

Yekaterina Fomicheva

**ANALYSIS OF THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN B2B MARKETING FOR
STARTUPS**

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Yekaterina Fomicheva
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ABSTRACT

Oulu University of Applied sciences
International Business

Author: Yekaterina Fomicheva

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Social media is a new, yet very prominent concept in present marketing communication. It has been growing steadily and became popular among marketers both in business-to-customer (B2C) and business-to-business (B2B). However, there has been more research done on how to apply and utilize social media in the B2C scenario and there are fewer explanations about B2B cases. Therefore, it was interesting to do research and analysis on how B2B companies operate, what are the factors influencing social media utilization and get insights about the use of different platforms and their role in the overall marketing process.

There are different strategies for different social media platforms to use them to their fullest potential. The bottom line for any company is to get a profit for their marketing efforts. As a consequence, companies must not only use social media but also analyze and make adjustments accordingly. Metrics and analytics are the tools that come in handy while working on effectiveness and getting results from marketing activities. On the other hand the success of the implementation will also depend on type and size of the company, and small companies are believed to have better chances due to their innovativeness and proactive approaches.

The subject of a present paper was observed and analyzed based on two B2B startups – MariaDB Corporation and Usabilla – operating in information technology, providing complex products and supporting services. Both companies actively use social media and are present in Facebook, Twitter, Google+, LinkedIn and YouTube. The analysis was done based on these channels and the activities executed. Generally, the companies engaged their fans and followers with visual content, such as pictures and videos, as well as produced own content, for example webinars, events and blog posts.

Conclusions made suggest that social media marketing in B2B cases is an additional and supporting tool as the main platform is the company's website. It is essential to be present in social media as it helps search engine optimization. Importantly, the content shared through social media must be relevant and interesting. Therefore, the efforts made via social media are substantially directed to attract potential customers to visit the website.

Keywords: b2b, social media, social media marketing, b2b marketing, startups

CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION.....	5
2	B2B AND SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING	7
2.1	Characteristics of B2B marketing.....	7
2.2	Benefits and barriers for social media marketing.....	8
2.2.1	Benefits.....	8
2.2.2	Barriers	9
3	STARTUPS AND DIGITAL MARKETING	11
3.1	Characteristics of a startup	11
3.2	Startup marketing.....	12
3.3	Startup digital marketing	13
4	SOCIAL MEDIA CHANNELS AND MEASURES	14
4.1	LinkedIn	15
4.2	Twitter	17
4.3	Facebook.....	19
4.4	Pinterest.....	20
4.5	Google+	21
4.6	YouTube.....	22
4.7	Social media effectiveness measures.....	23
4.7.1	TrueSocialMetrics.....	23
4.7.2	Google Analytics.....	25
5	CASE ANALYSIS	27
5.1	Companies profile	27
5.2	Social media use and importance.....	29
5.3	Effectiveness measures	39
6	CONCLUSIONS	41
7	DISCUSSION	43
8	REFERENCES.....	45

1 INTRODUCTION

In the last decade the traditional marketing models and approaches have been either replaced or supplemented with a new phenomenon called social media. It has rapidly been growing and gaining millions of users around the globe. As a result, companies, both business-to business (B2B) and business-to-consumer (B2C) have a need to implement and use social media in order to communicate with their customers on a new level. It pressures the companies to change their old marketing strategies and bring it to the new level to be closer or where the customer is.

Despite the trends and popularity of social media marketing, the implementation process seems to be somewhat problematic. The strategy and time of adding the social media into the existing marketing mix will depend on numerous factors: the size of the enterprise, innovativeness, management and organization style or budget.

Start-up companies have a significant advantage at this stage. A startup is a company that produces a new or has an existing product or service, and defines human enterprise where a product or service is associated with a person (Ries, 2011, 28). By the definition it is expected to be novel and innovative. This is where the social media comes in hand and small firms have a greater success using it. Social media provides low costs and boosts the awareness and innovativeness for the business. However, the adaptation of social media will depend on the field where the business operates, geographical location and strategy of the company.

Customers feel more engaged and comfortable when companies give them an opportunity to give feedback and communicate (Mangold and Faulds, 2009, 357-358). Customer oriented businesses (B2C) have recognized the usefulness of social media and utilized it effectively into the marketing mix. On the contrary, B2B companies still struggle to do the same as there is no strategy available on how to implement it. However, social media became inevitable and more B2B companies started to actively use it and increased expenditures significantly (Michaelidou, Siamagka and Christodoulides, 2011, 1154.) It is also important that B2B uses different channels of social media. However, there are different strategies on how to use different channels (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest). Furthermore, these strategies vary for an ordinary and business consumer. This thesis will concentrate and analyze the channels that are the most relevant for B2B use: LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook and Google+.

The aim of this thesis is a discussion and analysis of the role of social media marketing in B2B context for startup companies. The research question present thesis aims to answer are:

1. What are the characteristics of B2B social media marketing?
2. What are the different social media platforms and what is the difference between them?
3. Why startups companies are more willing to utilize social media?
4. What are the effectiveness measures of social media marketing efforts?
5. What role does the social media play in B2B marketing?

The paper consists of two parts: theoretical and practical. The theory part is done by critical literature review based on books, scientific articles and blogs. A special attention is put on the year of publication and fit to the topic researched. The year of publication is especially important as social media and business environment are rapidly changing and recent literature allows apprehending these changes. In particular, literature reviews include theses and articles written on SMEs and social media in B2B marketing. There is also a correlation between two concepts. Due to the small size, startups and small companies cannot allow operating and having an office in multiple countries, and therefore social networking helps to manage the business and overcome distance. (Zhang, 2015.)

The practical part is based on the analysis of social media use of an existing startup companies operating in B2B field. The research is qualitative with observation as a basic method of gathering necessary data. Both companies' social media platforms, where they are present, will be observed and compared to the information in theory part. Only recent, year 2014 social media activities will be monitored in order for information to be the up-to-date. The purpose of the division of the thesis into two parts is to compare the theory with the reality and make relevant conclusions.

The limitations for this thesis are the small amount of scientific literature on social media in B2B marketing. Social media trends are changing constantly and the focus was on general features. The analysis is made based on only two companies and all the necessary data was gathered to answer research questions. However, there is a lack of information on effectiveness measures. Since there are only two companies analyzed in this thesis, the results cannot be generalized and further research is required, for example comparison of two or more companies from different continents, for example Europe and America for wider perspective on the issue.

2 B2B AND SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING

Business-to-business (B2B) greatly deviates from business-to-consumer (B2C) concepts and the ways marketing is done, and digital marketing in particular. This chapter will outline what B2B marketing is, how does it differ from B2C and what are the main benefits and barriers in adaptation and utilization of social media in B2B's marketing activities.

2.1 Characteristics of B2B marketing

Business-to-business (B2B) and business-to-consumer (B2C) approaches differ in multiple aspects and it is important to understand the difference. The B2B marketing can be defined as "the marketing of goods and services to organizations by creating profitable, value-oriented relationships between the organizations and the various individuals working for these organizations" (Busscher, 2013.) Business customer is more demanding and expects the products or service of exclusive quality. Furthermore, the decision-making process is more complex and time consuming and sometimes may take several months because a good financial deal is targeted to be accomplished (Sarros, 2014). Business-to-business markets have narrower segments yet larger sales processes and the establishment of personal relationships play a crucial role. Therefore, B2B spends more on people, sales support and the advertising budget is measured in thousands rather than millions.

Literature suggests that the B2B segment is more rational than B2C and B2B markets are an "emotions free zone". However, if explored deeper B2B is different than it seems to be. In the B2B scenario, the customer is an individual or a group of individuals who are responsible for decision-making and therefore the approach has to be more personal (Mehmodi, 2014, cited 25.06.2014.) It is important to remember that behind any business, there is a person and people have emotions. In B2B, emotions and personal connections might play even more important role because the reputation of the company is put along with big money.

