

Sokos Hotels St. Petersburg – Social Media Marketing Strategy

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<p>Abstract</p> <p>The objective of this thesis is to act as a report for a production made for Sokos Hotels St.Petersburg. The topic of the production was to research competitor activity in social media and to create a working social media marketing strategy for Sokos Hotels St.Petersburg for the year 2015. This particular topic for the thesis was chosen due to the writers internship work at Sokos Hotel St.Petersburg marketing team, and being as such related to his current work tasks there. There was found to be plenty of room for improvement in the Sokos Hotels St.Petersburg marketing department on the field of social media marketing. Social media marketing is still quite new field for many companies in the modern world, as such there is also a theory part focusing around the basics of social media and marketing is included in this report.</p> <p>The thesis is divided in to three general parts, first one working as the introduction to the topic, introduction to Sokos Hotels St.Petersburg and structure of the thesis as well as explaining the research questions and methods used. The second part of the thesis is dedicated to theory behind social media and marketing with the third part being reserved for explaining the research done and the strategies created in the process of this thesis for the client organization as well as showing a summary of the work done, and analysis of the thesis process in general from the writers point of view.</p>			
<p>Keywords</p> <p>Social media, marketing, competitor research, Sokos Hotels St.Petersburg, production</p>			

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1 INTRODUCTION

Social media has revolutionized a large part of our lives and human interaction in the last decade, first across most western countries and by now almost completely globally and as such has become the new shining frontier for marketing. Countless of people use social media daily varying from few minutes to several hours per day browsing various social media sites, and the sites themselves keep multiplying, with new ones being found at an increasing speed. While marketing focused on social media is no longer a completely new thing and one could say that the major boom has already peaked, many companies today are still only picking up the pieces and finding out just how important it is to be active in the social media and reach your target audience even better. Internet marketing as whole is becoming more and more tightly focused; companies want to reach the specific target audience for the business. This has created need for more and more research and work focused on the topic of social media marketing, not only in the broad aspect of the theme, but also through very small scale focus such as the production done for this thesis, providing analysis, theories and strategies for active need and usage of companies.

The focus in this report is to show the work done for Sokos Hotels St.Petersburg within the limits of confidentiality; the thesis process was split in to two parts with this being the report on the work done for the company previously mentioned. The production itself focused above all to provide a compact and clear look in to social media marketing, to the theories and general information behind it, and to present workable strategies for the company involved, the production will not be made public based on the wishes of Sokos Hotels St.Petersburg management.

The personal motivation for this thesis came from a combination of having a personal interest in marketing and especially focused towards marketing through social media as well as the interest to write a useful thesis for the internship company to provide a project of real value to them. The topic was agreed upon with discussion from the internship company that the writer was working in, as there was found to be dire need for more innovative and effective use of social media and above all a centralized social media strategy that would work as base infrastructure for future operations.

1.1 Thesis Structure

This chapter is dedicated to go going through the structure and form of the thesis. As previously mentioned, the thesis is divided first of all, in the production part, which has already been delivered to Sokos Hotels St.Petersburg, which contains all the research, suggestions and strategies done, and due to privacy and confidentiality reasons will not be shown as part of this report.

There will be six chapters, each having its own set of sub-chapters as seen necessary by the writer to clarify the text. The first chapter of the thesis is the introduction, which is a very general description of the thesis and social media marketing as a topic, as well as and what will follow briefly in the thesis, additionally there is a brief introduction to Sokos Hotels St.Petersburg as a chain, with this sub-chapter acting as introduction to the structure of the thesis. Second chapter is about the thesis process acting as continuation on the introduction to clarify the writing process, objectives of the research and the research questions used.

Third chapter is focused on research methods giving an in-depth explanation of the methods used and their validity, with sub-chapters focused on explaining all three forms of research specifically, as well as a small sub-chapter for explaining the theory of quantitative and qualitative research. Fourth chapter is about theory, focusing on explaining the basics of social media, marketing and marketing through social media to give an insight for the reader of the thesis, as well as providing the general information base for future understanding of the later chapters dealing with the report on the production and what work was done for Sokos Hotels St.Petersburg.

The fifth chapter acts as a brief report on the production, providing a summary of all the work and research done for Sokos Hotels St.Petersburg. The sixth and final chapter is left for summarizing the research done and strategies suggested, as well as analysing the thesis process itself and what could had been done differently or improved on. Additionally at the end of the thesis will be a list of references as well as a small part for appendix documents.

