

One Year of SEO

Case Companies: Lumidigital &
stickersmurali.net

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ABSTRACT

Today, technology enables marketers to reach out for consumers rapidly, efficiently and inexpensively, like never before. Web marketing is incredibly powerful; it allows the targeting of chosen groups of people, very precisely, in no time, and at a very low-cost. The biggest change, brought by web marketing, is certainly the transition from outbound to inbound marketing techniques.

Search engine optimization (SEO) is a branch of web marketing. SEO focuses on visibility in search engines, and it does so, through on-site and off-site optimization. The topic of this thesis, as the title suggests, is: "One year of SEO". The research issue is the assessing of one year SEO campaign, performed by the case company (Lumidigital) for its client's website (stickersmurali.net). The goal is to benefit both companies with some recommendations and insights for their future collaborations.

The research process began collecting literature on the subject. The literature was used to build the theoretical framework supporting the empirical part of the thesis. The utilized literature comes from both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources come from the case company Lumidigital, and include Google Analytics and interviews with the two co-founders of the SEO agency. Secondary sources come from online and printed publications.

In the empirical part of this thesis, Google Analytics, detailed statistics on the website performance, are analysed and commented.

The final outcome sees positive results for both parts. For Lumidigital, the empirical proofs of a job well-done; another success story to add to the company portfolio. For stickersmurali.net a remarkable increase in web traffic from visitors and an improved visibility in all the three main search engines: Google, Yahoo! and Bing.

Key words: Search Engine Optimization (SEO), Web Marketing, Google Analytics, e-commerce, Inbound Marketing, online visibility.

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1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces the thesis background and explains the methods used to conduct the research. The research objectives are clearly stated. The theoretical framework is briefly explained. The research questions are presented and the limitations for answering them listed. The chapter ends with an overview on the thesis structure.

The economy is changing fast, and so are consumers' habits, needs, wants and expectations. During the last decade, humanity experienced the massive transformation of technology affecting the lives of billions of people. Internet and new technologies are pushing this continuous change further and further. Young adults still remember when back in the days, accessing the Internet was possible only using a desktop computer or a laptop. Today, smart-phones, which fit into a pocket and can be carried everywhere, are constantly connected to the Internet, enabling people to access to an ever growing amount of information, communicating instantly and inexpensively, and purchasing goods and services at any time.

Such technological revolution brought a multitude of new opportunities for marketers. The biggest revolution is the shift from the old outbound marketing approach to an inbound marketing way of being reached by consumers (Bradley 2015). These concepts are discussed in more detail later on this thesis with a detailed analysis of the major inbound marketing techniques. The graph on figure one, next page, shows the growth of electronic trade in Italy, the focus country for this thesis, between 2004 and 2014. In ten years' time, the Italian turnover of online commerce has grown fifteen fold. Its constant growth and positive trend is very encouraging for any business willing to enter the online retailing, and some forecasts further growth in future years as well. (Casalessio 2015)



FIGURE 1: e-commerce in Italy, 2004- 2014 (Casaleggio e-commerce in Italy, report 2015)

This thesis investigates a real world business case: one year SEO marketing campaign performed by a SEO agency for one of its clients.

The two companies in this study are Lumidigital, the service provider and www.stickersmurali.net, the client. The idea for the thesis came to the writer during his internship at Lumidigital.

The case study is a Business to Business (B2B) example of inbound marketing service provision: Search Engine Optimization (SEO).

Lumidigital is an Italian SEO agency based in Tallinn, Estonia. Lumidigital offers its services to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) operating in the Italian market. Since all of Lumidigital's clients are firms, it is a B2B business model.

SEO stands for Search Engine Optimization, and is a series of activities aimed to better position a website in the Search Engines Result Pages (SERPs), gaining a greater visibility on the Internet. How SEO works is discussed in chapter two.

The company case analysed in this paper is one year SEO marketing campaign. The campaign was performed by the SEO agency, Lumidigital, for its client's website: www.stickersmurali.net.

Stickersmurali.net is an Italian company selling wall stickers online. Wall stickers, are inexpensive wall decorations. Because of their characteristics, wall stickers are profitable niche products.

The on line Business Dictionary defines a niche product as:

“A good or service with features that appeal to a particular market subgroup. A typical niche product will be easily distinguished from other products, and it will also be produced and sold for specialized uses within its corresponding niche market.” (businessdictionary.com)

The client's website was made from scratch and published by Lumidigital at the end of 2014. Since the very first day after its publishing, the website's performances have been monitored and recorded by Google Analytics. Google Analytics statistics from the entire year 2015 are reported in this paper and used to assess the outcome of the SEO marketing campaign.

Analytics include very detailed information about users: number of visits, gender, location, time spent on page, interactions (leads), channels, age and much more (Cooper 2012).

The aim of this paper is to help companies, the SEO agency, Lumidigital, and its client, stickersmurali.net, understanding and assessing the efficiency of the SEO campaign in concrete terms. Moreover, this study could be used as a proof of the real benefits of SEO. This data can be used by Lumidigital to acquire more customers.

1.1 Thesis Objectives, Research Questions and Limitations

The main objective of this work is to understand the concrete value of a SEO campaign. This is done by measuring and assessing the results achieved in one year time period campaign. The findings are be expressed in terms of concrete benefits for both companies, in a comprehensive and objective way, analyzing real statistics from Google Analytics.

The outcomes of this thesis are meant to be used by both companies: the service provider (Lumidigital) and its client (www.adesivimurali.net). With the findings of this research they gain a deeper knowledge and a better understanding of the results achieved during the year 2015 with the undertaken SEO campaign.

The assessment of the SEO campaign studied in this thesis, is the result of a thoughtful analysis of the data from the Google Analytics, showing the website performances. These include: number of visitors, gender, geographical area, channels used to reach the website, interactions (leads), time spent in each page, and more.

Defining the research question, or issue, to be answered is one of the very first steps in a research work. The research question leads the whole process of research, determining the approach to be chosen, and clarifying the expected outcome (Creswell 2014).

The research issue in this work is:

How to measure and assess one year of SEO in terms of concrete benefits for the client and the service provider.

In order to approach the issue, a few additional support questions (or

sub-questions) have to be answered as well. These are both theoretic and empirical:

1. How does SEO work?
2. How do search engines work?
3. What are web analytics and how do they work?
4. What are the concrete benefits of SEO and how to measure them?
5. How many visitors reached the website (www.stickersmurali.net) from a search engine?

Often research faces difficulties. In most cases, difficulties relate to the unavailability of data. In this very study, the main difficulty and limitation is the denied access to the client financial performance and its conversion rate. This is due to the confidentiality policy. The lack of data is an obstacle because it prevents the study from being as precise as it could be in the measurement of the costs and benefits of the SEO campaign under scrutiny.

Another important issue is the uniqueness of this case. Since the study focuses on one specific case company, the findings cannot be generalized nor applied to other enterprises operating in different industries.

1.2 Theoretical Framework

This thesis aims to understand the functioning of SEO and web analytics. The theory gathered in the first part of the thesis is then used to evaluate the case: an SEO campaign performed during the year 2015. Two companies are involved in this study: Lumidigital, the SEO agency, and stickersmurali.net, the client. The findings are meant to help the case companies in their futures collaborations.

All the theory is used to answer the research sub-questions.

Understanding the functioning of SEO, search engines and web analytics is essential to evaluate a SEO campaign. Furthermore, some technical concepts need to be introduced. These include: organic traffic, SERP ranking, algorithms, referral, social media, conversion rate, and more.

Chapters two and three contain all the needed theory, which is then put into practice in chapters four and five through empirical evidence.

1.3 Research Methodology and Data Collection

There are two possible approaches to a research: inductive and deductive. An inductive approach uses a few specific cases to draw generalization. In an inductive study a theory is developed after the data have been collected. On the contrary, a deductive approach starts from a general theory and aims to an empirical conclusion. In a deductive study, prior to the collection of data, a clear theoretical position is developed. (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2009).

SEO is evolving constantly, and so are the strategies used for it. Nevertheless, the core principles remain unchanged. Online visibility is a real problem for any company. However, rather than pleasing search engine algorithms, it is crucial to deliver contents which fulfill users' requests: pleasing them instead. A massive amount of literature is available on the topic. In consideration of the existing literature, this study uses a deductive approach: after building the needed theoretical

framework, this, is used to test its own validity through the observation of the numerical data collected. The whole process leads to an empirical conclusion.

The second step in a research is the choice of a method for collecting the data. There are three main methods: qualitative, quantitative and mixed. Each one of them is particularly suitable for a certain type of issue to be investigated

The qualitative method focuses on understanding the phenomena as a whole, through categorization and conceptualization. It is based on theory, and through theory it explains the phenomena. On the other hand, the quantitative research is based on numbers and measurement, it emphasizes the importance of testing and verification with the support of statistics and diagrams. Finally, it is possible to combine these two methods, generating a third one: the mixed method (Creswell 2014).

This thesis uses a mixed method, combining data analysis and a theoretical approach.

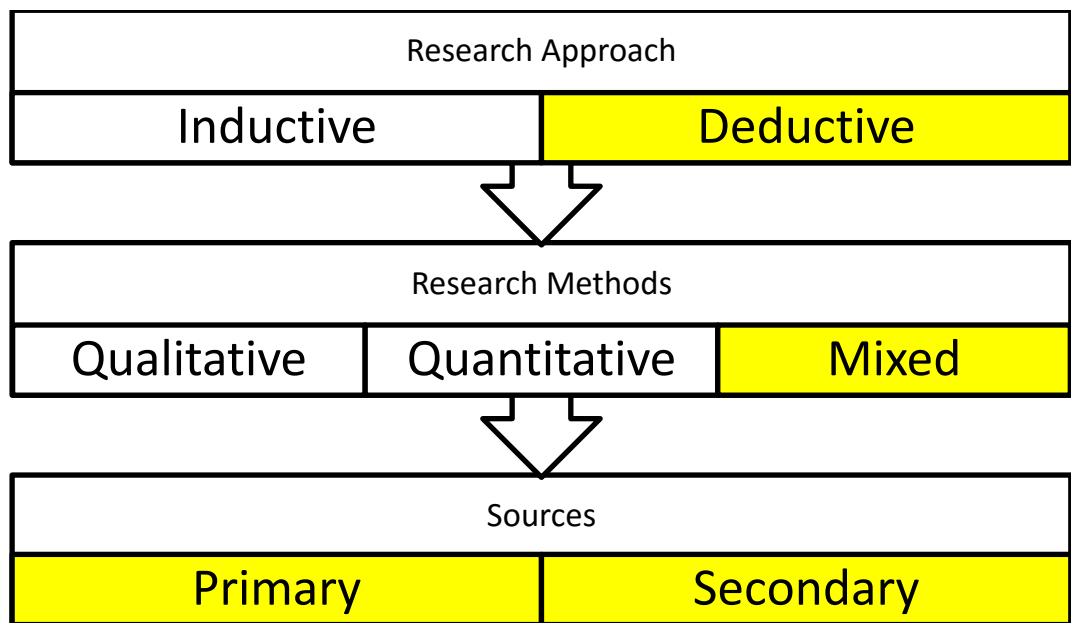


FIGURE 2: The Research Process. NB: the relevant parts for this study are highlighted.

The figure two, above, summarizes the entire research process. The research starts from choosing the best approach (inductive or deductive), it

then continues with picking the method (qualitative, quantitative or mixed), and is then implemented by collecting the sources (primary or secondary).

A scientific study is reliable and valid when it utilizes accurate and consistent data. This case study enjoys a privileged access to data thanks to the writer's professional links with one of the case companies.

Most of the SEO knowledge needed to write this thesis has been gained by the writer during the time spent as a company intern (Lumidigital SEO agency). A remarkable share of knowledge has been gained fulfilling work tasks, part of which is relevant for the case study. Another important source of information comes from informally interviewing the two tutors, who happened to be the founders of the SEO agency Lumidigital: respectively the Chief Technical Officer (CTO) and the Business Analyst. The writer himself, as an intern, performed several tasks which are part of the SEO campaign under research in this study, and for this reason is very familiar with the case. Another important part of data comes from the Google analytics, kindly provided by Lumidigital. All of the above are primary data.

To complete the work and have a more reliable outcome and a wider perspective, secondary data, gathered from literature, both printed and electronic publications, are used to validate and interpret the primary data.

The amount of such diverse information implies the use of both numerical and conceptual analysis.