As a logical assumption, B2B uses different marketing communications tools in conveying the unique value proposition and promote a product or service. B2B uses an interactive approach rather than one-way communication. Consequently personal selling, direct sales and tradeshows

are the most used ways of publicity. Traditional advertising plays less significant role, because the target audience is smaller and B2B products or services are not about the brand awareness but about the quality. In addition to traditional marketing communications tools, social media seem to take over as one of the most powerful marketing channels, especially in B2B settings. Social media allows closer, personal interaction with a customer without geographical and time barriers. On the other hand B2B companies are not as active as B2C in using social media. Research has suggested a few reasons for that: first, the concept of social media utilization is not well understood, and second, the interest and adaptation of social media in B2B has been slower than in B2C (Jussila, Kärkkäinen & Aramo-Immonen, 2013, 606.) Indeed, social media marketing adaptation is more challenging and along with benefits brings multiple barriers.

2.2 Benefits and barriers for social media marketing

There are numerous reasons for B2B companies to utilize social media as an additional marketing tool. However, some disadvantages could also be found. Main benefits and barriers will be discussed in the following sub-chapters.

2.2.1 Benefits

Research has suggested that social media, in particular social networks, such as Facebook and LinkedIn could be employed in B2B companies to initiate communication and trust, which eventually might lead to substantial business relationships (Michaelidou, Siamagka and Christodoulides, 2011,1155.) Likewise, communications via social networks suggest neither time nor geographical barriers. (Ibid.,2011.) Therefore, the service could be provided from and to any location. This is critical for B2B companies because it is important to build relationships and establish more impersonal communication. In addition, social media has an influence on building a brand loyalty. A paper by Erdogmus and Cicek (2012, 1355) also points out that users of Twitter and Facebook say that they are more likely to recommend and purchase from the company after the engagement via social media. Furthermore, social media allows consumers to share and comment on a company's performance and product and share it with peers. As a result, B2B companies that recognized and used social media successfully agree that it can increase brand awareness, connect with customers and influencers and eventually increase sales (Katona & Sarvary, 2014,144-146.)

Some other important benefit of social media from human resource management is that it does not demand long and special training of staff meaning that there is no or low financial investments on that. (Kvick-Nastja and Poblete, 2013,10.) Social media also enables companies to inform about new products or service, innovation and hence, maintain existing relationships, attract new customers and establish transparency. Further, companies can keep track of their competitors by visiting their social networks and web pages (Mehrtens, 2013.) In the B2B scenario marketing is not about the marketing, it is about communication. With introduction of social media it became easier to identify customer's needs, via social interaction improve customer service and sales support, and make a customer a part of research and development (Jussila, Kärkkäinen & Aramo-Immonen, 2013,612.)

2.2.2 Barriers

Despite aforementioned benefits discussed, B2B companies did not fully recognize the importance and value of social media as a powerful marketing tool. Indeed, along with attractive benefits social media utilization bears some risks and barriers. Some of the barriers include lack of money, resources, skills, innovativeness, size of the company, how empowered a customer becomes and privacy issues (Barnes, 2006). There is a limited literature and evidence on adaptation of social media in B2B companies and possible challenges encountered.

The research suggests that the main problem in adopting social media in B2B companies is lack of IT skills and time to maintain social media channels active (Michaelidou, Siamagka and Christodoulides, 2011, 1155) (Doiron & Fleet, 2014, 1,2). In contrast to the benefit of low investment into staff training, research by Järvinen, Tollinen, Karjaluoto & Jayawardhena (2012,102) claims that unqualified employees will experience additional stress due to limited capabilities. Therefore, continuous training and update of their skills will require investment in human resources. With an introduction of social media the customer became an active part of the business process. Thus, companies cannot estimate how much power a customer has over. For example, the customer can generate, edit and create new information about company's product, service and overall performance. User generated content is widely spread and perceived as more reliable among peers and influences buying behavior significantly (Mehrtens, 2013.) Last but not

least barrier in social media marketing is the privacy issue. Barnes (2006) argues that social media imitates privacy. In fact, users do not know how accessible information became. Furthermore, information about the company could be accessed and utilized by other organization via social networks, and be offended against and potentially harm the business (Bowley, 2009, 41.)

In order to start implementation of social media as a marketing tool in B2B organization, all advantages and disadvantages have to be taken into account. Various factors, such as innovativeness and size of the company define the implementation decision. The research by Michaelidou, Siamagka and Christodoulides (2011,1155) suggests that smaller firms have an advantage being more innovative and flexible to changes and new technology and expected to be more proactive in social media engagement.

3 STARTUPS AND DIGITAL MARKETING

3.1 Characteristics of a startup

There is no commonly agreed definition of what a startup is. Some experts suggest that being startups is a state of mind. However, Eric Ries defined a startup as follows: “*a startup is a human institution designed to deliver a new product or service under conditions of extreme uncertainty*” (Ries, 2011,27). It is important to note that the definition does not mention the size or industry of the company. The business can be large, with many employees and capital and still fail, where small business in contrast may succeed. The concept is explained further in details.

A startup is an institution building: find skilled employees, establish corporate culture, and coordinate activities to deliver the best result. Furthermore, a startup is a human enterprise, as a product or service is associated with people and relationship built inside the organization. As the definition suggests a “startup” is something started from the beginning and expected to bring novelty. Therefore, the innovation is in the core. Usually startups work in the environment of high uncertainty and risks; their survival depends purely on execution. Most business tools are not designed to overcome uncertainties and therefore startups surviving with basic forecasts, businesses plan and they are very flexible to the changing environment (Ries, 2011, 29).

What is the economical advantage for the country to support and encourage entrepreneurship and startups? Firstly, startups provide an opportunity for innovations and as a result become a commercial success. Secondly, startups provide jobs and consequently influence economic growth. It is advantageous for the economy to invest in long run into startups that will potentially create more employment, for example in particular field of industry that eventually will create a new generation and skilled workers. Thirdly, startups create a competitive environment and the economy remains stable, healthy and motivation driven. In addition, startups encourage young people to bring their ideas and implement them by creating own company. All the startups have a potential to become a big leading corporation with right strategy, people and skills. (Startupmzansi.org, 2014. Cited 10.01.2015.)

3.2 Startup marketing

Traditional marketing uses an approach of 4 Ps (product, price, place, promotion) or 7Ps (product, price, place, promotion, process, people and physical evidence). Small business and enterprises have to put stress on different aspects, such as word-of-mouth. As a result they have been focusing on 4Is: information, identification, innovation and interaction (Stokes, 2000). It is also important for small firms to create a competitive advantage and unique selling points. In order to achieve it, networking is used as a primary marketing tool. In order for small enterprises to be competitive they have to constantly develop, innovate and rely on customer and market information (Stokes, 2000, 7.)

It is generally accepted that startups and innovation are interconnected. Indeed, the marketing strategies of the small companies are strongly linked with innovative behavior. The link between marketing and innovation was pointed out by Drucker (1954, 37):

“there is only one valid definition of business purpose: to create a customer .-- It is the customer who determines what the business is -- Because it is its purpose to create a customer, any business enterprise has two – and only these two – basic functions: marketing and innovation.”

Furthermore, what does innovation mean in startup context? It could be a novelty of a product or service, or a development of an existing idea, or most likely is the accessing of a business environment and competitors, and being proactive in the decisions (Stokes, 2000). Research also claims that the small firms show innovativeness in the unique application of a particular marketing tool into a given situation.

The customer relationship and customer satisfaction is the key of a small company's success. Therefore, the process of customer orientation is different. Small enterprises use process of elimination rather than a traditional segmentation. Throughout this process a competitive advantage might be achieved (Stokes, 2000, 8.)

The points discussed earlier suggest that the key to a small business survival leads in innovativeness and the ability of flexibility to constantly changing environment. In addition, a degree of innovativeness helps small firms to compensate the disadvantages it may have over a bigger competitor. A successful adaptation of innovative marketing measures by market assessment, customer orientation and unique proposition.

3.3 Startup digital marketing

Apart from the traditional marketing small business started to think and utilize social media for various reasons. Along with the benefits it brings, there are still some challenges to be faced. The adaptation and implementation of social media depends on the industry, geographical location, management and strategy of the company. By using the social media companies give an opportunity to their customers to communicate. Furthermore, it generates more exposure and visibility in the search engine (Stelzner, 2011). Due to the limited financial means and highly competitive environment, small business need to find different ways to use marketing tools and perform; and social media could help here and becomes important (Ibid.,2011.) It provides new opportunities at relatively low costs and visible results.

