

# **Marketing communication of meeting services**

**Case: Original Sokos Hotel Alexandra**

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<p>Abstract</p> <p>The purpose of the bachelor's thesis was to find out how to implement marketing communication in the meeting industry in order to meet the objectives of the client companies. The objective was to consider how the company could reach corporate customers and which marketing communication means were reasonable when marketing to organizations. Another aim was to find out factors that affect the purchase decision when choosing meeting services.</p> <p>The data was collected using quantitative and qualitative methods. The quantitative research was conducted using an online questionnaire via Webropol and collecting data at the EventumExpo fair. The questionnaire was targeted to organizations that use meeting services. The qualitative research was carried out through individual theme interviews with the customers of the Original Sokos Hotel Alexandra. The questionnaire was based on the theory part, and the setting for the theme interviews was derived from the principles of quantitative research and theories.</p> <p>Through the research, the usage of online channels emerged as an eminently important means of communication. The service provider's web sites were the most popular tool for an information search. A preferred technique was to search for information independently through online channels and by consulting colleagues.</p> <p>Based on the research, it is possible to understand corporate customers' behavior concerning the use of different communication channels. Hence, companies can plan their marketing communications more effectively. Studying the factors that affect the purchase decision gives information of what content should be emphasized in marketing communication. The message should convey a reliable image and good service, and especially for potential customers, the message should imply professionalism and experience in meeting services.</p>		
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<p>Tiivistelmä</p> <p>Opinnäytetyön tarkoituksena oli selvittää, kuinka toteuttaa kokouspalveluiden markkinointiviestintää, jotta se kohtaisi yritysasiakkaiden tarpeet. Tavoitteena oli pohtia, miten yritys voisi tavoittaa yritysasiakkaita ja mitkä markkinointiviestinnän keinot ovat järkeviä yritys-markkinoinnissa. Lisäksi tavoitteena oli selvittää tekijät, jotka vaikuttavat ostopäätökseen kokouspalveluita valittaessa.</p> <p>Tutkimuksessa käytettiin kvantitatiivista ja kvalitatiivista tutkimusmenetelmää. Kvantitatiivinen tutkimus toteutettiin verkkokyselynä Webropolin avulla ja keräämällä vastauksia EventumExpo -messuilla. Kysely suunnattiin yrityksille, jotka käyttävät kokouspalveluita. Kvalitatiivinen tutkimus toteutettiin yksilöllisinä teemahaastatteluina Original Sokos Hotel Alexandran asiakkaille. Kyselylomake laadittiin teoriassa esiin nousseiden asioiden pohjalta, ja teemahaastatteluiden runko muodostettiin kyselyn sekä teorian pohjalta.</p> <p>Tutkimuksen kautta erityisen tärkeäksi viestinnän kanavaksi nousivat verkkokanavat. Palveluntarjoajan verkkosivut olivat erityisen suosittu tiedonhakukanava yrityksille. Tietoa halutaan etsiä itsenäisesti ja joustavasti verkkokanavien kautta sekä hyödyntämällä kollegoiden tietoja.</p> <p>Tutkimuksen pohjalta on mahdollista parempaan ymmärrykseen yritysasiakkaiden käyttäytymisestä eri viestintäkanavien käytöstä ja siten suunnitella tehokasta markkinointiviestintää. Ostopäätökseen vaikuttavien tekijöiden tutkiminen antaa tietoa, mitä sisältöä markkinointiviestinnässä tulisi korostaa, jotta se olisi tehokkaampaa. Viestin tulisi välittää luotettavuutta ja hyvän palvelun kuvaa, ja etenkin uusille asiakkaille viestistä tulisi välittyä ammattitaito ja kokemusta kokouspalveluiden suhteen.</p>		
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# 1 OPENING MEETING

Operating and working in a work community requires exchange of thoughts. Meetings create good frames for discussion and decision making, and within every organization meetings are held, whether those are small snapshots held in the organization's own properties or extensive stakeholder events held in service provider's venues. The key for successful co-operation and relationship management is communication. (Rogers 2013, 2-3.)

The meeting industry is considered rather a young industry, and it is often connected to business travelling. Meetings, however, have been held since long time ago.

Organizations search for facilities to exchange ideas and communicate. Meeting services are rarely a service provider's only business operation but often operating as supplement to other services, such as accommodation or restaurant services. (Rogers 2013, 2-3.)

Competition is nowadays considerable, and the involvement of the Internet has increased the amount of information that people can access, increasing consciousness and critical thinking towards goods. Therefore, companies need to put a lot of effort on planning how to attract customers and gain recognition. (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick 2012, 6.) Marketing communication is a way to communicate with customers and potential interest groups, and to win over the target group. However, marketers need to know how to attend to their customers and the target group, where to communicate and what kind of messages to use. Not only accomplishing goals is important but following and developing the company's own operations in a constantly changing environment. (Kananen 2013, 9-10.)

This thesis was assigned by Original Sokos Hotel Alexandra, which is one of the three Sokos Hotels in Jyväskylä. The objective of this research is to study marketing communication means for meeting services, and the research problem is to find out how



the client company can implement effective marketing communication in order to get new customers, maintain the relationship between the current ones, as to increase visibility and recognition through marketing communication.

This thesis is an empirical study which used a quantitative research method, and which is based on the primary data. The central theoretical parts of the research, which were familiarized with the help of the theory, are meeting services, marketing communication, brand and organizational buying. The topics were covered by analyzing and drawing conclusions from the theory and research results. The topic was outlined to consider marketing communication means, not the entire marketing concept, in order to avoid too disordered research that could easily get aimless.

An interest towards marketing and meeting services had an influence on choosing this subject. In addition, marketing communication research had not been done before for Original Sokos Hotel Alexandra's meeting services, and the company saw it important to get information to help them design their marketing communication better. This research also gives information that is applicable for other organizations that are operating in the same industry since the results can show an organizations' general behavior when purchasing meeting services.

In outline, the framework of the research proceeds in the following way after the introduction: first, the client company of this thesis, Original Sokos Hotel Alexandra, and Jyväskylä as a meeting city are adduced. After this follows the double-barreled theoretical framework, in which the first part covers meeting services and the other part marketing communication. In the meeting service section, the organization and the customers of meetings, meeting venues, and trends in the industry are explored. The marketing communication section focuses on the different means of implementing communication, organizational buying, and a brand's influence on purchase decision. After the theoretical framework, the implementation of the research is explained.

## 2 OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT OF ALEXANDRA

### 2.1 Original Sokos Hotel Alexandra's meeting services

There are altogether three Sokos Hotels in Jyväskylä: Original Sokos Hotel Jyväshovi, Original Sokos Hotel Alexandra and Solo Sokos Hotel Paviljonki. The hotels belong to the Sokos Hotels –chain and further, to the S-group. Regionally the hotels are owned by the cooperative shop Keskimaa. (Hotels Jyväskylä n.d., S-group in brief n.d.)

The S-chain's hotels are divided into three different type: Original, Break and Solo. Each type has their own characteristic features, which differ the hotels from each other. The Original Sokos Hotel Alexandra belongs to the Original by Sokos Hotels –brand, which values are to be a heartily Finnish hotel. (Original by Sokos Hotels n.d.)

Sokos Hotels is the largest and well-known hotel chain in Finland, comprising over 50 hotels in Finland, Tallinn and St. Petersburg. (Sokos Hotels. n.d) Sokos Hotels is part of the S-group, which is entire Finland comprising network of companies that operate in retail and service sectors. The S-group consists of twenty regional cooperatives and the SOK Corporation owned by the cooperatives and its subsidiaries. The S-chain aims with its operation to produce competitive services and advantages to the co-op members in a profitable manner. (S-group in brief. n.d.)

The Original Sokos Hotel Alexandra is located in a central place near Jyväskylä's travel center, offering accommodation-, meeting-, restaurant- and other leisure services. The hotel has 16 meeting venues with the capacity of 8-160 people, versatile restaurant services, and a parking possibility for customers. It is possible to organize for even 190 people's events at the hotel's restaurant Franseska. Also the hotel's restaurant Gastropub Jalo's Jaloklubi is available for private events. (Meetings & events n.d., Original Sokos Hotel Alexandra n.d.)

The Original Sokos Hotel Alexandra has diverse meeting facilities for smaller and larger meetings. From the three Sokos Hotels in Jyväskylä, meeting services are concentrated to the Original Sokos Hotel Alexandra, since it has the most extensive selection of

meeting venues. The Alexandra's accommodation capacity is 274 rooms, therefore, it is also suitable choice for several day's meetings. The clientele of Original Sokos Hotel Alexandra is wide, and depending on the date, a typical client varies from a business traveler and a meeting customer to an individual or a group leisure traveler. (Kallio 2014, 7.)

The selling and reserving of the meetings of Original Sokos Hotel Alexandra is managed by the sales service of Jyväskylä's Sokos Hotels. The buyer can choose between meeting packages and a plain venue rent. The meeting packages include a venue rent and servings. Those are good options for buyers who have bigger meetings with a large number of attendances, and if the buyer also wants servings. The meeting packages can be modified according to the buyers' wishes, considering the timetable of the meeting and the servings.

The most typical meetings that companies organize in Alexandra are day meetings, and the typical amount of participants varies between 20-30 people. Two days lasting meetings are also common meetings in the Alexandra. The amount of the participants in these varies between 20-40 and 60-100 people. Less prevalent are two-day meetings in Alexandra with over 100 participants and evening events including accommodation. (Ahonen 2015.)

## 2.2 Jyväskylä as a meeting city

As a national level, the meeting-, congress and fair travelling is significant in Jyväskylä region. Jyväskylä has been ranked as the fifth popular congress city in Finland in congress city ranking 2014. (Keski-Suomen matkailuelinkeinon strategia 2002-2006, 2002.) Jyväskylä is located in a good hub in the middle of Finland with comprehensive traffic connections that enable connections to all over Finland. Jyväskylä has copiously grand industry, internationally outstanding companies, small and medium enterprises and universities, therefore, there are lot of potential customer organizations for Original Sokos Hotel Alexandra. In addition, Jyväskylä is seen as an attractive city due to the reasonable prices compared to the capital area. Tourism organizations especially

highlight that the area is developing and is a dynamic economy area. (Keski-Suomen matkailuelinkeinostrategia 2008, 7.)

There are lots of attractive tourism centers in Middle-Finland area: Himos is significant during the winter season and Peurunka is counted among top companies as a rehabilitation center. From all the travels directed to the Central-Finland over 60% are leisure time travels. And from the journeys directed to Jyväskylä almost 50% are profession related and only 42% are leisure time travels. Summer is the most silent time of the year, due to the decrease in the amount of the commuters as travelers. (Keski-Suomen matkailuelinkeinon strategia 2002-2006, 2002.) Already this suggests that business travelling is significant for Jyväskylä area.

There are several meeting hotels operating in Jyväskylä area, which business area, and further, the target customer group is similar to Alexandra's. The biggest city center hotels that can be considered as the competitors of the Original Sokos Hotel Alexandra are Scandic, Cumulus and Rantasipi Laajavuori. In addition, Peurunka, which is located a little bit further away from Jyväskylä, can also be considered as a competitor for Alexandra. However, there are also several smaller meeting service providers in Jyväskylä, such as restaurants and universities, but the ones mentioned above are meeting hotels, such as Original Sokos Hotel Alexandra, and therefore, compete especially of the same larger meeting groups.

### 3 MEETING SERVICES

The conference industry is considered rather as a young industry, originated from Europe and the North America. However, by these days the industry has become worldwide forming part of the business tourism. Due to the young age of the industry, it is claimed not to have some of the necessary characteristics of more established industries, such as sufficient market intelligence, well defined terminology, appropriate education and training structures, and clear entry routes. Meetings, conferences and conventions are in a leading position in the modern communications both in internal

communications, such as sales meetings and training courses, and in external communications, such as technical conferences and product launches. (Rogers 2013, 2-3.) Meetings and conferences are closely related to the tourism industry, and considered as a part of the business travelling.

Barker (2011) refers to the results of several studies pointing out that meetings are nowadays held more than before, and that the number will increase in the future. More meetings are held because work is nowadays more complex than before. The meaning of networking has become more emphasized, as also active collaboration within the organization and with the partners in cooperation. In consequence of the increased equality in work unions, employees' opinions are given more weight. Working has also become more team oriented, which demands more meetings in order to communicate and exchange ideas. And for this, meetings are the most natural environment. (Barker 2011, 11-12.)

Services are intangible commodities in which production and consumption communication has an essential role. (Isohookana 2007, 65). A service process often includes some kind of an interaction between the customer and the service provider. However, the interaction is not always directly personal, and alternatively, the interaction also occurs in situations where it is not even that visible. (Grönroos 2009, 77.) The preparation of meeting- and accommodation venues, and serving production are done before the meeting starts, and the customer only sees the delivery of these services, but is unaware of the actions that enable the end product.

A service entirety is usually described as a service package that consists of intangible and tangible elements. (Grönroos 2009, 225). The service package is composed of the core service, facilitating services (and products) and supporting products. The core service is the reason for the market existence. A meeting's core service comprises from the value of its official program. Whereas the additional services create physical and social value to the attendances of the meeting. (Blinnikka & Kuha 2004, 34-36.)

A meeting is an occasion where people gather. It can signify a defined interactive situation or goal-directed gatherings. The purpose of the meeting can be decision

making, informing or discussion. Meeting is a general term for events that enable communication among the attendances, which aim is to generate better ideas or decisions together. The purpose and type of a meeting vary depending on the needs of the participants. It can range from simple morning meetings to diverse several days lasting meetings. The turnout may alternate form meetings of few people to thousands of participants. Premises can range from small negotiation premises to an event entity that takes place in many cities. (Rautiainen & Siiskonen 2013, 14-15.)

The most common are the meetings of different unions, boards, and organizations, which aim to motivate and train the personnel, and medical and other scientific meetings. The meetings of companies are often necessary events for information sharing, however, for instance, non-profit unions can have an obligation to gather periodically without any particular reason. Regardless to the form of the meeting, the most important thing is to have a specified goal for it. (Rautiainen & Siiskonen 2013, 14-15.)

### 3.1 Organizing meetings

The organizer of a meeting is usually a union or an organization. It is common that the organizing company or union plans the meetings' schedules and goals, and buys the facilities, services and possible catering form the service providers. The number of service providers in the meeting service industry is extensive, and it is common that the service providers are in straight contact with the customers at some point during the process. (Blinnikka & Kuha 2004, 29-30.)

A company's marketing department usually organizes the meetings and events of the company. Arranging meetings is expensive for companies. Therefore, the definition of exact goals for each event is essential so that the value could be also financially measured within at least a particular timespan. A meeting operation should always be goal-directed in order to get the most benefit out of it. (Blinnikka & Kuha 2004, 34.)

From the organizer's point of view, the organizing process includes several steps. Starting from the beginning, clear objectives should be set. Defining the goals and

purpose of the meeting create a base for choosing a suitable venue, planning the timetable, budget, and marketing plan. Meeting arrangements can include food, beverages, social events, refreshing, transportation and accommodation. (Rautiainen & Siiskonen 2013, 14-15 & 53.)

When choosing the date for the event, other events occurring at the same time in the near areas nearby should be taken into account. Those usually are hindrances if affecting the availability of convention, accommodation and restaurant venues. Alternatively, the events can benefit being connected to the program of the meeting. (Rautiainen & Siiskonen 2013, 54-55.) Further, in the process, it is also important to prepare the program and define the duration of the meeting. Health and safety issues should also be taken into consideration along with the venue contracts and service guarantees. Ultimately, after the meeting, the evaluation of the event is also an important part of the organizing process that should be implemented after each meeting. (Rogers 2013, 178.)