1.4 Thesis Structure

The thesis is divided into eight chapters. The first chapter introduces the study, describes the research process and the reporting form. Chapters number two and three are theoretical. Chapter two introduces search engine optimization and all the theories related to it. Chapter three focuses on the use of web analytics to measure and assess web marketing

campaigns. Chapters four and five are empirical: they both present data collected from measurements and observations. Chapter four presents the two companies which are part of the SEO campaign: stickersmurali.net, the client company case which sells wall stickers through its website; and Lumidigital, the SEO agency which implemented the entire SEO campaign. This is done through observation and knowledge gathered also during the time spent by the writer as a SEO copywriter intern for Lumidigital, the SEO agency. Chapter five exposes the numerical data provided by Lumidigital. These include web analytics and other statistics which are essential to assess the results achieved during the entire SEO campaign. Chapter six contains recommendations for both companies on how to maintain a profitable partnership. Chapter seven draws the conclusions for this study and answers to all of the research questions. Chapter eight ends the work with a summary of the main ideas and findings.

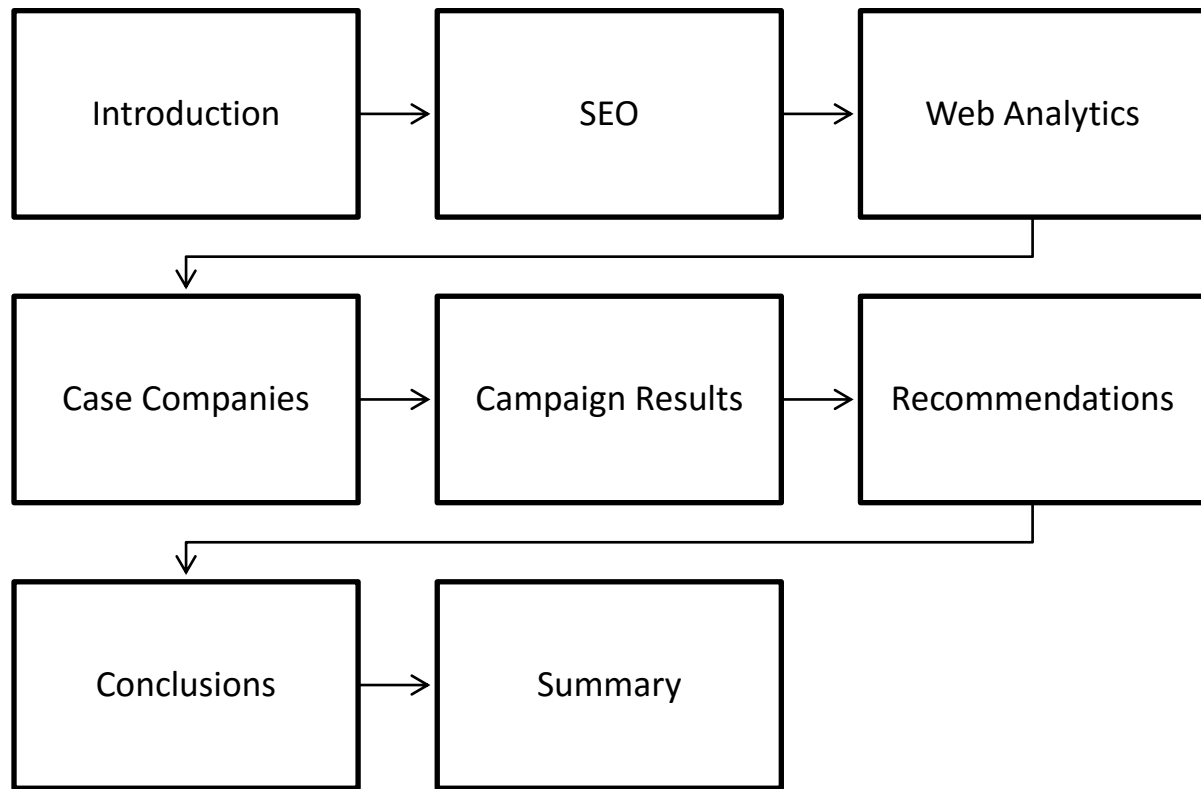


FIGURE 3: Thesis structure

Figure three, above, contains the entire structure of this thesis, from the introduction to the final summary.

2 SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION

This chapter introduces the reader to Search Engine Optimization (SEO). On-site and off-site optimizations are explained. The concept of inbound marketing is introduced highlighting its importance in a SEO strategy.

2.1 Origin of Search Engines

The Internet as we know it today was originated by Arpanet, an U.S: army protocol created in the Sixties to transfer confidential information quickly and safely among different units. The name Internet comes from the words **Inter**connected **Net**works, and this explains its first purpose: a network of networks. Until the Nineties, the amount of information and users having access to the Internet was very limited, mostly American colleges used the network to share information. In 1990, Alan Emtage, a student at McGill University in Montreal, created Archie, the very first search engine in history. At that time there were only few hundred web sites, and before Archie the only way to access them was by knowing the exact URL address. Archie made web browsing much easier. (Levene 2010.) After Archie, many other commercial search engines were born. (Search Engine History 2015.)

2.2 How Search Engines Work

In order to understand the importance of SEO, it is crucial to know how search engines work. Particularly, two critical factors need to be clarified: how web sites are valuated according to search queries, and how these are translated into search engine result pages (SERPs). Search engines use spider software to collect synthetized information on the contents of websites, thus they analyse them making it possible to appear on result pages. (Gudivada et al 2015.)

Before going too deeply into technical details it is important to clarify the difference between search queries and keywords. A search query is the

text entered by the user in the search bar. It can be anything which pops up to the user's mind. For instance, it can be a misspelled word. A search query might contain one or more keywords, or none. On the other hand, keywords are specific words or phrases which are frequently entered by users in their search queries. Search engines keep record of the most relevant keywords and use this data to improve the quality of their service.

The real functioning of a search engine is much more complex, as it is the algorithm which makes it work. For instance, Google, declared using over 200 parameters (Dean 2013) to assess websites and their relevance to users' search queries. Google keeps the functioning of its algorithm confidential and nobody outside Big G really knows exactly what parameters are used to assess and classify websites. Moreover, in order to keep its leadership as the world number one search engine and discourage unethical practices used to unfairly improve the page ranking (black hat SEO), Google updates its algorithm all the time: about twice a day. This makes it even harder to gain any accurate knowledge of the factors pushing a page up in the SERP. For this reason SEO remains a never-ending race for visibility.

The SERP appears divided in two columns: the organic results on the left side and on the right side the pay-per-click (PPC) ads. Sometimes PPC appear also on top of organic results. Figure four (next page) illustrates the importance of having a well-positioned website on the SERP.

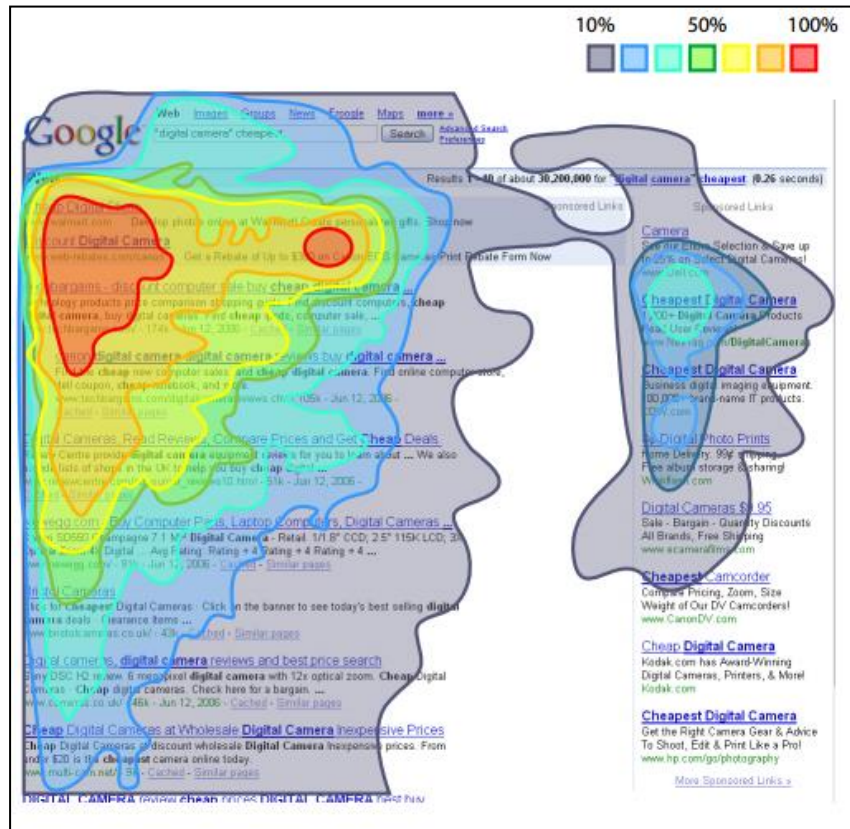


FIGURE 4: Google SERP heat map. (www.elliance.com)

A Chitika Insights study, conducted in 2013, proved that more than 90% of users see only the SERP first page, i.e. ten organic results. Another study, on page one, (Lieberman 2014) found that over 60% of traffic goes to the first three snippets. This proves once again the importance of ranking in search engines.

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) aims to better rank a web page on search engines. It combines keyword marketing and other inbound marketing techniques. The main idea behind inbound marketing is that the company no longer expects to reach customers, but instead it wants to be reached by its own customers. Search Engine Optimization is one of the most modern and efficient forms of inbound marketing. SEO main goal is to better position a website on the Search Engine Result Pages (SERPs), and it does it optimizing itself for all the keywords related to users search queries (Bradley 2015).

A search engine is a portal offering an easy access to any sort of

information available on the Internet. The three most popular search engines are: Google, Yahoo!, and Bing. A search query is what a user writes on the search bar.

A website positioned on page one in Google's SERP is a very valuable asset for the company who owns it.

As the most used search engine in Europe and the United States, Google has a solid authority among Internet users in the two continents. Big G has become so popular that in the English language the verb “to google” is a neologism, meaning to perform an internet search.

The table one, below, shows the use of search engines in Italy during the year 2015. (www.gs.statcounter.com)

TABLE 1: Search Engines in Italy (www.gs.statcounter.com)

Search Engine	Usage %
Google	95.53
Bing	1.92
Yahoo!	1.77
Arianna	0.35
Ask Jeeves	0.19
Others	0.23

At first glance, it appears how Google enjoys a total monopoly in the Italian search engine industry (95.53%), i.e. the focus country for this study.

2.3 Outbound Marketing and Inbound Marketing

Outbound marketing is what people have seen for decades, it is the traditional way to sell products. Outbound marketing uses advertising in all of its traditional forms, such as: television, radio, newspapers, magazines, billboards etc. These channels have been an effective way to reach consumers for years, but today things have changed. Outbound marketing approaches potential buyers directly with the obvious intention of selling, and it was still widely used during the first decades of the Internet.

The main problem with outbound marketing is that consumers' habits have changed radically during the last decade. People are now much more aware about advertising messages and they do know how to avoid them. (Dysart 2014.)

For this reason, marketers nowadays need to use other ways to reach consumers, and inbound marketing is one of them.

The core idea of inbound marketing is to provide useful information and quality contents, which, once published on the Internet, are available to everyone. The two founders of the marketing software company Hub Spot, Brian Halligan and Dharmesh Shah, introduced the term “inbound marketing”. This new concept is based on the idea of creating quality content, which appeals to potential customers. Once such contents are online, users find them, and this leads them towards the company. Quality content must be original and of interest for potential buyers. News, articles, videos, pictures are all examples of contents used in inbound marketing. Inbound marketing relies on three main pillars: Content, Search Engine Optimization (SEO), and Social Media. (Halligan & Shah 2010.)

2.4 On-site Optimization

SEO is done in two directions: on-site, and off-site. On-site optimizations include all the technical fixes needed to make the web site faster and more user-friendly. Off-site optimizations consist in optimizing external pages which lead to the web site. (Bradley 2015.)

2.4.1 Content is King

The co-founder of Microsoft, Bill Gates, used for the first time the expression “Content is king” in one of his publications in 1996. His article, written when internet was still at its very beginning, foresaw the reality we live today. Gates wrote that on the internet “the broad opportunities for most companies involve supplying information or entertainment. No company is too small to participate”. As we know, today, anyone with

access to the internet can publish unlimited contents, and this is true for individuals and for companies as well.

In the digital marketing era, contents are what users are constantly looking for, and the mantra “content is king” remains one of the most popular among web marketers. Everything stored in a website is considered content: pictures, videos, blog articles, info-graphics, software etc.