As for any other size of business, startups have to be present and use social media platforms regularly. Importantly, the thorough analysis has to be made in order to evaluate and access how effective the campaigns were. It is advised for startups to put more effort into creation of a good website with relevant, interesting and easy to follow content for its customers. A complement will be using social media to promote blog posts, or free material to direct the followers to the website and generate traffic. Visual content, such as videos and presentations will attract potential customers and bring more leads. There are different social medium that can help a company to be engaged in conversations, discussions or forums. By the definition, startups are innovative and creative, and therefore it is expected that there is an outside box thinking and visionary approach to use of social media. (Elance.com, 2015. Cited 10.01.2015.)

4 SOCIAL MEDIA CHANNELS AND MEASURES

The reason why social media has to be valued and utilized is because it allows companies to be honest with their customers, get valuable feedback and as a result provide them with a better service that meets their needs (Gillin & Schwartzman, 2011). There is a limited academic and popular literature on how to introduce social media into overall marketing communications mix. Social media is argued to be a “hybrid element of promotional mix” (Mangold and Faulds, 2009), as it appears to be more difficult to control flow and content of the information yet it contains characteristics of traditional marketing communications model – bilateral communication.

According to the definition given by Kaplan & Haenlein (2010, 61) social media is “*a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content*”. Furthermore, social media marketing is defined as “*methods for advertising products, services, or brands using the Internet, by attracting the interest of groups of people who discuss them, make suggestions about them, etc. online*” (Dictionary.cambridge.com, 2014, cited 17.07.2014.) It follows that social media enables users to generate, exchange, comment and add content. Social media marketing aims to attract and engage targeted user participation and enable a customer to share their opinion.

It is important for B2B companies to use a variety of social media channels and platforms. However, the question is not “what to use” but “how to use”. There is a different strategy for different types of social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn etc.).

Social media channels

Customers feel more engaged and comfortable when companies give them an opportunity to give feedback and communicate (Mangold and Faulds, 2009, 361.) Studies showed that the use of social media increases both brand awareness and return on investment (ROI). (Kumar & Mirchandani, 2013, 1155.) As mentioned earlier B2C companies recognized the need and usefulness of social media marketing a long time ago and therefore have an advantage, since there are strategies on how to utilize them effectively. Only recently B2B companies started to incorporate social media channels into their everyday communication activities with increase in expenditures (Michaelidou, Siamagka & Christodoulides, 2011, 1156.) There is also a difference in channels used for the consumer and business consumer. This chapter will concentrate on the

channels that are useful and play a significant and relevant role in the B2B social media marketing: Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Pinterest and Google+.

4.1 LinkedIn

LinkedIn is a social media platform, which aims to connect professionals worldwide in order to increase their productivity and expand the network. It is the largest professional network in the Internet. It became, as an addition to its features, one of the recruiting channels for the companies – in 2013, 93% of recruiters used LinkedIn (Plus, 2014, cited 13.01.2014.) Ultimately LinkedIn allows a company to create a profile and build a professional network. Figure 1 below shows that essentially LinkedIn is used either for business purposes or business and personal use, and a small share of personal use only:

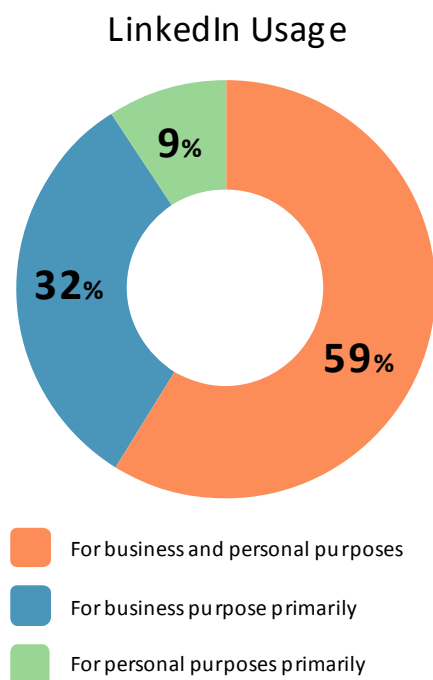


FIGURE 1. LinkedIn usage by B2B professionals (Plus, 2014, cited 13.01.2014).

The significant share of business and personal purposes derives from the owner(s) of the business and consequently personal connections become connections of the business.

In addition to the basic features of LinkedIn, it is argued to be the best platform for generating leads. As an example, Hubspot's lead generation was 277% more effective than on Facebook or Twitter (Plus, 2014, cited 13.01.2014.) LinkedIn assists companies to demonstrate their professional expertise and share it with the connections. Therefore, companies have to aim to

create or participate in discussions within the LinkedIn communities and gain awareness, traffic and increase conversion from the visitor to the lead.

As Figure 2 shows, LinkedIn is more popular amongst the B2B rather than B2C marketers. Nearly 33% of B2B businesses name LinkedIn to be the most important social media platform:

Single most important Social Channel, B2B v. B2C marketers

% share of respondents naming platform most important for their business
May 2014

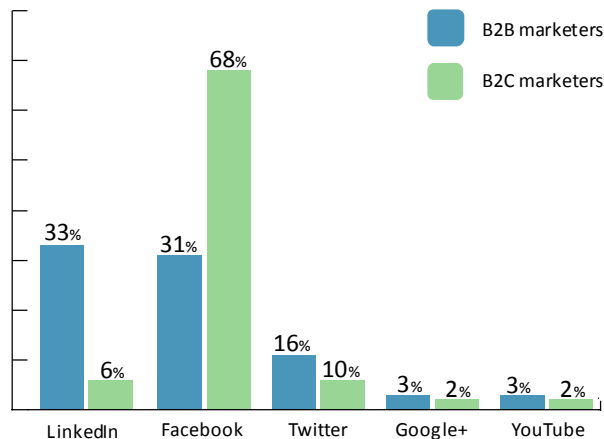


FIGURE 2. Single most important channel, B2B vs. B2C marketers. Modified taken from (Mediabistro.com, 2014, cited 6.09.2014).

More than 70% percent of B2B marketers are planning to increase usage of LinkedIn compare to B2C. It was argued that besides generating the leads, LinkedIn is the platform that converts leads into customers (Bondar and Cohen, 2012, 134.) In order to use the LinkedIn profile effectively and attract more leads and customers, there are certain advices to be followed. Firstly, the profile itself has to be visually attractive and have relevant information of the company with the link to the website or blog, and have a proper profile picture, such as a logo or staff photos. Secondly, the company could be recommended through the LinkedIn connections. A company can list jobs and therefore attract potential employees. In the former case LinkedIn works as a recruitment tool. Thirdly, companies are recommended to list and mention their products and services on the "Products & Services" tab. By completing this list, it is more likely to generate leads by customers' recommendations or by employees sharing the links to the personal profiles. It is important to encourage the advocates of the company as they add value to the company. (Ibid., 2012, 137-140).

The other important function of LinkedIn is that the company can participate in discussions and answer or ask questions by sharing expertise. It is important to be a part of as many groups and have more followers because the answers and questions will be displayed in the newsfeed. Eventually, these discussions could lead to the ideas of blog posts where the company can share their opinion and an expert eye. (Ibid., 2012, 144-146).

4.2 Twitter

There is little research done on how to use Twitter by the organizations and what is the best strategy. It is also argued that Twitter differs from other marketing communications media platforms. So, one tweet will be one-to-many because all the tweets are publically shared, however, functionality wise it will go as one-to-one, as it will be “retweeted” or “favorited” by one individual and potentially reach a larger audience. However, Twitter is still an interactive medium for personal communication and has a significant impact on organization-customer interaction, and is therefore used more as an additional marketing tool (Burton and Soboleva, 2011, 491.)

The purpose of using Twitter will depend on the type of organization (B2C vs. B2B), geographical location, current objectives and marketing strategies and objectives. The research done by (Burton and Soboleva, 2011,497) also suggests that there is a correlation between the managerial impact and Twitter implementation by the organization. The findings also claim that due to the lack of consistency in Twitter usage strategy, an overall strategy of utilizing it cannot be established. The main purpose of Twitter use by B2B organizations is to share content. Twitter (85%) along with LinkedIn (82%) is amongst the two mostly used social media platforms for B2B marketing:

Twitter is the most popular social platform

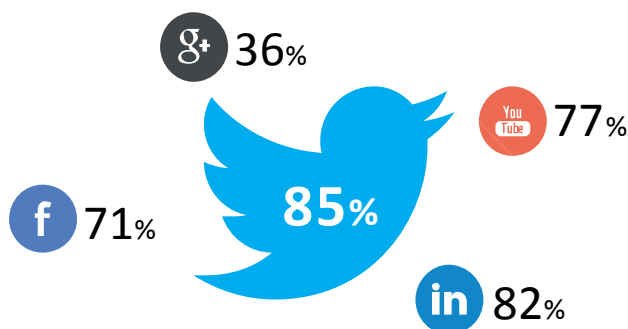


FIGURE 3. Twitter usage by B2B marketers. Modified taken from (Socbizblog,2013, cited 18.09.2014).