1.2 Introduction to Sokos Hotels St.Petersburg

The production part of this thesis was done as a project for Sokos Hotels St. Petersburg, which is the Russian branch of the Finnish chain of Sokos Hotels. The branch in Russia consists of one five-star hotel and two four-star hotels, all with their unique touch and appeal. The hotel where the writer did his internship was Solo Sokos Hotel Palace Bridge, a very luxurious 5-star hotel with focus on business guests by providing good quality meetings and events services, conference facilities and a luxurious spa. It is also in Palace Bridge where the majority of the Russian chain management, sales and marketing are controlled from. (Gulina 2014)

The second hotel is Solo Sokos Hotel Vasilievsky, also luxurious four star hotel. Vasilievsky is situated right on the embankment of the Neva river, with a unique focus on arts and culture, which manifests through there being art being presented in the lobby of the hotel, a very unique interior decorations approach and having wide access and partnerships with many theatres and museums. (Gulina 2014)

The third hotel is Original Sokos Hotels Olympia Garden, located more to the south from the centre. Olympia Garden is a four-star hotel and is a more traditional Sokos Hotels style, directed towards being a meeting and conference hotel for business guests especially. Original Sokos Hotels Olympia Garden is very traditionally Finnish looking hotel, in line with the Sokos Original standards explained later. (Gulina 2014)

A year back the Sokos Hotels as a chain went through a rebranding process, where the titles Solo, Break and Original were born, these are used to classify and differentiate the different hotels in the chain and offer them all some uniqueness. Hotels classifying as Original are very Finnish by all means, from the interior decorations to the selection of services, they represent the more conservative and traditional approach of Sokos Hotels, this also shows in Olympia Garden in St.Petersburg, as it was made to feel clearly much more close to the Finnish style of hotels than the rest. (Gulina 2014)

The Break hotels are focused at activity, usually serving as spas or ski-centres and holiday resorts, and differentiate themselves by offering plenty of energizing activities for their customers; there are no Break hotels in St.Petersburg. Solo hotels are the most unique of Sokos Hotels, with each Solo hotel having something unique to it, perhaps being a very historical building or offering something no other Sokos Hotel offers, in St.Petersburg, Palace Bridge has it's spa and historical building which lies inside the hotel as well as being by far the most luxurious of all the three hotels. Vasilievsky has its own focus on art and culture, which differentiates it as a Solo hotel. (Gulina 2014)

2 THESIS PROCESS

The purpose of this thesis is to provide and act as a report on the production done for Sokos Hotels St.Petersburg and to showcase the research done for them as well as give insight on the research methods used as well as provide a brief look at the general theory behind social media and marketing. There were no concrete researches done for this thesis in the form of questionnaires or statistical research, with the exception of small analysis on competitor activities. As such there was no hypothesis on the potential outcome of the research. Instead the thesis as a whole should be viewed as a combination of both the production done for Sokos Hotels and this thesis text which acts as the report on the work done. The research and work on the production were very much focused on providing competitor research, working strategy for the year 2015 as well as general, insight to social media marketing as a field and providing the theory behind it to the readers of this thesis.

In this chapter there will be shown the research questions set and to offer insight on the objectives of the research, the research methods, these were used when making the research and work related for the production itself, but are shown here as they do not break the confidentiality of the production.

2.1 Objectives of the Thesis

The objective of this thesis were set and agreed upon together with Hanna Tiitola, Sales and Marketing Manager from Sokos Hotels St.Petersburg upon the start of the writer's internship in the said company in St.Petersburg, Russia. There were several goals and tasks set forth which were to build the base for writing the production, these included going through and improving the Sokos Hotels website and social media sites for all three Sokos Hotels in Russia, as well as conducting a competitor research by both field analysis and online-research with the main importance of the production part of the thesis being an analysis on the level of competition in St. Petersburg for Sokos Hotels St.Petersburg from the point of view of social media marketing by going through competitor actions. Additionally the culmination of all the research and work done was to showcase potential strategies and offer suggestions for future plans on how to improve Sokos Hotels St. Petersburg social media marketing in the future. In addition in this report part of the thesis there is a more traditional literature based research on the theory around social media that was not included in the production itself. The overall end goals are simply summarized: "To research the

level of social media marketing competition in St. Petersburg and to offer viable strategies and suggestions for Sokos Hotels St.Petersburg to be used in later development". (Tiitola 2014)

2.2 Research Questions

Research questions can be considered to be the guidelines of the thesis and the production as a whole, the idea is to come up with a certain amount of research questions, which will then direct the research and writing efforts overall and clarify what the thesis will be about. Usually the research questions are thought up by the writer of the thesis, but in this case as the thesis was a production done for Sokos Hotels in St. Petersburg, the questions were decided together with the local supervisor within the company. The research questions themselves set for this thesis were quite simple and were agreed together with the writer and Hanna Tiitola, Sales and Marketing manager at Sokos Hotels St.Petersburg, who was also the guide for the thesis process and internship from Sokos Hotels St.Petersburg. The research questions agreed upon were the following:

(Tiitola 2014)

1. What are the social media marketing capabilities and actions of our competitors?
2. How do you, as a customer see our current website and social media activities?
3. What kind of strategies or suggestions would you offer to us as a company based on the research done to better improve our online and social media services?