When the objectives and the style of the meeting have been determined, the next step is to choose a suitable venue for the event. The organizer can use the company's own premises or alternatively the supplier's venues. Finding a suitable venue is one of the essential decisions when arranging meetings, which influences the success of a meeting regarding the delegates' comfort. (Rautiainen & Siiskonen 2013, 54-55).

Criteria that affect the choice of the meeting venue are functionality of the facilities and suitability to the nature of the meeting, technology, price, accessibility, and availability of catering and accommodation services. Technical readiness regarding the equipment in the venue has also increased its importance when organizing meetings today. Good accessibility is one important factor when choosing the place, since the place should be easy for the participants to reach. Appropriate and versatile facilities contribute to the success of the meeting. Everyone should be able to see the speaker, and the premises should not be too small in relation to the number of the attendances. (Rautiainen & Siiskonen 2013, 55.)

Another factor that affects the choice of the meeting place and venue is the personnel's professional skills and service propensity. In addition, the functionality and sufficiency of the lunch and café venues also emerge as influential factors concerning the choosing of the meeting venues. Almost every meeting has at least coffee served either during the meeting or at the end, and the daylong meetings usually include meal. (Rautiainen & Siiskonen 2013, 54-55, 58 & 64.) On the other hand, if the organizer does not have previous experience of the supplier, these aspects are difficult to know beforehand, and therefore, they might not have a great influence on the choice of the venue. However, the organizer can still hear others' experiences of the venue supplier, which can have an effect on the decision.

Common service providers for meeting services are hotels, restaurants and universities. A key part of the sales and marketing process for meeting venues is the opportunity to show the benefits and attractions of their venues for the potential clients through a show round. This should always be conducted by the person who knows the venues and is able to sell the benefits of the facilities. (Rogers 2013, 230.)

The organization process from the meeting venue providers' point of view includes three stages: planning, arrangement and follow-up marketing. In the planning stage the event's goals and nature must be defined, and the buyer's preferences concerning the services, and the number of participants need to be considered. In addition, informing customers and personnel is an important part of the process that affecting the success of the meeting. For instance, in a hotel the sales assistants' knowledge of the meeting product and the facilities, programs, and food products is the key for selling the organization's meeting services. (Rautiainen & Siiskonen 2013, 66.)

### 3.2 Customers of the meetings

According to Rogers (2013, 42) the conference industry's buyers can be divided into two broad types: association and corporate buyers. Corporate organizations are established to create profit whereas associations are non-profit. Corporate organizations' meetings can be compartmentalized into general meetings, training courses, sales conferences,



team-building events, technical conferences, product launches, and incentive travels. The participants of the meeting can be employees of the company: a certain team or department, supervisors or directors, or either an external group comprising stakeholders or new potential customers. (Rogers 2013, 43-44.)

Association buyers refer to professional or trade associations or institutions, voluntary association and societies, charities, religious organizations, political partners, and trade unions. Their operation is mainly non-profit, and the objective of their meetings can be, for example, political change instead of immediate economic benefits. Typical meetings for this group are annual gatherings, trainings, and communication- and technology oriented gatherings. (Rogers 2013, 42-52.)

The actual end user of a meeting can be an individual, a member of a union or a work community's representative, who takes part to the meeting. The participation can be dependable on other people than the end user itself. Attending a corporation's meeting can usually be compulsory for the employee, like an employee training. And opposite, attending an association's meeting is usually dependable on the individual itself. (Rogers 2013, 42-52; Blinnikka & Kuha 2004, 26-27.)

Companies' might arrange meetings regularly and it is a normal part of the employees' job description within companies. Participants seek solutions for their problems from meetings, so the content should benefit them. Thus, it is important that meetings are planned according to the attendances, and therefore, the organizer company or association needs to be aware of in which role the participants are in the meeting. (Blinnikka & Kuha 2004, 26-27.)

### 3.3 Service providers

There are variety of different types of facilities for meetings, ranging from a hotel or a restaurant venue to convention centers. The majority of meetings are held in conference rooms or in offices on the property of the organizing company but as the meetings become larger and involve more people, the venues and possible other services are rent from an organizational supplier. (Fenich 2012, 56-57.)

The suppliers of meeting services provide for an external hire the venues and the services. However, often the suppliers are not operating exclusively in the meeting industry. Hotels comprise over half of the meeting industry's service suppliers, offering services and multi-functional venues for variety of meetings. (Rogers 2013, 60-61.)

The conference activity in hotels is mainly focused on business- and meeting hotels. Hotels' premises are versatile, and especially functional for small or medium sized meetings, seminars or symposiums. An advantage for hotels as meeting venues are their restaurants and accommodation premises and comfortable premises for leisure time. (Rautiainen & Siiskonen 2013, 42-44.) Comfortable outdoor venues and lobbies can support networking and social functions, and increase the comfort during the meetings. Besides, physical attributes have significant impact on the participants' involvement in the proceeding. Eventually, these can positively affect the overall customer experience. (Fenich 2012, 58.)

Along with hotels, other usual meeting venues are conference centers, academic venues like colleges and universities, multi-purpose venues like leisure centers, town halls and other civic facilities. (Rogers 2013, 60-61.) Conference centers are adequate for the arrangement of bigger conventions. The greatest assets of conference centers concern the versatility of the venues, which makes them suitable for several types of events. Conference centers usually have a service desk, other meeting and exhibition venues, and restaurants. The idea of a conference center is that multiple events can be organized there simultaneously. (Rautiainen & Siiskonen 2013, 32-33.)

### 3.4 Trends in the industry

Changes in the social attitudes and the technological development will shape the conference industry in the future. (Shone 1998, 154). Technology in the meetings industry market is constantly developing bringing new applications onto the market. However, technology affords opportunities, and therefore it is vital to adopt the changes to remain competitive. Technology can improve the efficiency and the effectiveness of

meetings, help in cost reduction and increase in income generation, and enhance the participants' experience. (Rogers 2013, 356-357)

The technology development has enabled online conferencing, in which two or more locations are simultaneously interacting via video connection. The benefits of an online conferencing are that online meetings can be organized with a short notice, and those can be time and money saving, enabling individuals with a long distance to have meetings effortlessly. (Rogers 2013, 356-358.) For the meeting service providers, readiness for online conferencing is clearly an advantage already these days but more significantly in the future. The Original Sokos Hotel Alexandra already has video conferencing possibility to offer for the customers, which can be a good asset for the company.

In addition, along with the consumers' increasing usage of the Internet, the importance of online information-, reservation-, and sales programs will grow. The internet will become a central sales-, marketing- and distribution channel for reaching customers. Besides, social media is predicted to have an important role in digital marketing in the future. (Keski-Suomen matkailuelinkeino strategia 2008, 5-6.)

For the part of demand, interest towards meeting travelling where the meeting is connected to events and different programs will increase. Meetings are planned so that there is an additional program connected to the actual program of the meeting. The additional program can be, for instance, a health promoting or an experience yielding event. (Keski-Suomen matkailuelinkeinon strategia n.d., 6.)

Generally, the changes in the consumer behavior will have a vast effect on the industry. Well-being, traditions and safety are the most apparent trends in consumer behavior nowadays. Besides, the consumers' quality consciousness and experience seeking are other factors that companies need to take into consideration. Even though individualized services are emphasized in the consumer preferences, social cohesion is still important for them. Alternatively, consumers will still prefer individualized products according to their personal liking. (Keski-Suomen matkailustrategia 2008, 6.)

## 4 MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS

There are different types of communication: speak, gesticulation, body language, electronic and symbolic. People are constantly communicating and it is a way to understand the world, and this also concerns the companies. Communication can be both conscious and subconscious. Even if the organization would not have thought the different means of communication it is constantly communicating with its name, visual appearance, location, products, services and prices. A company should be aware of the messages that it transmits to its surroundings in order to have a positive corporate image. (Vuokko 2003, 10.)

A company's overall communication can be divided into three divisions: internal communication, external communication in a form of marketing communications, and external communication in a form of corporate communications. (Isohookana 2007, 16-17.) This thesis focuses on marketing communication, but in order to understand the entity, the two other parts are shortly presented, too.

A company's personnel form the internal communication of the corporation. The internal communication concerns the company's internal interaction and aims to bind and motivate the personnel to work for the company's goals. The level of the internal communication is in straight connection with the external environment's image of the company. (Isohookana 2007, 16-17.)

The corporation communication, in turn, is connected to the company's overall operations, and is used to affect the entire company's recognition and attractiveness. Stakeholders, which refers to a person, group or an organization that has interest in the organization, want to know different things about the company, therefore, through corporate communication the company can provide information to satisfy the need for knowledge at these sectors. All the three areas should formulate an integrated entirety transmitting a uniform message, which supports the company and its goals. (Isohookana 2007, 16-17.)

Marketing communication is part of marketing; it aims to support sales by increasing demand, give information about services or products, and maintain and manage customer relations. Marketing communication is about persuading, informing and reminding consumers of the company's commodities, and emphasizing the benefits of the services or products by using both direct and indirect means of communication. (Berström & Leppänen 2009, 332; Isohookana 2007, 16-17; Kotler & Keller 2009, 510-511.)

Marketing communication has a great significance for both creating a mental image and promoting purchases. Right communication increases brand recognition and company's image, which affects the demand of the company's supply. Marketing communication is a way for the company to have a dialogue with the consumers and build customer relationships. Therefore, marketing communication is often called the "voice" of the company. (Berström & Leppänen 2009, 332; Isohookana 2007, 16-17; Kotler & Keller 2009, 510-511.)

The changes in the world have shaped the communication environment marketers are operating nowadays. Technology changes consumer behavior by affecting consumers' information proceeding. Due to the extensive information sharing through different kind of media, capturing consumers' attention has become more challenging, which has forced marketers to rethink their marketing communications activities. The options for communication delivery have increased, therefore, consumers can decide, whether they want to, or how they want to receive media's marketing content. Some consumers might perceive marketing communication to grow disturbingly. Hence, marketers' challenge is to utilize technology creatively in order to avoid invading consumers' life too much. (Kotler & Keller 2009, 510-511.) The increase of the communications, on the other hand, puts challenges to marketers how to distinguish from competitors and how to reach the target group. Therefore, knowing the customers' preferences in information receiving and in media usage is essential for companies in order to carry through effective marketing communication.

#### 4.1 Plan and objectives

The objective of marketing communication is to create something in common between the sender and the receiver. It can refer to creating a mutual perception of the product, company or procedures. (Vuokko 2003, 12.) The definite goal is to achieve profitable sale. However, accomplishing this goal often requires a long-term use of different communication means. Therefore, the company should choose from the multiple means of marketing communications the suitable approaches for the different target groups. (Bergström & Leppänen 2009, 328).

When planning a marketing communication strategy, the reasons for the communication and the goals for it should be signified. This helps measuring whether the objectives have been achieved but also monitoring and evaluating the resources that have been used. (Isohookana 2007, 98-99.) Implementing unified communication and knowing the target group and their needs, and being aware of what communication sources they use, is the key to effective marketing communication.

The marketing communication objectives can be explored at macro- and micro-level. It is important for the marketers to understand the different levels the messages affect in receiver in order to implement effective communication. (Isohookana 2007, 98; Kotler & Keller 2009, 514-515.)

The objectives of macro-level emphasize marketing communication's conclusive aim to effect sales. The objective chain consists of five stages. The first stage is exposure, which refers to the receiver's possibility to see or hear the message. Knowing which communication channels the target group uses is key factor for reaching them. The second stage is processing, where the receiver participates the communication process after receiving the message. The marketer needs to manage to design an apt message in order to succeed in the communication and to get the receiver to consider the message beneficial and giving attention to that. After processing the message, it also has to affect the members of the target group so that they will choose the sender's service or product over the other options. The target group must also react to the communication and give feedback to the sender. The final stage is the messages' effect on victory, which refers

analyzing the effects of the message from the point of view of increasing profits and decreasing costs. (Kotler & Keller 2009, 514-515.)

The objectives of micro-level are related to the target group's thinking and behavior. At this level, the objectives are explored from the receivers' responses point of view, and three different stages can be distinguished from it. The first stage is cognitive, which concerns the receiver's objectives of learning about the service. The second stage's objectives are related to feelings. The target group needs to consider the service interesting for themselves and like it. The third stage applies to conative objectives, which means that the target group needs to buy or try the offered commodity. (Isohookana 2007, 98-99; Kotler & Keller 2009, 514-515.)

#### 4.2 Promotion mix

Marketing communication consists of diverse activities, which share a joint goal concerning marketing: selling the brand. Two major forms of marketing communication are advertising and promotion. By communicating about the brand, the company sells its products and services. (Rossiter & Bellman 2005, 3-6.)

The whole marketing communication mix of a company consists of a blend of different marketing communication means: advertising, sales promotion, public relations, personal selling and direct marketing. Each of these means uses different tools to promote the services and the products. The advertising includes radio, television and print, the personal selling includes sales presentations and fairs, the sales promotion includes discounts and coupons, and the direct marketing includes catalogues and the Internet. (Kotler, Wong, Saunders & Armstrong 2005, 719.)

Marketers need to plan their marketing communication strategy assessing which operations of the marketing communication mix will have the best effect on the customers' buying process. The type of the product or service market, consumer readiness to make a purchase, and a company's market rank are things that companies need to consider when developing their marketing communication strategy. Companies can considerably differ in their choices concerning communication channels even within

the same industry. (Kotler & Keller 2009, 512, 526 & 529.) In the following chapters, the features of the different forms of marketing communication mix are explored more closely.

### **Advertising**

Advertising in its different forms, is the organization's most important means of communication. (Bergström & Leppänen 2009, 337) The purpose of advertising is to persuade the potential customer towards the brand. Advertising can be divided into three main types: brand advertising, direct-response advertising, and corporate image advertising. Brand advertising refers to advertising in mass media, such as television, radio, newspapers, and magazines, which is not aiming to direct-response. Direct-response advertising, in turn, attempts to produce a sales inquiry, retail visit or direct purchase through advertising in direct-to-customer media, such as, telemarketing, direct mail and websites. Corporate image advertising aims at advertising the branded company or organization instead of focusing on specific brand-items. (Rossiter & Bellman 2005, 6.)

Mass media advertising is usually used when the target group is large. However, nowadays marketing is more often targeted to a certain precisely definite group and the aim is to address potential buyers more personally. Advertising can be continuous and long-term, or short term campaigns implemented when necessary. Both practices are important for the company and the advertising should not be only composed of separate campaigns. Long-term advertising makes a company and its brand distinguished, creates images and helps the company to differentiate from competitors. (Bergström & Leppänen 2009, 337) In addition, advertising can be used to build up a long-term image for the product or service and assure consumers to believe that the company offers good value, which produces positive effect on the sales. (Rossiter & Bellman 2005, 6.)

Besides being divided into three different types, the different forms of advertising can be considered by the goal of advertising, which can be informative, persuasive, reminiscent or reinforcing. Informative advertising emphasizes new products, or informs



about the price changes or new additional services, whereas persuasive advertising endeavors to affect customers' opinions, attitudes and behavior. Reminder advertising reminds of the existence of the product or service and encourages a customer to repeat a purchase. Relationship reinforcement advertising, in turn, aims to convince current purchasers of making a right choice and communicates about good reasons to continue the customer relation. (Bergström & Leppänen 2009, 338.)

Advertising can also be considered from the aspect of the used advertising tools. In marketing communications, it is important to choose tools and use forms that reach the targeted audience. A marketer can use actual advertising tools, which refer to media advertising, or direct advertising, or other supplementary advertising forms. Frequently, marketers use a combination of different advertising forms to create a functional entirety of their advertising operations. (ibid., 338.)

### **Sales promotion**

Sales promotion aims at creating quicker or greater purchases, consisting of different short-term incentive tools, the purpose of which is to affect consumers or the trade. It is in a central role in marketing campaigns. (Kotler & Keller 2009, 554.) Sales promotion signifies the promotion of a product and service awareness and an increase of transactions and interest. It is applicable for both consumer marketing and organizational marketing. Its objective is to affect people's buying behavior, for example, through offers and price reductions. (Isohookana 2007, 161.)