Twitter is believed to be the best platform to improve or expand brand awareness of the company through content marketing. The platform is read and used mostly by working professionals in the age of 25 to 54 years old (Bondar and Cohen, 2012, 157.) Therefore it is important to use the right key words and target the right industry. It is important for the company to have a Twitter account because it attracts more traffic and increases SEO. In order to make a company's Twitter page more effective and generate more leads, it is advised to put an effort to create a good bio, which might include key words for example and yet be informative and engaging. Additionally, Twitter provides a field for the link to the company's webpage.

Up until now, there was evidence presented supporting the claim that Twitter is a platform that works through content marketing and relevant content is key. Therefore, it is crucial to share industry-related and continuous updates on a company's Twitter feed. However, with the amount of information flow in the web it will be important to narrow these updates to sufficient ratio to generate sufficient engagement rate. The most common ration to use is 10-4-1 rule: "for every 10 tweets with links to articles from third-party sources, tweet 4 times with company updates or blog posts and 1 link to a company landing page" (Ibid., 2012,161.)

There are multiple ways to attract leads with the content on Twitter. As on any social platform, company has to try to generate own content alongside with the third-party content that can be shared. The most common method would be to share a blog post. It is recommended to post it twice a day using different wording to attract followers. Another effective way is to use Facebook and Twitter simultaneously and promote each other. Companies also may use Twitter to re-direct their follower to the company's landing page, to share an e-book or a white paper or conduct and inform followers about a webinar the company has created. If using the correct keywords the webinar will attract new leads to join the event. Twitter is an effective tool to provide useful information to those who are interested in the company's products or services in particular (Ibid, 2012, 161-166.)

4.3 Facebook

Facebook is the biggest and most popular social network website. It mainly encourages B2C communication rather than B2B. However, with more than a billion of registered active users there is a high chance to target a business customer via Facebook. (Facebook.com, 2014, cited 20.01.2014.)

Facebook along with other social media platforms uses one-click social plugin. Nearly every page is using Facebook “like” or “share” buttons in order for consumers to share the content with their friends and communities. As a result marketers achieve the goal of a social media message being viewed throughout the network (Swani, Milne & P. Brown, 2013)

Social media used by B2B marketers

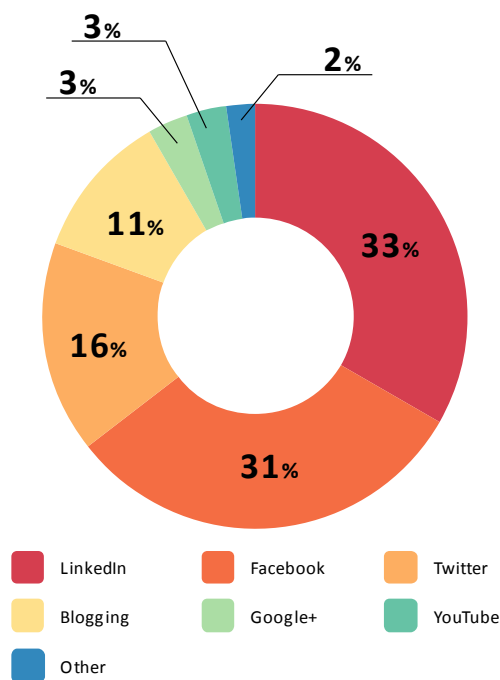


FIGURE 4. The percentage of different social media used by B2B marketers (Stelzner, 2011)

There are three reasons for B2B companies to create and use a Facebook page: search, reach and content. Search will help to gain a visibility through the search engines. Therefore, it is important that the company’s Facebook page contains all important information, such as a link to the webpage – whilst the webpage has a link to the Facebook page; it will help Google to recognize and influence the search. Reach will determine how far is the content spread. By posting a relevant and interesting content, company can increase the reach because the content

is more likely to be recommended and shared with other friends. Therefore, the content is a key to successful Facebook use and marketing. The content might include blog posts of the company, an interview of the influencers from the industry or anything related to the field of business operation. (Bondar and Cohen, 2012, 175,176).

There is an ongoing debate on whether Facebook is for B2C or B2B marketing. However, eventually the message posted or shared is meant for an individual – not a company. Facebook engages connections and interconnections and people are interested to find information or content that might be potentially useful for their job. For B2B companies and their marketing purposes, Facebook can be utilized in various ways – from a landing page to referrals and a recommendation platform. One of the most powerful functions of Facebook is a visual storytelling. It gives an opportunity to make the company “alive” by posting photos from the office, staff members, blog posts, and customer service. Facebook is the platform where a company can show its personal and “emotional” side by posting photos and videos, asking questions, promoting events. As a result, there will be more fans and engagement (Ibid, 2012, 259.).

4.4 Pinterest

Pinterest is a social media platform that allows users to visually share and find new content by “pinning” their interests via images, videos etc., to the personally created boards usually separated by themes, and discovering what other users “pinned”. The purpose of the Pinterest is connecting people through the common interest. The images shared could be uploaded from the personal computer or re-pinned from other users. Pinterest has all the standard functions of social networks: following the boards, like the pins, re-pinning, sharing the content to Facebook or Twitter and there is a pin button, which could be installed on your own webpage or a blog. Pinterest is a visual medium, which helps companies to interest their customers through colorful images, infographics and improve engagement rates. (Infront.com, 2014, cited 6.09.2014).

Ultimately there are many tips and strategies for B2B companies how to use Pinterest effectively. As Pinterest is growing its popularity and is a visual social platform, B2B marketers have to aim to engage and interest their customers in multiple different professional ways – creating professional content. The bottom line is that people buy from people and not from the enterprises. To incorporate Pinterest effectively into the routine marketing tools, the companies have to pin the

content from their websites, blogs, pictures from the website and not purely re-pin the others (Ibid.,2014, cited 6.09.2014). Pinterest also allows engaging the customers by creating the board where they can share own experiences by sharing a picture or a story. It is crucial to share information about the product or service the company offers by linking Pinterest to the service page with prices and features. In order to show “human “ side of B2B, company may create a board dedicated to employees and daily routine in the office (Campbell, 2013, cited 15.09.2014.)

4.5 Google+

Alike with the Pinterest, Google+ uses the same model of connecting people with similar interests and opinions into circles. However, B2B marketers divided into two categories: one, who believes in Google+ and those who consider it as a waste of time and money. In fact, Google+ is the world’s second largest social network. It took 24 days to reach 20 million users. Consequently, it is of absolute importance to have a presence there as it positions businesses as a leader in its field and attracts more visitors to the webpages (Mathmarketing.com, 2014, cited 17.09.2014.)

Google has a good reputation, which is why people find Google+ trustworthy, with high-quality content and intelligent conversations. With “circling” function it is easy for the company to identify the audience for both existing and potential customers. Therefore, it is necessary to share relevant, useful and valuable content. As an additional advantage of being present in Google+, a company increases its chances to be visible in Google search. Now B2B marketers are looking for how to achieve higher rankings and need to incorporate that into their SEO strategy (Mathmarketing.com, 2014, cited 17.09.2014).

Google+ has some very important features as a social network platform. Firstly, it is a mid-point between Facebook and LinkedIn – it is not as casual as Facebook, yet not as business oriented as LinkedIn. Secondly, it offers authorship. It is the way to connect company’s content with a Google+ account. This is an important feature for the employees as they can make contributions, which will be positively associated with the company. As a result, it increases chances to gain visibility in Google search results. Lastly, Google offers to connect company’s Google+ account to the maps and geotag the business. It also could influence SEO traffic of the company (Jones, 2014, cited16.09.2014.)