3 RESEARCH METHODS

The research process for this production and thesis were quite direct, while the topic of social media marketing is very wide and has lots of variety to itself, it was agreed with the marketing management of Sokos Hotels St.Petersburg to limit the scope of the production to be more focused on the actual concepts of competitor actions, current situation of the hotel, their online materials and presenting viable strategies for future usage. While the basic ideas of social media and social media marketing will be explained they were not to be the main part of the production, and as such the research done for them is based on pre-existing literature primarily. Overall the goal of the production itself and the research done for it was to be so that it would be useful, clear and provide good guidance to the Sokos Hotels St.Petersburg, who had asked for this product from the writer.

This chapter will be dedicated to explaining the research methods used in finding out all the related information of the thesis. The research done can be divided in to three parts essentially and each will have its own sub-chapter for explaining them more in-depth, starting with explaining the theory behind quantitative and qualitative research.

3.1 Quantitative and Qualitative Research

Quantitative and Qualitative research are quite important terms to understand when talking of research methods. Briefly explained to clarify these terms most types of research, whether it is done for a thesis project or a real-life work task at some company can be divided in to either quantitative or qualitative based on the way of measuring and researching, and based on the data they produce. (British Library 2014; Explorable 2014)

Quantitative research focuses on counting and measuring things, gathering statistical information which can be gathered and compared easily, it usually requires very systematic research process of first working out how to gather the data, then compiling all the data and information and finally then analysing and comparing the gathered data. Additionally in quantitative data hypothesis play a large part, there is usually meant to be a solid hypothesis when starting the research what to expect and aim for. The validity of quantitative research comes from repetition and comparison with similar studies, a test should be done many times over long periods of times to gather as much data as possible from over a long period of time, and when it is all converted in to statistical analysis, from that can the answers be found to the set research ques-

tions. Good examples of quantitative research would be a customer satisfaction survey, filled by every customer when they commit business in a shop, over a period of one year, done with a simple questionnaire and later compiled and analysed, it would then effectively show what the customers found lacking or good especially over time when the sample size of customers would grow large enough. (British Library 2014; Explorable 2014)

Qualitative Research is then completely different, it is focused very much on analysing concepts, feelings, people, choices and other such information that cannot be converted in to statistical information. The gathering of Qualitative Research is largely focused around discussions or observations, for example interviews done with potential customer partners can be used to get a feeling and understanding of their reliability. Qualitative research relies quite a lot on the researchers own abilities, and as such is much harder to prove the validity of the research, and can generally be considered very broad way of researching things. Good examples of qualitative research would be interviews, focus groups, content analysis and such, of course with qualitative research it requires notes to be taken and the information to be gathered, filtered and focused but instead of relying on computational program to analyse the statistical information as with quantitative research, gathering and finding the results lies on the capabilities of the researcher.

Alternatively and what would even be recommendable, is not to rely on just either quantitative or qualitative methods when conducting research, but combining both usually gives the best results, such as in the example of this thesis, there was done a competitor research analysing their social media activity and capabilities, from this was gathered both quantitative data in the form of posting frequency and follower information, but also qualitative data when analysing what kind of updates they were making on social media, what was the feel and touch of these things, how well did they appeal to the reader or customer, these will be explained more in-depth in the following sub-chapters. (British Library 2014; Explorable 2014)

3.2 Competitor Research

Large part of the research data gathered for this thesis came from an active study of the competitors for Sokos Hotels St.Petersburg, especially focused towards their online actions in various social media platforms. For this part of the research both quantitative as well as qualitative research methods were used. In terms of quantitative methods was analysing the statistics of the competitors and analysing the statistics of Sokos Hotels St.Petersburg. This refers to the basic values of the hotels such as number of rooms, rating on various websites as well as gathering statistical data of their social media sites, such as amount of likes and visits on Facebook, the frequency of new posts during three months period from September to November. This quantitative information provided the statistical comparison point for the current situation of Sokos Hotels St.Petersburg as well as helped build aims and targets for future approach and strategies in the later chapters.