Sales promotion tender an incentive for buyers to buy. Three distinctive benefits can be distinguished from sales promotion: communication, incentive and invitation.

Communication attracts attention to the product or service that is promoted and may lead the consumer to the product or service. Incentive, interest or inducement brings value to the customer, which improves the effectiveness of the promotion, and aims to attract new customers. Whereas invitation advances the customer to response the transaction immediately. (Kotler & Keller 2009, 527.)

The objectives of sales promotion vary between the tools used. Incentive promotions are used to attract new customers or to reward of a loyal relationship. Promotions often attract those who are looking for a new brand, but is less effective on changing loyal brand buyers' buying behavior. The long-term benefits of sales promotion can be seen in high brand dissimilarity markets, where sales promotion can, however, change buyers' brand preferences. In the markets of high brand similarity the long term effects on buyers' brand preference are minor but the short term effects can be more evident, producing high sales response. Certain types of promotions can gradually improve the company's image. (Kotler & Keller 2009, 445-555.)

### **Public relations**

The relations to other interest publics are important for companies as the relations to the customers, suppliers and dealers. A public refers to any group having potential or an actual interest in a company, or a group that can have effect on the company's ability to obtain its goals. Information- and public relations have an important role in marketing because they are supposed to affect the consumers' image of a company and its products or services. (Kotler & Keller 2009, 563.)

The common public relations tools are news and events, which can help to inform about company's publications, social responsibility actions or other corporate image related to information. A company's website can also work as a good public relations tool. (Kotler et al. 2005, 794-795.) Public relations are targeted to many parties, therefore, they can be carried out in many different ways. Rather than gaining a quick sale, public relations focus on building up a long-term image of the company. (Blythe 2000, 101.)

Organizations' public relations can be divided into internal- and external sides. Internal public relations concern stakeholders and representatives, such as staff and commercial relations, such as suppliers, customers, agents and intermediaries. Whereas external public relations concern public media, local communities and the general public, and the government. (McCabe 2009, 248.) The internal public relations is part of the organization's internal marketing activity and the main tools that companies use in that for the information transmission are staff newsletters, training programs and social

events. External public relations, in turn, often use the news media to communicate. Messages sent via information services can catch-up the receivers better than messages transmitted via paid media, since information media increases the credibility of the information. (Blythe 2000, 102-104.)

### **Personal selling**

Personal selling has a decisive role in the execution of business operations' fundamental purpose: producing profitable sale. Sales personnel are in a central role in the organization's and customer's relation, therefore, they are in a crucial role accomplishing the set profit-, profitability- and customer satisfaction goals. (Vuokko 2003, 168-171.)

Compared to the other marketing communication tools, personal selling has a unique attribute involving personal interaction in the communication with the buyer. This helps the seller to offer more personalized solutions to the buyer, and also to make quick adjustments to the offer. Personal selling helps to build deeper personal relationships with the buyers. Due to the personal situation in the selling, buyers have increased tendency to respond, even though the buyer would not be interested. (Kotler, Bowen & Makens 2010, 375.)

Through personal selling, the seller brings value to the customer, aiming to customer satisfaction and continuum of the customer relation, and to the attainment of the company's goals. Personal selling is more emphasized in the trade of organizational goods and services than in consumer buying. In the consumer markets personal selling concentrates on customer acquisition, guidance, and customer relation maintenance. (Bergström & Leppänen 2009, 411.)

Selling work can be divided into two major types: on-field selling where the seller approaches the customer, and office selling where the customer comes to the seller. There are different forms of selling, as well as different tasks of selling, which vary depending on the industry. The selling can be directed to the different stages of distribution channels. Communication skills, right personality, decisiveness, motivation

and product knowledge are salesperson's most important attributes. Central factors in successful selling are the skills and knowledge of the seller, and his/hers own motivation. Customer knowledge is essential in selling process because it creates the base for the sale procedures. (Bergström & Leppänen 2009, 412-413 & 415-417.)

### **Direct marketing**

Direct marketing works both as a media- and sale channel. It is especially used in the development and maintenance of customer relations in both organizational- and consumer marketing. Its endeavor is to get a customer to react to the message, and it can be either non-addressed or addressed and printed or digital. (Bergström & Leppänen 2009, 383-384.)

There are number of channels using direct marketing to reach customers: direct mail, catalogs, telephone marketing, online marketing, and mobile devices. Unlike advertising, sales promotion and public relations, direct marketing relies on personal communication instead of mass communication. Direct marketing utilizes consumer-direct marketing without intermediaries. The marketing message can be precisely targeted, which works as an advantage of the direct marketing, producing more results than in mass marketing and with lesser amount of money. (Bergström & Leppänen 2009, 383-385; Kotler & Keller)

Over time, the usage of direct marketing has become very popular. Several outcomes can be outlined as a consequence of the risen direct marketing activity. As a consequence for market fragmentation, the importance of direct marketing activity has increased and the mass marketing techniques have become more limited and are not reaching the target group as efficiently as personal marketing techniques. Besides, the technology development has enabled better computer accessibility and more sophisticated software, which have made the generation of personalized messages and letters easier. (Jobber & Lancaster 2009, 331-332.)

The augmentative diversity and supply of lists have also their effects, providing comprehensive data for marketers to use in the direct marketing activities. Developed

analytical techniques also have an influence from their part, taking the categorization of consumer groups to more developed level. Direct marketing offers also an option for more cost-effective personal communication comparing to personal selling, which is regarded as rather an expensive marketing activity. (Jobber & Lancaster 2009, 331-332.)

It is important to remember in the planning of direct marketing campaign, as with all marketing communication, to coordinate the campaigns in order to convey consistent message, which all support the concerted objective. Marketing activities that transmit different message cause inefficient impact and confusion within the customers, as blurred brand image. (Jobber & Lancaster 2009, 332.)

### 4.3 Digital marketing communications

The involvement of the Internet and mobile technologies in marketing has increased recently. Internet can also be a means of interactive marketing communications since several service situations can be initiated and managed online. Internet is a service and relations central media, even though it is often used only as a means of selling. (Grönroos 2009, 339.)

The implementation of the online operations affect how fruitful the interactive marketing communication is. The company is at a certain role in the communication process, which means that the company needs to be able to respond to the customer after encouraging the customer to contact the company. If the responding for e-mails does not happen quickly, it means that interaction is not occurring, and the customer loses interest towards the company. (Grönroos 2009, 339.)

At many level, digital equivalents of traditional media have become vital components in marketing. For example, in an online campaign marketers can engage audience by using advertisements and content on social media. Search engine optimization (SEO) can profit visibility in the internet through higher ranking, for example, in the Google. As in all marketing communication operations, also in digital marketing, marketers should integrate digital operations with the traditional offline media in order to get the best benefit out of it. (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick 2012, 20 & 29.)

A company still needs to be able to validate the reasons for its online marketing communication operations as all the other marketing communication operations. There are different ways for companies to implement marketing communication online, which are: brand- and campaign web sites, search engine optimization, and product or service visibility, among others. (Isohookana 2009, 261-262.)

The websites of a company are good way to provide information for customers, however, those are not useful if the potential customers cannot find those quickly and easily. The search engine optimization, hence, is good way to increase coverage of the company in the Internet. (Isohookana 2009, 263.)

The usage of e-mails in marketing communication is increasing. E-mail advertising is affordable, and technically an easy way to approach customers and to market services. It can be used to promote campaigns and activate customers to visit the company's websites. However, challenges for the marketers is how to stand out from the competitors' e-mails, and to succeed to design an apt marketing message. Poorly designed e-mails can cause negative feelings in the receiver and result in rejection of the company's e-mails. (Kotler & Keller 2009, 574-575.)

E-mail advertising is push-marketing, where the marketing message is sent from the company's bases, nor the customer's request. Push-marketing technique is encouraging the customer to react to the message by an action. Whereas, the Internet marketing follows pull-marketing strategy where the communication goes from down to top and the customer makes the decision to contact the service provider. From the principles, these strategies are different. Marketers should always consider carefully the reasons for using push-marketing strategy, since the message can turn against the marketer if the receiver does not consider the message important. (Isohookana 2009, 267.)

Contacting the company through e-mail and by phone is common in the reservation and purchasing of meeting services. The personnel of sales service are in an essential role at this stage of interaction in the process. The customers are waiting quick responses to their requests and the sales personnel needs to meet with these expectations.

#### 4.4 The role of a brand

Marketing communication, besides promoting the services and products, is also a way to promote the company's brand. The brand is a strong factor for the Sokos Hotel, having a great meaning in all the business operations of the client company of this thesis. The Sokos Hotel was chosen in 2014 Finland's most appreciated (Markkinointi & Mainonta and Taloustutkimus), reliable (Valitut Palat) and responsible (Sustainable Brand Index 2015) brand. (Sokos Hotels –ketju on vastuullinen n.d.)

The comprehension of the commercial importance of services has increased, and the significance of understanding service branding has also grown. Brand images have a great effect on consumers' usage of the services besides the attitudes and opinions towards the brand. (O'Cass & Grace 2004, 257-264.) The way of thinking has changed in recent decades, and currently, the development of service brands is also considered very important for service organizations. (Grönroos 2009, 384).

Kotler, Bowen and Makens (2010) define brand as an element or a combination of different components, which can be a name, term, design or symbol that identify the seller's services or goods and differentiates them from those of competitors. Due to the important functions that brands provide, it is important for companies to know what image the customers have of their brand. (Kotler, Bowen & Makens 2010, 239.) From the service point of view, the definition of a brand can still be criticized. It lacks the most important service character, which is the nature of the process. Nor does it adduce the involvement of the customer, which is a fundamental part of services. (Grönroos 2009, 384-385.)

Brands help customers, whether an individual or organization, to identify the producer of the service or good, and also enable them to assign responsibility to the producer. Customers learn from their past experiences. Therefore, they learn which brands satisfy their needs. Thus, brands provide a simplification for customers' service or product choices, simplifying the search and decision making considering purchasing. (Keller 2008, 6-7.)

It is important for a company to remember that a brand stands for a certain promise for the service or products creating relationship between the parties. The buyer offers loyalty and trust assuming that the seller will behave according to the brand image. In a business-to-business buying situation, well-known and positive brands can reduce the risk in buying decisions, where the implication can sometimes be quite profound. (Keller 2008, 8-9.)

A customer has a crucial role in brand development. Therefore, it is good to remember that a company cannot create a ready-made brand by itself, but the customers are the key to the generation of a brand. A company offers grounds for the brand, and customers decide whether it will be built up or not. In service production, the customer is an important part of the service process, therefore participating in the development and maintenance of the brand, which is why, companies need to be able to produce good quality continuously. (Grönroos 2009, 386-387.)

#### 4.5 Organizational buying

Consumer buying behavior is determined by the end user's choices and the factors that channel those. Organizations, in turn, buy goods and services for their operations or for re-selling purposes, or to produce or market new products. Generally, organizational and consumer buying behavior are thought to differ from each other a lot. However, organizations' buying behavior is from its basis similar to consumers'. Commodity acquisition is based on the satisfaction of the needs and the purchases are driven by different motives. (Bergström & Leppänen 2009, 145.)

Typical for business buying is that it involves more people in the decision-making, and the process is more professional than in consumer buying. The purchases often involve great amount of money, therefore, the choice-making is remarkable decision for the companies. (Kotler, Bowen & Makens 2010, 176-177; Jobber & Lancaster 2009, 78-79.) One meeting can be even worth of thousands of euros for the service provider.

Specific requirements affecting the choice making are neither uncommon in the process. Organizational buying usually involves lots of negotiation, and the goods or services are



tailored according to the desires and demands of the buyer. (Kotler, Bowen & Makens 2010, 176-177; Jobber & Lancaster 2009, 78-79). Criteria concerning, for example, the room size and transformability of an available meeting venue, and requirements for technical readiness can be in an essential role in the purchasing of meeting services. Sokos Hotel Alexandra has different service packages for the buyers to choose from to the purpose of their meeting. The service packages are configurable, and the buying process includes negotiation about the food and beverage servings, table layout and timetable of the meeting.

Long-term relationships between the organizational buyers and the seller are also common in organizational buying. It is reasonable for the suppliers to invest in customer relationships due to the importance of a large clientele. Although the buyers within companies are under the influence of emotional factors, the weight of rational issues are still characteristic in the decision-making. For instance, strict specifications concerning the budget can affect the economic reasons to weight a lot in the decision-making. (Jobber & Lancaster 2009, 78-79.)

Organizations buy hospitality products for the purpose of providing training, rewarding employees and distributors, and providing accommodation for their employees. Eight typical stages can be distinguished from the organizational buying process. This buying process model is known as the buy grid framework. (Kotler, Bowen & Makens 2010, 179.)

The buying process starts from problem recognition, which can be occurred by an internal or external stimuli. There is a need within a company that can be solved by acquiring a commodity or a service. Internal stimuli can be, for instance, a new product or employee training that create a need for a meeting to explain the product or for a purpose of training the staff. External stimuli can be caused by an advertisement or a call from a salesperson offering a useful corporate program. (ibid., 179.)

At the second stage of the process the buyer determines requirements for the purchase and formulates a general need description. (ibid., 180). For meeting services planning this means that the organizer considers about the date of the meeting, food and

beverages, meeting space, location, and what is the need considering audiovisual equipment, and also, whether there is a need for accommodation.

After the needs are described at a general level, the buyer begins to specify these needs. It is essential that in a sales situation the salesperson is able to answer the prospective client about their equipment capability considering the product specification. (ibid., 180.) Considering again from the meetings' arranging point of view, this refers defining the exact number of meeting venues and the table set up, possible separate group working venues, possible accommodation venues, what technological equipment is needed, and how many whiteboards are needed.

The fourth step is conducting a supplier search where the buyer searches for the most adequate service providers. The buyer can do information retrieval in many ways, by searching from the internet or calling to familiar service providers. The fifth step concerns requesting a bid from the potential suppliers. The bid should adduce the company's resources and capabilities well, in order to stand out from competitors. The seller's or sales person's writing and proposals' presenting skills are highlighted at this point, since succeeding in the selling process can be highly dependable on those. (ibid., 180.)

Once the buyer has received the bids, the next step is the choice-making between the options and moving towards to the supplier selection. The physical facilities of the supplier, and service quality and professionalism of the employees are considered before the final choice. Responding to the chosen supplier and writing the final order with the list of the meeting's technical order-routine specifications is the seventh step in the organizational buying process. The supplier then answers with a contract that specifies the cutoff dates, minimum guarantees for food and beverages, and cancellation notes. (ibid., 180-181.)

Post purchase performance review of the product or service that the buyer makes, is the eight step of the process. The buyer evaluates if the service and product met with the expectations. For the supplier, it is essential to collect feedback form its customers. It is

the only way for the company to find out how well it succeeded, and if there is something that needs to be improved. (ibid., 181.)

## 5 RESEARCH IMPLEMENTATION

Research method is a compilation of manners and practices that are used for the accumulation of observation. The type of the information that is searched and from whom and where it is searched guide the method selection. The definition of a method, according to general description, is procedure that is guided by rules and is used for achieving and searching information in science of problem solving. Methods are always in a central position in the researcher's work in an empirical study. (Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 2009, 183-184.)

In this thesis, both the quantitative and the qualitative research methods were used. According to Hirsjärvi, Remes and Sajavaara (2009) these two research methods are impossible to clearly separate from each other, therefore, those can well be used as complementary to each other. (Hirsjärvi et al. 2009, 136). However, Metsämuuronen (2006) points out that using both methods comprehensively in a same research is not reasonable but choosing the other to be a principal method and using the other as a supportive method is a better option. (Metsämuuronen 2006, 254).

