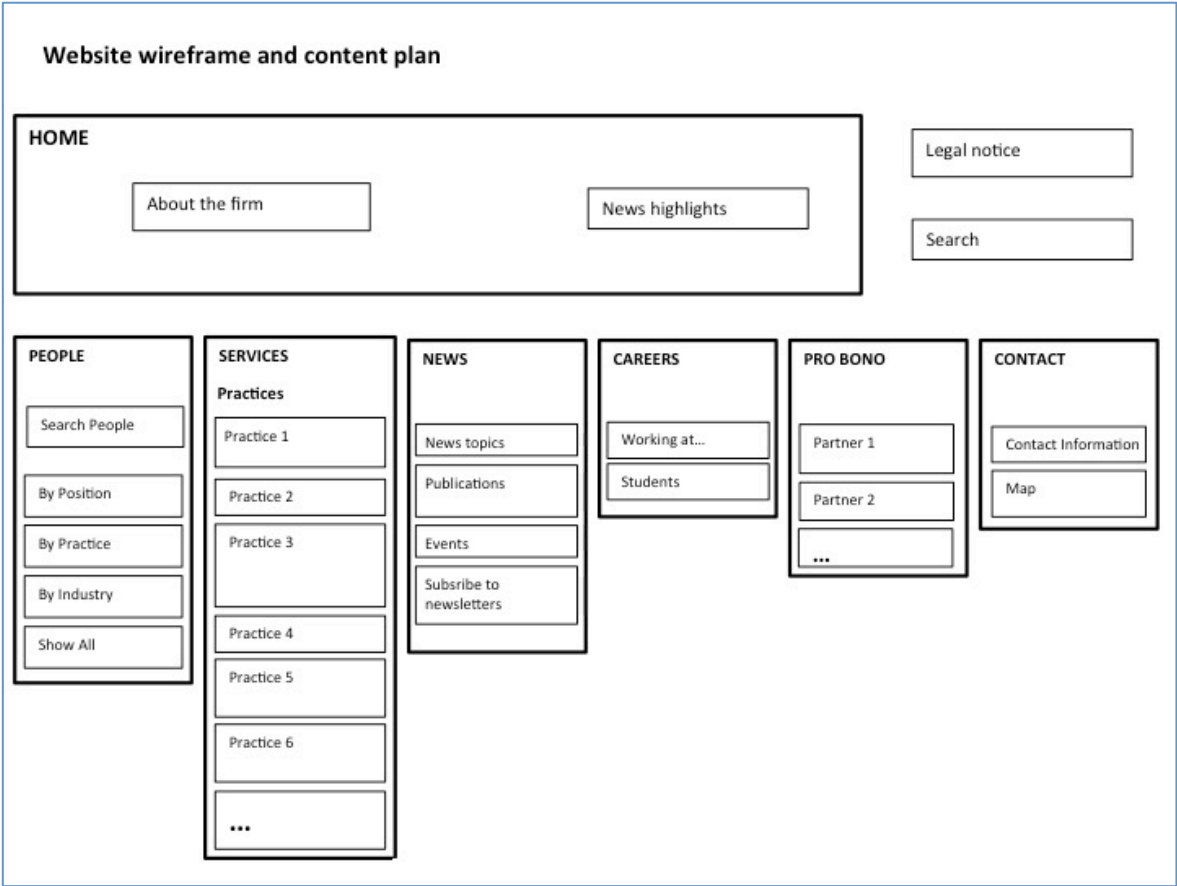


Figure 6: Model of a website wireframe

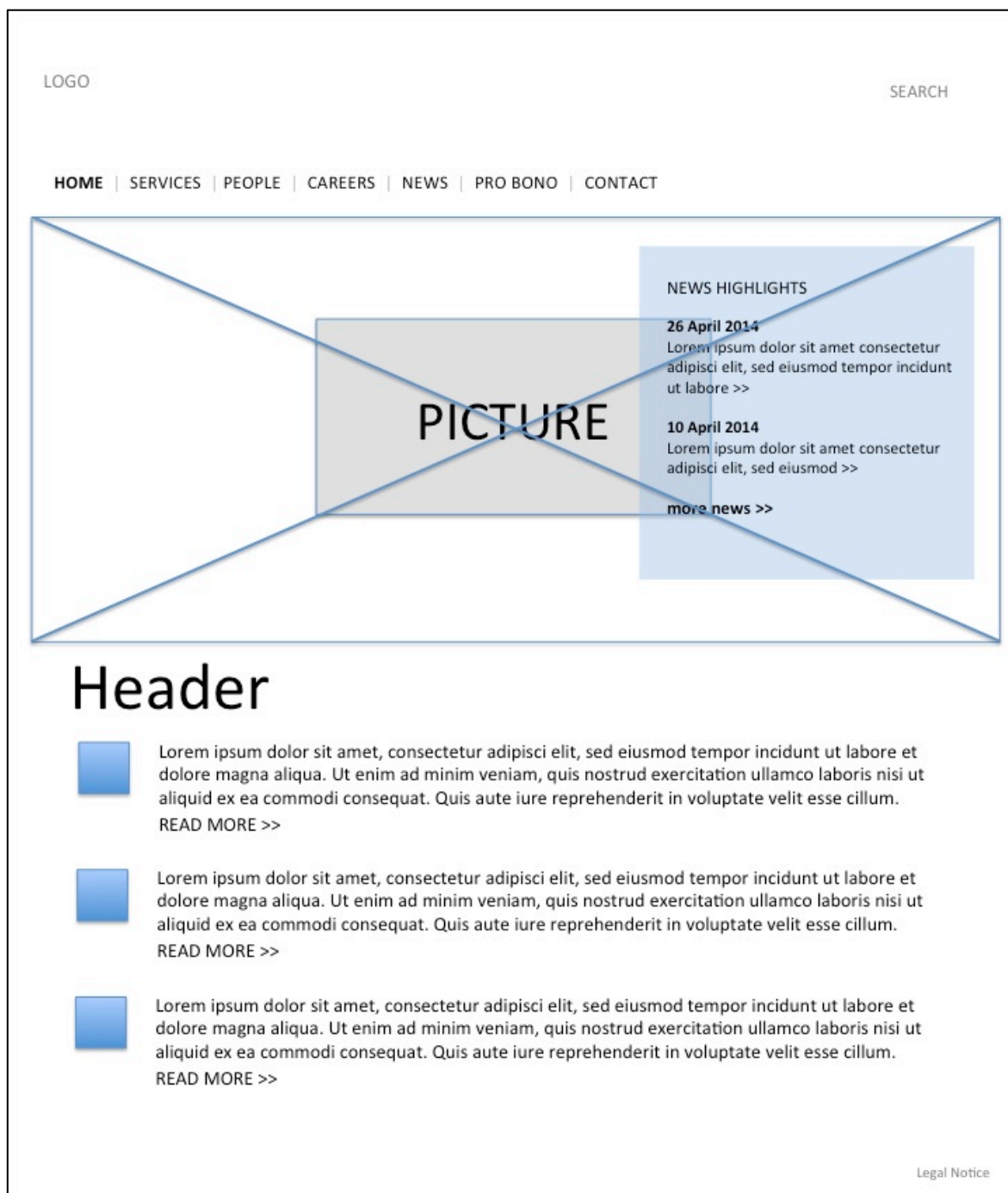


Figure 7: Model of a visual website wireframe

3.6 Good website content in brief

Relevant website content is essential for the firm in order to engage its audiences. What is good content depends on the context and what is the audience that a firm aims to reach. For example students and future employees are different audience from General Counsels looking for information from possible law firms to hire. However, it is possible to sum up some key points for good website content.

Good website content is

- Easy to find: it has general awareness within target groups, and it is referred to within networks either by the firm's personnel or other people, and the content is designed so it is easily search engine optimised;
- Differentiative: it presents the business from a different angle than the competitors, and it provides answers to questions the site visitor is looking to find;
- Engaging through affectivity and convincingness: even a business-to-business website content can create affections by providing convincing and useful content to the site visitors. Engaging content can be supported by various channels (e.g. social media or blogs) that are targeted to different audiences but are consistent with each other; and
- It leads the client: the site visitor finds easily the information he or she is looking for and perhaps new questions emerge, a good website offers links to related content that might interest the visitor and it guides the visitor to action. Depending on case and branch of the firm, this action can be a sales order via e-commerce platform, direct contact to a professional via website or providing valuable content that leads to re-visits to the site.

Through its website business-to-business company strengthens its position within current clients and builds awareness within new strategically important prospects. This is why a company website should be align with the firm's strategy.

4 Conducting the project

In this chapter I describe the process of website development especially from the viewpoints of content creation. I also describe how the research data was gathered as the project proceeded. This is the acting phase of the action research project (Figure 6).

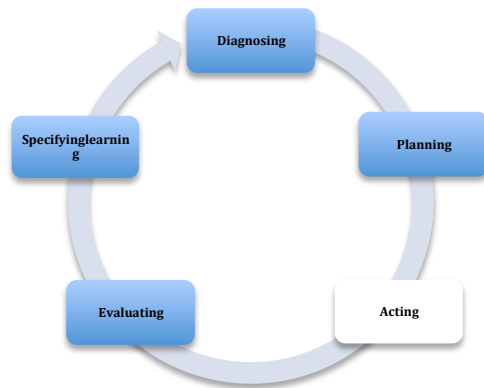


Figure 8: Model on how the action research project proceeds, phase 3: acting

4.1 Project team and data collection

The execution of the project started by gathering an internal team to lead the website renewal project. The core team involved three people. The Marketing and Communications function was the project owner and I, as the responsible for the website, acted as project manager for renewal project. Two partners of the firm were also involved during the whole project providing important information on the industry as well as insights from the firm's point of view.

I felt that it was important to engage the whole firm in the project to ensure the best possible outcome and to create a positive hype towards the website renewal. As the project proceeded other employees of the firm were included in different phases of the project, for example IT functions contributed their knowledge on technical issues and the lawyers and staff members were involved when relevant. However the core team was responsible for the overall project.