Qualitative data on the competitors was based on a field research, done by the researcher himself through visiting the competitor hotels in their physical locations to get to know them better as well as to gain physical marketing material from the hotels such as brochures, leaflets as well as meetings and events information. While this was not directly useful for the thesis itself it was very important for the writer to get a better feeling and understanding of the competitors and the field of business, also the physical material provided by this field research was used by the Sokos Hotels St.Petersburg marketing team to help improve their own actions and physical materials.

In addition to the field research the qualitative side applies to the online based research, as mentioned previously there was a focus to gather statistical information which was relevant to social media, but social media is based a great deal on provoking emotions and feelings from the readers, the posts and updates need to be of certain type to catch the interest and attention of the people. Special attention was paid to the type of posts and updates as well as on the pictures used by other hotels in their social media sites to get better understanding and qualitative data on what exactly they do right and what should be avoided, these were critical to help build up ideas and suggestions for future strategies and approaches.

3.3 Interviews and Literature Research

Another large part of the research materials for this thesis were gained by several interviews set up with the other marketing team members in Sokos Hotel St.Petersburg as well as with managerial staff, these interviews were semi-formal by structure in the way that the writer had prepared few general questions and topics to discuss about and then discussed the topics with the interviewed, the point of the interviews was to gain general information of Sokos Hotels St.Petersburg and of social media marketing. Additionally there was some email exchanging and semi-interviews from Sokos Hotels employees in Finland and Tallinn, these are also listed as sources as for example the Sokos Hotels Tallinn social media strategy was provided by Evelin Org from Tallinn and was very useful when preparing the strategies for the production.

Some meetings are listed as sources of information in the references, as taking part in them the writer acquired a great deal of relevant information especially on the strategies and suggestions part of the production. All the interview data is primarily qualitative in nature, as the goal was not to find any similarities between the interviewed people but more just to find proper answers to the set interview questions that would help provide useful information for building up the production

Another major source of qualitative information was based on the various literature sources listed in the references. Various publications, other relevant thesis works as well as scientific articles were used as reference material to build up general knowledge of social media field, marketing and also of the hotel business in general when trying to create a very specific and working strategy for Sokos Hotels St.Petersburg exactly. All this data is qualitative in nature as there can be no statistical information gathered from pre-existing texts in this case. The literature sources provide especially the majority of the information done for the theory part of this thesis to help explain the concepts behind social media and marketing.

4 THEORY AND RESEARCH

This chapter of the report will explain the basics of the theory behind social media with a brief introduction on the vast topic, focusing later on explaining important concepts and terms useful and necessary for understanding social media better. Followed by a compact look at the most popular social media sites and finishing off with a sub-chapter that explains the basics of marketing through social media.

4.1 Introduction to Social Media

Social Media is a very central term to understanding all that is going on in this thesis, ten years ago people would have still wondered at the term but today, you will be hard pressed to find someone who has not used some form of social media in their lives yet, especially the last four years have been a massive revolution on marketing and reaching consumers in completely different way, and the frontier is still hot and new. There are plenty of challenges to understanding social media and marketing, to quote Evans: "Building on the personal empowerment and liberation that the Internet offers, consumers are actively connecting with each other and talking about everything from cars and health to scrapbooking techniques and pool chemicals. In the process, they are either reinforcing marketing efforts or beating marketers at their own game by directly sharing their own experiences and thoughts on the Social Web." (Evans 2008, 7-8)

Social media has made it very easy for companies to reach even larger customer base today, and has opened countless of new possibilities in how to use this new frontier. Now more than ever managing and reaching out to your existing customer base is easier than ever, and at the same time attracting new customers can be done without investing large budgets to more old fashioned marketing. One can run promotions and competitions to draw interest or equally easily set up stronger customer loyalty through working and easy social media availability. (Bazunova 2014)

In many ways social media is quickly replacing the more traditional media for marketing and to fully understand all the perks related to it, one needs to know also the history of social media, understand the most often used terminology that has built around the various multitude of different social media platforms used actively by people around the world. Social media can roughly be divided in to a few categories which are social networking sites, blogs as well as podcasts, bookmarking sites, platforms that allow media sharing as well as social news. (Grahl 2014)

History of Social Media

While social media can be considered a relatively new phenomenon it has its roots going quite far back together with the common history of the internet. Originally the internet has been home already for years to various Bulletin Board Systems (BBS) which enabled users on the internet to exchange messages and information. Many of the earliest BBS date back to the 1970's already to the first foundations of the internet as a semi-public creation. Later through the 1990's there started to appear first social networking sites such as Six Degrees, Live Journal and later MySpace, and with each new site appeared new features enabling social networking, customized profiles for the users, ability to post updates and add images or user created content. Facebook originally came to be in 2004 together with Flickr and Twitter being found in 2006. The process has been very fast and the late 2000's the growth of the sites and variety has grown almost exponentially, the progress has been tightly tied with the general development of Web 2.0 as well as the constantly advancing capabilities of the users themselves and advancements in programming languages, enabling easier user content creation and file sharing methods. (Heckadon 2010, 5)