Content becomes king only when it is capable of grabbing the interest of the audience, through a valuable form of information or entertainment. Joe Peluzzi, CEO and founder of the Content Marketing Institute, defines content marketing as “the marketing and business process for creating and distributing relevant and valuable content to attract, acquire, and engage a clearly defined and understood target audience - with the objective of driving profitable customer action”. Useful contents build trust among users, who enjoy accessing them and sharing them with other people. This, eventually, strengthens the ranking of a website on search engines, granting a greater visibility and a beneficial popularity. This is what a web marketing campaign must aim to. Figure five shows how many B2C use content marketing and how do they perceive its value.

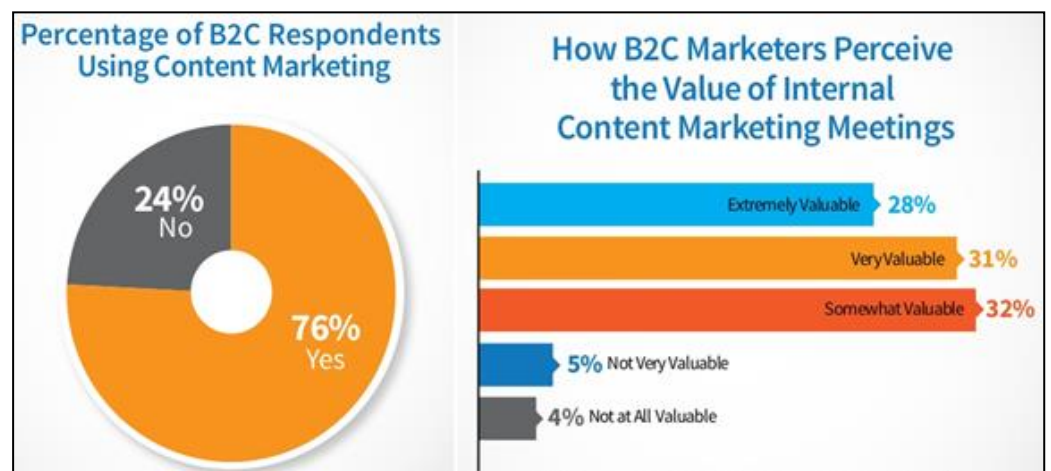


FIGURE 5: How B2C perceive content marketing

The figure clearly shows how the vast majority of respondents agree on the importance of content marketing.

2.4.2 Blogging

A blog, contracted form of web-log, is a container for web contents. Originally used as personal media, blogs are nowadays widely used as marketing tools. An e-commerce blog publishes regularly any sort of news related to the field. Such news is not necessarily about the product itself, but in a way closely related to the offer for customers. A blog is one of the most efficient tools in a SEO campaign because it represents one of the most profitable strategies to improve the relations between companies and customers. Beltrami (2014) considers a blog, “the best solution to build from scratch a proprietary medium”. A blog confers authority to the company and at the same time permits to measure the interactions between users and the firm, from different aspects. This means being able to collect valuable information on what customers are looking for. On the other hand, customers have an easy access to information that would be difficult to find otherwise.

Every time a user searches the internet, three actions occur: do, know and go. “Do” is the intent of performing an action, like purchasing a ticket or listening to a song. “Know” means looking for some information, like, in what year the French Revolution began, or, what is the cheapest place to buy a new pair of shoes. “Go” is the action of visiting the website where the needed information is stored. (Fishkin 2015.)

The Institute Burke stated that “Search engines are the new Yellow Pages of the digital era” (2010), this statement is supported by the amount of web searches on local businesses (76%), while searches on Yellow Pages account only for the 74%. The discrepancy keeps growing, and this stresses once again the importance of web content, or as Fishkin calls it, “empathy for the audience”. Understanding what the target group needs and wants is the most efficient way to reach them online.

Every search query performed on Google has a specific goal. For this reason a search engine ranks the pages according to their relevance to the user expectations. Since 2011, Google with its Panda algorithm

update, pays even more attention to the quality of webpage contents. The aim of Google is to become more and more human like: reading webpages as humans do, indexing them and delivering every time the best possible outcome. (Margherita 2015.) SEO strategy is discussed later on, in this thesis.

2.5 Off-site optimization

In addition to on-site optimization, a complete SEO campaign must include off-site optimization too. This happens outside the website.

2.5.1 Link Building

The number of backlinks and their authority, determines the positioning of a website. Since the Nineties, search engines utilize link popularity as one of the main factors to rank a webpage. Because of this, the link building is one of the most important strategies of a SEO campaign. There are two main practices used in link building (Moogan 2015):

Outreach link building: encouraging third parties, sites or blogs, to host some hypertext linking to a page of the own website. Sometimes, popular bloggers are willing to write a review of a product and add a link to the company's website on their post, for a monetary compensation;

Article marketing is the writing of contents for third sites which allow the publication, with hypertext leading to the website. These website include guest posting and press releases. Some uses also comment on forums or blogs. This activity is very time consuming, and to be effective, it requires a lot of perseverance and time. Link building is one of the strongest off-site optimization techniques, and, if used wisely, it brings remarkable benefits. However it is crucial to avoid spamming with poor quality contents. (Moogan 2015.)

2.5.2 Social Media

Often social media are confused with social networks, which are a subcategory. Andreas Kaplan and Michael Haenlein (2010) define social media as a group of internet applications based on the ideas of the web 2.0, enabling the creation and exchange of contents created by users. On the other hand, social networks are the platforms which allow the creation of a profile, the managing of contacts and the sharing of contents among the network (Arienzo 2014). Hence, social media are tools, whilst social network are platforms.

The main value Social Media offer, is to actively interact in a community of people, building trust, getting support and creating relations. By creating engagement, any firm can reach a broad audience who listens. A mix of different platforms, Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Pinterest, blogs etc., enables an active and bilateral communication with consumers. Interacting with users is the key to maintain customers and create loyalty, which translates into repeated purchases. (Vien 2015.)

2.6 SEO Strategy

Bradley (2015) compares SEO to the very well-known board game of Monopoly. In both cases the winning strategy is the same: acquiring as much real estate as possible. The player with the biggest amount of properties wins, always. In Monopoly, a property is a box, and every time other players land on that property, they must pay the rent. In SEO, real estate includes all the available spots in the search engine result page (SERP). The winner, in SEO, is the one who is able to acquire the maximum amount of real estate in the SERP.

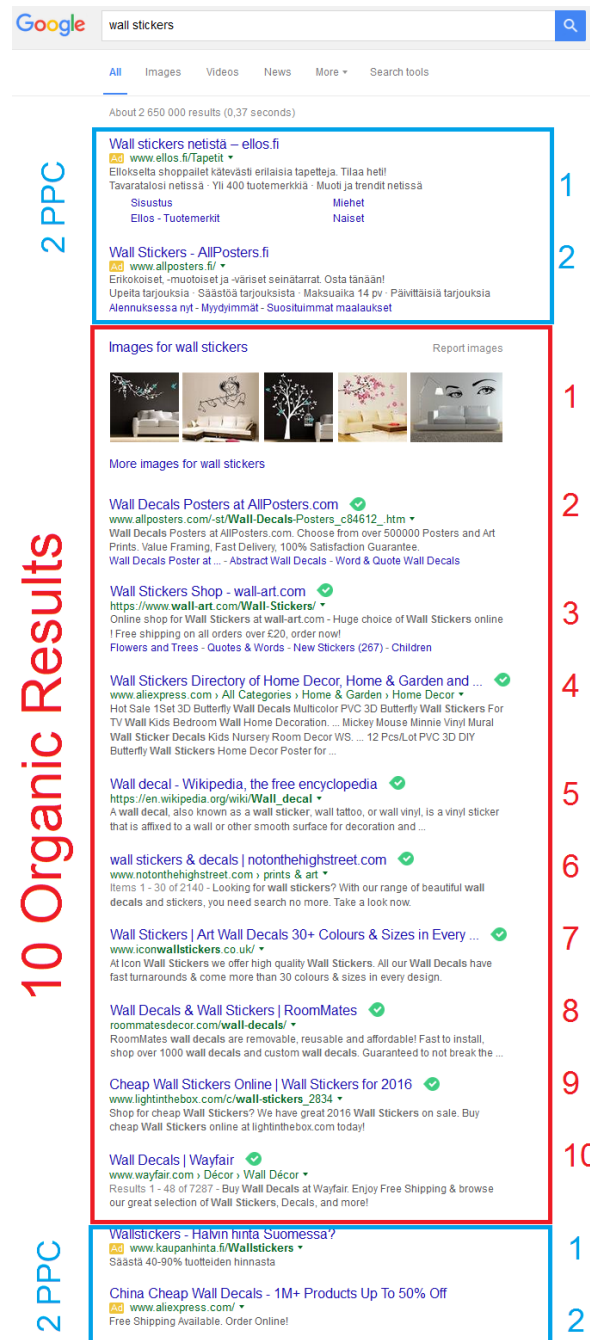


FIGURE 6: Example of a Google SERP

For instance, Google result pages display ten organic results, including images and videos, plus a variable amount of pay-per-click (PPC) results. Each one of these corresponds to a slot which can be conquered with the right SEO strategy. The picture above is a Google SERP example. The first two results are pay-per-click (PPC) and they can be easily recognized by the little yellow square on the left with the text Ad inside of it. This means that some advertiser paid Google to appear on top of the result

page for this search query. The tool used in this case is Google Ad Words. The same picture shows, right after the first two PPC, ten organic results. These are those pages which Google's algorithm considers to be the most relevant to the search query. It is worth noticing that the very first result offers a Google image search; nevertheless it is considered an organic result (Bradley 2015). Finally, at the bottom of this SERP, right after the ten organic results, there are two more PPC. This is just one example of a Google SERP: other queries might lead to a different number of PPC and other results such as videos and images. For all of these reasons, a goods SEO strategy requires a ubiquitous approach, maximizing the presence in every possible website. This is done with the use of:

- social media;
- video directories such as YouTube and Vimeo;
- publications in third sites, press releases and article marketing;
- forums;
- picture sharing websites such as Flickr;
- micro blogs, i.e. Tumblr;
- popular blogs (influencers);
- etc.

2.6.1 SEO is Always Geolocalized

One of the criteria used by search engine algorithms is geolocalization. For instance the query in figure six (previous page), was performed in Finland; for this reason the SERP lists several .fi domain websites.

Geolocalization helps providing the most relevant results depending on the user's physical location. This makes sense because in the majority of cases search queries aim to find some product, service or map, available near to the user. For this reason SEO needs to be always geolocalized. Geolocalization is done inserting certain parameters in the SEO optimized

website such as the city, region or country of interest, in addition to using the language spoken by the target group. (Bradley 2015.)

3 THE USE OF WEB ANALYTICS FOR SEO

This chapter introduces web analytics, tools for measuring websites performance, and improving effectiveness in web marketing campaigns.

3.1 Web Analytics

Web analytics include: the measurement, analysis and reporting of internet data, essential to optimize the use of a web site (Boscaro & Porta 2014). In digital marketing, web analytics have a key role. As the American web analytics guru, Avinash Kaushik (2010), puts it; statistics are the key to the decision making process, and so are the cost benefit analysis. Kaushik emphasizes the importance of taking decisions with immediate effect, or using his own words: “on the cutting edge”. This is fundamental to be always one step ahead of competitors. Since firms’ resources are limited, Kaushik suggests three principles, worth considering when analysing web analytics, in order to maintain the highest online visibility: functionality, simplicity and affordability.

In addition to this Kaushik adds the 10/90 rule: 10% of the investments must pay for the analytics tools needed, while the 90% goes to the professionals who are capable of interpreting the data. This puts great evidence to the people and their interpretation skills, essential to use data profitably.

3.1.1 Web Analytics is the Performance Metric System

The success of a web marketing campaign can be measured using web analytics. Järvinen and Karjaluoto (2014) identify three stages in the web analytics performance measurement process:

1. Performance Measurement Content: the developed metrics system. It includes what is being measured, the selected metrics, and their structure in the metrics system.

2. Performance Measurement Process: the process used to refine and manage performance.
3. Performance Measurement Context: the internal and external organizational contexts where metrics systems occur. (Järvinen & Karjaluo 2014.)

Once collected and analysed, the data need to be reported and the findings must lead to action. Metrics measurement is an integral part of organizational strategy. The winning formula aligns metrics and strategy, with a clear vision of the definition, dimension, and structure of the metrics. The organization management carries out its implicit role of support, providing the required expertise and commitment to implement the strategy. The diversity of organizations implies various approaches which change from one organization to another. (Järvinen & Karjaluo 2014.)