This principle has been used as the basis for this thesis. The quantitative method was used as a principal research method and the qualitative method was used to support the research and to get more profundity to the subject. The objective of the questionnaire was to clear up organizations' meeting behavior, preferences considering marketing communication channels, issues that affect purchase decision and opinions and images about Original Sokos Alexandra's meeting services. With the interviews, the endeavor was to closely analyze what the observation units think about the marketing communication of meeting services and how they see different things affecting purchase decision.

## 5.1 Research problem and research questions

The researched phenomenon in this thesis is marketing communication in meeting services. A problem that has not yet been solved is usually connected to the phenomenon, and a research aims to solve that problem. (Kananen 2010, 18). Original Sokos Hotel Alexandra did not have information about the organizations' preferences considering marketing communication channels. The objective of this research was to find out which marketing communication channels the target group prefers and what the issues that affect their purchase decision are.

In order to be able to explore the research object, the research question needs to be clearly defined. With the right questions, the research object can be understood and solved, and the connections between different parts and their effect on the phenomenon can be explored. (ibid., 19.) In this thesis, the main research question was derived from the research problem as follows:

*“What are the most effective ways to reach business customers from the marketing communication point view?”*

Sub questions are the following subjects derived from the main research questions, which support the main question:

*“How to implement meeting services' marketing communication so that it would meet with the objectives of business customers?”*

*“How to increase visibility and recognition for Alexandra's meeting services?”*

*“Where do companies look for potential meeting service providers and what affects the purchase decision?”*

Hypotheses considering the research results is typical for researches. As brought out in the theory part, the development of technology can be hypothesized to have an effect on the preferences of marketing communication channels, shaping out the information seeking process. Also, as people have more easily accessible information available, it has

made them more critical towards the service quality and operations of a company, which can be seen affecting the decision criteria considering the purchases.

## 5.2 Research methods

Quantitative research is statistical research, in which complete, structured and open questions are used. The focus is on exploring questions connected to calculations and percentages. The method is about dealing with figures and studying the dependence between them. The objects of interest are variables, which are the foundation of the method. (Kananen 2010, 77-79.) Standardized research forms are usually used in data collection, and the results are usually elucidated by using charts and figures. (Heikkilä 2014, 15). The endeavor of qualitative research method is to extrapolate the results, which is executed by studying a small group that represents the researched population and then drawing general conclusion from the results. This is also why the importance of the correspondence of the chosen representatives is emphasized. In order to be able to generalize the results to concern the entire population, the sample group should be equivalent to that. (Kananen 2011, 22.)

Qualitative research, in turn, aims to explain the phenomenon or reasons of a certain behavior, and hence, gives a better understanding of the research object. (Heikkilä 2014, 15.) Qualitative research method is used to define and conceptualize the phenomenon, and the objective of the method is to explore the research object as comprehensively as possible. Instead of verifying the existing statements, qualitative research endeavors to find or reveal facts. A typical data collection method is the interview. (Hirsjärvi et al. 2009, 161.)

Using two different research methods in the same research is called method triangulation. Triangulation combines several research methods in the same research with the aim of getting consolidation for the research result. The combination can be either method combination, as in this thesis, or different data collection means within the same research method. (Kananen 2010, 72.) Using two different research methods,

which in this case were questionnaire and interviews, enable a more profound analyzation of the results and also increase the attest of the results.

A quantitative research method was chosen as the principal research method since it emphasizes reliability, unambiguousness and reasoning of the results, and aims at the generalization of the results, therefore, the method is suitable considering the research object of this thesis. By studying a representative group of the buyers of meeting services, a comprehension of the entire population's marketing communication preferences could be explored, and the client company could get information of what marketing communication channels the object group uses and plan their marketing communication according to that information. In addition, since there already exists theories about the phenomenon, a quantitative method is suitable for this research. (Kananen 2011, 18.)

As an assumption in quantitative research is that there are existing theories of the phenomenon, since the method does not aim to clarify the phenomenon as the qualitative method but is based on the existing theories. Qualitative research, in turn, helps to give more in-depth information of the reason-consequence relation and gives a comprehensive image of the research object. (Kananen 2011, 18-19.) However, a qualitative method was not used in this research to get clarification of the phenomenon but it works as a good support for the quantitative part of this thesis, giving a different aspect for the research problem by exploring the reasons of the research object. The interviews enable to clarify and deepen the results of the survey.

### 5.3 Data collection

When it is a question of the quantitative research method, questionnaire is one tool for data collection. Whereas it concerns the data collection of the qualitative research, interviews are one way of collecting the data. In this thesis the foregoing methods were used. Quantitative research based on the primary data, which refers to data that is collected towards the research. (Heikkilä 2014, 13.) The questionnaire consisted of closed-, open- and mixed questions and it was implemented by collecting answers

during Eventum Expo fair 23.09.2015 in Jyväskylä, and via online survey software Webropol between 06.10.-17.10.2015. The qualitative method's interviews were implemented as individual semi-structured telephone interviews for the clients of Alexandra who have participated the meeting reservation process for their companies.

### **Data collection of quantitative method**

A survey as a research method is considered as a cost-effective way of collecting data from a broad group and to find out information for several questions. A researcher needs to choose from the different ways of implementing a survey the ones that are suitable considering the research in question. The researcher needs to, for example, choose the group that is studied: is the entire population studied or is it a sample survey, where only a part of the population is explored. (Heikkilä 2014, 31.) However, the survey has challenges, too. The response percentage can remain low and the misunderstanding of the questions is possible, and the researcher does not know if the respondent has taken the questionnaire seriously, which can cause skewing of the results. (Hirsjärvi et al. 2009, 195.)

Also emotionality concerning certain issues can affect the results of a questionnaire, since often a person might not even recognize the basic reasons for the actions he or she makes, such as reasons that affect purchase decision. And even if a person would be aware of the reasons that affect the purchase decision, he or she usually is incapable to define the importance of the different factors in the choice making. Due to these reasons, surveys are always incomplete and do not tell the entire truth, but that does not mean that surveys were pointless. The researcher can still get reliable information concerning the target group's needs and values after understanding the emotional effects of the decisions. (Rope 2005, 32-33.) Also because of this, the qualitative method was chosen to be implemented to support the quantitative research.

The quantitative part of this thesis was conducted with a sample survey, which is suitable method when the population is wide. Sample is a representative picture of a population, and therefore, conclusions drawn from the sample can be generalized to concern the entire population. Of course, this requires that the sample has similar

attributes in a same relation to the entire population. In the quantitative research different sample methods are also possible. In this research the used method was simple random sampling, in which each unit of the population has an evens odds to be selected to the sampling. (Heikkilä 2014, 31, 34.)

The target group of the survey were companies, associations and organizations that use meeting services. The target group consisted both current and potential customers of the client company. The client company's customer register was used as a one information collection tool, where the contact information of the customers were collected. In addition, online customer registers, like Finder.fi, were used and contact information of potential organizations were collected via those.

Using the client company's customer register ensured targeting the questionnaire to an applicable representative of the target group. Whereas, collecting contact information from the Internet using online organization databases, did not tell whether the organization represents the target group well. In addition, choosing also the person to whom the questionnaire was sent within the organization was challenging. Therefore, a clarification of the target group was written to the beginning of the covering letter, and the receiver of the questionnaire invitation was kindly asked to convey the invitation to a person within the organization that corresponds the research object better, if the invitation ended up to a person that does not have experience of organizing meetings for their company. Due to this, collecting contact information from the Internet was arduous and required critical thinking under each organization considering the applicability for the target group. In order to get responses from the targeted group, in the beginning of the covering letter the target group was clarified.

Before publishing the questionnaire, it was carefully checked and tested. Few changes were made to the design of the questions after it was tested. The questionnaire (Appendix 1) was divided up to five subject areas: background information, organization of meetings, information searching, purchase decision, and Original Sokos Hotel as the service provider of meeting services.



First, data was collected during an Eventum Expo -fair on 23.09.2015, which is a fair of event, accommodation and meeting services. The enquiry was carried out by stopping people at the fair and giving them a chance to take part to a survey by iPad. However, the response amount in the end of the day was not very substantial, and therefore the survey was also sent via e-mail to the potential respondents. Covering letter (Appendix 2) was sent in touch with the questionnaire, in which the purpose of the research was explained aiming to motivate the target group to answer. As a lure in the questionnaire, willing respondents could participate to a prize draw of an accommodation gift token. This was also hoped to motivate the target group to answer the questionnaire, and at the same time, to increase the response percentage. A reminder message was sent 12.10.2015 after a week of sending the invitation to the questionnaire.

#### **Data collection of qualitative method**

The qualitative part of the research included two theme interviews, which were implemented after the quantitative part of this thesis. The observational units were chosen considering their relation to the phenomenon, which is important in order to get relevant answers. The observational unit should be, according to the words of Patton (1990), a typical case related to the phenomenon. (Kananen 2010, 54). These observational units were chosen from Original Sokos Hotel Alexandra's customer register with the criteria of recently having organized meetings. Interviewing representatives of organizations that regularly organize meetings serves the objective of exploring marketing communication more deeply, since the interviewees supposedly have experience of the subject, and are applicable to answer questions concerning marketing communication and meeting services.

Generally, in qualitative research, the needed amount of the interviews is explained with the concept of saturation, which means a situation where the answers start to repeat themselves and the most recent ones do not give any new information concerning the research problem. (Kananen 2010, 54.) In this thesis, only two interviews were implemented but the purpose was to get deepen information of the subject and to

attest the results of the questionnaire, and therefore the focus was not achieving similarity in the responses.

The interviews were half-structured theme interviews, and the themes of the interviews were based on the theory of this research and the subjects of the questionnaire (appendix 4). The final interview background consisted of three subject areas: background information, choosing meeting place and the future of marketing communication. After exploring the quantitative results, the objective was to get more deepen information of marketing communication and purchase decision, which were the selected themes for the interviews. In addition, the theme questions were purposely quite broad, since the quantitative research already had detailed questions but the aim in the interviews was still to get deeper in the answers.

Important in theme interviewing is that the themes should encompass the entire phenomenon as well as possible. (Kananen 2010, 54.) Half-structured interview is flexible, which has been mapped only in outline and proceeds according to the themes. With the help of the themes, the objective is to find comprehensive meanings of the topics. Theme interview is described to proceed from general questions to details. (Kananen 2010, 55-56.)

Due to the challenges of finding suitable dates for the interviews, those were conducted by telephone. The dates for the telephone interviews were agreed beforehand, hence, the interviewees could allow time for the interview and the interviewee was able to get ready for the interview by settling oneself to a quiet place. Both interviews took approximately 20 minutes and those were recorded with a call recorder application and transcribed afterwards.

The theory of this thesis and the variables used in the quantitative method supported the creation of the interview themes. The first theme focused on summing up the backgrounds of the interviewee with the aim of exploring their meeting behavior. After that, the factors that affect the choosing of meeting place were explored and from where the interviewees search for information of meeting venues. The last theme concerned the future of marketing communication and how the company should adapt

to that. However, in this method it is good to take into account that conducting the interviews via telephone lacks personal contact, which can affect the interviewees' trust to the interviewer

#### 5.4 Data analysis

The analysis, readings and conclusions of the results are the core of the research. During analysis process, the researcher is revealed what type of results are to be get for the problems. In empirical research, the data is analyzed after the preliminary work has been done. (Hirsjärvi et al. 2009, 221.)

The first step is checking out the data. In a questionnaire, this concerns examining if some of the samples need to be discarded. The next step is completing the data, which can, in statistical and document data, be contacting the respondent for clarifying the answers. Third stage is arranging the data for the data recording and analyses. The means that are used to recording data depend on the research strategy. (Hirsjärvi et al. 2009, 221-222.)

Quantitative data is transferred into variables, which requires encoding the data. Encoding is giving each observational unit a value with each variable. (Hirsjärvi et al. 2009, 221-222.) Qualitative data, in turn, is usually preserved in a verbal form and the answers are not transferred into numeric form like in the quantitative method. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2000, 136-139). The analysis method of quantitative results depends on the used indicators and the measure levels of those. In statistical reasoning the most essential distribution numbers are presented in the analysis, and based on which, the generalizations for the population are made. The results can be presented as proportions, i.e. percentages, for example in simple table charts, when the distribution is assumed to be equivalent to the phenomenon within the entire population. (Kananen 2011, 85.)

Qualitative data is managed by transcribing, which simply means writing down the interviews. There is no standardized methods for the analyzation of qualitative results since there is several options for that. Therefore the decision for breaking down the data

is done how the researcher chooses. In this work the audio tapes of the interviews were transcribed to a text file, and then explored and compared. A chosen method was also to partly categorize and summarize the responses so that the substantial meanings that the interviewees gave could be found out. Substantial meanings refer to the answers that the researcher sees valuable for the research. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2000, 136-139.)

It is generally thought that data processing and analyzation should be started as soon as possible after the data collection stage or field stage. Suitable for a research where data has been collected with structured forms, like in qualitative research, is that the analysis is started after the data has been collected. Qualitative method differs from this, since in that method the analysis is not made at one stage of the research process but along the whole research. (Hirsjärvi et al. 2009, 221-223.)

## 6 RESEARCH RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter, the results of the quantitative research and qualitative research are presented. After presenting the results of the quantitative method, the results of the qualitative method are explored. The reliability and validity of the research are considered in the end. The questionnaire form and the part of the figures are included in the appendices as the structure of the theme interview.

### 6.1 Survey results

The quantitative data was collected via a Webropol-survey, which was sent to 133 persons. Altogether 45 responses to the questionnaire were received. Therefore, the response percentage turned out to be 33%. The amount of non-response remained quite high, which, of course, affects the generalization level of the research and narrows down the analysis methods that can be used.

The questionnaire consisted of 15 questions, both scale-based questions and multiple choice questions. The questionnaire was mainly a structured form, but it also included open questions that were analyzed according to the features of a qualitative method.

The results of the research were managed using the analytic software SPSS. The analysis of the open questions was conducted by making content analysis, which means dismantling the data and compiling it again into logical entirety. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2012, 103-104). The results were easily transferrable from straight from the Webropol to SPSS, however, due to little oversight concerning the adjustment of the Likert-scale, some emendation was required to be made before the data could be explored.

The beginning section of the questionnaire focused on exploring the backgrounds of the respondents. The section included questions concerning the type of the organization, the size of it, the location of the office and also, whether the organization has organized meetings at Original Sokos Hotel Alexandra.

In the first question, the type of the organization that the respondents represented was asked in order to get a better picture of the respondents. Almost a half (47%) of the respondents (n=45) worked in a company, and the remaining half divided into operators of associations (29%) and the public sector (24%) (Appendix 5). According to the results of this questions, and as presented in the theory (chapter 3.2), it can be seen that the customer segment of meetings is wide. The needs of these groups can vary, which should be considered in the marketing of the meeting services.

In the second question, the respondents were asked about the size of the organization they are working (Appendix 5). The responses of the sizes of the organizations varied a lot: the majority of the respondents (42%) were working in a large organization where the personnel is over 100 employees, and a little less than a third (29%) of the respondents represented a small organization with the personnel under 20 employees. The figure below (Appendix 5) illustrates the division between the sizes of the organizations.

The third question concerned the location of the organization. The question was open-ended. Thus, the responses were analyzed and divided into appropriate categories after exploring the responses of this question. A clear division of the responses could be detected, therefore the responses were categorized into “Jyväskylä” and “other area”. The table below (Table 1) illustrates the division of the locations. The majority of the

respondents' representative organization was located in Jyväskylä (73%), with almost the third (27%) located in other areas.

Table 1. Location of the organization (n=45)

	n	%
Jyväskylä	33	73
Other area	12	27
Total	45	100

The respondents were also asked if they had organized meetings at the Original Sokos Hotel Alexandra. Over half (60%) of the all respondents had organized meetings at Alexandra whereas 40% had not organized meetings there. (Table 2.)