4.2 Important concepts and terms of Social Media

Social Media itself is a term of course, which refers to an internet based application or platform that allows users to exchange and create their own content, pictures or text, communicate with other people or just share their latest images, all of social media has its basis on the foundations of Web 2.0. The term Web 2.0 refers to a new way of utilizing the World Wide Web especially when it comes to creating and sharing content across the internet. (Kaplan & Haenlein 2010, 60; Fuchs 2014, 37-38)

Naturally social media depends a great deal on not only the internet but various mobile devices now, with smart phones becoming the standard of personal communication in the western world. Mobile Social Media is used to refer to this particular combination of mobile phones, internet connection and the built social media applications. (Fuchs 2014, 37-38)

Other important terms related to social media are likes, followers, fans, hearts, thumbs which all usually refer to the same thing, to a person who actively follows a certain type of social media or actively "likes" some update or promotion done on social media, these terms vary and depend on the platform involved. Usually the likes and followers are very good indication of your popularity on the given platform and

can be used to measure the return of investment when it comes to social media or calculate how well your posts and updates reach the audience. (Coles 2014, 199-202; Bodnar 2011)

Posts, Updates and Tweets generally refer to a new content uploaded to a social media platform, for example on Facebook one can update their status, doing a brief message which can be anything the users' desire or it can be a promotional image uploaded by a company to their social media site. Tweets are a special term for the short limited messages used on Twitter. (Coles 2014, 199-202)

Hashtags started out with Twitter originally but has now spread to be used in almost all platforms between people. Hashtags are quite simply the tags for a certain post or Tweets on twitter, marked by the hash # sign, for example a post done with the image of this thesis work could be tagged on almost any social media platform as #Thesis-Work and for anyone searching for pictures with the same hashtags would see it in their feed. Hashtags might first appear quite silly but are very useful in getting your message out there, and also act as valuable tools for marketing work, as the hashtags themselves act as marketing channels in many social media sites. Hashtags can be measured by the sites that use them; many of them offer some kind of Feed service. (Coles 2014, 199-202; Bodnar 2011)

Feed refers to an active updating list of news related to the chosen social media site; Facebook offers you a feed of your friends' latest updates, Twitter offers you feed with all the hashtagged posts you are following and so on. These feeds offer a very useful way for not only the customer to see and access information, but allows marketing to easily follow what attracts people and which things are trending among the social networks. (Bodnar 2011)

Trending then refers to quite simply whatever is being discussed, shared or promoted around the social networks, or simply whatever is popular among the people. Usually for example Twitter as a site will show the reader what are the top 25 hashtags being used at any given moment of the day and these trends fluctuate widely. Trends are very useful for marketers to follow and see what is popular and the best goal for any aspiring social media marketer is of course that their updates or promotions would be trending across the world. (Bodnar 2011)

4.3 Popular Social Media platforms

When talking of social media platforms, Facebook is usually the first thing that comes to mind for most people, by far the biggest and most well-known, Facebook revolves around sharing personal information, connecting with other people or groups, chatting, sharing images and so on, used by over billion people across the world today it continues to innovate and grow and act as an example for many aspiring social media sites. Facebook, VK and LinkedIn are very good examples of social networking sites, focusing on enabling the users to contact other users through these sites and stay in touch. (Warner & LaFontaine 2014, 9-16)

Vkontakte (VK) is the Russian made social media platform quite close to Facebook, being the more popular choice among Russian speakers, it offers the same basic functions as Facebook but with less built-in support for applications, yet at the same time offering certain qualities that would not most likely be possible in more western social media platforms due to copyright laws, for VK offers the choice of listening to music, watching series and movies etc. VK was very important to get to know and understand when preparing the production for Sokos Hotels St.Petersburg as by far the most followers on social media were from VK. (VK 2014)

Twitter has been part of the big three giants of social media with Facebook and Youtube for long time now, based around "tweets" which are short limited messages which may contain at most 140 letters as well as the use of hashtags to tag the short messages, allowing people following certain hashtags to see these messages anywhere. Twitter has become the favourite of instant reporting, well used by many people and companies that are always on the move or actively promoting things. Well known for being a tool of journalists to do instant updates on critical news around the world or being the choice of social media activists to rally for some cause. The shortness and limited space of the messages makes for fast and snappy communications. Twitter can be considered to be a microblogging service or alternatively also a social news site. (Warner & LaFontaine 2014, 9-16)