B2B marketing: Google+ is the most promising platform to discover

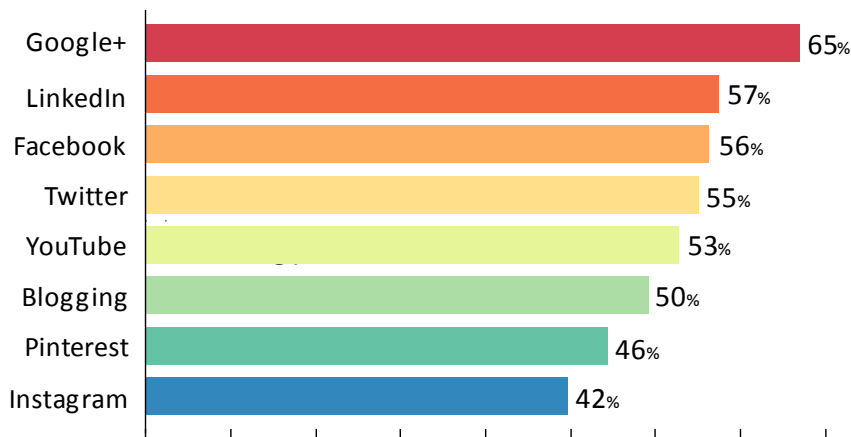


FIGURE 5. B2B Marketing: Google+ is the most promising platform to discover. Modified taken from (Stelzner, 2011)

4.6 YouTube

YouTube is the second largest search engine after Google, and the largest video-sharing service and social media platform. In fact, YouTube is more useful and important for B2B companies and marketing than for B2C. As being complex in nature, B2B products or services require more guidance on how to use it and video is the most effective way to provide it. There are some lines to follow in order to make video interesting yet informative. Firstly, it has to be short and companies should stick to three minutes. Secondly, B2B has emotions too and it is allowed and recommended to be humorous and entertaining. Thirdly, the company should tell a story rather than being frankly informative (Bondar and Cohen, 2012, 142-144).

Recent reports on content marketing trends for B2B (Marshall, 2014, cited 27.12.2014) suggest that video content acts as a lead generator medium and increases brand awareness. The other highlights of the report state that 76% of the marketers use YouTube to publish their video content. In addition, marketers have been distributing videos through other social media platforms, newsletters or websites. YouTube has been confirmed to be a platform that helps companies to reach a potential customer.

The findings from the research by AOL Platforms (Alford, 2014, cited on 27.12.2014) reveal that YouTube is a platform, which introduces to customers a new product and converts it into a

purchase. The reason why YouTube has a leading position in the first and the last stages of buying process is because video provides fast answer to a question of customer's interest. As any previously mentioned social media platforms, YouTube must have a novel and engaging content, marketers have to be committed to maintain the channel and well thought marketing strategy that will attract customers. (Bondar and Cohen, 2012, 144-145.)

4.7 Social media effectiveness measures

4.7.1 TrueSocialMetrics

In order to measure how effective is the social media marketing for the company appropriate metrics have to be used. However, to find a good tool might be a challenge. There are different analytical tools available for social media platforms such as Pinterest, Facebook and LinkedIn.

If the business only looks at the number of followers on each of the platform, that number does not portrait the overall picture and details behind it. Fundamentally there are three metrics companies should look at in order to measure social media success: conversation, amplification and applause, as shown on the figure 6:

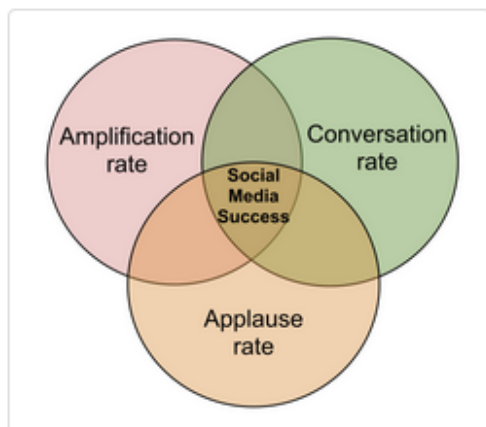


FIGURE 6. Social media success: conversation, amplification and applause (Truesocialmetrics.com, 2014, cited 19.09.2014).

Analysis of these three rates helps business to identify gaps and see the tendency of posts performance. A closer look will help to understand what these metrics mean. Conversation rate measures a number of audience comments or replies per post. The positive side is that it can be measured for any social platform (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn etc.). A company has to aim for

high conversation rate, however, the conversations have to be meaningful and keep the audience interested to stay. Amplification rate measures the rate at which company's followers engage with the content and share it with their circles, followers or connections. For example, for Facebook amplification rate is the number of shares per post. What companies should pay attention to is to measure which content causes the amplification. The following steps will include at what time, where and by whom the content was shared. Lastly, the applause rate will measure the number of likes, favorite tweets or pluses (for Google+) per post. The most important part to understand here, is that the "like" is a relative quality and the number of endorsements the company is getting will influence the results in Google search because the content becomes more relevant.

Using conversation, amplification and applause rates will have an assertive effect on overall picture and identify the gaps but it does not tell about the quantification of the economic value. The right participation in a social media will add the value to the company's bottom line. Therefore, different tools are used to measure the economic value of social media participation, such as Google Analytics, Omniture, and Web Trends etc. The numbers derived from there have to be viewed and analyzed on a daily basis in order to determine what channels contribute the most and what is their direct value (Kaushnik, 2011, cited 18.09.2014) (Slideshare.net, 2014, cited 20.09.2014).

The example of the analytics is shown on the figure 7 below:

	Twitter	Facebook Page	Google +	Blog
1. Conversation rate Comments per post	6.70	1.50	4.20	72.33
2. Amplification rate Re-Tweets per post	17.15	0.00	12.35	2374.33
3. Applause rate Favorites per post	8.25	22.00	22.05	180.67
4. Economic Value Value per visitor	1.02	0.80	2.00	0.00

FIGURE 7. An example of analytics report using TrueSocialMetrics. Taken from (Kaushnik, 2011, cited 18.09.2014).

4.7.2 Google Analytics

If TrueSocialMetrics allows to measure the performance of each channel individually, Google Analytics provides an analysis and overview on the whole picture – starting from the website and monitoring what device customers use to access the website or network. However, it remains a problem that companies tend to concentrate only on one measure, for example the number of visits. The negative side of looking at the number of visits only, is that it does not open the whole story on how people got there and what were the actions.

There are three fundamental metrics that could help the effective evaluation of the website performance: page/session, average session duration and bounce rate. The page/session metric will indicate how many pages were visited during the one session. The number companies should aim for is 2.00 and above. This will indicate that during the session more than two pages on the website were visited. In B2B context it means that, if the person went to the website he will want to find out more information of services, for example. If that step has not been made then the number will be below 2.00. In order to improve it or maintain the high number of sessions, company website has to be simple and easy in navigation (Bloom, 2014, cited 3.12.2014.)

Average session duration will tell how long has one session lasted. The number to aim for is at least 2:00 minutes. If the time spent is above then the visitor is engaged and found information that interests him or her. Usually the reason why people stay on the website longer is that they find interesting content, such as blogs, guides, specific information on the services or videos relevant to the search (Bloom, 2014, cited 3.12.2014.)

Bounce rate is “the percentage of single-page sessions, i.e. session in which the person left your site from the entrance page without interacting with the page” (Support.google.com, 2014, cited 3.12.2014.) Generally, bounce rate has to be kept below 60%. Higher bounce rate will indicate that the visitors do not find relevant information from the website. The reason for high bounce rate could be site design, user behavior or incorrect implementation of Google Analytics. In order to improve bounce rate it is important to analyze the data on a regular basis and evaluate findings. In addition, change of the website design and navigation, or changing keywords might improve the bounce rate (Bloom, 2014, cited 3.12.2014) (Support.google.com, 2014, cited 3.12.2014).

In addition to the measures described above, there are metrics that help to evaluate an overall B2B website performance: channels, landing pages and all pages.

Channels correspond to the ways people came to the website. The channels include organic search, via search engine and it remains as the most important metrics to look at. Direct search occurs if the URL of the website was typed directly into the address bar. Referral search happens when the link to the website was provided on another page. A social channel is registered if the name of the company was searched via social networks, as Facebook or LinkedIn (Bloom, 2014, cited 3.12.2014.)

Landing pages are the pages where the visitor first enters while visiting the website. By looking at the analytics of the landing pages, a company can identify which pages generate the most traffic of the website. To maintain or improve landing pages traffic, evaluation of keywords or choosing the right keywords is essential (Ibid., 2014, cited 3.12.2014.)