The number and variety of web metrics is enormous and it is growing all the time, however, the most significant are:

1. Number of unique visitors: the number of people that visited a site during a specific timeframe. Unique visitors represent the count of individuals that visited the site regardless of the number of times they visited it. For instance, if person A visits the site once, and person B visits the same site five times, there are two unique visitors and six total visits. These numbers are important because they represent the size of the audience reached. As marketing efforts expand, their effectiveness needs to be regularly assessed.
2. Interactions per visit: even if visits do not convert (turn into sales), it is important to monitor visitors' behaviour on the site. What are they doing, what can be done to get them to do more, and how their behaviour can be leaded to conversions? For instance, what are the page view rates per unique visitors, what is the total time spent, the comments or reviews made, etc. All of these interactions are

important, and the SEO goal is to increase these interactions and also to figure out how to leverage these increased interactions into increased conversions, e.g. downloads, subscriptions, purchases, etc.

3. **Traffic Sources:** It is important to have a diverse number of sources for incoming traffic. The three primary source categories are: direct visitors, the ones that type the url directly in their browser address bar; search visitors, coming from search engines (organic); and referral visitors, coming from an external link in a third site or blog. All three sources are important but have varying levels of conversion. For this reason, it is important to calculate how much each traffic source is converting, dealing with it separately.
4. **Conversion rate** is one of the most important metrics; it is the percentage of people who performed an action on the site. Actions include: completing a purchase, filling out a contact form, viewing a certain page etc. The reason why conversion rate is so important is that it is the ultimate measure of how successful the website is. A low conversion rate means that: either the wrong kind of visitors is viewing the site, or the site is not effective at convincing visitors that it offers the right solution to their problem. Conversion rate can also tell if something is broken on the site. For instance, if conversion rate suddenly drops, it probably means that there is an error in the check-out system or a problem with the sign-up form (Lumidigital 2016).
5. **Bounce Rate:** a bounce is when a user visits a site and immediately clicks the back button or closes the browser tab. This means that the user did not find what was looking for and decided to leave the page right away. It is the equivalent of someone browsing a store, taking a quick look around, and immediately walking back out the door. Of course, sometimes people just end up to the wrong site. Getting the bounce rate down to zero is almost impossible. Nevertheless, reducing the bounce rate is critical. Every lost visitor is a lost opportunity. Among other things, SEO aims to understand

the reasons why people leave. The solution to this problem, usually comes from adding better contents, and improving navigation.

6. Top pages: the most visited pages. Knowing this helps focusing on those contents users like the most, enhancing the overall experience. One tool commonly used to gather even deeper understanding of users navigation is the heat map. A heat map shows which areas of the page receive more interest by users following the movement of the mouse cursor.
7. In addition to these indicators, goals are measured also with key performance indicators (KPI). KPI need to vary over time in order to pursuit a constant improvement. For this reason the number of KPI is very wide: number of unique visits, average number of pages viewed by a single visitor, conversion rates, income generated by SEO activities, number of abandoned checkouts, and so on. (Jackson 2009).

3.2 Google Analytics

Many web analytics tool are free of charge. Google Analytics is one of them. Google Analytics is the traffic analysis tool with the biggest market share. With 54.4% of all the websites using it, Google analytics enjoys a market share of 82.9% globally. (w3tech.)

Google Analytics utilizes page tags. These are small parts of html code added on webpages, with few lines of JavaScript. The server, through these codes, stores data on users, and enables the webmaster to access detailed statistics on the website usage and performance.

Google Analytics provides a wide range of information. The most viewed pages, visitors' origin (search engines, direct visits, referral, pay-per-clicks), average time spent on pages. This information can then be used to improve the website. In the particular case of an e-commerce, there are specific analytics to increase sales. Google keeps track of the most sold items, and the most searched by users. Moreover, Google Analytics

calculates the profit margin for each product sold, the average amount of each purchase and the time needed to finalize a purchase. The most advanced feature of Google Analytics is “Goal Flows”, used to maximize conversions.

4 CASE COMPANIES

This chapter introduces both of the case companies and their collaboration. Here, the SEO campaign is unveiled and so are its technical details.

4.1 Lumidigital SEO Agency: the Service Provider

Lumidigital is a very young and dynamic company, and the service provider in this case study. The writer himself during his internship was able to get to know personally the two co-founders, who happened to be his tutors and co-workers. During the six months spent at Lumidigital office in Tallinn, the thesis author understood the importance of working in a harmonious group, where everyone contributes actively, sharing his personal expertise to the pursuit of a common goal. As a small SEO agency, Lumidigital is very committed to its clients and tries to keep in touch with them regularly, with a strong focus on communication. Lumidigital is very aware of the fact that its clients' success is tightly connected to its own profitability, and for this reason strives to deliver always the best possible results. As SEO results can be quantitatively measured and reported, the company website proudly exhibits many of the successes achieved with clients.

For the purposes of this thesis, informal interviews with the two co-founders of Lumidigital were conducted by the author himself, during the traineeship.

4.2 Stickersmurali.net: the Client

The case company stickersmurali.net, the client, is a small sized enterprise operating in a niche business: wall stickers. Wall stickers are inexpensive decorations which are easy to apply on any wall surface. Stickersmurali.net categorizes its products into themes, with numerous themes for each room of the house. Wall stickers are meant to fit with any

kind of furniture, they are easy to install and can be removed at any time without damaging the surface. All of the characteristics listed above, make wall stickers a product which is simple for anyone to use, and a good present idea. An important advantage of selling wall stickers online is that they are not commonly sold on brick-and-mortar stores. The internet is the perfect place to sell them: a well done website allows displaying an enormous amount of products. Moreover, shipping costs are limited due to the light weight and the small size.

The School of Management at Milan Polytechnic published on October 2015 its study on e-commerce and B2C, reporting the latest trends in the Italian electronic retail. According to this publication, wall stickers are a sub-category of furniture and home living (arredamento e home living). This sector appears to be worth the 2% of the whole online commerce in the country; a pretty decent share of the entire market, which makes wall sticker a perfect niche product. For the sake of completeness, the strongest sectors in the Italian online market are: services, tourism and insurances.

In order to get the best opportunities from the internet, a small company such stickersmurali.net needs to implement a solid SEO strategy. A small company without a well-known brand is forced to use keyword marketing to make its products visible to consumers online. Potential customers are very likely to insert search queries such as “wall stickers” on the Google search bar, rather than a particular brand, and once the result page appears, by clicking on the most appealing snippet they end up visiting the website. Such context stresses the importance of SEO for small businesses which is discussed in this chapter.

Outsourcing web marketing services, to an external company, is a smart decision for a small firm as stickersmurali.net because it allows them to concentrate all of their efforts on the core business: making and selling wall stickers.

Stickersmurali.net is an Italian e-commerce. The website is available in Italian language only, and its SEO campaign is geo-localized for its core market, Italy. This means that all the chosen keywords used in the site optimization are those used by real users in the market area of interest. Web tools, such Google Ad Words or ubersuggest, give access to the exact keywords used on search queries. Moreover, accurate information on monthly searches volume is available as well.

Another way to sell online is through market places. These are websites that, in exchange for a fee, offer: a great visibility for the products, a secure platform granting a transparent and efficient exchange between seller and buyer. Some of the most popular market places are: eBay, Amazon, etsy and alibaba. Despite of the visibility, the cost of the fee takes an important part of revenues away from the seller. If sometimes selling through market places might be an important way to reach new markets, stickersmurali.net did not use this option, focusing entirely on its own website for its sales. Nevertheless, market places represent the fiercest competitors for this small company. (Lumidigital 2016.)

The SEO project implemented for stickersmurali.net can be divided in two periods:

- Firstly, the main goal is to obtain visibility and more visits, this is done using the funnelling technique.
- Secondly, conversion rate must be strengthened through an enhanced customer experience in order to increase revenues.

The time period under study is 12 months long (one year), starting from January 1st, 2015 until December 31st, 2015.

4.3 Keyword research

Every SEO campaign starts with a keyword research. The goal is to collect all the relevant keywords entered by users on search engines. There are

plenty of tools online for doing this. In our case, two were used: ubersuggest and the keyword planning tool of Google Ad Words.

Ubersuggest.org is a website used to easily find most of the relevant keywords, based on the user need. By entering a general keyword, ubersuggest offers a long list of similar keywords. Ubersuggest is free to use and is a very handy and useful tool to start a keyword marketing research. At Lumidigital, ubersuggest is generally used in the very first phase for every campaign. The keyword planning tool of Google Ad Words is a much more powerful instrument, able to provide very detailed information. Google Ad Words offers very precise statistics on keywords, including their competitiveness level. Both tools can be set up to analyse a specific country and language. This is important because SEO works on geographical bases.

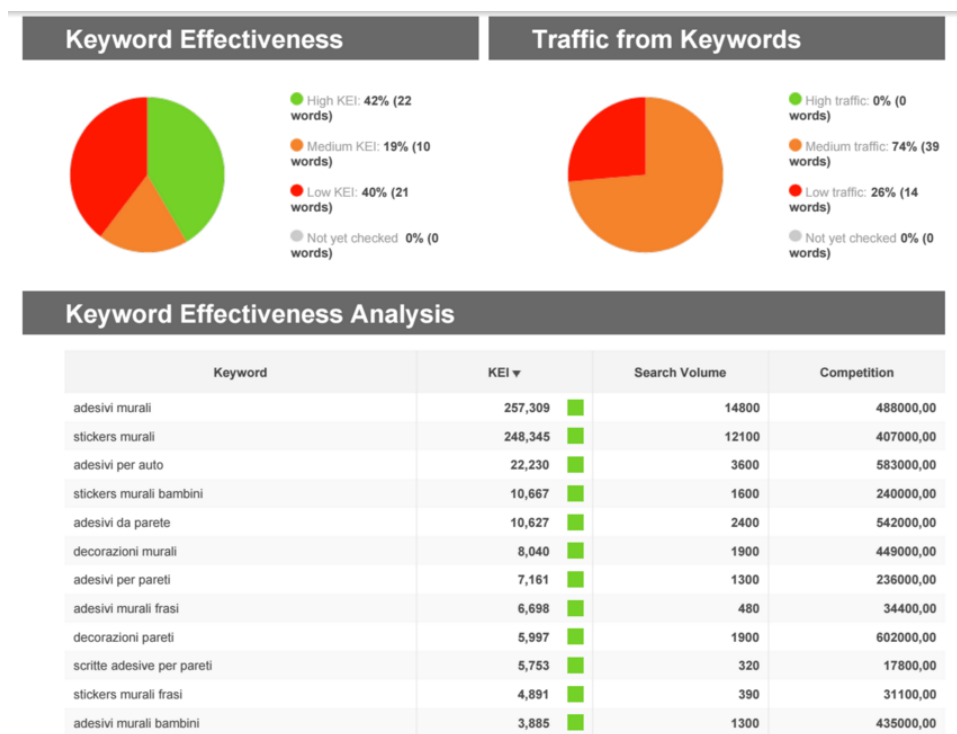


FIGURE 7: Example of Keyword Research Report (stickersmurali.net), listed by their Keywords Effectiveness Indicators (KPI). (Lumidigital 2016.)

The keyword research ends with the writing of a keyword research report. On the report are listed 50 to 60 keywords which are used during the campaign. Figure seven (previous page) shows the keyword research report done by Lumidigital for its client stickersmurali.net. Only the first 12 appear on the picture, but the total report includes 53 of them. Keywords are ranked according to Keyword Effectiveness Indicators (KEI).

4.4 SWOT analysis

A SWOT analysis is used to assess the whole SEO campaign.

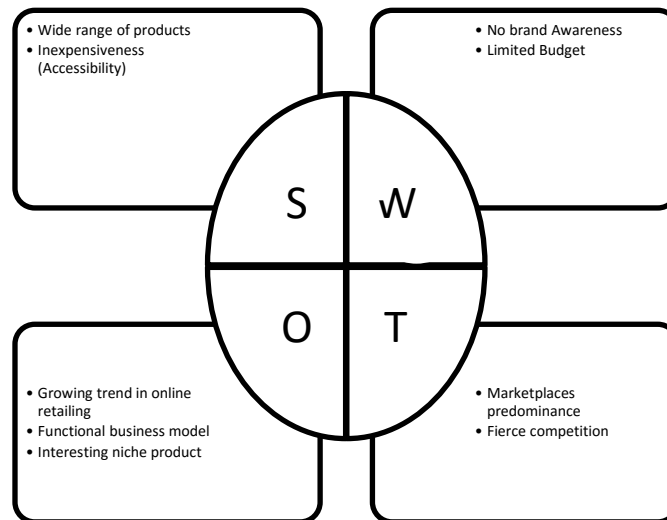


FIGURE 8: SWOT analysis for the SEO campaign project

SWOT analysis lists internal and external factors: strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

4.4.1 Strengths

A **wide range of products**, with high quality pictures, is a great asset, especially in this sector where visuals are paramount.