This project team, partners of the firm and personnel served as target groups for my data collection throughout the research process. During this project I conducted face-

to-face interviews, group discussions and surveys with the respondents group. Also the work and discussions with the project team provided me a lot of information on how a company website should be designed.

4.2 Benchmarking

Before the actual website development started, the website team browsed through different websites to find out what we like, what works in practice and how the content is presented. After drafting the project plan this was the first actual step towards the development of the new company site.

The team benchmarked both Finnish and foreign law firm's websites and also some other business-to-business professional services firm's sites. These benchmarks provided insight on what content our peers provide on their websites, and how their websites look and feel. We also visited some consumer brand's websites to find inspiration. Altogether the website team actively benchmarked around 20 business-to-business professional services websites.

What I noticed is that many of the business-to-business websites look and feel very similar. The navigation and content does not differentiate sites. Some firms used colours and imagery in a way that it differentiates them from others, such as strong or surprising colours like pastels or hand drawn visual elements; however, some of them created mixed messages and even compromised the credibility of the firm if the messages and imagery were not coherent. There are firms that have very advanced and exemplary websites, however, a "generic corporate site" is a good definition to most of the sites benchmarked.

In visual website design business-to-business companies often seek to reflect professionalism, credibility and performance. However, it seems that very often this leads to imagery and colours that reflect distance, non-humane aspects and even intimidation. Images present companies' office spaces; in many cases there are no people in pictures and colours are dark. However, navigation bars are usually well designed so they are

easy to browse and use. On the sites where people were present in the pictures, especially on home page, the feeling of the site was more inviting and accessible.

On business-to-business websites news and articles highlighting firm's services and professionalism are typically presented both on home site and on separate news section. Some firms provide topical news content regularly and more often than others. Regularly updated news and articles makes the site feel more active and interesting. Well-designed headlines and lead paragraphs increase attractiveness of the content and encourage browsing further.

Many of the benchmarked firms present their staff on the websites and it seems that those firms consider staff profile on their site as one of the most important features. Technical quality of this section is important. While browsing the benchmarked sites, I noticed that some of the people galleries were very easy to navigate and visually enjoyable. Most of them also had short presentations of the personnel. It is important that the site visitor easily finds contact information that he or she is looking for and depending on the need also further information on the person.