Instagram started out as convenient image editing and enhancing platform that allowed the user to edit their images taken with mobile phone camera for example, and then uploading the same edited content to Facebook or Twitter or Flickr. Starting out it soon grew to be very popular and has by now even surpassed Twitter in popularity. Instagram is all about pictures and other people liking your pictures, which creates an instant feedback. This has created a bunch of Instagram celebrities and whole new

sub-culture of young people seeking validation from having their images rated by others. (Coles 2014, 199-202)

LinkedIn is often referred to be the businessman's Facebook, though it differs quite critically. LinkedIn is bit older than the new more popular platforms, but has remained true to its idea of being a place where people doing business connect. It provides the platform for people doing business to seek for advice, partners, new deals or ideas. . (Warner & LaFontaine 2014, 9-16)

Tumblr a relatively new platform focused around creating whole pages for certain topics by the users and especially well known for being a platform that allows more adult content by the users when compared to almost any other popular platform that all have very strict policy for adult material. Tumblr is very much focused on being a platform for pictures, videos, audio files, stories and blogs and all this operates around the nifty system of hashtags of course. (Tumblr 2014)

Flickr is an image sharing site enabling the users to set up profiles with categorized albums and acts as very popular site for storing your images and videos online. (Coles 2014, 199-202)

Youtube is the former giant of social media, being the very well-known video uploading and sharing platform that has offered us countless videos showcasing all the broad way of life around the world. Still counting in among the three biggest of social media, Youtube still remains very much focused on videos alone and did not develop to try rival the rise of Facebook and the like, but remains still one of the internet's most popular sites. Youtube is an good example of media sharing platform as a type of social media same as Flickr, Tumblr and Instagram. (Warner & LaFontaine 2014, 9-16)

Reddit is quite popular site that can be considered to be a social news site, it allows the users to create posts to various sub-forums varying from every aspect of life with other users then either up or down voting posts and news based on how appealing they find these updates, this creates an interactive system of constant feedback for the users. (Reddit 2014)

Blogs come in many forms and types with several sites dedicated to allowing the users to create their own blog-sites where they are usually free to post whatever they

prefer, within the limits of the platform and rules associated. Popular blog sites include Wordpress, Blogger, Penzu etc. (Bodnar 2011)

4.4 Marketing through Social Media

The theory around social media marketing is very important to understand, and with all the general important terms and concepts as well as the most popular sites explained it is important to also explain most of the basics when it comes to marketing through these sites. As general idea marketing through social media is quite similar to marketing through more traditional media, the goal is to catch the interest of potential customers and hopefully make them interested enough to actually become real customers. Good marketing through social media seeks to engage the customers, listen to the customers and to build up business network. (Coles 2014, 7-8)

When thinking of setting up operations to support social media marketing one first needs to clarify what the exact needs are, what is the target market, the demographics around it, what platforms should be used to reach the audience and what are the necessary structures needed to conduct good social media marketing. All these issues should be thought first and clarified in to a social media plan of action or strategy. (Sigala, Christou & Gretzel 2012)

As mentioned, demographics play a big part in social media and understanding them is important when thinking of marketing and where you want to orientate your efforts. Some sites are favoured by young crowds, some used by people of all ages, some are orientated directly at business people such as LinkedIn and some such as VK are essentially only popular in Eastern Europe. Knowing the target market and the customer base enables clear planning when it comes to social media activity and helps the marketers capture the interest and emotions of the readers. (Coles 2014, 9-12)

When one has enough data and information on what the targets are, it is necessary to build at least a simple strategy to work with. The strategy should clarify who does what, when and how; is there for example just one person, such as a marketing coordinator who is responsible for managing all the social media sites and works with coming up the interesting posts and updates, a good SWOT analysis is always a good way to start thinking of social media marketing. The strategy will then act as the framework for conducting any and all marketing on social media, and for example if a company is part of a larger chain, perhaps the general guidelines of the social media

marketing come down from the chain itself, giving quite clear borders and limits what work with. (Bazunova 2014; Väyrynen 2014)