All pages are placed in order from most to least page views. There might be a few pages opened and views in one session. By looking at the metrics a company can analyze what are the most visited and interesting pages. In fact, the page "About us" might be receiving more page views than "Services" (Ibid., 2014, cited 3.12.2014.)

5 CASE ANALYSIS

In order to answer one of the research questions “What role does the social media play in B2B marketing?” two startup companies will be analyzed and their behavior on social media platforms will be observed. MariaDB and Usabilla were chose among the variety and number of startups companies. These two companies represent two different European countries – Finland and the Netherlands – which consequently will allow a comparison how social media marketing is done in different places. In addition, MariaDB and Usabilla are present in multiple platforms, which will allow answering research questions in mind, and the information is representative. Note, SkySQL is a startup company, now part of MariaDB and referred as such in the text. There was no contact with the companies, therefore they do not benefit from this thesis and the all the information used is public and anybody can access it.

At the beginning, each platform was observed carefully and later relevant and representative posts were found and put in order to analyze them and compare to what literature suggested in the first part of the thesis.

5.1 Companies profile

MariaDB

MariaDB Corporation Ab is a Finnish enterprise based in Espoo, offering software and specializing in high availability and high performance. The company was found in 2010 by MySQL Ab team as SkySQL, and in 2014 changed its name to MariaDB Corporation. The clientele includes Google, HP, Wikipedia, Harvard University, IBM and multiple other small and medium businesses. MariaDB products and services offer easy to use data solutions to increase data productivity and reduce service crashes. MariaDB helps is using ecommerce, content management, user data management and manage Webscale applications. (Mariadb.com, 2014, cited 10.12.2014.)

There have been multiple company cases shared after the adoption of MariaDB and what was their reaction to the new name and software support. As one example, Swisscom Hospitality

Services has been a loyal customer of MySQL since 2002. Swisscom Hospitality Services is a division of Swiss Telecom Ltd., the leading mobile operator in Switzerland. The company focuses on high speed Internet and TV in hotels and it manages network design and 24/7 maintenance and support. In Swisscom Hospitality Services MySQL processes Internet access, IPTV and conferencing solutions. In 2013 Swisscom Hospitality Services changed MySQL to MariaDB and were uncertain if it will provide the same value. However, they changed the software and claimed that it was not significantly different from MySQL and works even more efficiently and powerfully, and they get sufficient support from MariaDB team. (Mariadb.com, 2014, cited 10.12.2014.)

Usabilla

Usabilla is a Dutch software and service startup found in 2009 by Paul Veugen. The company's key focus is to provide their clients with a feedback tools and believes that the feedback is a key to success for a website or a service. Usabilla team consists of marketers, web developers, user experience designers and usability experts (Wikipedia, 2014, cited 11.12.2014) (Usabilla, 2014, cited 11.12.2014). The range of Usabilla products include Usabilla Live for Websites, Usabilla Live for Email and Visual Feedback. Usabilla Live for Websites allows customers to leave their feedback on the website by accessing feedback button. Usabilla Live for Email works by the same principal as Usabilla Live for Websites, but in contrast the feedback widget attached to the email where a client can leave a feedback on the emails received. Visual Survey is an online tool that allows remote user testing and visual surveys. Each tool is connected and collected in Usabilla website for analytics. (Wikipedia, 2014, cited 11.12.2014.)

DELA is a Dutch an insurance cooperation and one of the Usabilla's clients. They offer wide range of financial and practical services and for them it is a priority to know what do their clients think by leaving the feedback. Usabilla Live helps to get the valuable feedback constantly and strengthen the relationships between DELA and their customers. The feedback received includes the things that customers do not understand or when some services do not respond. Based on that the problems could be fixed immediately. Until now, Usabilla Live feedback button improved customer experience and helped to build a user-friendly DELA website. (Usabilla, 2014, cited 11.12.2014.)

5.2 Social media use and importance

Both MariaDB and Usabilla are present in social media networks, such as Facebook, Twitter, Google+, LinkedIn and YouTube. They use it to share and inform their customers on the services updates, new releases or industry relevant content. However, companies' websites remain as one of the primary and most important social media that customers tend to refer as for help of service assistance. In addition, companies make blog posts that are relevant to the products or service they offer, or share the general information to the relevant topics. The analysis below will provide an overview and comparison on how two companies use different social media with an emphasis on what content is shared, why it was noticed and engaged customers and why particular social network was used to share the content.

Facebook

As previously mentioned, Facebook is the best platform to visualize the company's stories or content shared. For example, Usabilla (figure 8) shares the webinar event with a picture that fully describes its topic. Likewise, using the picture to attract attention, MariaDB (figure 10) is asking the questions from their fans about how they use MariaDB's tools and services making it personal.

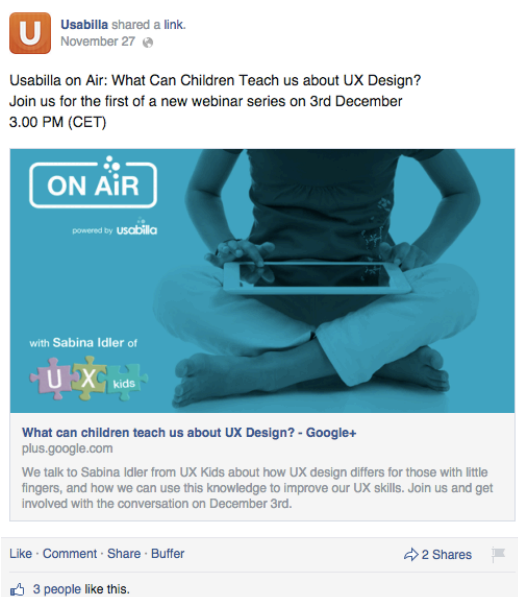


FIGURE 8. Facebook post from 27.11.2014. Usabilla, 2014 (cited 12.12.2014)



FIGURE 9. Facebook post from 31.10.2014. Usabilla, 2014 (cited 12.12.2014)

Figure x by Usabilla related their post to Halloween and shared fun and humorous picture related to the services they provide – smiles for feedback tools. As a result, it attracted more attention than the previous post (figure 9) and was liked by more fans. On the other hand, generally Usabilla receives poor amount of likes and shares per post. This might be due to wrong-targeted customers and infrequent posting. In addition, Usabilla does not produce Facebook specific content and uses it primarily for sharing blog posts.

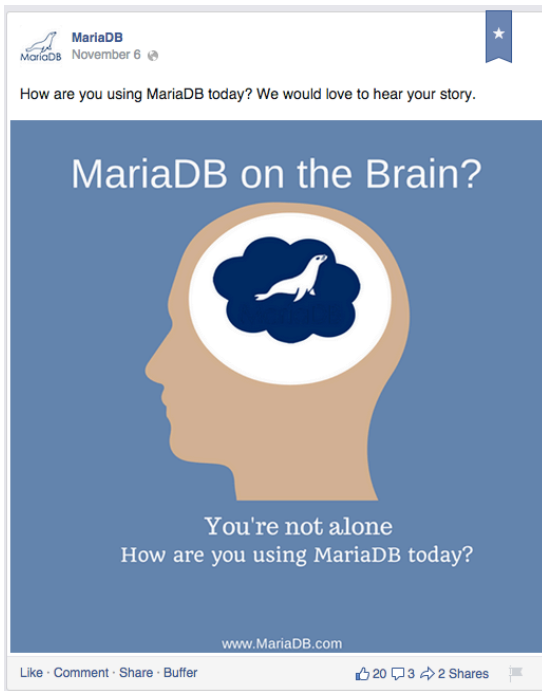


FIGURE 10. Facebook post from 6.11.2014. MariaDB, 2014 (cited 12.12.2014)

Likewise Usabilla, MariaDB also posted an event related picture to Thanksgiving Day and thanked its customers for using MariaDB's services. The post received 27 likes, one comment and one share. It is interesting to note that event related post received less comment and post shares that the post related to the question MariaDB asked about how their customers use services and products. However, MariaDB used Facebook effectively in both posts because the first post has been used to receive recommendations and opinions, the second post was more personal and closer to customers.