Videos, sounds or picture effects are not widely used on the business-to-business website. However, these elements are often used on consumer product websites to get attention, create atmosphere and to bring content to the site. During this project I have noticed that video content is going to increase on business-to-business sites. Today videos are easy to make and modern website technology and external services, such as YouTube or Vimeo, makes it easy to upload and link video material to the Internet. Business-to-business firms seem to be very careful with any content that they think might compromise their credibility. In my opinion, as long as the content is strategically executed, it will not diminish credibility of the company. This goes for the substance videos as well as elements that create atmosphere, such as sounds, if they support the strategy in content or brand-wise.

Many of the benchmarked firms have LinkedIn profiles and some of them use also Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. From these social media channels LinkedIn, which is profiled as professional social media channel, is most widely used among law firms.

Social media, however, is not often promoted or actively connected with the company website and thus often lacks of content coherence.

As described in chapter 3.4, business-to-business companies' are often missing their opportunity to use company websites as an active and engaging marketing channel. Very few corporate websites had video content or actively directed site visitors to their other channels, such as social media profiles.

Features that stood out from the benchmarked websites were coherent, versatile and useful content combined with pleasant user experience. For example great visual outlook of the website is not important if the site does not provide engaging content such as up-to-date news and interesting articles. It seems, that with a good content strategy a well designed company website provides a great possibility to differentiate a firm from the competitors and also enhance the brand.

4.3 Research interviews and group discussions

One important group to involve to the project was the partners of the firm. Partners own the firm and in this context, one could say, they own the brand of the firm. Two of the internal project team members are partners and they could provide me reflections from partners' attitudes and expectations towards this project. However, as members of the project team, they were somewhat subjective to the matter and it was essential for the project to consult all the partners during the project.

I first mapped partners' attitudes and expectations towards the website renewal by interviewing five of them. Partners were selected so that they represent both, the whole firm's viewpoint and also practice (firm's service areas) focused views. Semi-structured interviews with partners were conducted in the early website design phase to map what are the fundamental elements and messages that the website should include. Interviews were conducted in Finnish, since it is the working language in the firm.

The interview questions were following:¹

1. What kind of message and image of the firm you wish the website provides to the site visitors?
2. What are the things that should especially be emphasized on the website?
3. What kind of emotion towards the firm should the site visitor have after visiting our website?
4. What added value you would like our website to provide to the site visitors?
 - a. Clients;
 - b. Prospects; and
 - c. Students.

Group discussions with partners were held before the construction of the site started. I called up “partner clinics” to inform and consult the partners about the website project. These discussions also guided the decisions regarding content and visual image of the site. Altogether I held two partner clinics, each focusing on different topic regarding the website renewal. The topics for the clinics were selected based on their importance regarding the website project in whole. In the partner clinics I presented the website team’s proposal for the final outcome of the certain part of the project, otherwise the discussions were unstructured and participants were free to bring up any thoughts regarding the topic. Information received through these forums was valuable and it often reflected rather freely partners’ thoughts towards the issues at hand.

First topic to discuss was the structure of the website (wireframe), that defines the content and navigation on the site. I presented the model for the website structure designed together by the advertising agency and our internal website team. This was important topic since the wireframe model is a blueprint of a website and everything on the site will be developed according to that model. It is important to decide what enti-

¹ Original interview questions in Finnish:

1. Minkälaisen viestin ja mielikuvan toivot verkkosivujemme välittävän sivustolla kävijöille?
2. Mitkä ovat asioita, joiden sivustolla tulisi erityisesti nousta esiin?
3. Minkälainen tunne sivuillamme vieraileville tulisi jäädä sen jälkeen, kun hän on käynyt siellä?
4. Millaista lisäarvoa toivoisit verkkosivujemme välittävän sivuilla vieraileville?
 - a. asiakkaille; b. prospekteille; c. opiskelijoille

ties are included on the site (e.g. services, description of the firm “about us”, etc.) and how these entities are placed on the site.

Second topic for partner clinic was visual layout of the website. This new visual layout of the website will be implemented to all of the firm’s marketing materials, so this phase of the project was also very important. Three different options were presented to partners, and internal website team members also let them know which one was their recommendation for the final decision for the layout.

I also had unstructured discussions throughout the website project with the development team, that included the firm’s IT department, the two project responsible partners and advertising agency. Other lawyers than partners were also invited to some of the development team’s meetings to hear their thoughts on the website. The content of the site is created with the heads of practices, and in this phase I gathered their comments on the website content.

4.4 Surveys

I conducted two surveys to the personnel of the firm concerning the website renewal project. I used a web questionnaire to gather answers from the respondent groups. Web-based survey was an efficient way to deliver questionnaire to large group of respondents. Link to the questionnaire was sent via e-mail with a cover letter explaining what is the purpose of the survey and instructions to fill up the web form. Reminders to the respondents were sent from both of the surveys. Both surveys were anonymous.

First survey was sent out to the 13 partners of the firm regarding the visual image of the site. This same topic was also covered in one of the partner clinics. As the visual image of the website was to be implemented to the firm’s marketing materials, I felt it was important to assure that partners had possibility to express their thoughts. Web-based survey also enabled to attach pictures of the website layouts to questionnaire, this way the partners had possibility to re-examine the given options. Nine out of thirteen partners answered to the survey, the response rate was 70 %.

Website's visual layout survey was structured as follows:

1. E-mail cover letter with a link to questionnaire
2. Short preface for the survey
3. Pictures of three visual layout options with short descriptions on each alternative
4. Question: In my opinion the best alternative for the layout of the website is: (a./b./c.)
5. Open comments field regarding the layout options.

Second survey was send out to the whole personnel, altogether 80 people, and it was conducted 4 months after the website was already launched. Aim of the survey was to find out how the personnel sees the firm's brand identity after the website launch. Questions (Appendix I) addressed personnel's perceptions of firm's identity, how satisfied they are towards firm's marketing and communications actions, their use of professional media (legal business magazines etc.) and their use of social media. In overall the survey provides information on how to further develop website's content. In this thesis I have concentrated to the survey responses that are related to the company brand and marketing excluding questions regarding the use of professional medias and social media. Response rate of the survey was 35 %.

Firm's brand image survey was structured as follows:

1. E-mail cover letter with a link to questionnaire
2. Short preface for the survey
3. Open ended and multiple-choice questions regarding firm image, firm's marketing and communication activities, following of different professional medias and use of social media.