Social media marketing has the benefit of being very cost effective, with substantially small investment one can gain large visibility, and in the best situation all it takes is for one video or promotion of a company to go viral on the internet and suddenly you will have more coverage and fame than existing market giants. This is in no way easy task to achieve, but something that all social media marketers wish to aim for. Social media marketing rarely requires intensive marketing campaigns, more important is that the sites on the platforms are in good order, constant stream of updates and promotions keeps the followers and fans interested and active on the page and offering or asking for feedback offers an easy outlet for the customers to give feedback on whatever the company is doing. It is not always necessary to even be active on the social media yourself with updates and all, but at least being present and being capable of listening is important, and listening here refers to following what the potential customers follow, what do they like, what do they talk about, what is trending and where. It is also easy to keep an eye on your competitors by having one person regularly scan their activities as was done with the production part of this thesis. (Coles 2015, 11-13; Evans 2008, 14-20)

Other important matter when it comes to good marketing on social media are clarity and simple updates, the use of images is important as they say more than a thousand words, one has to remember that the people browsing internet and social media are constantly bombarded by information from all directions in their daily lives, a grey and boring post is simply swallowed among the sea of updates on an average day, while at the same time too much information or text will create an effect where the person will lose interest before even finishing reading. Keep it simple, clear and effective. Especially in this case a lot of companies are still struggling. All in all understanding the mechanics behind what catches attention of the readers is critical in social media marketing, and because of this understanding the demographics of your target market in social media is vital. (Bazunova 2014)

As previously mentioned when for example thinking of making a new post to Facebook about a new promotion campaign the company is running, it needs to catch the attention of the reader, for example a lot of Hotels in St.Petersburg regularly do updates on their social media sites where they attempt to provoke emotions from the followers by posting an nice image of coffee cup from a balcony of their hotel and simple slogan "Come enjoy nice mornings with us", it is simple and effective and that

is the key of good marketing in social media, at the same time it goes straight to the heart of the customers they are trying to attract, people looking for nice time on holiday, seeking to expand their experiences and also be the ones enjoying a nice cup of coffee on the balcony viewing the beautiful city, it strikes to the emotions of the readers immediately and it works. (Coles 2014, 8-10; Bazunova 2014)

In addition to companies building their own social media capabilities, many companies have grown around to work purely with the sea of statistical information born of this massive flow of information, and most companies managing social media sites receive majority of their funding and income from selling market information to willing corporate customers interested in buying. Yet at the same time, a company cannot even begin to access this information or the benefits brought by it, without having functional and working activities in social media themselves, and because of this the need for good planning and working strategies on how to approach and take advantage of this new section of marketing is more important than ever. (Lyngbø 2014, 20-22)

To summarize the process involved with social media marketing:

- Identify the need for social media marketing
- Research the demographics and target market
- Assess the resources within a company for planning a strategy
- Research the competition on social media for your market segment
- Choose the channel and social media platform that you want to work on
- Create a social media strategy that should contain all the relevant information and goals set for the marketing campaign
- Allocate the budget and resources to match the needs for social media marketing
- Based on the strategy and all previous information, assign roles within the company of who does and what with social media

Challenges of Social Media Marketing

There are many challenges with social media marketing as with everything new, people are still constantly finding new ways to take advantage of social media from marketing perspective and new sites appear on a monthly basis almost. Some challenges that one might face with marketing in social media are; how to create good advertisements, promotions, how to follow the traffic and success of ones operations in social media as well as the tips and tricks of getting your social media followers to be bit more than just that, to transform them in to customers. Privacy issues must also be considered when conducting good social media marketing, as everything that is on the internet will most likely stay on the internet so marketers tend to avoid too much personal or private information. Time and efficiency management are also big problems with social media often, as was also found while preparing the production part of the thesis, to conduct good social media policy there needs to be very clear image of who in the company does what and when. Stagnation and lack of innovation are one of the worst enemies for social media marketers and one very easily falls to a pitfall of repeating the same promotions and updates over and over, it takes a lot of work and creativity to stay fresh on such a highly competitive area where the users themselves constantly create more content on their own. (Fuchs 2014, 25-35)

Another very modern issue with social media marketing is to consider mobile social media that offers very unique potentials for harvesting customer data and offering channels for marketing. Mobile social media of course refers to social media conducted through various mobile devices such as smartphones. Mobile devices require bit different thinking when it comes to marketing. Marketers can for example create phone apps that are linked with customer loyalty programs or promotion campaigns, and by installing these apps on their phones the customers can receive regular benefits, while in exchange provide valuable marketing information to the marketers by accepting their terms and conditions. (Kabani 2012, 12-20; Lieb 2012)

5 PRODUCTION REPORT

This chapter is meant for reporting the work done for Sokos Hotels St.Petersburg and showcasing the results achieved by all the work and research done for the production. As previously mentioned the thesis is divided in to two parts, the production and the report. The production is combination of all the research, analysis and a strategy created for Sokos Hotels St.Petersburg and is only meant to be for their use in their own marketing actions. This is a compact report however on the work done and how the process of creating the production went. The research methods were already explained in the previous chapters together with the research questions used, they were used to define the research and act as guidelines for building this thesis. The theory explained in the previous chapter was not required by Sokos Hotels St.Petersburg to be part of their production and was as such left to be part of this report. The general process of the information gathering for the production was explained in the research methods chapter.