FIGURE 11. Facebook post from 26.11.2014. MariaDB, 2014 (cited 12.12.2014)

Twitter

Twitter is all about the content and the more own content company produces the better chances it has to be re-tweeted, shared and recommended. One of the most powerful and common uses of Twitter by the companies is tweeting the blog posts in the feed.



FIGURE 12. Twitter post from 19.11.2014. Usabilla, 2014 (cited 12.12.2014)

Usabiila uses their Twitter page and feed by sharing regularly third party content that is related to the products, service and industry company operates in. Usabilla post from two to six posts per day. However, company also uses Twitter as a promotional page for other social media platforms, such s Google+ to highlight the most important issues and topics. In addition, Usabilla uses hashtags effectively and they are related to the keyword of the company, for example most frequently UX, UI, web design.



FIGURE 13. Twitter post from 25.11.2014. MariaDB, 2014 (cited 12.12.2014)

MariaDB is a larger startup and their main focus is to generate own content and write blog posts. Therefore, company uses Twitter as a medium to share and direct its followers to their website and blog. Additionally, MariaDB advertises own webinars and events on Twitter (see figure 14):



FIGURE 14. Twitter post from 18.12.2014. MariaDB, 2014 (cited 12.12.2014)

Both Usabilla and MariaDB used Twitter to share their blog posts with some relevant information for their customers. Usabilla shares a content that will help their customers to improve use experience (UX) and user interface (UI). Similarly, MariaDB informs followers regularly about the release of a new version of the software or tools, as well as shares the third party relevant content.

LinkedIn

Both companies use LinkedIn as their professional profile (figure 15 and 17), where they post information from their blogs or company related issues or share interesting articles mentioning the company.

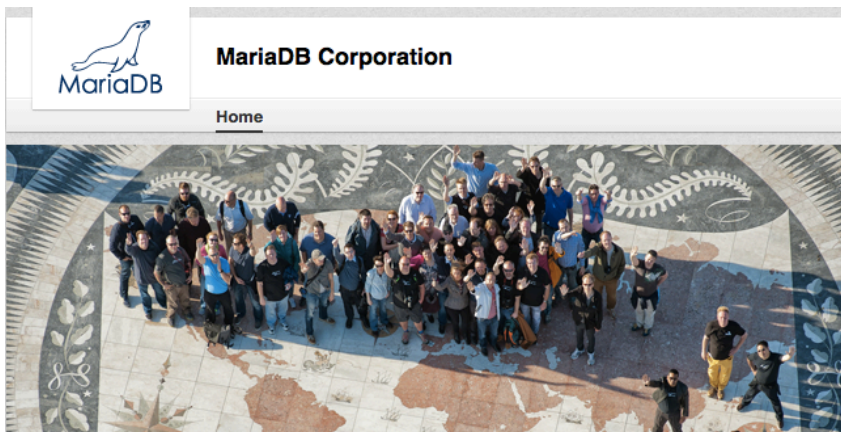


FIGURE 15. MariaDB LinkedIn profile, 2015 (cited 12.01.2015)

There are 797 follows of MariaDB's LinkedIn profile. The information provided on the profile includes company name, industry, number of employees, headquarter and type of the company.

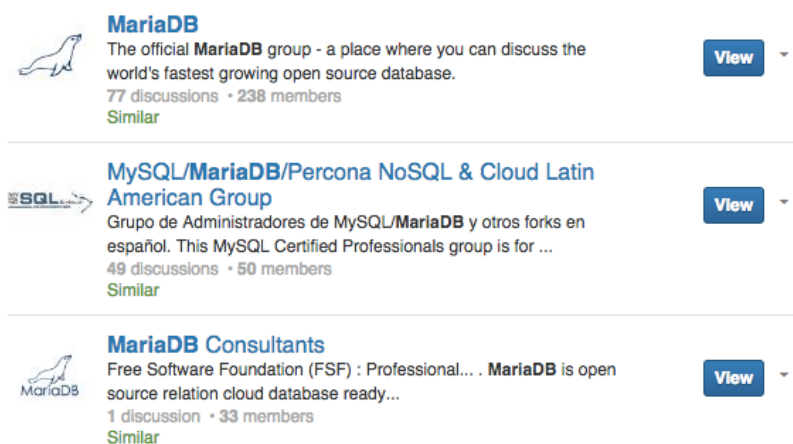


FIGURE 16. LinkedIn search results for MariaDB, 2015 (cited 12.01.2015)

When search for MariaDB it gives 3, 783 results on LinkedIn. These results include employees working for the company, mentions of the company, groups and discussions. It was interesting to note that MariaDB has no job listed on LinkedIn. However, it has multiple groups, such as MariaDB Consultants, MariaDB official group and groups that are region specific, for example Latin America Group. These groups generate a few discussions and account for members interested in the content.



FIGURE 17. Usabilla LinkedIn profile, 2015 (cited 12.01.2015)

Usabilla as well as MariDB is present on LinkedIn and receives 97 results when performing a LinkedIn search. It also includes employees, mentions, shared posts and job listings.

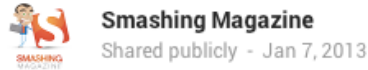


FIGURE 18. LinkedIn job listings results for Usabilla, 2015 (cited 12.01.2015)

Unlike MariaDB, Usabilla is not present nor created a group. However, Usabilla uses LinkedIn's very valuable and unique feature of recruiting. There are two positions (Figure 18) that Usabilla offers for public view. A person can take his resume directly from LinkedIn and send letter of application to a contact person.

Google+

Google+ is the platform marketers want to learn about the most and it gains popularity especially amongst B2B companies. Both Usabilla and MariaDB are present and use Google+ as a social media platform (figure 20 and 21).



A couple of useful usability testing videos - <http://blog.usabilla.com/7-must-see-usability-testing-videos/>



6 Must-See Usability Testing Videos
- The Usabilla Blog

blog.usabilla.com



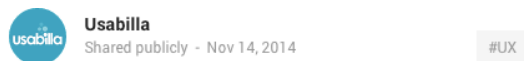
+17 5 Add a comment...  

FIGURE 19. Google+ post from 7.01.2014. Usabilla, 2014 (cited 2.01.2015)



We talk to Sabina Idler from UX Kids about how UX design differs for those with little fingers, and how we can use this knowledge to improve our UX skills.

Join us and get involved with the conversation on December 3rd.



🗨️ What can children teach us about UX Design?

📅 Wed, December 3, 2014, 3:00 PM
📍 Hangouts On Air - Broadcast for free
👤 78 people watched

Did you watch?

+8 14 

FIGURE 20. Google+ post from 14.11.2014. Usabilla, 2014 (cited 2.01.2015)

Usabilla does not post frequently on Google+ and uses it primarily to share video content from YouTube. In addition, Google owns both Google+ and YouTube, which make it convenient for the user or customer to find a link to the content of interest. Even though Usabilla is less active by its own on Google+, it receives mentions and references by other users (figure 19).



MariaDB 10.0.15 now available <https://blog.mariadb.org/mariadb-10-0-15-now-available/>

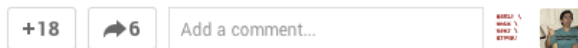


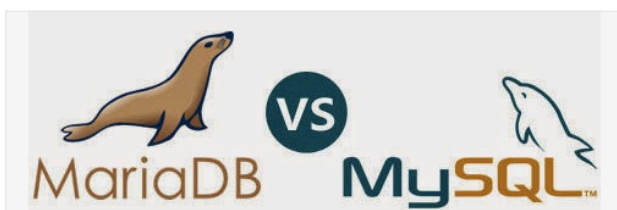
FIGURE 21. Google+ post from 25.11.2014. MariaDB, 2014 (12.12.2014)

Unlike Usabilla, MariaDB is an active user of Google. However, it works as a complementary platform as well, to share the blog posts (Figure 21) and re-direct readers to their website. MariaDB receives many “pluses” and shares as the content is relevant and if interested in services customers want to learn more they will be directed to the webpage.



QUESTION:

MariaDB vs Mysql witch one is the best option to run on linux. personally, i think Mysql. but what do you think....



30 comments

FIGURE 22. Google+ post from 29.12.2014. MariaDB, 2014 (cited 12.12.2014)

Besides being active itself, MariaDB is a subject of various discussions amongst Google+ users, see figure 22. People ask questions about how do they like MariaDB or what software is better. It increases MariaDB search engine visibility and encourages company to be innovative and produce more content.