In the first open ended survey question the respondents were given an example to provide adjectives in their answers: such as modern, flexible, slow, hierarchic, distinguished, active, passive, international, Finnish, etc. This example list of adjectives may, to some extent, have affected to the choice of adjectives, however, I don't see that the guiding example has affected to the answers given.

4.5 Personnel engagement and project communication

From the beginning I wanted to engage personnel, especially partners and lawyers, to the project by informing about the project and how it is proceeding; after all, the site is for marketing and communicating the work they do.

From the beginning of the project I noticed that the renewal awoke strong feelings in different employee groups and some change in mind-set was needed when developing and implementing the renewed website internally.

Especially the partners, as the owners of the brand identity, and other heads of practices expressed strong feelings towards the change, both positive and also some negatively reserved. Generally, the need for update was acknowledged and welcomed but the fear of change, and even the fear of losing control of the firm identity, and possible workload for partners and lawyers were bubbling under. This was something the project team needed to take into consideration in project communication: how to engage people but without adding pressure or sense of unwelcomed additional work.

For project communication I drafted communications plan that communicates different phases of the project to different audiences depending on what is expected from them as an input during the project. I divided employees in different groups as follows:

- i) Internal website team;
- ii) all the personnel;
- iii) partners;
- iv) heads of practices; and
- v) lawyers.

Communication was targeted in a way that the overall project and its progress is communicated to all members of the personnel and more detailed communication was targeted to those groups whom it concerns and who are expected to provide some input during the process. For example, for partners, the project group held “partner clinics” where the progress of the project was presented and project group also consulted partners about important steps of the project: structure of the site and visuals. During the

project the heads of practices were asked for their input when writing the content for the site. All the lawyers were asked to write their curriculum vitae's, and the personnel were prepared for photo-shoots for the new website.

Internal communications is often difficult in any organization. In this case, when I communicated about a project that I was managing, I noticed that there was not enough time to plan for the internal communication although I had all the information needed to communicate the developments of the project. I had planned to whom I communicate but really not what, when and how. Preparing a thorough internal communications plan beforehand would have saved me time during the project.

4.6 Agile project management

As explained earlier, agile development model was chosen as the work method for the website renewal project. In agile method the discussion between internal project team and advertising agency was frequent and constant. In the most active development phase of the project the entire development team met on a weekly bases and between the meetings discussion was active between project manager and advertising agency's project manager.

The pace of the project was fast and required lots of time and focus from everyone involved. I anticipated this might be a challenge for the project, however, nothing that would compromise the final output, a new website for the firm. All the project members were enthusiastic and, in overall, took active role in the project.

Designing wireframe for the site, which defines site hierarchy of the contents, navigation on the site, and basically defines the user experience, was very important and time-consuming step in the project. Internal project team had to define what, how and where the content would be presented on the site. At the same time, first drafts of the site's visual image were produced. These were steps that also needed to be presented to the partners for consultation.

After the wireframe, visuals and content was defined and approved, the project shifted into even more hands on phase, which also involved lawyers and partners. Text content was written and images imported for the site. This also was an intensive phase that involved a lot of time. I managed the small team who imported content on the site.

The site was decided first to launch internally for final editing and content check. This was a well-justified decision in time-wise and it also created a feel of assurance, since all the employees had plenty of time to browse through the site and get to know the content.

Actual launch of the site was executed in a hurry and with a sense of urgency, which I find normal in such heavily involving and, one could say, emotionally significant, project. At this point it is good to remember the fact, that website requires constant development, and all the content both can and need to be updated regularly.

4.7 Look and feel of the website

Design of the website's wireframe was one of the most time consuming parts of the website project. The project team had to make decisions which sections of the website they wished to emphasise on the site navigation. Some sections had an obvious place in the wireframe, for example contact information would be placed on the right hand side in the navigation bar of the website. This is rather typical place for contact information on a website and people are used to look this information from the right side of a website and find it easily.

The placing and structure of people and services sections required more thorough consideration and reasoning. The project team wanted to emphasise people section and make it well functioning with clear structure and search function. However, the information on the services the firm provides is important and provides an outlook to the firm.

How the website should look and feel to the site visitors; its purpose, messages and visuals, were developed in active co-operation with the partners of the firm. In general,

partners had very similar thoughts on how the new website should look and feel and no drastic differences with the project team and the partners occurred. I did not make a survey on how the website should look and feel to the external target groups. According to content strategy, this is not necessarily required assuming the internal stakeholders, in this case the partners and other client responsible, know their clientele.

Partners and lawyers, the ones who meet the clients and the ones who have just recently graduated from law school, are able to provide the insights on what the target groups are looking for a site. This approach also saves time when designing the content, since you do not have to conduct and go through the results of a survey. However, it requires thorough conversations and work to define the content for the external target groups. It is also important to evaluate the content critically: is this something the client expects to find and consider as valuable content or is it something that the firm expects the client needs and pushes the information to the client.

The message and image of the firm transmitted via website content ideally reflects the firm's strategy. The site should

“reflect insight, and it should reflect professionalism, and quality”, said one of the partners interviewed, and this message came across from the other interviews and discussions as well. Based on partner interviews, the site should reflect quality and professionalism through its technical solutions and user experience (i.a. navigation), through the quality of content and sophisticated design.

“In my opinion, the differentiation shouldn't be done by shattering the colour schemes or the typical conservativity of the business. Not like that, but by doing it better.”

According to the partners, the site should emphasise the firm's expertise in a way that it would support client or prospect's purchase decision and buying process.

“We have wanted to highlight, this, no nonsense and clear substance point of view.”

The site should provide direct contact details and contact people so that it would be easy for a client to approach the firm. The site should present case references and rec-

ommendations, and the content should be topical and constantly updated, and this way aim to awake the site visitor's interest towards the firm. However, it was also acknowledged that this kind of content is available from competitors' websites as well.

When discussing about the site visitors' emotions when visiting the website, brand experience and the firm culture was mentioned.

“We think that we can differentiate by how a client experiences our values and culture, and the way client experiences the superior added value delivered by us. It would be wonderful if a client would be able to experience our values and culture.”