Inexpensive products are easy to sell, and can be used to reach a large segment of consumers.

4.4.2 Weaknesses

No brand awareness for stickersmurali.net: this small company is unknown to the public, unless it strives for online visibility.

Limited spending budget, a small firm needs to spend very thoughtfully because even the smallest mistake can cause great damages.

4.4.3 Opportunities

A **growing trend in online retailing** represents an appealing opportunity for small firms aiming to reach a bigger customers base.

Stickersmurali.net benefits from its **functional business model** which makes the company easy to manage.

Wall stickers are **interesting niche products**: hard to find in brick-and-mortar, can be easily sold online.

4.4.4 Threats

Marketplaces enjoy a massive online visibility. Stickersmurali.net is absent from marketplaces.

Many other **competitors** are very active on the exact same sector: wall stickers and home decorations.

4.5 Website structure

Usability, quality contents, a pleasant design and an intuitive hierarchy of products into categories and sub-categories, are the main strengths of stickersmurali.net. The website is build using Woo Commerce, a free e-commerce toolkit for Word Press. Word Press is the platform hosting the website. A template is used, and the choice of colours is meant to be appealing and pleasant. Colour marketing principles were taken under account while designing the website.

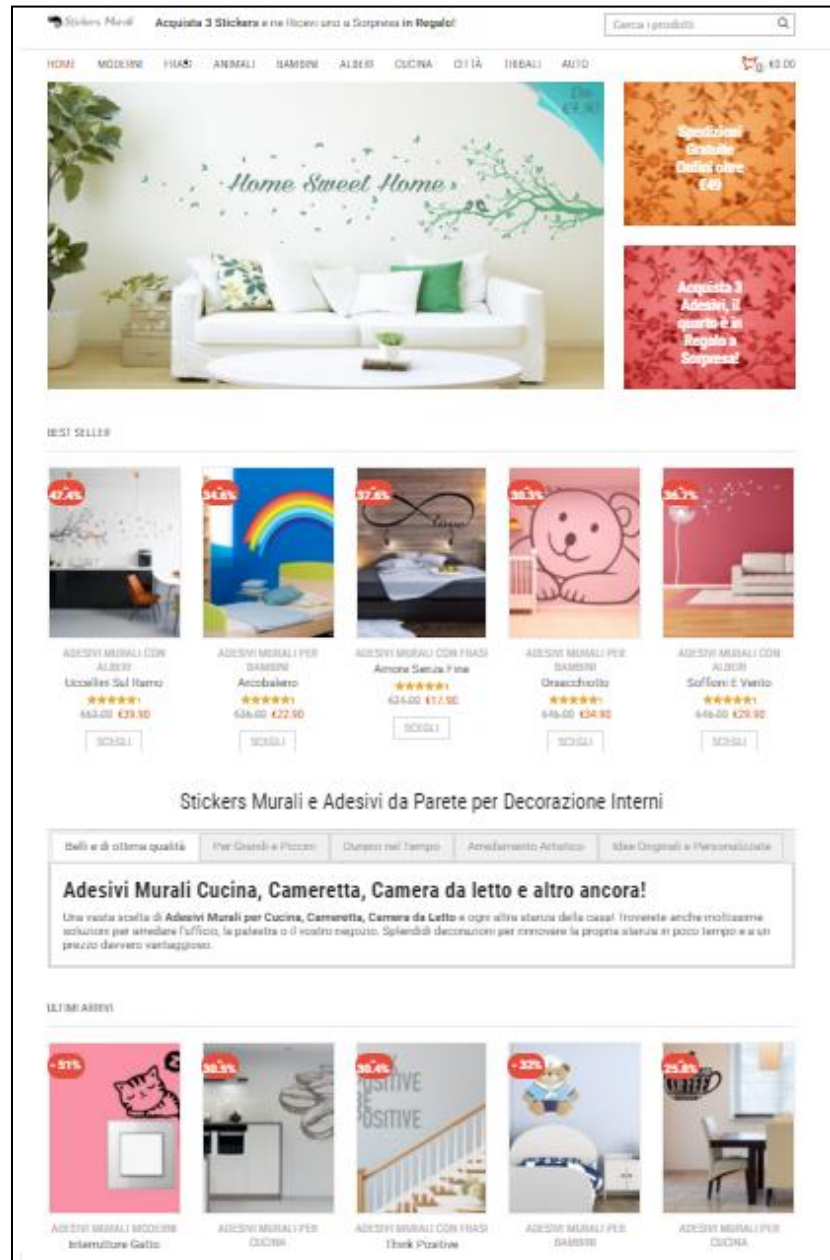


FIGURE 9: stickersmurali.net, homepage.

The home page, (FIGURE 9, previous page) contains:

- Header: compact with the company logo, the chameleon: symbol of camouflage and symbiosis. Next to it: special offers on evidence, and on the left a search bar to facilitate the navigation;
- Product categories;
- A nice product picture slider;
- Scrolling down, the user can see what products are the best sellers, and what are the latest stickers added on the catalogue;

- Latest posts from the blog;
- Footer (figure ten, below), here can be found all the relevant information on the company, about us, contacts, terms & conditions, shipping, warranty, payments and refunding. At the very end there is a call to action: “subscribe to our newsletter”.

It is worth noticing the presence of product categories only in the menu on top of the page. Search engines and their algorithms start reading the page the exact same way a human would: from the top left corner to the right and from the top to the bottom (Bradley 2015). Having the categories here means that the webpage is indexed for the product categories. This is essential for SEO and positioning.

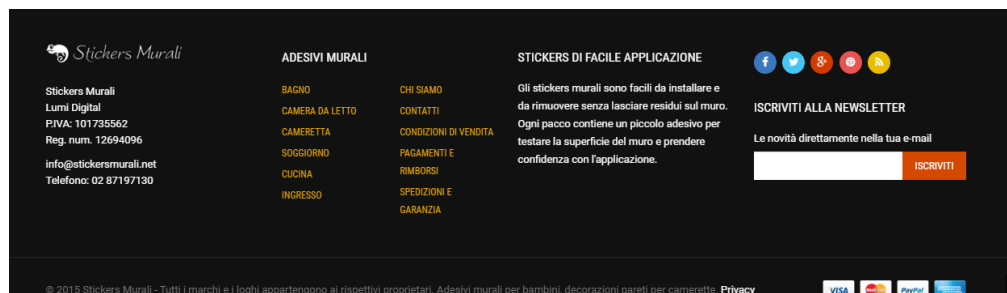


FIGURE 10: stickersmurali.net, footer.

4.5.1 Categories and Tags

Woo commerce is a content management system (CMS) which facilitates the subdivision of a website contents into categories and tags.

Furthermore, it organizes pages, enhancing the user experience, with a more intuitive navigation and an easy-to-use search tool. Using Woo Commerce, all the products on sale in stickersmurali.net are grouped into categories. In the categorization process the relevant keywords are inserted to optimize the website visibility in search engines. These are the keywords from the report (figure seven, page 31). Thus it is possible to know what products enjoy the highest demand.

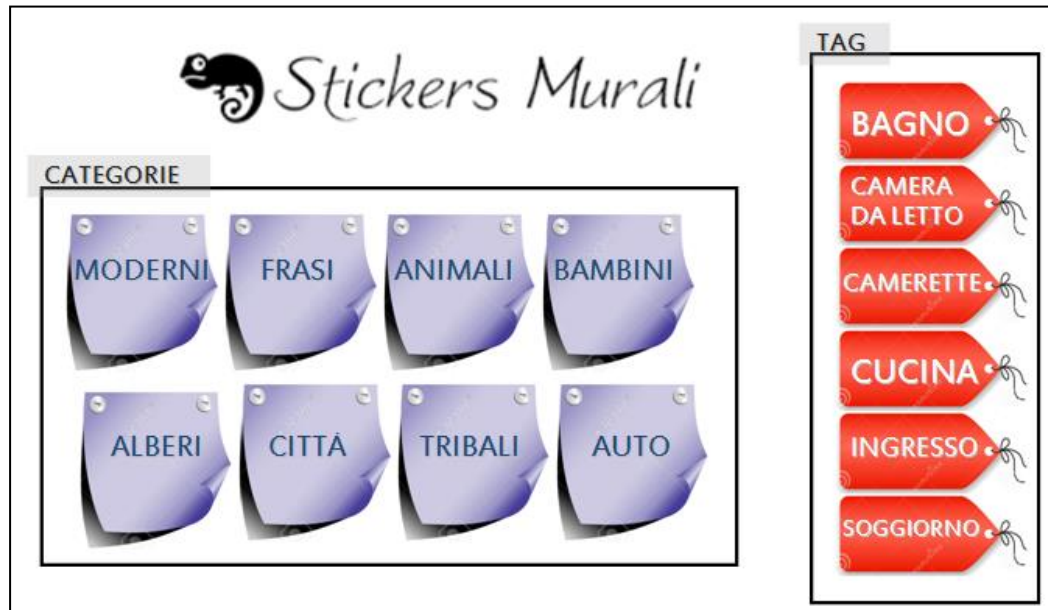


FIGURE 11: Stickersmurali.net categories and tags (Lumidigital 2016)

Tags must not be confused with categories (figure eleven). Tags are useful to give more detailed information on the page contents to users and search engines. If categories are the main way to list products, tags add some extra value with a richer description. In stickersmurali.net categories describe the products while tags are the list of rooms where stickers are supposed to suit the best.

4.6 Product Page

The product page is crucial for an e-commerce. Here conversions, i.e. sales, take place. Here users make their buying decision. In stickersmurali.net (figure twelve) the product page contains:

High definition picture of the product;

Product name, description and price

Short product description: every page is singularly handwritten by the copywriter. From a SEO perspective it is important that every page contains a unique text. Copied contents receive a negative assessment by

the search engines and their algorithms. This means a poorer ranking on SERPs.

High level of customization: the user is able to choose colour and size of the product. This feature maximizes the customer experience, filling the gap between an online store and a brick-and-mortar.

Call to action: buy it now button at the bottom.

Clear instruction, terms of payment, shipping and users reviews,

Related products

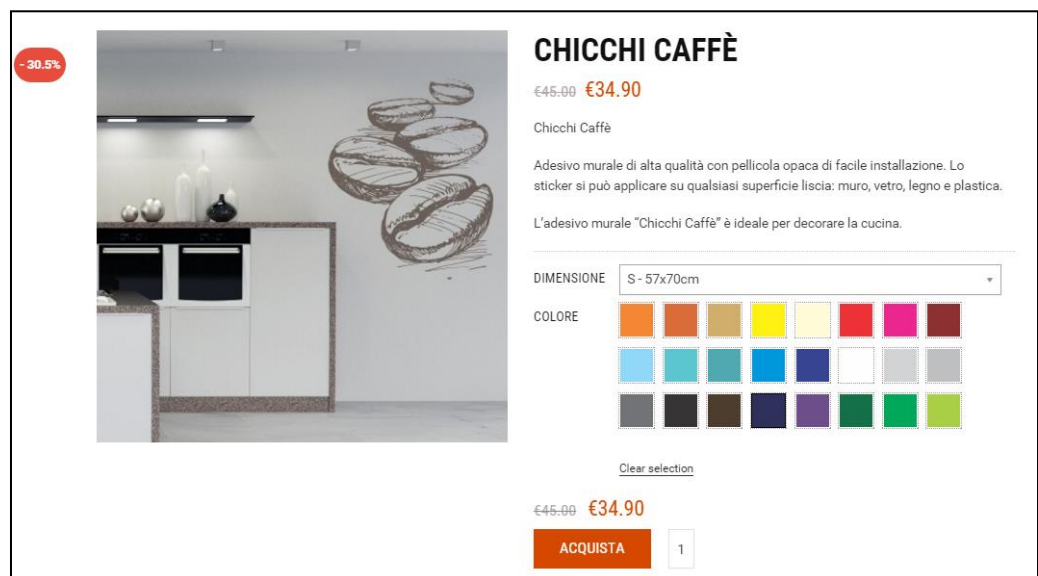


FIGURE 12: stickersmurali.net, product page

Products are available in different colours and sizes.

4.7 On-page optimization

In stickersmurali.net, the data-entry is hand made for every single page. The copywriter's job is to ensure that every single page is unique, original and interesting. The same rule applies for product descriptions. Even similar products must have a different wording. Google algorithm penalizes duplicated contents. (Lumidigital 2016).

Every page contains its own meta-tags (meta-title, meta-description and URL). All of these appear on the snippet in the SERP, therefore their SEO value is extremely important. Their length must not exceed the measures in pixels, displayed by search engines. A too long text does not appear entirely on the snippet. A well written snippet helps the user choosing the page of interest and enjoys a better ranking on SERPs. Figure thirteen, below, shows a Google snippet for stickersmurali.net.