Table 2. Experience of the Original Sokos Hotel Alexandra meeting services (n=45)

	n	%
Yes	27	60
No	18	40
Total	45	100

In order to find out how the division of organizing meetings in Alexandra goes according to the location of the organization, the variables were cross tabulated (Figure 1). Over half (67%) of the respondents that represented organizations that is located in Jyväskylä, had used Alexandra's meeting services and third of the organizations (33%) located in Jyväskylä had not used Alexandra's services before. The division of having organized meetings in Alexandra of organizations that are located somewhere else was slighter, over half (58%) had not organized meetings in Alexandra and nearly half (42%) had organized meetings in Alexandra. Therefore, it could be concluded that organizations from even further away are still quite familiar with the meeting services of Alexandra. It

is naturally positive for the client company to know that organizations even from further away have chosen Alexandra as their meeting place when they have arranged meetings in Jyväskylä and tells that Alexandra is also known elsewhere.

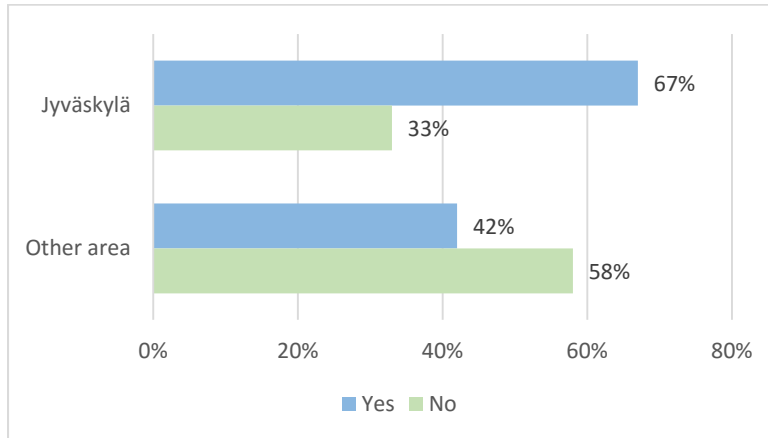


Figure 1. Organizing meetings in Alexandra according to the location of the organization.

The frequency of organizing meetings was also asked (Table 3). The results showed that within nearly half (44%) organizations meetings are organized approximately under five times a year. Only nearly tenth (9%) responded to organize meetings weekly. Both answers organizing meetings once a year and more often than once in a month got 16% of the answers. In general, meetings are arranged less frequently, and only small subset arranges meetings weekly or more often than once in a month.

Table 3. The frequency of organizing meetings (n=45)

	n	%
weekly	4	9
more often than once in a month	7	16
once in an month	5	11
under five times per a year	20	44
once in a year	7	16
more rarely than once in a year	2	4

The respondents were also asked about the durational type of the meetings (Appendix 5). The most prevalent type of meeting was half-day meetings, with the response percentage of 49. The second typical type according to the results was day meeting (33%). A little over tenth of the respondents chose the option “other”, in which evening meetings was repeatedly mentioned as a type of meeting that the respondent organizes. Only 4% had chosen several day’s meetings as a main type of the meeting that they organize.

The principal target group of the meetings that the organizations organize was also wanted to find out via the questionnaire (Table 4). Over a third (38%) had answered holding meetings mainly to own personnel. However, almost the same distribution, a third (33%) of the answers, chose the option “customers or potential customers”. The answer options might have been a little bit distractive in this case, since 11% of the respondents had chosen the option “other” and typed there “members of association”. The option “own personnel” was also meant to concern the members of associations, however, some of the respondents did not see that as a suitable option, and thus, had chosen the option “other”. In this case, the option was misleadingly design, and therefore, there was misunderstanding among some respondent.



Table 4. The main target group of the meeting (n=45)

	n	%
own personnel	17	38
customers/potential customers	15	33
other stakeholders	8	18
other	5	11

The questions “target group of the meeting” and “organizational type” were cross tabulated (Table 5). It was compared, if there were differences between the organizational types concerning the common target group of the meetings. For this table, “customers” and “other stakeholders” -variables were combined into one option to have enough answers to be compared. Thus, this table studies how the division between companies, associations and public sector goes and is there difference whether the meetings targeted more to personnel inside the organization or to outside persons.

Table 5. Target groups according to the organization type (n=45)

	company	association	public sector
Personnel/members	8 38%	9 69%	5 45%
Customers/stakeholders/ potential customers	13 62%	4 31%	6 55%
	21 100%	13 100%	11 100%

As the table shows, there is some difference between companies, associations and public sector. Companies' meetings are considerably more targeted to "outsiders" (62%), and over third (38%) of the meetings are targeted to personnel inside the organization. Whereas associations' and public sector's meetings are targeted mainly to the own personnel or members. Although the difference in the public sector is not that prominent than the difference within associations in which 69% of the meetings are targeted to members and 31% are targeted to outsiders. In public sector the difference is not that evident: 45% of the meetings are targeted to own personnel or members and 55% to customers, stakeholders or potential customers.

The division might be explained that associations mainly have meetings among the members, in which the union's subjects are trashed out. These figures also support the theoretical background of the type of associations' meetings (chapter 3.2) that associations are non-profit and the common type of their meetings are annual gatherings, trainings and communication oriented gatherings. Companies' meetings, in turn, are rather directed to customers or other stakeholders, which refers to the fundamental purpose of their operations: to create profit. Of course companies also have meetings for personnel training and for general meeting purpose.

However, due to the small amount of the responses in the groups, airtight conclusions cannot be made based on the results, and the conclusions should be taken with a grain. However, conclusions can be considered as approximate results, which help in the designing of the marketing communication message better since the different needs of

the organizational types can be evaluated, and in that way, they can be directed with a more apt marketing message.

The respondents were asked to choose three most important marketing communication channels where they look for information when searching for a meeting place. In figure 2, the respondents' preferences are illustrated. The figure shows that three channels clearly stand out from other options. Service provider's web sites were chosen among the most preferred information searching channel by 80% of the respondents. Work mate's recommendations were chosen by 69% of the respondents and online search engines by 60% of the respondents.

The results in the figure 2 refer that online channels are popular source of information but word-of-mouth information also weighs. The respondents were also asked to mention which words they use when searching information from online search engines. The responses divided around search words "meeting venues", "meeting place", "meeting" and "meeting services". The most frequently typed one was "meeting venues". Respondents also mentioned using a name of the city as a definition to these, for example "meeting place, Jyväskylä", in order to find relevant results of the possible options for the meeting places. One respondent also described using different and unordinary combinations, aiming to find inspiring venue for the meeting. The client company can utilize this information when doing search engine optimization. From these results, the most used word combinations in the search engine searches are known and the search engine optimization can be made according to that.

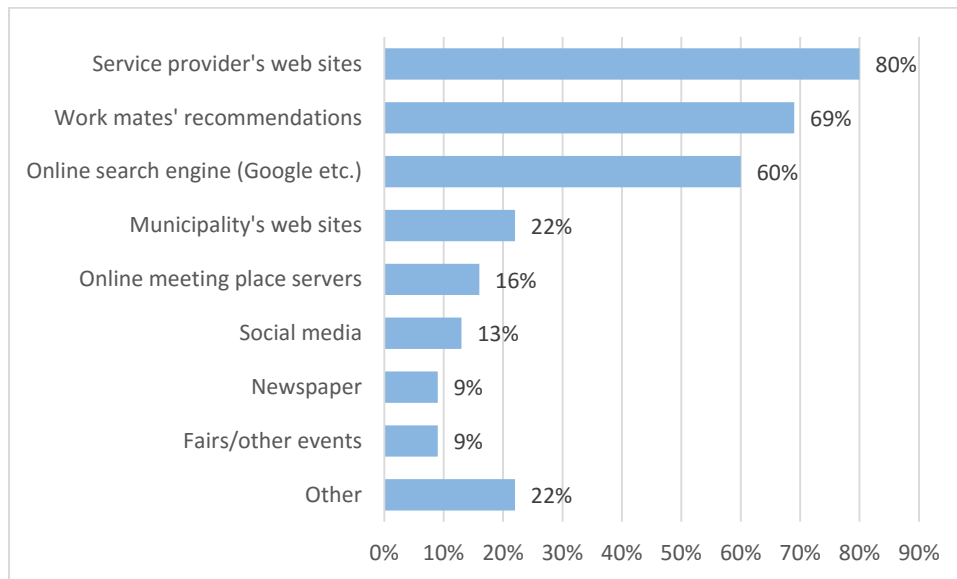


Figure 2. Favored information searching channels for meeting services

Traditional sources of information were not considered very important. Newspaper had been chosen among the most important information searching channels by only nearly tenth (9%) of the respondents. Also fairs and other events got 9% support as an important information searching channel. On the other hand, fairs are not organized very often and newspaper might not provide that wide information than could be accessed, for example, on the Internet, and therefore, those might not be that handy channels for the information searching.

Only fifth (22%) had chosen online meeting place servers, like kokouspaikka.com, as one important source of information. From the results it can be concluded that those are not yet quite popular tools for the information searching. It might be that online meeting place servers are not yet quite familiar to people, or since there is not every meeting place available, service provider's web sites or online search engines are more favoured. On the other hand, if the person who is searching for a meeting place, knows the service providers that are operating in the area, he or she might not consider necessary to use that kind of a server. Instead, the person can search information independently from each meeting service provider's web site, and does not need to find new operators from the city.

The numerous visits to the service provider's web site and online search engine indicate that buyers have already safe and familiar options for meeting services and therefore prefer to search for meeting services on the service provider's own web site. Personal connections were also considered as a valuable source of information when searching for meeting services. Those may be considered a particularly reliable option by the person who searches for a meeting place since the opinions are based on a colleague's experiences.

As for the ninth question, the respondents were asked to choose the option through which they would like to receive information of meeting services. The respondents could choose several options in the question. As shown by figure 3, the most popular option was through the service provider's website (76%). Almost a third (29%) had chosen e-mail as the source of information. However, the distinction between these two is remarkable, and should be taken into account. The other options (a salesperson's contact 11%, newspaper or leaflet 9%, and social media 7%) got quite a similar support, and altogether the same amount of support as e-mail, and only nearly half the support that the service provider's web site got.

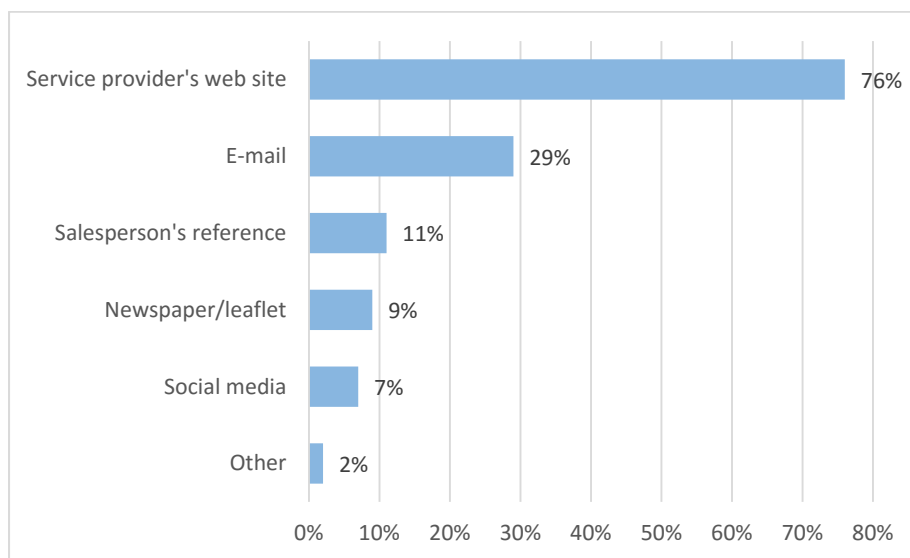


Figure 3. Preferred channels for information receiving

The response division suggests that customers want to search information independently and trust the service providers' web sites, and do not prefer contact that is initiated by the service provider. According to these results, the importance of social media as an information receiving channel is not quite popular. It might be that the importance of social media will still increase in the future but yet, its usage is not that prominent.

Respondents' opinions considering the factors that affect purchase decision was also mapped in the questionnaire. In this research the marketing communication channels were studied, therefore factors that affect purchase decision were also naturally one explicable issue in the searching of the contents that the marketing message should be.

In the research it has been solved how important the different factors are considering the purchase decision. Respondents were asked to evaluate different variables based on how extensive the importance of those is considering the purchase decision. In addition to the overall results, the differences in the responses between the groups was explored. The opinion variables are ordinal scale variables, and therefore those should not be interpreted by using narrow means, but in this, the scale is interpreted as equal leveled, and hence, the variables as an interval scale. The explanatory variable in the group comparison was the organization's type. P-value is used to describe the statistical significance of the dimension's differences. If the  $p < 0,001$  the result is statistically remarkable, if  $0,001 < p \leq 0,01$  the result is statistically significant, if  $0,01 < p \leq 0,05$  the result is statistically almost significant. The respondents had to evaluate each item in the Likert-scale 1-5, where grade 1=very important, 2=quite important, 3=I do not know, 4=not so important and 5=does not affect purchase decision. Even though the choice option 3 means that the respondent cannot answer to the question, it is possible that not all the respondents have read the instructions carefully enough and understood the number 3 to signify neutral option. Also, in this question the Likert-scale's numbers were recoded.

As the Figure 4 illustrates, location (63%) is mainly seen as a very important factor for the purchase decision. Besides, reliability (56%) and service quality (49%) are seen

important considering the purchase decision. Accessibility, however, has only been classified with a slight difference as a very important factor (46%), but the difference to a quite important is slender (41%). Membership and accommodation services, in turn, have not been seen very influential factors to the purchase decision. But the effect of accommodation might not be considered very important since the most typical meetings were not two day's meetings, and therefore, there is not even need for accommodation.

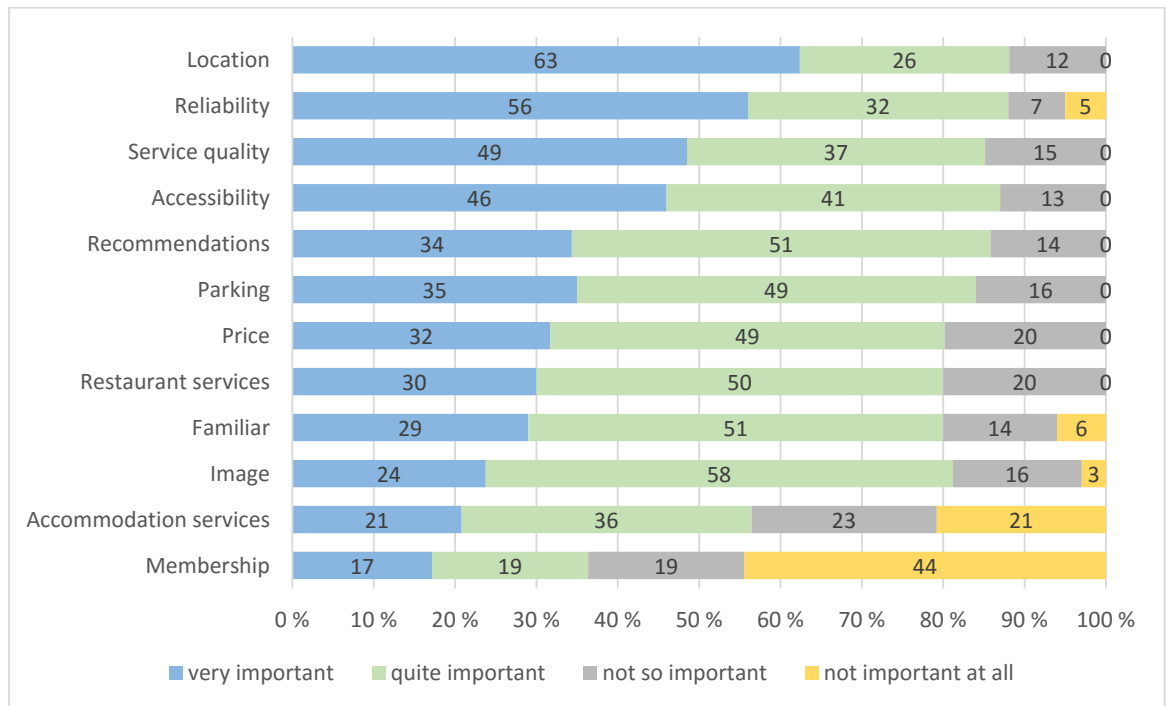


Figure 4. Factors that affect purchase decision

The image (58%) and familiarity (51%) were considered quite important factors for the purchase decision. This implies that organizations might not be quite eager to organize meetings in a totally new place. And as adduced in the theory part (chapter 4.5), meetings are usually quite expensive for the companies and there is a risk connected to the purchasing. Therefore, the organizations might want to remain with the familiar option where they have organized meetings before. And as covered in the theory, the

image tells a certain promise and affects the purchase decision. However, as the results point out, it is not considered as the only truth.