The added value that the firm hoped to be able to provide through its website was different to each target group defined in the questions. For students the messages should emphasize the firm culture that encourages employees to develop themselves through their work, bear responsibility but also experience freedom in their work. This message about the firm culture, again, reflects to other stakeholder groups, such as clients and prospects.

“If this is the best place to develop as a professional, then this must be the best place to buy services”, one of the partners expressed his thoughts.

4.8 The firm brand

The second survey I conducted was sent to all the firm's employees and aimed to find out how they see the firm's identity and brand. The survey was an anonymous web-based questionnaire and it was sent to the employees via e-mail. Response rate of the survey was 35 %.

First question asked what kind of images the firm brings to the minds of respondents. The following conceptions were mentioned in several answers: distinguished, international, high quality, traditional, trustworthy, and slowly changing. Distinguished and international were both mentioned over 10 times, other conceptions were mentioned in 5 or more answers (Table 3).

Second open-ended question was about the pursued firm image and asked how the clients should know the firm. The following adjectives rose from the answers: distinguished, high quality, professional, modern, active and insightful. All the afore mentioned conceptions were mentioned more than 5 times in different answers, however, none of them were mentioned over 9 times (Table 3).

Table 3: Comparison of the firm image and the pursued firm image according to the employees of the firm

Image of the firm	Pursued image of the firm
Distinguished	Distinguished
International	Professional
High quality	High quality
<i>Traditional</i>	<i>Modern</i>
Trustworthy	Insightful
<i>Slowly changing</i>	<i>Active</i>

In table 3 I have compared the given answers to these two questions regarding the firm image. From the six most often mentioned conceptions distinguished and high quality were mentioned in both set of answers. In the personnel's minds both are considered as a part of the firm's image and pursued image. Two indifferent conception pairs appeared as well: the personnel sees that the firm is traditional and slowly changing when again they say that the clients should see the firm as modern and active.

The personnel feel pride of the firm's organization culture that supports and encourages individuals' professional development and its great work environment and enthusiastic atmosphere. As a part of the organization, I recognise this atmosphere. However, as a researcher I find it surprising that the firm culture and good level of satisfaction towards the employer is so emphasized. High level of expertise and professionalism were mentioned in many of the answers. The firm's long history and prestige were mentioned only in few answers.

According to the employee survey, the firm image lacks general awareness among the wide business-to-business audience. The image should also be more modern, easily approachable and in overall the firm brand needs sharpening. At the moment the employees feel that the external firm image is not equivalent to the image that they experience.

4.9 Website statistics

Website statistics provide a good overall view about the number and behaviour of the site visitors. Often website operators offer some kind of statistics tool and for example free Google Analytics tool is also widely used to follow website statistics.

In the beginning of the website renewal project I recorded the statistics of the firm's current website to see how many visitors the site had in overall and what were the most visited sites. This information is also a good tool to measure the possible change that the website renewal might bring to the number of site visitors and to see if their behaviour changed when they visit the firm's new website, for example what pages they visit. However, most of the statistics are not directly comparable between the old and the new website, since site structure is different and the new site has pages that did not exist on the old website.

I anticipated that the amount of site visits would increase after launching the new site. The newly launched site awakes interest among the firm's target and peer groups but also renewed site structure was designed to be easy to browse and to provide more updated content. The most visited sites on the old website were home page and people section, these probably will maintain their position on the renewed website as well. Home page is an obvious starting page for site visit and people section in professional services firm is often the most searched content.

4.10 Internal launch of the new website

The site was first launched internally so everyone had time to browse the new site and get to know the structure and the content. Heads of practices also had time to edit

presentations of their practises and this was also efficient way to do final testing before external launch of the site.

I drafted a communications plan for internal launch of the new website adapting Fagan-Smith's framework (2008) for effective internal communication. The plan included the internal needs and business objectives that needed to be accomplished, it defined the communications function's role in the launch, what needed to be communicated and to whom, tools and channels used in the internal launch, communications schedule, measures to see how successful the communication of the internal website launch was, and execution and evaluation of the communications.

From my point of view the most important part of the internal communications plan was what internal needs and business objectives need to be accomplished: website texts reviewed by people who hadn't been heavily involved in the project, informing personnel about external objectives of the site and also to make the final website and new visuals familiar to them.

5 Conclusions and recommendations for further development of the website

In this chapter I evaluate the outcome of the website renewal project and present conclusions of it. Website development is a continuous process, therefore I also present suggestions for further development of the firm's website.

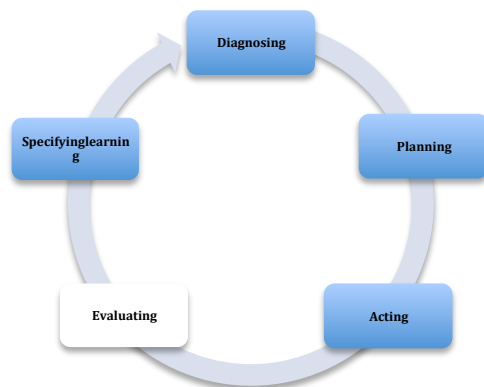


Figure 9: Model on how the action research project proceeds, phase 4: evaluating

5.1 Project evaluation

Project evaluation is an important part of a project. The purpose of evaluation is to measure productivity of the project, measure accomplishment, and to avoid weaknesses and mistakes in the future. Project evaluation also establishes new knowledge and understanding about the effectiveness of policies, and people's participation and it also helps to make plans for future work.

There are plenty of project evaluation methods and tools, for example, CIPP, which is an evaluation model that requires the evaluation of context, input, process and product in judging a programme's value. CIPP is a decision-focused approach to evaluation and emphasises the systematic provision of information for programme management and operation.

In this project evaluation in question, instead of using any specific evaluation model I evaluated the project by answering questions regarding the project and its outcomes. The set of questions is adapted from Jisc Company's project Evaluation plan (2013)

(Table 5). This is a summative project evaluation aiming to present whether the aims and objectives of the project have been achieved and whether the work has been useful.

Table 4: Project evaluation (adapted from Jisc company's project evaluation).