YouTube

YouTube allows companies to share video content related to what the company does, produces and offers. MariaDB and Usabilla offer software and it is very important that they share videos related to how to use it, what are the advantages and other relevant issues.



FIGURE 23. YouTube video from MariaDB channel, year 2013 (cited 12.01.2015)

MariaDB offers its customers sophisticated software which help to analyze content and improve user experience. When the new product was released they made a number of videos outlining the feature and usability, compared it with old versions. On Figure 23 is the video on what MariaDB is and why a customer should change and use it. The video kept short and outlines the most important objectives.



FIGURE 24. YouTube video from Usabilla channel, 2014 (cited 12.01.2015)

Usabilla along with MariaDB offers feedback tool software for the customers and their websites and webpages. In their series of videos Usabilla opens up different tools for different purposes, for example on figure 24 is a video about Usabilla Live for Websites. The company claims that their tools are easy to use and therefore, the video is short, visual, and informative. It is also interesting that the usabilla YouTube channel is run by one of the employees – Sabina Idler, and there is no Usabilla YouTube channel.

5.3 Effectiveness measures

According to Startup ranking analytics the engagement rate has been calculated for both companies. The engagement rate measures how much is the audience engaged with the content company shared, twitted or posted. There are formulas to calculate Facebook and Twitter engagement rate:

Engagement rate for Facebook = number of people who liked, commented, shared or clicked on the post/ number of people who saw the post (Simply Measured, 2014, cited 12.12.2014.)

Engagement rate for Twitter = Number of replies + Retweets /Number of followers (Socialbakers.com, 2014, cited 12.12.2014.)

However, the numbers presented on Startup ranking are abstract and it is hard to say what is behind these numbers and how they were derived. Due to the nature of the companies' analysis, this chapter will only suggest what analytics could be used in order to measure social media presence effectiveness, what is a good engagement rate and what are the factors influencing it. It is important to use metrics and analytics because all the marketing strategies and tools company implements are aimed to ensure that there will be a profit and return on investment (ROI). These tools help companies to analyze how much profit one customer generates and therefore, project channel specific revenue (Bondar and Cohen, 2012,357.)

An ultimate aim for the companies is to increase a number of followers or fan, replies or comments and retweets or shares on Twitter and Facebook respectively. That will result in higher engagement rates. Special attention should be directed to what content the followers like, to what content they react, what is the best time and date to share the content, monitor the number of the audience. According to "The complete Guide to Twitter Analytics", (2015) it was analyzed that tweets that contain pictures and videos get the most engagement to Twitter. Furthermore, tweets posted on Sunday get the most replies and retweets (MarketingCharts, 2014, cited 12.01.2015.)

Facebook is not very different from Twitter when it comes to analytics and what to companies should pay special attention to. However, there are a few different insights to look at. Firstly is the audience growth per month. If the company manages to grow organically 10% monthly, it is the best result to be achieved. Another measure is a number of likes and comments that will show the engagement rate. By looking at what the fans like and comment, company can decide what

content to post more and what should be the strategy. It is also useful to check how many unfollowed company's Facebook page, how many mentioned the company in their posts and the number of impression, how many people viewed a post. (Mashable, 2010, cited 12.01.2015).

Other platforms such as LinkedIn, YouTube or Google+ can be monitored using Google Analytics. LinkedIn has simple analytical tool showing how many new followers company's profile received daily and monthly. YouTube and Google+ are connected to Google Analytics tools and it is convenient to monitor and make changes accordingly following it.

6 CONCLUSIONS

There has been always a debate about business-to-business (B2B) and business-to-consumer (B2C) approaches and their approaches on how to do effective marketing. Social media is a new yet fast developing phenomena in conducting marketing – social media marketing. It is no longer seen as an addition to existing marketing tools, it became a necessity. Even though B2B considered being unemotional and strictly about the business, usually that is not true and in fact B2B involves more emotions than B2C. Indeed, business customers demand more and they expect and require a more personal approach because they are oriented on doing long-term business. It is also important to remember that behind any business there is a real person.

Previously mentioned, social media became an essential part of companies' marketing activities. The major benefits a company receives by utilizing social media and using it wisely as well as effectively are no geographical and time boundaries, no significant expenditures on training the staff, receiving a valuable feedback and as a result improving overall communication. However, there are obstacles to face: lack of expertise, insufficiently trained staff, lack of social platform's maintenance, and security issues as information is accessible online by anyone, including competitors. There are additional factors influencing successful adaptation of social media, and one of them is the size of the company.

Startup companies are believed to have better chances to utilize social media and incorporate it into their every day operations. These companies are usually small or medium in size and more creative and innovative by definition. At the beginning social media does not require any investments and it is a good start for the marketing. It also improves their competitiveness, minimum finance and gives a chance for fresh company to enter the market. Startups are very important for the economy. Therefore, it is important to support them and provide them an opportunity to try new methods of marketing performance. Through the support of startups and their innovative methods and ways, there could be rise of new social media marketing strategies and use.

Two B2B startup companies from different countries were used to analyze their social media presence and approaches. Finnish company MariaDB Corporation and Dutch Usabilla both provide software to their customers. It is a complex product with service support (24/7), therefore

one of the major advantages that social media brings is that they can provide this service with no time and geographical boundaries. Both companies are very active in social media and use various platforms, in particular Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Google+ and YouTube. There are different strategies using different channels, and companies post and share various content on each medium. The key in social media marketing success is to post relevant content. After the thorough analysis of both companies and their contents it is clear that MariaDB and Usabilla follow the rules of social marketing and feed their customers right information. They utilize each platform to its potential and also mastered to use platforms simultaneously by advertising one platform on the other.

As an overall conclusion, B2B companies' primary platform is their website and that is where all the efforts must be addressed to. The website is the most informative and visual social platform. It was shown through social media channel analysis of two companies that they attempt to re-direct their customer to visit the website via social media. However, it is not necessarily enough to be present but it is also crucial to post relevant and engaging content to attract customers. Furthermore, by being present in social media make companies recognizable for search engine, generate organic search and boost the search engine optimization. All in all, B2B companies use social media as a complementary marketing tool, however it is necessary for them to be present there in order to be visible by search engines and as a result to attract potential customers and direct them to their website.

7 DISCUSSION

The analysis of social media marketing, especially in the B2B environment, was very interesting to research and I explored some new interesting points and characteristics, which are usually overlooked or not seen in every day life.

It was unfortunate that I did not find a real case company in order to get better insights into the marketing operations and how would that company measure it's success. On the other hand, I wanted my work to be essentially theoretical because the topic was rather general and there were lots of concepts to be covered. The only drawback of pursuing this theoretical approach was that I did not get a chance to study and see the analytics and metrics, which influence and visualize how well companies perform on social media.

For the question under investigation, this thesis used two startup companies to analyze the role of social media and what type and kind of activities companies usually execute. I tried to expand the geographical scale of companies and chose them from two different European countries – Finland and the Netherlands. The sample is still very small to come to big conclusions, however it is not biased to one country and general idea could be understood. Also the size of the companies was not equal, even though both were startups: MariaDB became a large corporation and Usabilla has been established just recently. In further works, it is possible in addition to the size of the country discuss the influence of country's economy and level of innovativeness, as it was one of the core characteristics for startups. The scope of different factors will influence the adaptation and success of social media marketing.

In the overall conclusion it was pointed out that for B2B companies, social media is still a complementary yet very important marketing tool. As research progressed I came to the impression that social media might not be important at all and B2B is forced to use it - in order to keep up on the same level with B2C. However, the more information I read about each platform the more it became clear that B2B needs social media equally or even more than B2C. Company's website is the core of business activities and it is a place where all the information is to be found. Social media interaction enhances and welcomes B2B customers to visit the company's page by re-directing them there through blog posts or events created by the company. Another important and beneficial feature of social media for B2B companies is that customers can

become advocates of the company by commenting on content and recommending their products and services - visible for everybody. Therefore, social media is a new word-of-mouth and B2B companies are starting to recognize and use it to their advantage more actively.

Suggested further topics to investigate and research closely could be, for example, a more thorough analysis of each channel and specific metrics related especially to B2B cases; factors influencing adaptation of social media marketing; comparison of social media marketing activities among different countries; content marketing and why it is crucial; detailed comparison of B2B and B2C social media marketing.

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