Membership was not seen as an important factor considering the purchase decision, almost the half (44%) had chosen it as a “not important at all” considering purchase decision. However, almost a third (17%) had chosen it as a very important factor. The membership might therefore be regarded as an additional benefit but only a few considered that very important. According to the results, few have still considered that membership would considerably affect the purchase decision. The S-chain has S-card membership for the business customers, which is utilized by the organizations and which benefits the owner. Price was considered as a quite important factor in the purchase decision (49%). Considerable is also that no-one evaluated location, service quality, accessibility, recommendations, parking, price and restaurant services as “not important factor at all”, therefore, those emerge as critical factors considering meeting services that the companies should keep in their mind.

Opinions considering purchase decision were also compared between two groups (figure 5). Organizational type was defines as explanatory variable for purchase decision. The organization groups, association and public sector were combined into one so that the figure would be clearer. In the figure, the factors are presented by the averages. The higher the average is, the more important the respondents have regarded the factor. However, it must be taken into account, that averages can be formed in different ways. For example, an average number 3 can be either formed with numbers 3 and 3, or with 1 and 5. Hence, it must be remembered that the averages do not tell the standard deviation within the values the variable has got.

Location and reliability are considered important factors in the both groups, with the average of 3,5 and 3,4. Accessibility has divided up the results a little bit and companies have considered that slightly more important than associations and public sector. Both groups have rated service quality as an important factor (3,3). Recommendations weigh more to the representatives of the companies (3,3) than to the representatives of the associations and public sector (3,1). Also restaurant services have been rated more



important among the companies (3,2) than the association and public sector (3), however the difference is only statistically approximate. For the companies (3,2) it is also a little bit more important that the place is familiar than to the associations and public sector (2,9). Whereas parking, price and image value more for associations and public sector than to companies. The difference between the importance's of accommodation services is higher among companies' representatives (2,9) than among associations and public sector (2,3). Though it is not very important for either of the groups with the average of less than 3. According to the results, associations and public sector do not consider membership important (1,8). Companies consider membership slightly more valuable, with the average of 2,5. The difference between the groups is only statistically approximate ( $p=0,121$ ). Partly due to the small sample group, general conclusions cannot be drawn from the results but those can be considered approximate.

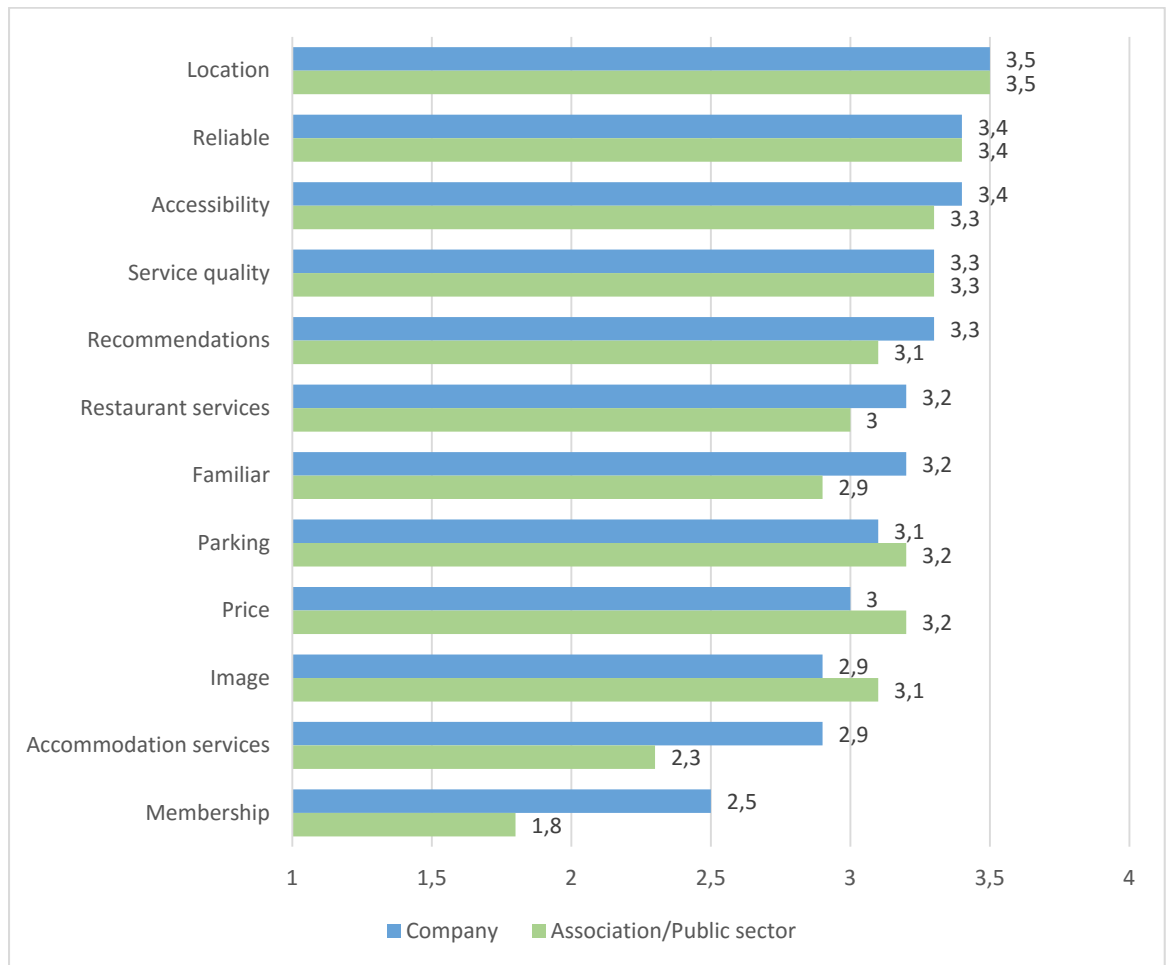


Figure 5. Factors that affect purchase decision according to the organizational type

In the research, it was also asked who within the organization participates to the choosing of meeting places. The question was open-question, and after transcribing the results and categorizing those, conclusions could be drawn from those. The given answers were categorized into two groups: the person in charge or executives within the organization. Mainly, the same person is responsible for meeting services, or then the person in charge of the project is in charge of that. Generally, when it comes to bigger companies, the decisions need approval from the board or a supervisor but often several persons were mentioned to be involved in the process.

If there is always a same person who is in contact with the service providers, the buyer and the seller can create a good relationship, which increases the buyer's loyalty

towards the organization. Knowing the service provider and being acquaintance with the seller, makes the reservation process fluent when both know the needs and procedures of each's.

The respondents were asked to evaluate Original Sokos Hotel Alexandra's meeting services (figure 6) either based on their experiences or images within the 1-5 Likert-scale between strongly agree (1) and strongly disagree (5). For data analysis, the scale was recoded to follow logical scale and the numbers were turned around for the options (1=strongly disagree; 5=strongly agree), so that the means could be calculated right. Besides, the option 3 was left out of the calculations so that it would not skew the results.

Opinions and experiences of Alexandra's meeting services were quite positive. Half of the respondents (53%) had a strong agreement to the statement of the good location of Alexandra. Almost a half (44%) had responded "somewhat agree" to the statement that Alexandra is reliable. 49% of the respondent rated Alexandra as a quite reliable and over a half (56%) considered Alexandra quite professional. 57% has responded that Alexandra has quite a good reputation. However, issues concerning the facilities and appearance were not clearly seen as an advantage for Alexandra. 25% considered that Alexandra is not very attractive and 19% considered that Alexandra is not quite modern either. Contentedness among the attendances during the meeting, however, is important for the success of it.

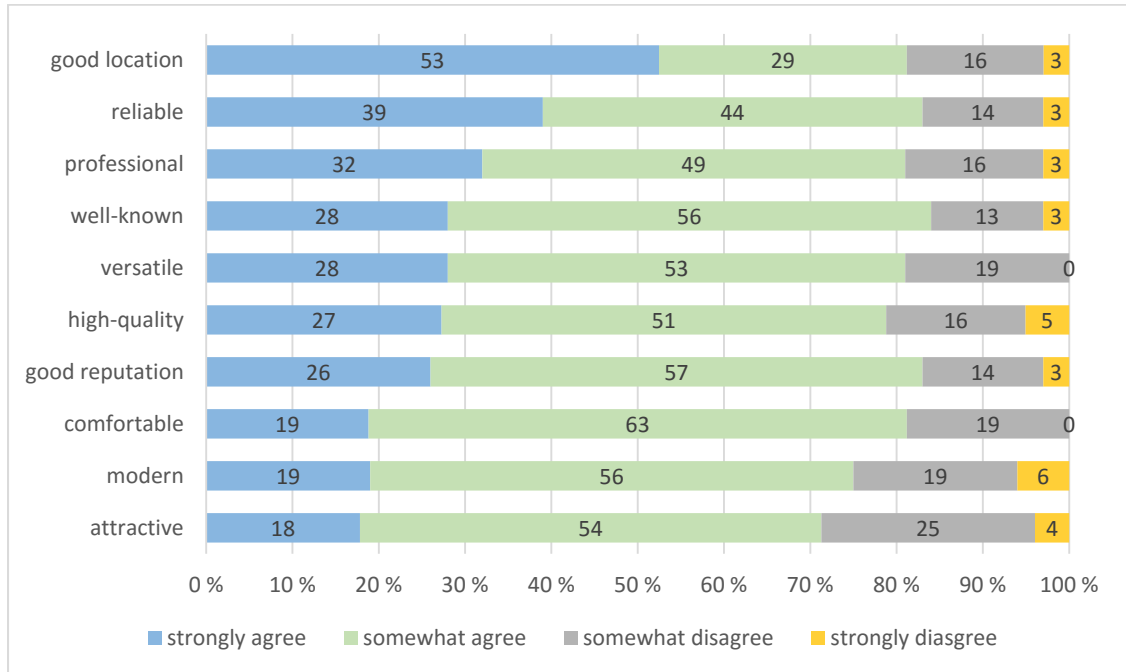


Figure 6. Evaluation of Alexandra’s services

The respondents were also asked about their image of Original Sokos Hotel Alexandra’s advertising. As it is seen in the figure 7, almost a half (40%) of the respondents had not seen advertising, and a third (31%) thinks that there is little advertising and the other third (29%) thinks that there is enough advertising. The results are divided quite evenly but still, a larger group has not seen advertising.

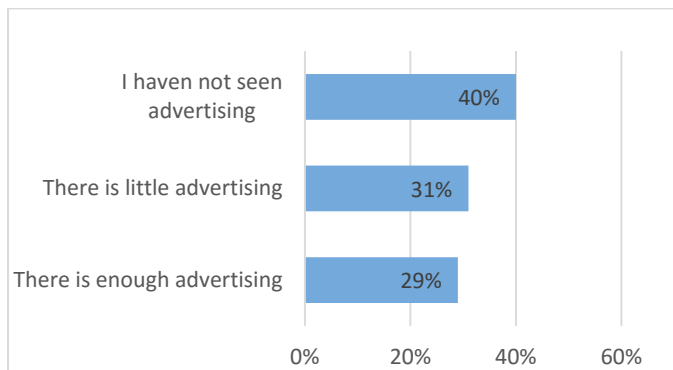


Figure 7. Opinions of Alexandra’s advertising

Of course, since Alexandra's only business operation is not meeting services, the focus in advertising is not mainly on that. Therefore, the overall picture of the advertising can be that there is only a little advertising. Also, if larger amount of advertising is implemented via e-mail, those who are not on the e-mail list, will not receive the message and are unaware of the advertising. Implementing online advertising would be solution to this, then those who do not receive e-mail advertising message could still receive the marketing messages. Of course, then the ranking, and similarly, visibility in search engine's search is highlighted. Hence, the customers can reach the first stage of macro level's objectives, which is exposing to the message, and which is also a requirement for reaching the other levels of the model.

In order to get a better understanding of what opinion of the advertising does Alexandra's customers have, the opinions among the Alexandra's customers were explored (Table. 6). Over a third (37%) thinks that Alexandra has adequately advertising. Majority, however, considers that Alexandra has little advertising. A fifth (22%) of the Alexandra's customers have not seen advertising at all. Nobody thought that there is too much advertising. From this it could be concluded that at least Alexandra could increase the amount of advertising, since nobody considered that there would be too much of advertising.

Table 6. Opinions of Alexandra's advertising according those who had organized meetings there

..	n	%
There is adequately advertising	10	37
There is little advertising	11	41
I have not seen advertising	6	22
Total	27	100

The respondents were asked to compare Alexandra to other Jyväskylä area's meeting services (Figure 8). The Likert-scale was used in the comparison where scale from 1 to 5 was used. However in order to make the figure clearer, the option 3 (I do not know) was

removed. Most of the respondents (72%) considered that Alexandra has good connections compared to other area's service providers. Also 68% of the respondents responded that Alexandra has a good location comparing to the other meeting service providers. Accommodation services were also mainly considered good (50%) comparing to others. The respondents did not agree with the statement of "apt advertising" comparing to others. Majority of the respondents (37%) considered that comparing to the others, Alexandra's advertising is not very apt, and 11% regarded that the advertising is poor compared to the others. Statements considering image (58%), comfortable meeting environment (53%), good service (56%) and functional facilities (55%) were perceived to hold true quite well comparing to the others. Either, nobody had answered that Alexandra would have poor connections and location comparing to the other service providers. However, the overall opinion is quite positive how well Alexandra is competitive to the other meeting service providers.