	Internal stakeholder engagement	Outcomes and impacts	Effectiveness of the project
Have objectives been met?	Internal stakeholder engagement was in a sufficient level to be able to proceed with the project in time.	Technically secure and advanced company website: Yes. An updateable communications channel that provides insightful and useful content for site visitors: Yes. Modern visual image: Yes.	The project was not executed as effectively as possible, lack of people resources caused a sense of urgency and from time to time workload was piled to too few people.
Have Outcomes been achieved?	Stakeholder groups took part in the project in a level that the set outcomes have been achieved.	Yes. Content of the website will be continuously developed further.	Yes. The website meets the objectives set.
What are the key findings?		We have been able to define the website successfully and with fo-	Project management plan needs to be clear to everyone involved in

		cus to the most visited pages: Home and People.	the project to be able to steer the project efficiently.
What benefits there are for stakeholders?		Modern website with useful content (people, services) and practice heads have possibility to update and present more content on the service sites.	
What are the lessons learned?	Stakeholder communication plan and role matrix should be created well before the project.	The outcome is successful, because of good site definition done beforehand.	Project management plan needs to be clear to everyone involved in the project to be able to steer the project efficiently.
What should have been done differently?	To create even stronger engagement to the project and define clear roles for the project team members.	Content creation should have been defined more carefully. However, this is not crucial, since the content is developed constantly.	Put more effort on communicating project management plan to the team members involved.

In overall, project definition was well executed: the objectives and goals set for the website renewal were well defined as well as the website wireframe that set the framework for the technical development of the site. The site meets the objectives set to the final output of the project: the site is technically and visually modern, and it provides a platform for engaging content on the site.

When looking at the website statistics, the website renewal increased site visits. Site visits indicate the number of visits on the website. One individual visitor may visit on the website several times during the measurement period. According to the website analytics data the firm holds, the new website has tripled the amount of site visits. People section is the most visited site after the home page of the website. When examining the visits made from individual computers based on their IP addresses the new website has increased the individual visits approximately by one third compared to the old site.

To find out what are the reasons behind this increase in site visits, a survey for site visitors should be conducted. It is expected that a revamp of a website awakes interest among the firm's target and peer groups and this explains some of the increase during the first weeks after the launch. However, as the visits from unique computers (IP addresses) have increased and maintained that level after the first buzz, I believe, it is safe to say that the new site awakes more interest among the firm's target groups than the old website.

The project meets the goals and objectives set and the site meets the needs of both external and internal stakeholders better than the old company website; it provides information on the company, focusing on personnel and thought leadership content in the site. It also provides better possibilities for the heads of practices to provide content that highlights best the services provided by the firm.

5.2 Conclusions of the website renewal project

An interesting project has now come to an end and the website has been up and running for some time. To me, this project has been a worthwhile experience and I have gained a lot of new knowledge on how to develop a company website for a business-to-business company in the professional services field.

In my experience a good company website is designed carefully keeping the target audience in mind. The content of the site has to be updated frequently, and it has to be valuable and informative for the site visitors. Also the user experience, especially easy

navigation and efficient search function on the site is important. All these aspects support the company brand and engage site visitors and thus are ways to differentiate in the market.

For a law firm it is beneficial to present their staff on the company website. In my research it became obvious that the people section on a company website very often is the most visited site after the homepage. Legal business is people business and individual lawyers have a great impact on the firm's business. Another important feature on a law firm website is references from successful cases and client testimonials. Potential clients look for this kind of information to support their buying decision process. As already mentioned, the user experience and easy navigation is the key functionality that the site has to possess. Good and informative content and for example substance videos on the sites are important, but it is not exactly something that the site visitors are actively looking for in the first place.

In this case the firm wishes to highlight overall quality in each feature and functionality it possesses on its website. Quality throughout the website communicates reliability which is a very important factor in a professional services firm. This quality should be transmitted consistently from every aspect of a website and user experience in overall. It is important that the site visitor finds easily what he or she is looking for and also can easily navigate further on the site. However, the site visuals and technical aspects should be coherent to build a pleasant user experience and maintain the company brand.

Content is the king. The site content has to be interesting and valuable to the visitor in order for him or her, in the first place, to come to the site. Good content answers to the needs of the visitor and makes him or her to browse further and to return to the site. The site should have a humane approach in all of its content. On a good website the wording of the text is easy to read and understand. On law firms websites generic business-like jargon is widely used and thus well written website content is an efficient way to differentiate from others. Using pictures of people or dynamic pictures that illustrate movement can increase human approach on the website. Videos bring people closer and are an efficient way to, for example, explain complicated matters.

Good quality content, such as frequently published articles and industry insights, and good contact people gallery are perhaps the two most important features that the firm in this case wishes to highlight.

And what is the importance of people on a law firm’s Internet site? People are primarily interested in other people. People section is one of the most important sites on a business-to-business company website since it helps site visitors, that is potential clients and other visitors, to create emotional bond to the firms professional experts. It also gives law firms and individual lawyers possibility to present their professionalism through written curriculum vitae. I believe this importance is highlighted within legal services industry, since personal brands of lawyers are important in this business. What actually is surprising is how large gap there is between the people section and the third most visited services section. People page gathers 20 % of all the page views of the site when services main page gets only 5% of the page views (Table 6).

For the firm where this thesis is done, website’s people section is the second most visited page of the site after the home page. In this case people section is build as a contact gallery where the firm’s personnel is presented with their contacts and cv’s. People section should be compelling by its visual image and in addition to contact information also contain interesting information on the people presented.

Table 5: Five most visited webpages on the firm’s renewed website (April, 2014)

Page	% Page views
1. Home	23,75 %
2. People	20,30 %
3. Services	4,93 %
4. News	4,39 %
5. Contact (firm’s offices, address etc.)	3,96 %

5.3 Recommendations for the future development of the website

The company website created during this research project meets its objectives but, as already mentioned, website development is a continuous process. The content on the

site is constantly updated; some smaller enhancements needs to be made from time to time and new needs for the site appear. This does not mean that the site should be re-designed after every second year, but to update it's content constantly and develop the site technically and visually when needed is essential to keep the site attractive.

The firm's website was planned so that it is technically advanced and allows further development when new needs arise. Next steps to develop the site are to review the service descriptions and other written content of the site. This is part of regular updating of the site content. Many business-to-business firm websites are filled with text. Good information is something that site visitors often are looking for, however it's not about the length of written content, but how it is written. The content should speak directly to the potential client or other site visitor. It should give a clear promise of the benefits 'You' receive when working with 'Us'. The text should address the site visitor personally instead of providing impersonal and generic list of what the firm offers. The style of writing should be authentic and reflect the brand of the firm.