META TITLE	Stickers Murali e Adesivi da Parete 100% Originali da 4.90€
URL	stickersmurali.net/ ▼
META DESCRIPTION	Stickers murali e adesivi da parete per decorare camerette, camere da letto, cucina e soggiorno: scopri i wall stickers e gli adesivi murali più originali.

FIGURE 13: A Google snippet for stickersmurali.net contains: meta-title, URL and meta-description.

Every page in stickersmurali.net is completely optimized; Google algorithms recognize such optimizations and give a higher page ranking. The optimization process starts from the snippet and includes every page content.

4.8 Link Building and off-site Optimization

Link building is an essential part of every SEO campaign. The number of backlinks to the website must grow regularly over time, and the site of origin has to be as reliable as possible. Spam sites must be avoided completely, because they do more damage than good (Lumidigital 2016). Link building is used to increase a website's popularity and thus its SERP ranking. This process is quite long and the results arrive in the long run, however, solid web popularity is an incredible asset for an e-commerce, granting large visibility. A brand new website faces the most challenging phase of link building: no one knows it exists, and there is no regular user base. This is particularly true at the very beginning of the project. The web site has just been indexed and search engines barely know it exists.

For all of the reasons listed above, the link building strategy is to start collecting backlinks from other websites which permit the publication of

web contents. The major sources of backlinks are press releases. These sites allow everyone to register and start immediately writing and publishing original contents. This practice is called article marketing. What gives value to article marketing are anchor texts, which need to be always different and contain words strictly related to the topic (keywords and synonyms). Usually, in press release websites, all of the articles submitted must be approved by the administrators before being published. Every article directory has its own rules, but in general everyone expects interesting, useful and original contents. Articles which do not meet these standards are not be published.

During the entire year under study, Lumidigital published five articles per week, in five different press release sites. Every article contained one hypertext (link) to stickersmurali.net. Thanks to this strategy, in one year time, 260 new backlinks were acquired (five articles a week for 52 weeks) (Lumidigital 2016).

Other sources of backlinks are discussion forums. Here users exchange opinions and suggestions on purchases. A strong presence on relevant forums establishes a valuable connection with users. For instance, arredamento.it, a furniture forum, is the perfect place to share ideas and suggest the use of wall stickers to decorate an apartment. Arredamento.it and other similar forums were used during the campaign.



FIGURE 14: an example of article marketing

Another way of doing link building is through link exchange. Professional bloggers allow the publication of guest posts in their websites, usually for a fee. This is a rather expensive option, and was not used at all during the campaign.

Search engines use the number of backlinks as one of the main factors to assess the authority of a website. For this reason, Lumidigital puts great emphasis on link building, and its implementation during the whole campaign.

4.9 Content and Social Strategy

Blogging represent an extraordinary resource in web marketing: it increases web popularity and opens new doors for potential customers who are interested in the product. In keyword marketing, users search queries are taken very seriously, particularly when planning the contents to be posted in the company's blog. The very first step of the content campaign is to create an editorial plan. A new article is published weekly, and every article follows certain specific rules. Word Press is an excellent

platform for blogging because it includes plenty of very useful SEO tools. Every article can be optimized for a maximum of three keywords. Despite of being a company's blog, stickersmurali.net uses a user friendly approach. In every post are present useful suggestions and ideas on how to decorate different rooms of the house, using wall stickers.

In the very case of a niche business as wall stickers, blogging is a very powerful strategy. The topic is far for mainstream, and those users who end up reading the blog are very likely to purchase a product.

Search engines and their algorithms use specific criteria when assessing the content of a page and for this reason all the articles on stickersmurali.net blog are edited according to these principles:

500 words minimum length. The amount of words of an article tells how much effort it was put to write it. Of course the longer, the better, however 500 words are considered to be a sufficient length for a good article.

(Lumidigital 2016.)

Text is well organized using different headings (h1, h2, h3, h4, h5 and h6).

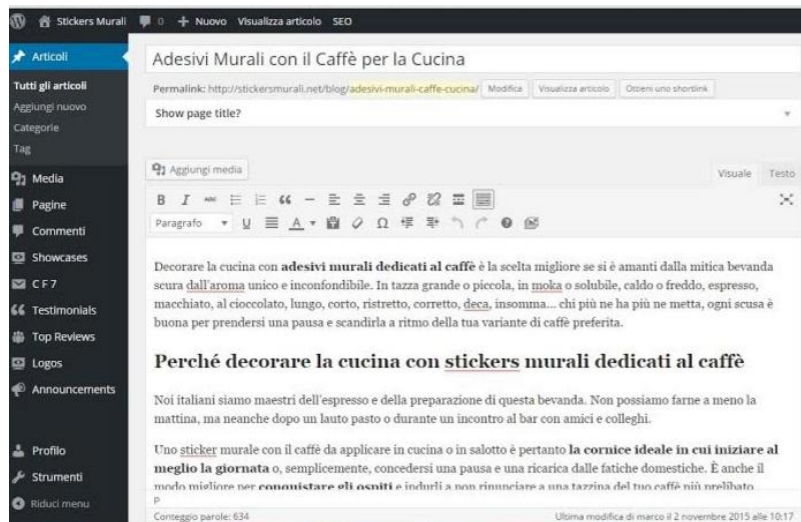


FIGURE 15: Word Press the blog editing and writing tool.

In stickersmurali.net blog, every article contains a maximum of 10 pictures. All the pictures are products available for sale on the e-commerce.

Pictures are optimized to search engines, with a proper title, description and the alt-tag attribute. Every picture contains also a link to its related product page. This enables users to easily purchase products directly from the blog. Figure sixteen, below, shows the graphic interface from Word Press, used to optimize pictures.

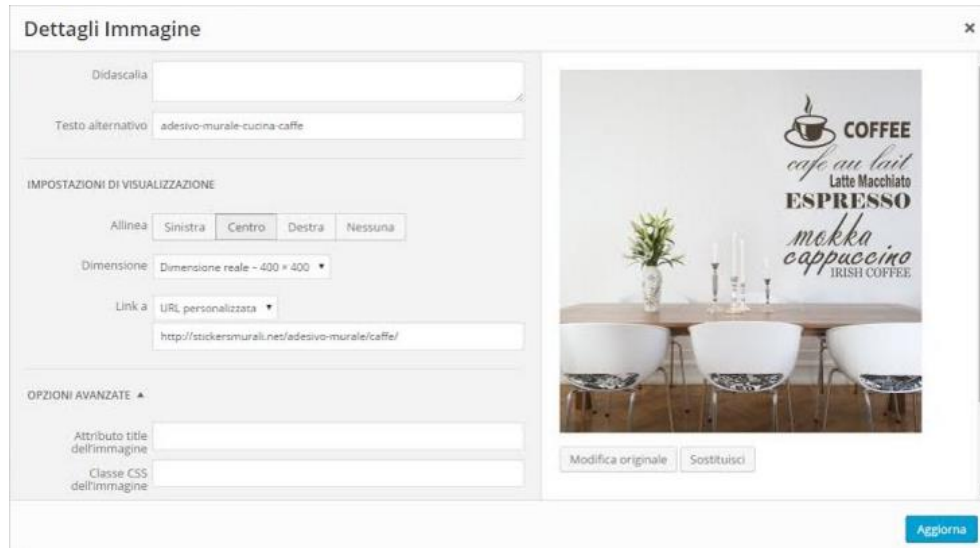


FIGURE 16: picture optimization in Wordpress.

Every page has the same optimization standards used on other pages: meta-tag, meta-description, URL. This is essential for a correct indexing.

4.9.1 Social Media

All the articles, once published in the blog are then shared on stickersmurale.net Facebook official account. Facebook remains the most used social media used in Italy and Europe. Being present on Facebook adds some extra visibility to the e-commerce.

The social media marketing strategy implemented for stickersmurale.net is minimal. Having a strong presence in social media is very time consuming, new contents need to be uploaded often and interaction with users has to be constant. However, a strong presence on social media does not quite increase conversions as much as positioning in SERPs. In addition to Facebook, stickersmurale.net is present on Instagram, Pinterest and Houzz.

Pinterest and Instagram enjoyed a remarkable rise in popularity during the last years. Both are very suitable for merchandise goods because they focus predominantly on pictures. Moreover, both are very suitable for interior design ideas and home living.

A Pew Research found out that Instagram and Pinterest are the two social networks with the biggest growth during the last three years. The amount of users between 18 and 22 years old has doubled. Right after Facebook, Instagram has the highest commitment rate level: 59% of users are active daily.

In the stickersmurali.net campaign, Instagram has been used to publish pictures of products and other contents strictly inherent with home decoration. Every picture has been optimized with the use of hash tags, filters, emoticons etc. This campaign focuses primarily on youngsters who are the most active users of Instagram. Because of its mobile nature, Instagram cannot be used to insert links or hypertexts.

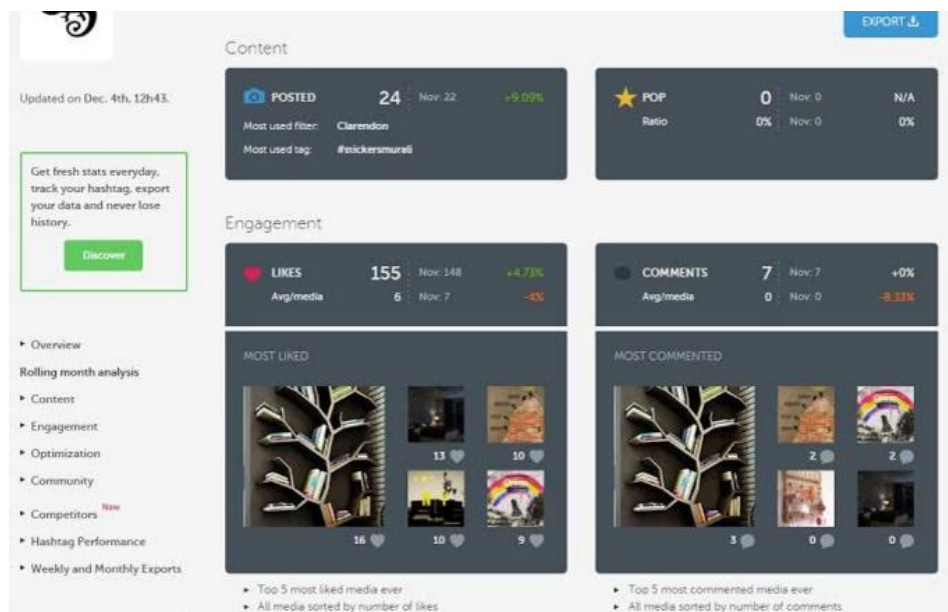


FIGURE 17: Instagram insights on the engagement rate for Stickersmurali.net, during November-December 2015

5 EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

This is an empirical chapter. The observation on Google Analytics data is used to assess the SEO campaign, with a special focus on the website performance.

5.1.1 Data Acquisition Process

The entire idea and commissioning for this thesis, began as the writer started his internship as SEO copywriter, at Lumidigital, in September 2015. The internship was six months long, and it ended in March 2016. During the six months the writer had the chance to observe and getting to know the company, its operations and its clients (including stickersmurali.net) from a privileged point of view. An important part of the empirical data used in this thesis, comes directly from the observations and discussions, during the working hours spent at the office, at Lumidigital. Being close to the company representatives, has been a extraordinary opportunity to interview them, discuss technical issues and collect numerous useful insights. Because of their unstructured and conversational nature, these interviews were not recorded; however, the writer took some notes.

As the internship came close to its end, Lumidigital provided the writer with the client's reports and the Google Analytics, part of which appears later in this chapter. What followed was an intensive desk research, which lasted from mid-March to the beginning of May 2016. During this time, an in-depth analysis of the empirical data, permitted to reach the results reported in this work. Figure eighteen (next page) recaps the data acquisition process.

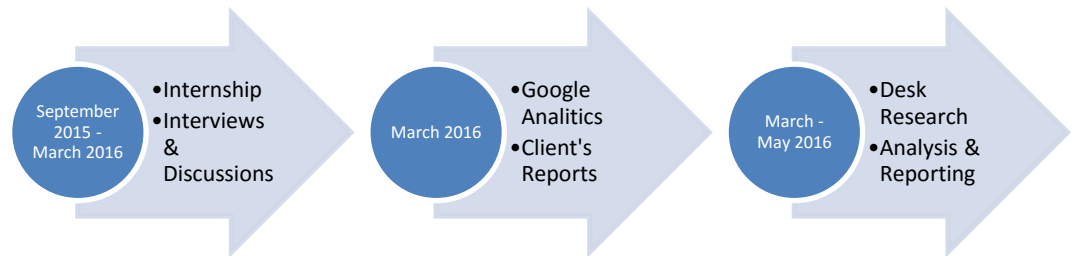


FIGURE 18: Data Acquisition Process

The data acquisition process, as it appears from the graph, has been straightforward and well-reasoned during its entirety.