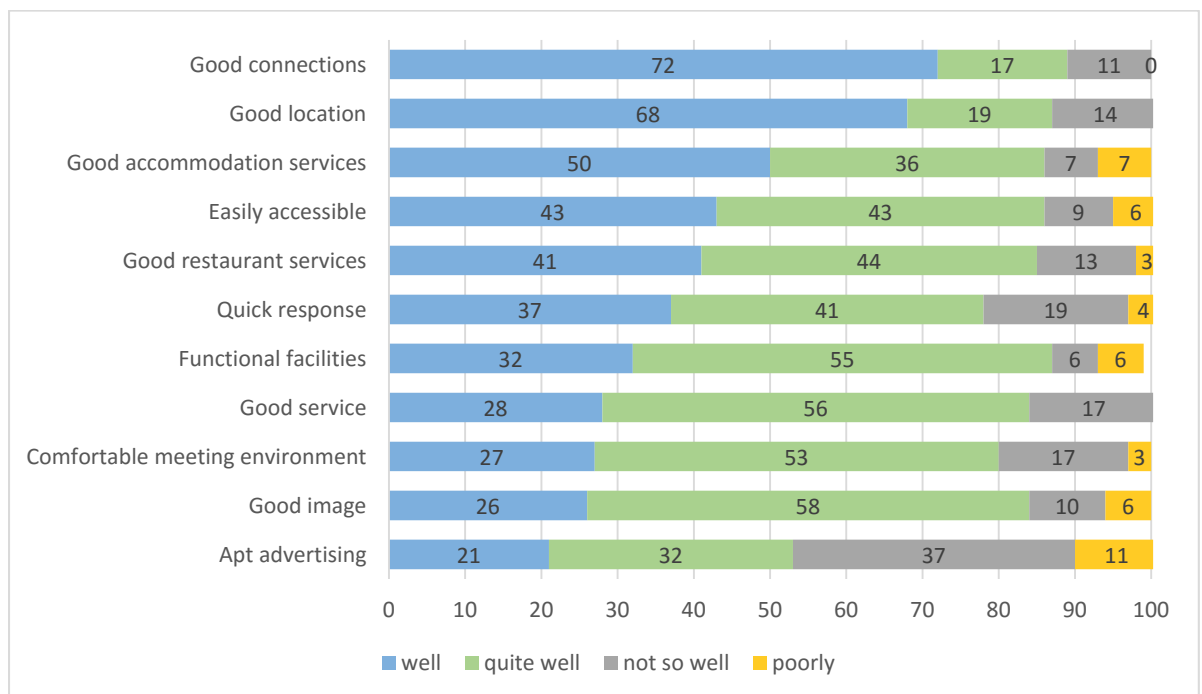


Figure 8. Alexandra's services compared to other Jyväskylä area's meeting services.

## 6.2 Interview results

The analysis of the qualitative data started with transcribing the interviews. The entire data was transcribed almost word for word. Dialect and colloquial expressions were written as such, and the interviewers' speech parts were also transcribed. The interviews were in Finnish, but for this thesis the quotations were translated into English. The respondents are referred to as respondent A and respondent B. The objective was to gain a more thorough information of the purchase decision and marketing communication with the customer interviews.

The interviews revealed that the presence or availability of the hostess was considered an important factor in meeting services. Often, the participants of the meetings are customers, and therefore, at least in that case, it is good if there is a specialist on the spot in order to avoid looking silly in front of the audience if some technological device is not working. It came out from both the interviews that the success of a meeting is important to the operations of the business, especially if the attendants of the meeting are stakeholders, customers or potential customers. If the meeting is a failure at some point, it can influence the attendants' image of the service provider. But also, resulting from the quantitative results, price and location were also considered important factors when choosing meeting services. The importance of the experience and expertise of the personnel turned out to be an essential criterion when choosing meeting services.

*“– – And of course it is important is there a hostess available during the meeting. There always is some technical problems etc., and therefore getting help for the problem is important. If the equipment are not working or if there is some kind of a problems with those it affects the entire image of the meeting and the ambience. It is not nice for the participants to wait while the speaker is messing up with the equipment trying to fix the problem.”*

*“Well of course the price is factor number one when the monetary restrictions weight heavily. – – But still, the price-quality ratio tip the scales.”*

The influence of brands was not straightly seen very strong considering the service provider preferences. However, the brand was thought to enhance the reliability of the

company. Similar results can be seen in the quantitative analysis, in which the brand was not considered a strongly affective character in purchase decision. But the interviews brought out the hidden importance of brands. And of course, as brought out in chapter 5.3, individuals might not always know the entire influence of the emotional factors. Therefore, they can be rated less important by the respondents.

*“Well, I do not choose by preferring those (brands), but of course those can give more reliable image of the organization. And maybe a well-known place is easier to choose anyway.”*

*“Naturally, there is preferences considering certain places but not straightly favoring of the entire brand. The level of the quality can still vary a lot, even under the same brand. – – But on the other hand if a certain chain has offices in many cities and we are satisfied with them, then it is a good thing.”*

When the interviewees were asked which marketing communication channels they use when searching for meeting services, both answered Internet as an effective option. The respondent A, however, stated that if the meeting is arranged in a familiar city, a request of quotation is simply asked from the service providers. Therefore, the importance of the Internet was only seen essential when organizing meetings in a city that is not familiar. The respondent A also mentioned the personal contacts to be important source of information.

*“Naturally, through internet if we are not organizing the meeting in our own city, in order to know what is the offerings at that (new city) direction – – But of course own contacts are the ones that are asked about the offerings and about the functionality. Those at least provide reliable information.”*

The respondent B mentioned that their company has started to outsource the competitive tendering of meeting services. And then from the options the organizer company chooses the service provider they want to have the meeting at.

An important marketing communication channels for meeting services were seen the service provider’s web sites. The respondent B also mentioned newspaper and personal



contacts as a good source of communication. E-mails were not considered very effective communication channel, instead, those were considered quite inefficient, since if there is a need for meeting services, the information search is made by self, and e-mails from the service provider are only generally put into the trash file, since those are considered irrelevant at the time.

*“Web sites of course, and no-emails. E-mails cannot be bore. Of course the ones (service providers) that have been used send e-mail, but if it is some other operator, those go quite quickly to junk mail. Nor anyone bothers to register those to anywhere and check those when there is a need. There is just no time for that.”*

Good marketing communication was describe as a clear message in which the offering of the organization is clearly presented and that it corresponds the reality. It was also mentioned that there is no clear rules of what type the message should be, and supposedly the interest is only risen if the receiver has a need for meeting services at the moment. The respondent B stated that considering the future, meeting service providers should target their marketing communication also to these competitive tendering companies, since the respondent also saw the popularity of those increasing in the future.

*“Well, I think that it (marketing communication) should be clear and the message should come out what is offered and specifically it should be what really is offered. And I think that most of all, marketing should be directed to the meeting organization companies, because my role in this in the future is going to be choosing between the choices that are offered.”*

*“There is no one clear rule of how the marketing communication should look like and what type should it be. I think it depends lot on the situation if the customer is interested. Maybe if the message would emphasize the experience that the service provider has would guarantee and give more positive picture.”*

Opinions considering the future of marketing communication and the direction where it is developing was also asked. And also, how companies should take that into account in

their operations. It appeared that the involvement of the technology and the Internet were seen strong. The Internet was seen to enable quick access to extensive information, and therefore, comparing service providers was considered easy.

*“Well, in the future, the part of the Internet will surely increase. More information is available, but similarly, from the seekers point of view, evaluating those becomes more challenging since there is lot of information available that should be considered. In that case, the importance of clear marketing communication that supports the company’s operations also increases.”*

*“– – When there is lot of information available standing out essential. And therefore, companies need to create a benefit that helps them to stand out and create something that gets customers to choose the company. – – Maybe also the service providers are required to better technological readiness considering the equipment of the meeting venue. People might want more inspirational venues for their meetings.”*

A clear challenge for companies in the future was seen how to stand out from the competitors. Also due to extensive amount of information, the results suggest implementation of uniform marketing communication, since as adduced in the theory (chapter 4), conveying uniform message through different marketing challenges is the key for effective communication. The customers and potential customers, therefore get messages which support the image of the company, and in turn, can make the company as a choice number one for the customers and to help the company to positively stand out from the competitors.

### 6.3 Suggestions

As the results show, the respondents regarded Alexandra’s meeting service advertising rather remote. As in the comparison of Alexandra’s meeting services to other area’s service providers, advertising was regarded the weakest feature of Alexandra, therefore the company could increase the amount of advertising. However, operating in a large

chain might restrict what actions the company is allowed to take, and Alexandra's marketing is partly controlled by the chain.

According to the macro level's objective, as introduced in the theory, the first step is to exposure to the message, which means that the receiver has to have possibility to see the message, which requires that the marketer knows which channels the target group uses. For reaching business customers, Alexandra should use their own web sites and e-mail to communicate with the organizations, which is also solution to increase recognition. Alexandra should make sure that potential client companies can also find their web sites from the online search engine's results, since important for the initiation of the communication is to provide the receiver a possibility to see the message. Besides, the web sites should be designed to support the online search engines' searches.

Alexandra could both implement a corporate imago advertising and direct response advertising, which would give the best benefit for their business. Corporate image advertising can in a long time span attract new customers and advertising that aims at direct response, in turn, can increase the sales. The client company should not forget the force of the customer's recommendations as a tool for communication. Of course, it can never be known what the customer tells about the company to others but by ensuring that the service is good, the client company can further positive communication about the company between the client companies. Since a customer recommends service if he or she has got a positive experience, therefore, maintaining good level of service will increase people's recommendations of the place.

Meeting with the needs of organization clients requires knowing what they consider important in meeting services, and what affects to their purchase decision. Of the contents, the marketing communication should show up the good features of Alexandra, like location, good connections and good restaurant services. The importance of emphasizing experience and good customer service is important especially when marketing those who are not yet customers, in order to convince the customer. But of course, the message should anyway support the image and professionalism of the

company. By segmenting the marketing communication messages the company can approach the customer better with a more suitable message.

Original Sokos Hotel Alexandra has a strong brand conveying an image of their business. The brand is always a promise for the customer, and can ease customers' decision making considering purchasing. The images of Alexandra were already positive, and therefore, the company has good possibilities to reach new customers with a right marketing communication. Online communication channels have emerged as effective ways of communication, therefore, those have been brought out and discussed more than suggestions of more traditional communication tools.

#### 6.4 Reliability and validity of the research

One of the most important factor that should be observed when doing thesis is to evaluate the quality and reliability of the work since the objective is to produce as truthful information as possible. (Hannila & Kyngäs 2008, 11). Reliability and validity together form an indicator for the research's reliability. Mistakes, which can be, processing mistakes, measurement mistakes, coverage- and nonresponse mistakes, and sampling mistakes, affect the reliability of the research in a declining way. (Heikkilä 2014, 176).

The reliability of a research implies to the repeatability of the results, pointing out that the results are not coincidental. There is several ways of examining the research's reliability, for example, studying the external reliability with the consistence of the research, which implies to two researcher's getting same results from the same research. This requires precise explanation of the starting point of the research. Internal reliability is get when the same statistics can be stated by measuring several times. In the quantitative method, in turn, the reliability can be studied by evaluating indicators' reliability with the help of the different statistical methods. (Hirsjärvi et al. 2009, 231.)

The concepts of reliability and validity have developed along with quantitative research. In qualitative research, the concepts are interpreted differently and the usage of those should be avoided. The concept of the validity is unclear in a qualitative research, since

the method endeavors to study a person as a phenomenon, and an individual does not always operate in the same way, and therefore the concept is not valid for the research method. However, these concepts should be somehow explored in the qualitative method, too. In the qualitative method, it could be carried out by specifically describing the research implementation. In addition, in the qualitative research the fact that the research is always the researcher's own interpretation should be considered. The challenge for the researcher is how he or she can replace his or hers natural way of analyzing things according to the up-front understanding with a more scientific attitude. (Hannila & Kyngäs 2008, 4.)

In this thesis, the results of the quantitative survey and familiarization to the theory before doing the qualitative research might have affected by creating pre-expectations and thoughts towards the research results. Qualitative method was however in a supportive position in this thesis, and therefore, studying the quantitative data was necessary in order to know which subjects should be studied more with the qualitative method. Also, creating theory basis before implementing the research was essential in order to be able to define right questions for explaining the phenomenon.

In a qualitative research, the quality of the research can be affected by designing good interview structure. Good recording instruments also affect the reliability of the results as the interviewing environment. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2000, 186.) In this research, the interviews were conducted via telephone, which can affect the interviewees' trust towards the interviewer and the results can remain superficial. However, the risks of the telephone interview was recognized and it was prepared to. Agreeing on the interview time in advantage with the interviewee helps preparing for the situation better. The choice of the interviewees affect what type of results will be get. Therefore, the interviewees were closely chosen considering their experience of meeting services.

Validity is another important concept that is connected to the evaluation of the research. Validity refers to the evaluation of the appropriateness of the used measurements and the research method from the point of view of the suitability of those for the chosen subject, and the ability to measure what was supposed to be

measured. (Hirsjärvi et al. 2009, 231.) For example a surveys' validity depends a lot of how successful the questions are, and whether those help to get solution to the research problem. The accuracy of the results is also dependent on the size of the sample. The reliability of the mean value increases in relation with the size of the sample, therefore, the smaller the sample is, the coincidental the results are and the bigger the trust gap of the research is. (Heikkilä 2014, 177-178.)

In a surveys, there is always a possibility for occasional mistakes. The respondents can understand the question in a different way than the researcher has meant. There was a possibility of misleading concerning the three Likert-scale questions in the questionnaire, in which the scale was designed contrary to normal design of a Likert scale: number one represented the other extreme "strongly agree" and number five was appointed as "strongly disagree". If the respondents have not read the question well, it might have had a distorting effect on the results. Due to this misplaced question, in the encoding stage of the data, changes to the scale were made in order to avoid distorted results in the averages of those. In addition, the third option in the Likert-scale was "I do not know", therefore, if the respondents have not read the instructions carefully, they might have presumed that the option 3 meant neutral, which can then have affected the results. Another risk concerning a survey is that the respondents might not answer honestly if the question is too personal. In this questionnaire, personal questions were avoided, which decreases the risk of dishonesty.

Implementing a survey in a way that the respondents are anonymous lowers the risk of dishonesty. In this survey the respondents had to respond to each question, on the other hand, this can lead to the respondent to try to answer something to the question, without remembering what really happened. Especially, when the asking how often the organization organizes meetings there might have been a possibility to a random error.

The validity considering the qualitative method is adjusted by exact account of the implementation of the research. The circumstances of the interviews should be described truthfully and clearly, since those have great effect also on the results of the interviews. (Hirsjärvi et al. 2009, 232.) The validity of the research can also be further

defined by using different methods in the research. This method, also called triangulation, was utilized in this thesis in order to specify the validity of the research.

## 7 ENDING MEETING

One objective of the research was to explore how the client company could implement their meeting services' marketing communication so that it would effectively meet with the objectives of the client companies. The solution to the research problem was tried to find out with the help of the theoretical background and by exploring which marketing channels the buyers of meeting services use, and, via the survey with interviews, explore what they consider important when buying meeting services.

The results of the survey and the interviewed customers of Alexandra gave information and a good view of the subject. The results to the questions on the questionnaire were quite similar but the interviewees' opinions deviated slightly. In both, the survey and the interviews, the importance of digital marketing channels was still emphasized. Digital channels are an easy way of searching information, and the amount of information available is extensive. Besides, digital channels are an easy and a quick way for communicating. The service provider's web site was considered an important source of information, after which come the colleagues' recommendations and the use of an online search engine. However, considering the online channels, the marketer needs to be able to stand out with the communication message. Also, the use of e-mail emerged as a popular communication method, although the usage must be considered carefully. In organizational buying, the need arises from the company, which then starts to search for a solution to the need. Therefore, even a creative e-mail sent a long time ago might be forgotten when the person is looking for meeting services.

Danaher's and Rossiter's (2011) study of marketing communication channels perceptions gave more encouraging results of the usage of e-mail in the business markets. According to their findings, e-mail compares well with other communication channel's attributes of being convenient, appropriate and acceptable and is considered

good communication tool in marketing communication by business receivers. However, they state that the senders are more cautious of e-mail. They also mentioned, that among consumers, the opinion towards e-mail was slightly negative.

Hence, maybe the other interviewee had considered e-mail also from the point of view of a consumer, and did not only consider that from the organizational point of view. However, the emotional and individual factors are slightly involved with the organizational thinking, and therefore the person cannot completely withdraw from the person he or she is, during the decisions that concern business operations.

I succeeded in the research to observe the importance of colleagues' recommendations as a source of information. Similarly, Finne and Stradvik (2012) found out from their study's results that so called "invisible communication" is emphasizing part of nowadays marketing communication. Companies should not see customers only as passive receivers of information but as an active senders of information. Therefore, as seen from the results, and as Finne and Strandvik have stated, it is essential for the companies to monitor the quality of their service and always strive for good service. In both of these above mentioned studies' similar issues of marketing communication have been highlighted as in this research, which can be considered increasing the reliability of this work.