According to the statistics, home page of the website is the most visited page of the site. It is the natural starting point for browsing the site and it also gives the first impression of the firm. This is why home page should create interest and be easy to navigate. Focusing on dynamic content, such as latest news and topical substance videos are examples on constantly updated content. Bringing people, for example images, videos or quotes, on the starting page also makes the firm and the website more accessible to site visitors. This can be done, for example, by presenting lawyers of the firm in short substance feature articles or video interviews. It is important to remember that the home page guides site visitors forward to the content they are searching for. The site design should be clear and the main purpose of the site as a starting page for navigation should not be forgotten.

People section is the second most visited page after the home page. When the visitor is heading to the people section, he or she is looking for specific information on a certain lawyer. Good quality and consistent "photo gallery" of the staff helps to find a certain person and makes the site emotionally more accessible. Brand-wise the updating of photographs of the personnel is important so the page – and the staff – do not look

out-dated. In a lawyer's profile it is important to highlight contact information and his or hers professional biography. Other important and strategically efficient way to use this most visited content page is to link other website content to the profile, for example by linking to the articles the lawyer has written and by providing links to the practice area or service sites he or she represents. This way the site visitor can be guided further to the website content and offer the visitor more related information to the subject.

In order to make the site to serve as a media hub to the firm's articles, client events, news and other channels, such as social media profiles, a new section should be created. A section that collects all these features would serve as a content repository for the firm's professional insights. This way topical content, for example, event micro-sites and whitepapers could also be linked individually to other channels. Also, internal linking in the website to the content repository would serve better clients' needs.

A good content repository function on a website serves personal branding within the site and in other channels. For example topical articles and videos can be linked to the lawyers' profiles on the site and externally to the company's social media channels or other medias. In social media channels it is also easy for the lawyers to distribute and comment their articles and other content to their target groups.

Video interviews, webinars and event invitations would bring more human aspect to the site. And as mentioned earlier, this is still somewhat new angle to provide content on a business-to-business website. Definitely something worth to try and see how it would serve the firms' clients.

To serve better the firm's future employees, the careers section should be re-designed so it would stand out from the other content on the site. Careers section is mainly targeted for students, but it should also give a good view to everyone else who is interested either working for the firm or otherwise to learn more about the firm's culture. This section should present pictures with people and it could perhaps implement the firm's visual guidelines a bit differently, yet coherently.

Keeping a company website up-to-date requires constant development and understanding of the trends on the Internet. Responsibility of a company's website development should be a designated role to someone who understands the needs of different target groups and can facilitate content development with the other professionals of the firm.

I believe that site visitor's emotional engagement towards a company website can be created through meaningful content, well-functioning user interface and pleasing visuals on the site. If the site visitors find the content of the site valuable to them, they are very likely to return to the site. This is also why it is important to regularly create new and update the content on the website. Up-to-date website also represents the firm as an active participant in the markets who follows its time, this can also increase the site visitor's interest towards the website.

Website content development is an interesting and on-going task. New ideas and good examples can be found from surprising sources and emotions can be awakened even on corporate websites when you know your audience.

6 Discussion

Action research aims to develop something specific within an organization and it can be viewed as a cyclical process. The last phase of action research cycle discusses and specifies what has been learned during the research process and reveals the needs and ideas for further development. (Myers 2013, 59-61.) In this chapter I summarise the key learnings of the research and discuss how my findings relate to the research questions presented in the beginning of the project.

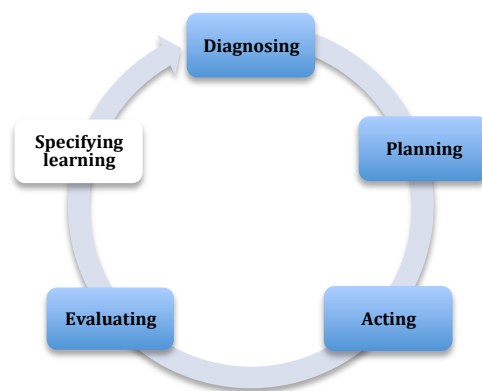


Figure 10: Model on how the action research project proceeds, phase 5: specifying learning

6.1 The importance of people

Until nowadays law firms in Finland have been able to operate in a rather stable environment within the industry. The economic downturn has not affected the legal industry as much as it has affected some other industries in Finland. This sustained economic stability and conservative business culture has not created a pressure to develop business strategies that would have a strong focus in business development and sales. Today it seems that this stability is starting to turn, the revenues within the industry are still good, however, some new firms with significantly different business approach have entered the field. Potentially these new rivals will shake the old business so that business development and sales increases their importance in law firms' business strategies.

Typically law firms have not followed a strong project management culture within their practice until nowadays. Developing the project structures is a long-term change process and requires new mind-set in different functions within a law firm. (Boake &

Kathuria 2011, VII.)

I see that Boake's and Kathuria's proposition backs up this recent and expected development within the Finnish legal industry. The changing business environment urges to draw attention to business development, and hence, increases the importance of project management. My experience of managing a website development project in a business-to-business law firm, again, supports Boake's and Kathuria's proposition: the history of project management is rather thin and implementing efficient project planning into the work routines is a long-term process. However, the mind-set for the change is right.

Managing a website development project requires understanding of the business in practice and how it relates to the clients of a firm. An essential part to achieve this understanding is active and collaborative discussion with the executive members of a firm and the personnel that actively deals with clients and prospects of the firm. (Keronen & Tanni 2013, 62.) As Safko and Brake suggest (2009, 141), a firm needs to understand what is important to its clients, prospects and other target groups and what they are looking for from the firm's website.

The down part of this approach is that the final outcome of a renewed website might serve better the expectations of the firm management than the clientele's. If the website development is not just a revamp of the existing website but the aim is to develop entirely new site that emerges, for example, from a totally new business strategy, conducting a client survey is necessity in order to find out what the firm's clients expect to find from a website.