5.2 Web Analytics

The tool used to monitor and assess the performances of stickersmurali.net is Google Analytics. The goal of the whole SEO campaign was to increase the inbound traffic, bringing more organic visits to the website. The analytics under scrutiny in this study refer to the time period January – December 2015.

The number of sessions is one of the most significant analytics on a SEO campaign. The graph in figure nineteen (next page), reports the number of visitors and their interactions. The exact figures are: 33,756 sessions, 27,890 unique users, 156,547 page views, 4.64 page views per session, an average session time length of about three minutes, a bounce rate of 51.37% and 82.59% of new sessions. The graph clearly shows how visits have been growing regularly over time. After a rather flat first quarter, in April the number of visitors started growing significantly for the rest of the year. Growth started with the launch of the company's blog, which added an important channel for users to find stickersmurali.net from search

engines. During the last quarter, the number of visits stabilized around 6,000 to 7,000 monthly.

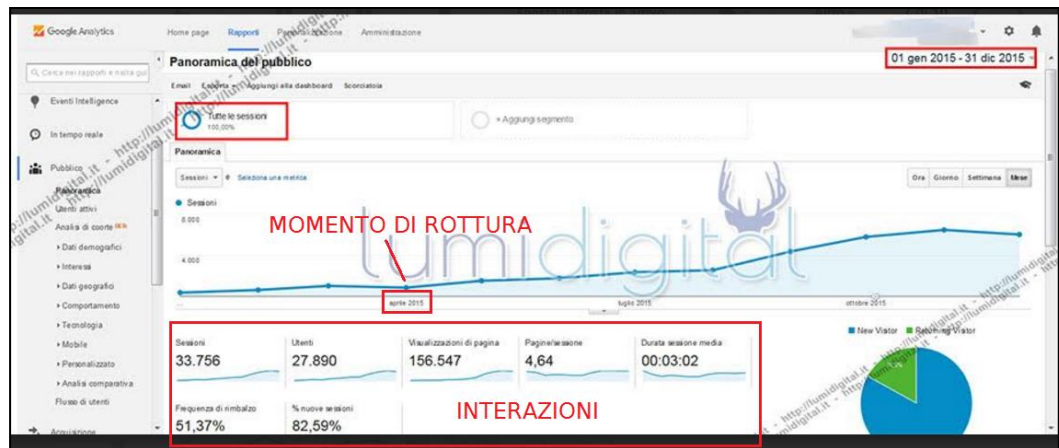


FIGURE 19: Sessions for stickersmurali.net during the year 2015 (Lumidigital 2016)

Since the company blog represents a remarkable way to attract visitors, let's have a look at the graph on figure 20 (below). The trend is exactly the same as in the previous figure nineteen, and it confirms the importance of content in web marketing and SEO. During the last quarter, blog pages received 900 to 1,000 visits per month.



FIGURE 20: blog sessions (Lumidigital 2016)

The majority of visits in this SEO campaign are organic: 66.7%. Figure 21 shows the impact of organic visits (orange line) over the number of total visits (blue line). Once more, the importance of SEO is proven.



FIGURE 21: Organic traffic (blue), total traffic (orange). (Lumidigital 2016)

The pie chart in figure 22 offers a very detailed overview of the main channels used to access the website: organic search, referral, social, and direct.

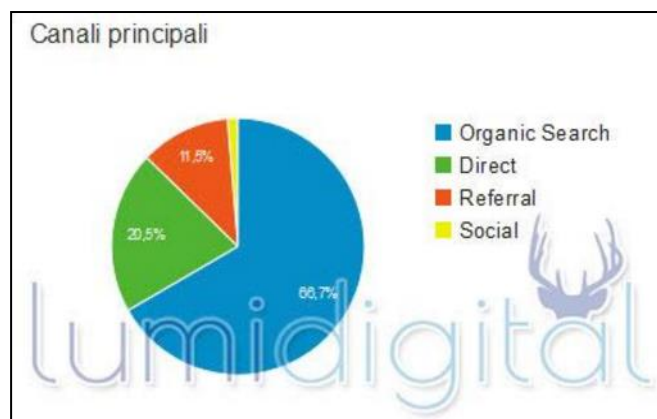


FIGURE 22: channels: organic searches 66.7%; direct 20.5%; referral 11.5%; social 1.3%. (Lumidigital 2016)

As it clearly appears from the pie chart above, direct visits are the second main source of traffic, right after organic search. Direct visits happen when users enter the URL directly to the browser address bar. This means that they are already familiar with the site, and return because they like it. Direct visits are a sign of growing popularity among users. Referral, visits from third sites, account for 11.5%. Unsurprisingly, visits from social media are at the bottom with only 1.3%. This is due to the strategic choice of limiting the budget spent for social media and focus on more efficient channels. Nevertheless, social media marketing can be improved in future campaigns.

Figure 22 offers some interesting facts about users' interactions. In spite of their small amount, social media users are those with the longest sessions, 3'45" and the highest number of pages views per session, 5.36. These data should be taken into serious consideration for future campaigns. Overall, organic search users are the best target group for two reasons: the lowest bounce rate (45.24%) and the highest conversion rate (0.46%). Referral visitors are the target group with the least potential: highest bounce rate, shortest sessions and the lowest conversion rate. Direct visits are a good sign of growing popularity for stickersmurali.net.

Default Channel Grouping	Acquisizione			Comportamento		
	Sessioni ? ↓	% nuove sessioni ?	Nuovi utenti ?	Frequenza di rimbalzo ?	Pagine/sessione ?	Durata sessione media ?
	33.756 % del totale: 100,00% (33.756)	83,06% Media per vista: 62,59% (0,00%)	28.037 % del totale: *100,56% (27.680)	51,37% Media del vista: 51,37% (0,00%)	4,64 Media per vista: 4,64 (0,00%)	00:03:02 Media per vista: 00:03:02 (0,00%)
1. Organic Search	22.515 (66,70%)	82,79%	18.641 (66,49%)	45,24%	5,35	00:03:20
2. Direct	6.915 (20,49%)	80,06%	5.536 (19,75%)	59,51%	3,68	00:02:50
3. Referral	3.876 (11,48%)	90,69%	3.515 (12,54%)	72,39%	2,13	00:01:36
4. Social	450 (1,33%)	76,67%	345 (1,23%)	51,78%	5,36	00:03:45

FIGURE 23: Sessions and interactions by channel. (Lumidigital 2016)

Google Analytics provides also interesting data on users demographics. Figure 24 reports the percentage of visitors divided into different age groups. The strongest target group are young adults aged 25 to 34 years old, and they represent a fair 33.5% of all visitors. Second is another group of young people, those aged 18 to 24 years old (27.5%). The third biggest group of users are those aged 35 to 44 years old (15.5% of the total). The graph shows how the number of visitors decreases among the older groups.

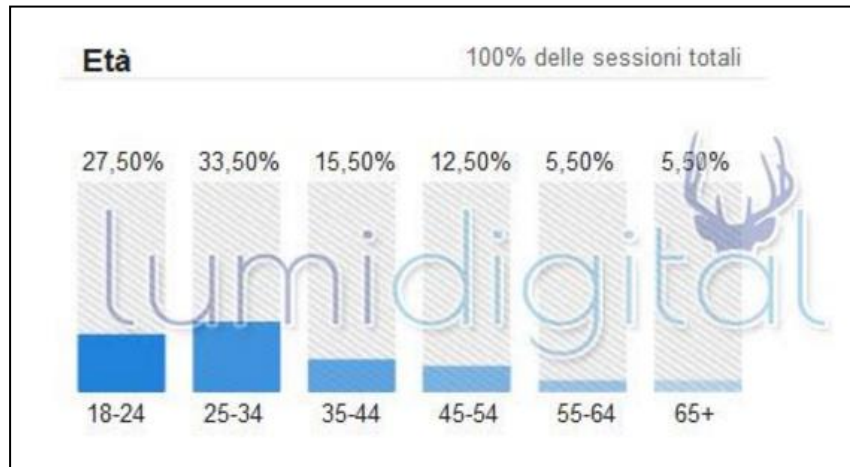


FIGURE 24: Users' age groups. (Lumidigital 2016)

The majority of users are men, 54.15% of the total. Women account for 45.85%, (figure 25). However, despite the slight majority of men, the home living segment seems to be quite balanced between genders.



FIGURE 25: Users' gender, 48.85% women, 54.15% men. (Lumidigital 2016)

As this SEO campaign is geolocalized, the majority of users are from Italy. Nonetheless, in spite of a monolanguage website, there is a remarkable share of users accessing the website from other countries too. For instance, with over 1,000 sessions, 5.02% of the total, the United States are the first foreign country on the list. These visitors might be Italians living abroad.

Paese	Sessioni	% nuove sessioni	Nuovi utenti	Frequenza di rimbalzo	Pagine/sessione	Durata sessione media
	33.756 % del totale: 100,00% (33.756)	83,06% Media per visita: 82,59% (0,56%)	28.037 % del totale: 100,56% (27.880)	51,37% Media per visita: 51,37% (0,00%)	4,64 Media per visita: 4,64 (0,00%)	00:03:02 Media per visita: 00:03:02 (0,00%)
1. Italy	28.154 (83,49%)	82,10%	23.115 (82,44%)	46,09%	5,10	00:03:19
2. United States	1.696 (5,02%)	99,29%	1.684 (6,01%)	86,14%	1,17	00:00:24
3. (not set)	997 (2,95%)	99,80%	995 (3,55%)	88,26%	1,17	00:00:25
4. Estonia	430 (1,27%)	13,49%	58 (0,21%)	32,33%	10,42	00:11:51
5. Germany	224 (0,66%)	34,64%	212 (0,76%)	75,45%	2,03	00:00:55
6. China	215 (0,64%)	97,21%	209 (0,75%)	84,19%	1,11	00:00:36
7. Switzerland	174 (0,52%)	74,14%	129 (0,46%)	50,57%	4,92	00:03:32
8. United Kingdom	140 (0,41%)	90,71%	127 (0,45%)	73,57%	2,54	00:01:28
9. Russia	140 (0,41%)	28,57%	40 (0,14%)	85,71%	1,26	00:00:41
10. France	133 (0,39%)	81,20%	108 (0,39%)	62,41%	4,74	00:02:27

FIGURE 26: Users' location, session lengths, and number of viewed pages. (Lumidigital 2016)

Desktop remains the main device used by stickersmurali.net users, 50.50% of the total. Mobile phones are number two with 35.59% of visits and tablets are number three with less than 14% (figure 27).

Categoria dispositivo	Acquisizione			Comportamento		
	Sessioni	% nuove sessioni	Nuovi utenti	Frequenza di rimbalzo	Pagine/sessione	Durata sessione media
	33.756 % del totale: 100,00% (33.756)	83,06% Media per visita: 82,59% (0,56%)	28.037 % del totale: 100,56% (27.880)	51,37% Media per visita: 51,37% (0,00%)	4,64 Media per visita: 4,64 (0,00%)	00:03:02 Media per visita: 00:03:02 (0,00%)
1. desktop	17.048 (50,50%)	87,04%	14.838 (52,92%)	50,51%	5,25	00:03:16
2. mobile	12.015 (35,59%)	79,50%	9.552 (34,07%)	54,03%	3,65	00:02:33
3. tablet	4.693 (13,90%)	77,71%	3.647 (13,01%)	47,65%	4,96	00:03:27

FIGURE 27: devices: desktop, mobile and tablet. (Lumidigital 2016)

Stickersmurali.net uses a responsive template, making the navigation easy for mobile users as well.

5.3 Positioning

Positioning is another great parameter in assessing SEO. Ideally, all the queries containing any keyword of interest for the campaign should bring a

SERP with the website snippet positioned on page one. Lumidigital uses dedicated software to record and report the positioning of keywords on the three main search engines: Google, Yahoo! and Bing. On monthly bases clients receive a detailed report with the positioning of every keyword used in the campaign. For this study, Lumidigital provided the writer with a detailed year report, based on those sent to the client. The figures which follow are from this report and offer an overview of the entire period under scrutiny.