The reasons for relying on work mate's recommendations arouses questions. Are the buyers exceeded with the information available online, and therefore they choose to ask a colleagues' opinion? Or is it about the reliability of other sources? The buyers might know that competition is hard and they might think that companies will try to do everything that they can to win the customers to their side. But on the other hand, as it came up from the interviews, recommendations are asked only when it concerns a new service provider when the buyer does not have much information of the company.

Location, reliability and quality of services adduced as the most important factors considering purchase decision. Original Sokos Hotel Alexandra got good assessments from their own operations. The questionnaire also suggest that Alexandra is quite well-known meeting place in Jyväskylä and known quite well at other areas. According to the



findings of this research the connection between a brand and purchase decision was not very prominent. However, in the theory that has been introduced, and also Hutton's (1997) research indicate a relation between the brand and purchase decision in certain cases. According to the results, brand has had an effect on the purchase decision when the product or service requires greater service, or when it is complex or if the buyer is under time and resource constraints. Therefore, it can be concluded that the emotional issues and ability to realize the quintessential reasons for the purchase decision might have affected the responses in this work.

Ultimately, it can be concluded that the customers prefer to inspect and compare service offering independently and flexibly by themselves, which surfaced from the preferences considering service provider's web site as a communication channel. Challenge that came over already from the theory but also from the interviews is how to distinguish from the other service providers due to the extensive information offering, and to get the customers to find the company. Optimizing web sites and using type words will increase the visibility in online searches' rankings. It is clear that digitalization is emphasized and its role will increase in the future since there is also lot of interest towards it. The question only is, which way will it develop? If the popularity and effectiveness of the e-mail advertising is, on the other hand, being questioned what is the next step in the development?

Marketing communication is said to be a company's essential voice, and with good marketing communication a company can increase its sales and improve its image. Even though Original Sokos Hotel Alexandra is already a successful company, the constantly changing operational environment requires to keep up with the development by adopting new marketing communication actions, therefore, exploring these issues is essential within certain periods. The success in marketing communication is accomplished with a clear plan, where each communication action has a precise purpose and that it is implemented using combination of different tools, however, in order to the messages to create uniform entirety that supports the same main message.

Elaboration of this work started by compiling theoretical background. It took a while until a proper data was found. Literature from both theoretical parts was available a lot, so the challenge was to find the most valid ones that could be used in this research. However, there was not much literature where these subjects would be connected, and therefore, while studying marketing communication, it was to be considered from the meeting services' point of view. There was some applicable researches available concerning marketing communication and organizational behavior, which were utilized in this research.

There was some challenges in the data collection, which also complicated the continuance with the schedule. The initial objective was to get as many responses as possible to the questionnaire during the Eventum Expo -fair, however, the goals were not reached and therefore, additionally, I had to consult to e-mail questionnaire in order to get more responses. In the implementation of the interviews were also minor challenges with getting agreed with a suitable date for the interview. However, the problem was solved by implementing the interviews by telephone. The response percentage remained rather small but the sample, however, reflected comprehensively the population of the survey. Small response percentage restricted the analysis of the results and the generalization of the results. The questionnaire could have been designed differently, since now there was some parts that might have led to random errors.

This research helps to understand organizational behavior related to meeting services better. The research gives information of organizations' marketing communication channel preferences and purchase decision, which are applicable also to the buying behavior of other organizations, since from the behavior those do not necessarily differ. This work provides valuable information to Original Sokos Hotel Alexandra concerning their organizational clientele and also for the use of marketing communication channels concerning meeting services.

Organizations have their own procedures in buying processes, therefore an idea for a further study could be the buying behavior considering organizations' meeting services.

This work already gives fundamentals for that kind of a research. Another possible further study could be studying the possible effect of brand on the images and expectations for the Alexandra's meeting services, or differences between the expectations that organizations have for the different brands within the Sokos Hotel organization related to meeting services, like expectations between Original and Solo brand of Sokos Hotel. In this work, these subjects were studied quite perfunctory, since the focus was more on marketing communication of meeting services. However, those emerged as important issues considering the understanding of the organizations' behavior concerning meeting services.

To conclude, companies are quite loyal to their meeting service providers, or prefer to choose places familiar to them. Therefore, the acquisition of new customers in the industry might be particularly challenging. Hence, best for the company would be implementing long-term objective marketing communication that aims to improve the image of the company, and which, in the long term would bring new customers to the company. Of course, a decision on choosing a meeting place results of many factors. Alexandra, however, has an ideal location in the city center with good connections and also has, as a meeting hotel, to provide accommodation and restaurant services to the customers. The long history of the company conveys an image of experience in the meeting services, which surely evokes image of expertise in customer service.

Customer understanding is essential in the future markets. (Matkailun toimialaraportti 2012, 52.) In the meeting services, the segmentation of customers is not easy, but the products need to be adaptable so that they serve everyone economically with quality. However, personalized service and marketing communication are connected to the overall customer experience, and for their part, promote the core of good customer service as its best: exceeding customers' expectations.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1. Webropol questionnaire.



#### MEETING SERVICE QUESTIONNAIRE

Questionnaire of meeting services.

This questionnaire is connected to meetings organizing, and is targeted to those who are responsible of organizing meetings at their work place, or have organized meetings before.

#### Respondent's background information

**1. Organization you represent: \***

- Company
- Association
- Public sector

**2. The number of employees within the organization: \***

- 0-19
- 20-30
- 31-59
- 60-100
- Over 100

**3. Location of the organization: \***

**4. Has the organization you represent arranged meetings in Original Sokos Hotel Alexandra? \***

- Yes
- No

(Continues)



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## Appendix 1(2). Webropol questionnaire.

**Organizing meetings****5. How often do you organize meetings somewhere else than in your own premises? \***

- Weekly
- More often than once in a month
- Once in a month
- Under five times a year
- Once in a year
- Less frequently than once in a year

**6. The meetings you organize are mostly: \***

Choose one (1) that best describes the meetings

- Half-day meetings
- Day meetings
- Several day's meetings
- Other, what?

**7. The meetings you organize are mostly targeted to: \***

- Own personnel
- Customers/potential customers
- Other stakeholders
- Other, what?

**Coverage of meeting services****8. Which communication channels you primarily use when searching for meeting services? \***

Choose three (3) most important.

- The internet's search engine (e.g.. Google). What search words?\*
- The internet's meeting place providers (esim. kokouspaikat.com)
- Service provider's we sites
- Municipality's web sites

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## Appendix 1(3). Webropol questionnaire.

- Work mates
- Newspaper
- Fairs and other events
- Social media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter)
- Other, what?

**9. From where would you like to receive information? \***

You can choose more than one.

- Service provider's web site
- Via e-mail's leaflet
- Social media
- Newspaper/leaflet
- Contact made by sales person
- Other, what?

**Choosing meeting services****10. Which factors affect purchase decision the most?**

Evaluate each feature on scale 1-5.

1=very important, 2=quite important, 3=I don't know, 4=not so important, 5=does not affect purchase decision

	1	2	3	4	5
Price *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Location *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Transportation connection/accessibility *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Parking possibility *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Service quality *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Image of the place *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Workmate's/friend's recommendations *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Good accommodations services *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Good restaurant services. *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Familiar *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Reliability *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

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Appendix 1(4). Webropol questionnaire.

Membership *		<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other, what?	<input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

11. Who participate the choice making of the meeting place within the organization? \*

Original Sokos Hotel Alexandra as a service provider

12. Evaluate the meeting services of Alexandra based on your experiences on scale 1-5.

If you do not have experinece, answer based on your images.

1=strongly agree, 2=somewhat agree, 3=I do not know, 4=somewhat disagree, 5=strongly diasgree

	1	2	3	4	5
Realiabe *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
High-quality *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Professional *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Attractive *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Comfortable *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Modern *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Good location *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Reputable *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Versatile *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Well-known *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other, what?					

13. What kind of image do you have of Original Sokos Hotel Alexandra's advertising? \*

- There is too much advertising
- There is adequtely advertising
- There is little advertsing
- I have not seen advertising

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Appendix 1(5). Webropol questionnaire

**14. How is Alexandra's meeting services ranked compared to other service providers near areas.**

Evaluate each point with the scale of 1-5. If you do not have experience, answer according to your images.

1=well, 2=quite well, 3=I do not know, 4=not very well, 5=poorly

	1	2	3	4	5
Good location *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Good traffic connections *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Comfortable meeting environment *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Good accommodation services *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Good quality restaurant services *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Quick response to requests *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Functional meeting venues *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Apt meeting advertising *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Good image *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Easy accessibility *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Good service *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other, what? <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**15. What would get you to choose Alexandra as the next meeting place? \***

## Appendix 2. Cover letter.

Hi!

I am studying Tourism in JAMK University of Applied Sciences. I am doing a research connected to meeting services' marketing communication in cooperation with Original Sokos Hotel Alexandra. Questionnaire is part of my thesis, therefore, each response will help me to succeed in this research.

I hope that you would have a moment to take the survey. The responses cannot be connected to the respondent. The responses are treated in confidence and anonymous.

I ask you to take the survey before 13.10.2015. You can start the survey by clicking the link below and it takes approximate 5 minutes. The questionnaire is meant for those who are responsible for organizing meetings at their workplace, or have organized meetings.

After taking the survey, you can leave your contact information in order to participate to draw of accommodation gift token. The gift token entitles one night accommodation for two persons to Sokos Hotels.

Thank you for your responses!

Kind regards

Kirsi Savolainen

### Appendix 3. Reminder letter.

Hi!

I am studying tourism in JAMK University of Applied Sciences. I am conducting a research connected to marketing communication of meeting services in cooperation with Original Sokos Hotel Alexandra. Questionnaire is part of my thesis, therefore, each response helps me to succeed in the research.

I would remind, that you still have few days left to take the survey and to participate the draw of Sokos Hotel accommodation gift token. I hope you got to relax to Sokos Hotels, and I surely will not bother you then with online questionnaires.

Responses are treated in confidence and those cannot be connected to the respondent. You can take the survey below, and answering took approximately 5 minutes. The questionnaire is meant for those who are responsible for organizing meetings at their workplace, or have organized meetings.

After answering, you can leave your contact information to participate to the draw of the gift token. The gift token entitles for one night accommodation for two persons to Sokos Hotels.

If you find that this questionnaire does not concern your area of responsibility, I ask you kindly to forward this message within your organization to person that corresponds the target group.

Kind regards,

Kirsi Savolainen

## Appendix 4. Theme interview frame.

### The frame of the theme interview

#### **Background**

1. Describe, what type of meetings you organize?
2. What you consider important when choosing a meeting place?
3. What do you expect from meeting services and meeting venues?

#### **Choosing meeting place**

4. How do you see the brand affecting purchase decision?
5. Where do you search for meeting services?
6. Which channels you consider important in meeting services' marketing communication?
7. Describe, what kind of marketing communication is good?

#### **Future**

8. How do you see marketing communication developing in the future?
9. How companies should take this development into account in their operations?

## Appendix 5. Tables and charts.

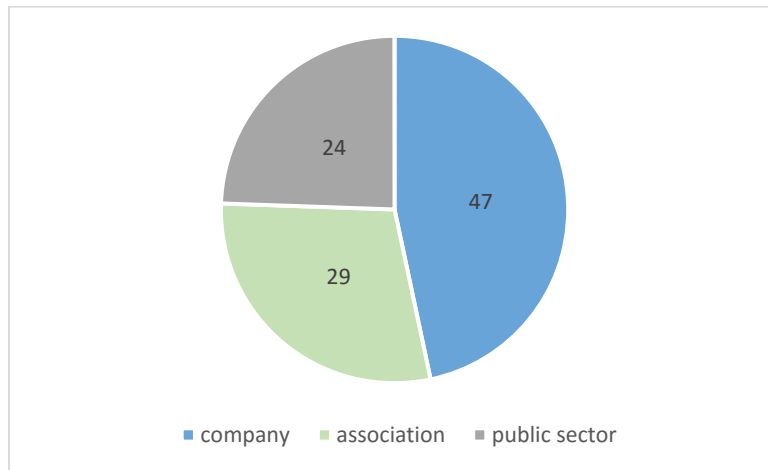


Figure 9. Organizational type (%) (n=45)

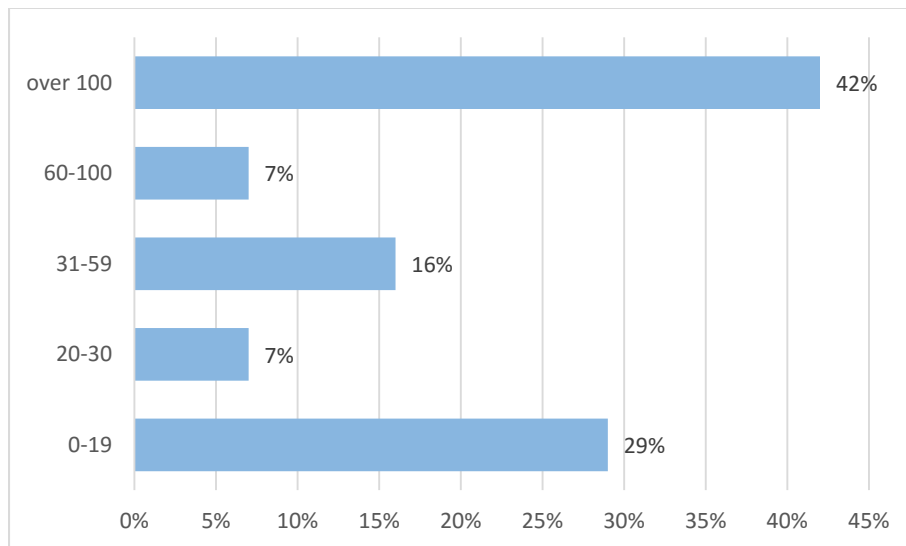


Figure 10. The size of the organization (n=45)

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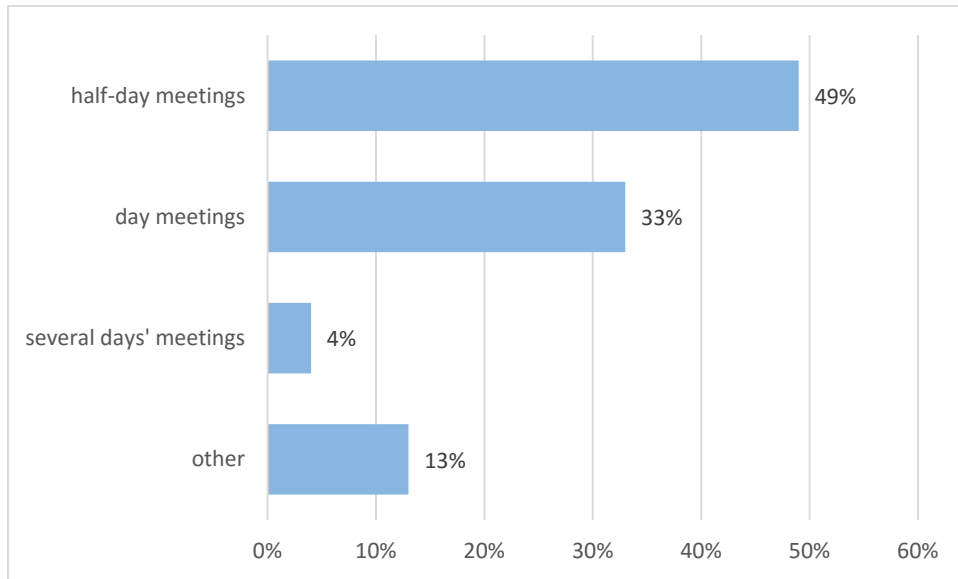


Figure 11. Typical type of the meeting (n=45)