The production consists of five chapters, and totals 19 pages. There is a brief introduction for the production part explaining its structure and approach, followed by the set research questions and briefing of the research done. The main parts of the report were an analysis of the current situation of Sokos Hotels St.Petersburg, competitor research and the strategy and suggestions for improving social media.

The analysis of the current situation deals with the state of the website, of the social media sites on Facebook and VK (VKontakte), done objectively from the point of view of a customer, instead of an employee. Additionally the writer acquired help from three outsiders to help analyse the website and gather their opinions on what works and what needed improvement. This analysis of the current situation was then compiled in to a small but compact report clarifying what the main issues and problems with the website and social media platforms were, as well as what was done right.

The competitor research was conducted during the summer and autumn of 2014, during the whole period that the writer worked in an internship at Sokos Hotel St.Petersburg. This consisted of following the activities of the competitors, analysing their statistical information to build relevant data and compiling a small but compact report on the competitor's social media activities. Additionally it also included what they did right, what they did wrong, how they compared to the situation of Sokos Hotels St.Petersburg and finished with a summary of the gathered information.

The most important part of the production is the strategy and suggestions part, consisting of five pages, without giving away too much information on the contents of the said text, there was a part for general suggestions which were based on the current situation analysis as well as the competitor research. These ideas were meant to be general improvements to help with conducting better social media marketing. Additionally there is a social media marketing strategy given to the writer from Sokos Hotels Tallinn, to act as a point of comparison and reference for the rest of the chapter and show one way how the organizing of social media marketing could be done.

Finally there is a chapter meant to act as a strategy suggestions for the year 2015, acting as a step by step guide on how to improve social media marketing and activity, with set goals and targets what to reach and improve and by when. This strategy was not meant to be a complete package on its own, but more to act as guideline and general framework on how to start improving social media marketing in Sokos Hotels St.Petersburg. Hopefully the production will be of use and value to Sokos Hotels St.Petersburg.

6 SUMMARY AND REVIEW

This thesis as a whole, both the production and this report part were quite long process starting from the early summer of 2014 with the start of the writer's internship at Sokos Hotels St.Petersburg, most of the time used in the process went to the research of the competitors as it required following over several months of their activities. Once enough data had been gathered the writing process began, with the focus being on finishing the production for Sokos Hotels St.Petersburg, this was arguably the more challenging part of the thesis as it was the actual work done for them, writing this report was easier, but for example writing the theory proved to be a challenge on its own, for finding suitable literature from libraries, friends and online was not as easy as it might sound.

While the topic was interesting and very on-point with the internship work at the previously mentioned company, after finishing the internship there was an unfortunate lack of communications from Sokos Hotels, and as such there has been unfortunately little feedback on the production done which the writer would had wished to hear from. However, there is always space for more future research and work. The strategy and suggestions done for Sokos Hotels were only meant for the year 2015, and were meant more as a mean to get the effective social media marketing up and going and on its feet. There is always room for improvement and more development, especially when considering how volatile and quickly developing social media is as an innovation on the internet.

A lot of things could had been done differently especially when considering the production itself, but a lot of the fresh ideas and suggestions or improvements only came to the writer after submitting the final version of the production to Sokos Hotels, additionally when it comes to the references, some of them such as the interviews with Evelin Org or Sirpa Väyrynen are listed in the references even though they are not cited directly in this report, but were used as source materials for the production.

For personal growth and developing my own skills in writing both the production and the report part of this thesis served well. I feel that I learned a lot during the process and especially due to reading great deal of relevant literature now know social media and marketing as a topic considerably well, especially when I started this process and agreed to write a social media marketing strategy for Sokos Hotels St.Petersburg I had no real previous experience or knowledge on professional level of social media marketing.

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APPENDIX 1 Interview Topic Questions for Sales and Marketing Manager Hanna Tiitola (Sokos Hotels St. Petersburg)

1. Could you describe basic information the company such as current status and operations?
2. How do you feel of the current situation of social media usage in Sokos Hotels?
3. What would be your wishes for the future of social media marketing in Sokos Hotels St. Petersburg?
4. What would be your own suggestions as the Sales and Marketing Manager for us to improve in social media marketing here?