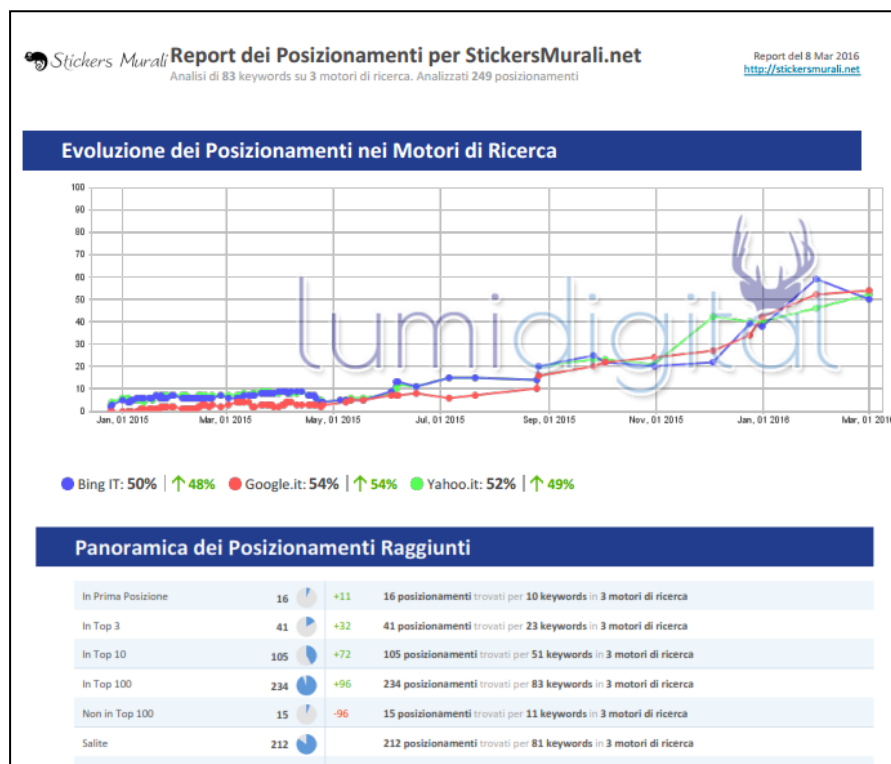


FIGURE 28: Stickersmurali.net and its positioning on Google, Yahoo! and Bing (January 2015 - March 2016). (Lumidigital 2016)

At a first glance, positioning improved for all the three search engines: Google +54%, Yahoo! + 49%, and Bing +50%. The visibility level is on average 52%. Ten keywords appear on the SERP first position. 23 are on top three. 212 positioning improved during 2015 and only 11 keywords do not appear in the top 100. These results are fairly good.

As already mentioned earlier in this paper, SEO results are long term. September was the month which showed the most remarkable results, after nine months campaign.

5.3.1 Competitors

In order to give a more complete vision of the market, Lumidigital keeps track of competitors. Competitors' positioning is listed on the same report (figure 29). The graph shows stickersmurali.net in fourth position. This ranking is the result of comparing every website's visibility. The most exciting outcome of the report is that during September, stickersmurali.net gained 40 percentage points, overtaking four of its competitors. The strongest competitor grew by 20 percentage points during the period under study.

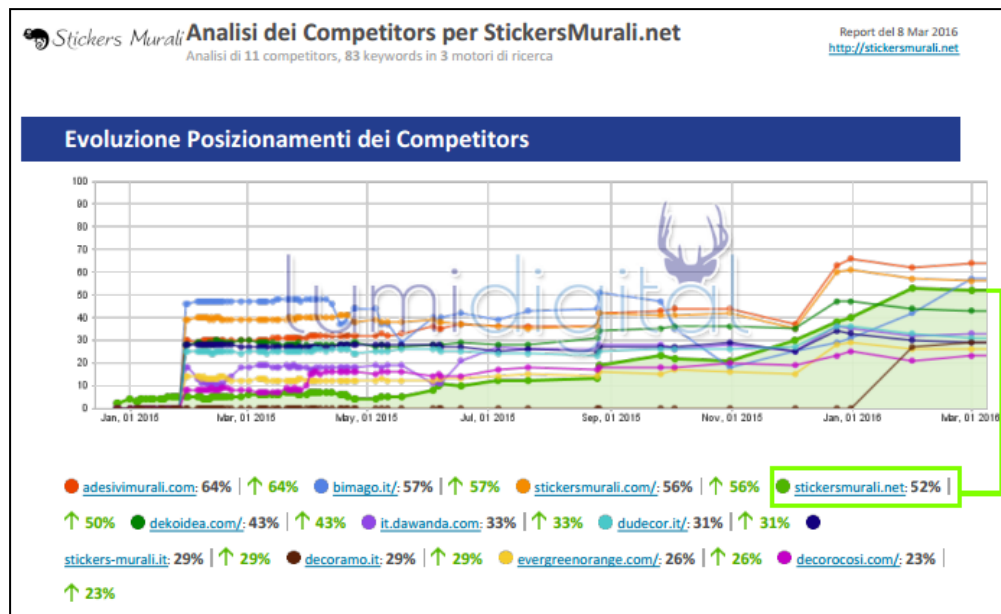


FIGURE 29: stickermuarli.net, analysis of competitors. Online visibility and positioning (January 2015 - March 2016). (Lumidigital 2016)

Analytics are clear: one year SEO campaign worked. Many remarkable improvements in stickersmurali.net website were reported during the year 2015. Although, the lack of data on financial performance, prevents this study from measuring the concrete benefits of the SEO campaign in

monetary terms, as for example the return of investment (ROI). This aspect was already mentioned in the limitations section, in the introduction.

6 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BOTH CASE COMPANIES

This chapter contains recommendations for the two case companies. At this point of the study, after analysing the outcome of one year partnership, there is sufficient information for suggesting how to maintain beneficial relationships, pursuing more ambitious goals together in future.

6.1 Lumidigital: Efficient SEO, Transparency and Effective Communication

Google Analytics speak for themselves: one year SEO campaign has been a success. This success is the result of hard and constant work. At Lumidigital, a team of professionals works every day to fulfil specific tasks, using the most updated knowledge on the field. This is the right approach in a multifaceted sector as SEO. The first recommendation for Lumidigital is to keep updating the team knowledge in future, the same way it has been done in the past, in order to be able to deliver efficient SEO.

Web analytics prove, without any reasonable doubt, the effectiveness of SEO. Previous successes represent an essential asset for the company. At the same time, reporting to clients the concrete results achieved during the campaign, builds a sense of common trust among the parts. The second recommendation for Lumidigital is to strengthen its transparency, in order to permit clients to have an easy access to relevant information.

To wrap up the first two recommendations above, there is a final one: maximize communication effectiveness. Being able to deliver top-notch services, supported by solid statistics, is not enough if the other part is unable to understand and interpret them. Lumidigital must transmit to its clients the clearest possible vision of what it does. A user-friendly and customer oriented communication is the most effective way of transmitting the sense of trust which benefits any business partnership. This is particularly true in B2B when many times the client lacks the time and the knowledge needed to understand the true value of the purchased service.

6.2 Stickersmurali.net: Always New Products and a Solid Web Marketing Campaign

Stickersmurali.net should be satisfied with the achievements of its first year of operations. A new website, starting from zero, reached good results, and still, a wide potential for future growth remains. Part of the credit for this success goes undoubtedly to Lumidigital and its SEO campaign. In addition to this, a broad and interesting offer of quality products adds value to a young company such as stickersmurali.net.

The main recommendation for stickersmurali.net is to strive for future growth. This can be done in two ways: an updated offer of new products to attract more customers, and a solid web marketing and SEO campaign to enhance online visibility.

Periodically adding new products to the e-commerce offer, wall stickers with original designs, is the key for engaging consumers, convincing them to buy. Stickersmurali.net has done it before: its website regularly widens its offer, with an added value for customers. The first recommendation for stickersmurali.net is to maintain its commitment with a broad range of products. The new products have to be appealing for customers in an original and fashionable way, according to the latest trends in the home living sector.

The second recommendation for stickersmurali.net is to promote the new product offer with a solid web marketing campaign. A strengthened online visibility can be obtained with a massive presence in search engine result pages (SERPs), social media, third parties websites etc. For this reason, in consideration of the positive achievement of the first year, stickersmurali.net should renew its partnership with Lumidital, and preferably augment the budget spending for web marketing and SEO. However, due to the lack of information on the company financials, the writer is unable to provide any suggestion on the ideal amount of money to be spent for future investments.

7 CONCLUSIONS

This chapter closes the thesis. The most relevant findings are reported, answering all the research questions. The issues of reliability and validity for this study are covered as well. This chapter ends with some suggestions for further research.

7.1 Answers to the research questions

How does SEO works?

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) aims to maximize a website visibility on Search Engine Result Pages (SERPs). Quality contents are the key to attract interested users, offering what they are looking for. SEO is done on-site and off-site. On-site optimization improves the site usability offering a great user experience. Off-site optimization builds links from third sides, bringing more traffic and popularity.

How do search engines work?

After indexing websites and their contents, search engines use this information to provide useful results to user search queries. To maintain always the highest standards, search engines keep updating the algorithms which make them work.

What are web analytics and how do they work?

Web analytics are statistics on websites' performance. A wide range of software offers web analytics to webmasters, who can use them to interpret the statistics and take action to improve performance.

What are the concrete benefits of SEO and how to measure them?

SEO gives visibility to a website, bringing more visitors. Web analytics and positioning are used to measure SEO effectiveness.

How many visitors reached the website (stickersmurali.net) from a search engine?

With 18,641 unique visitors, organic visits from search engines were the majority for the year 2015: 66.7% of the total.

To answer the research issue:

How to measure and assess one year of SEO in terms of concrete benefits for the client and the service provider

Web analytics provide a complete monitoring and quality control of SEO over time. Their high-level customization enables to determine the important factors which really matter for both the client and the service provider. Fixing the right key performance indicators (KPI) is a strategic priority. In addition to web analytics, financial performance is the ultimate proof of the real efficiency of SEO. More than anything else, return of investment (ROI) is the highest parameter to consider. Unfortunately, the lack of financial data made the calculation of ROI impossible in this study.

Nevertheless, the Google Analytics available for this study showed that:

- Stickersmurali.net registered an impressive stride in new visits; most of which probably converted into sales, making higher revenues and more cash flow to the company.
- Lumidigital was able to deliver what it promised: more organic traffic. In real terms, this means that, a satisfied client decided to renew the contract after the first year of provision. Overall, a new success story to proudly add to the company portfolio.
- Both parts benefited from the collaboration.

Google Analytics provide unequivocal proof of SEO validity and efficacy, through statistics on the website performance.

7.2 Validity and Reliability

Research is intended to find answers to specific questions. This research achieved all of its goals being able to provide satisfactory answers to all of the initial questions and issues. The use of both primary and secondary sources made this research successful. The primary data came directly from the case company. In particular, Google Analytics represents an

extraordinary source of information, and its value for this research is unchallengeable. Direct interviews with the company staff, even if performed informally, permitted the writer to grab some additional details which remain invisible from numerical data. Furthermore, being able to actively be part of the SEO campaign under study was an absolute advantage and a privilege.

All the secondary sources used in this study have been thoughtfully assessed based on their informative value, in accordance with the academic standards. Only those which fully meet such standards have been used.

For all of these reasons, this research is valid and reliable.

7.3 Suggestions for Further Research

SEO is changing all the time. The continuous updates in search engine algorithms require a constant research in the field. This means that the potential for future research is potentially endless.

SEO strategies vary depending on the kind of companies implementing it. Studying SEO for different industries would provide a more complete understanding of the topic.

8 SUMMARY

The aim of this research is to assess the outcome of one year worth of search engine optimization. This answers to the research issue. The findings are then used to offer useful recommendations to both of the case companies, making the effort put in this work worthwhile.

Web marketing and SEO are firstly investigated with a theoretical, and secondly with an empirical one. The theoretical part of this study covers multiple issues, including: the functioning of search engines, the difference between outbound and inbound marketing, on-site and off-site optimization, content curation, link building, social media, SEO strategy, geolocalization, and web analytics. A deep understanding of these matters is essential to properly evaluate the empirical data: Google Analytics.

Statistics from Google Analytics provide solid evidence on the website performance. Here, the theory gathered from previous chapters is used to interpret the numerical data, uncovering the truth behind graphs, charts and figures.

Once the meaning of figures has been clarified, findings are utilized to provide useful recommendations to both parties involved: Lumidigital and stickersmurali.net.

Lumidigital needs to keep focusing on the key factors to succeed: expertise, transparency and efficient communication.

Stickermurali.net needs to keep updating its offering to the customers with new products. Furthermore, it must consolidate its online positioning with effective web marketing and SEO.

The very positive outcome of the SEO campaign under scrutiny, supports strongly the likelihood of future favourable collaborations for the two case companies.

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