The most important features of a company website are good site navigation, relevant content and search function. (Kotler & Pfoertsch 2006, 141; Peekna & Bullett, 2012.) I agree with these points, website users who are looking for information, value that when they find easily what they are searching for and the information meets their needs, and perhaps even provides added value. Without these factors a website serves no ones interests and is pretty much useless. In brand-wise a good website differentiates a firm from its competitors and reflects company brand.

The information that the users are looking for from a company internet sites is staff and lawyer profiles, information on a firm's services, business experience, and contact information (Peekna & Bullett, 2012). This information equals with my findings in this thesis. According to the website analytics, the people section of the renewed company website is the most visited page right after home page. Services, news and contact information pages, in this order, follow the people section among the most visited sites.

It is interesting to notice that to site visitors information on individual lawyers is more important information on a law firms' websites than information on their services. On the other hand people are interested in other people and in the field of professional services these individuals' expertise is the service that a firm provides. In the light of this information, lawyer's profile pages on a website are excellent places to locate marketing messages and also provide valuable content to site visitors. As Laver (2012, 15) states, placing individual lawyer profiles on a law firm website is a good strategic decision.

I see that the meaning of marketing communication and sales activities within law firms' business strategies is increasing. Company websites role in supporting these activities grows and leads to faster development of the good quality content and providing added value to the firms' target audiences. This requires well functioning internal sub strategies and management processes for, for example, marketing activities and website development.

6.2 Ideas for future research

This is an action research case study that focuses on a website renewal project in one firm. Qualitative research has been criticised of being too subjective, difficult to replicate and hard to generalize to larger context. (Daymon & Holloway 2011, 10-11.)

It is true that the findings regarding the importance of people section on a business-to-business law firm's website are based on this one firm's case, however, these findings are equal to the ones presented in the theory of this study. The importance of individual people in business-to-business professional services marketing communication is

meaningful. This phenomenon combined to personal branding and social media channels would be interesting topic for further research.

Also evolving business strategies within the legal industry offers interesting research opportunities regarding business development and project management in law firms. How this affects to the balance between the old and new firms within the industry and what actions are taken in law firms' internal operations to meet the future needs? And also how this changing business environment affects to business development, and sales and marketing activities executed within the firms?

6.3 Reliability and validity

This research has been made for a firm to benefit its work. And, both external subcontractors and internal stakeholders have participated in the research project. Project memos for the aforementioned serve as consistent and thorough project log that documents the steps during the research project, which in overall is also presented in this thesis.

Research findings answer to the research questions and the findings can be utilized also in other companies.

Taking the above-mentioned reasoning into account, this research is reliable and valid.

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Appendix

I Employee survey questionnaire: Firm image

1. What images the firm awakes in your mind? (E.g. modern, flexible, slow, hierar-chic, distinguished, active, passive, international, Finnish, etc.)
2. How the clients should know the firm?
3. What are the things you are especially proud of the firm?
4. Is there something in the current firm image that you think should be changed?
5. Mention 1–3 international or domestic companies that you find exemplary
 - a) on legal services field
 - b) on other fields of business.
6. How satisfied you are on scale from 4–1 to the following marketing communi-cations activities: (scale: 4 = very satisfied, 3 = somewhat satisfied, 2 = not very satisfied, 1 = unsatisfied)
 - a) Firm presentation pack
 - b) Company website
 - c) Firm logo
 - d) Firm’s events
 - e) External communication
 - f) Internal communication
 - g) Marketing communication in overall
7. What professional medias do you follow (mention 1-3)
8. Which of the aforementioned medias do you value most?
9. Mention 1-3 other medias you follow that are not professional medias?
10. Which of the following social media channels do you use or follow actively?
 - a) Facebook
 - b) LinkedIn
 - c) YouTube
 - d) Instagram
 - e) Pinterest
 - f) Twitter
 - g) I don’t follow social media

11. [Follow-up question] Social media channels a–f: I update and provide content daily / regularly / once in a while / I follow, but don't provide or share content
12. Would you recommend the firm as an employer to people you know?
If no, why?

Original questionnaire in Finnish

1. Millaisia mielikuvia firman nimi yrityksenä mielessäsi herättää? (Esim. moderni, joustava, hidas, hierarkkinen, arvostettu, aktiivinen, passiivinen, kansainvälinen, suomalainen jne.)
2. Millaisena yrityksenä asiakkaiden pitäisi firman nimi tuntea?
3. Mistä asioista olet erityisen ylpeä firman nimi?
4. Onko nykyisessä yritysmielikuvassa jotain, jota mielestäsi pitäisi muuttaa?
5. Mainitse 1 - 3 koti- tai ulkomaista yritystä, jotka ovat mielestäsi esimerkillisiä
 - a) omalla toimialalla
 - b) muilla toimialoilla.
6. Kuinka tyytyväinen olet asteikolla 4 - 1 seuraaviin viestinnän ja markkinoinnin osa-alueisiin: (Vaihtoehdot: 4 = erittäin tyytyväinen, 3 = melko tyytyväinen, 2 = melko tyytymätön, 1 = erittäin tyytymätön)
 - a) Yritysesittely (markkinointimateriaali)
 - b) Verkkosivut
 - c) Firman logo
 - d) Firman järjestämät tilaisuudet
 - e) Ulkoinen viestintä
 - f) Sisäinen viestintä
 - g) Markkinoinnin toimenpiteet yleensä
7. Mitä juridiikan alan ammattimediaa seuraat (mainitse 1 - 3)?
8. Mitä edellä mainitsemistasi medioista arvostat eniten?
9. Mainitse 1 - 3 muuta mediaa jota seuraat, ja jotka eivät ole ammattimediaa?
10. Mitä seuraavista sosiaalisen median kanavista käytät tai seuraat aktiivisesti?
 - a) Facebook
 - b) LinkedIn
 - c) YouTube
 - d) Instagram

- e) Pinterest
- f) Twitter
- g) En seuraa sosiaalista media

11. [kysymyksen 2-osa, valintakysymys] Sosiaalisen median kanava a-f: Päivitän, tuotan ja jaan sisältöä päivittäin/säännöllisesti/silloin tällöin/Seuraan, en osallistu sisällön tuottamiseen tai jakamiseen.
12. Oletko valmis suosittelemaan *firman nimi* työpaikkana tutuillesi? - Ei, miksi?