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Introducing a Multichannel
Customer Service Solution for Stark

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ABSTRACT

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Integrated Multichannel Customer Service Plan For Stark

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The main objective of this thesis was to introduce three compatible integrated customer service templates for Stark according to the needs and wants of the customer service department. These providers all offer integrated technological solutions for multichannel services. This was done in order to improve work efficiency and thus have a positive effect on the customer experience. The purpose of the thesis was to find out what tools and programs the customer service representatives and the head of customer service thought worked well and what parts needed improvements. These findings were then used when selecting the three best-suited customer service template solutions. The company can then use the information and choose the best fit in accordance with the results and price.

Secondary research was integrated in the empirical part of the thesis and used when referring to theories, terms and in introductions. The secondary research was collected mainly from literature, articles and government statistics. Primary research was carried out as interviews of the customer service representatives as well as the head of customer service. Also consultation with the customer service providers was done as face-to-face meetings as well as via phone and e-mail.

The empirical part of the thesis was created in a way that would enable the reader to understand relevant parts of the Finnish construction industry, the company in question as well as customer service. This was carried out so that it would be easy to understand why customer service is rising into a more important role nowadays and what kinds of effects over the top customer service has for companies.

The customer service platform providers that are introduced in this thesis were selected and presented in accordance with the findings from the primary research. The commissioner was very gratified with the outcome, as the platform is to be updated in the future.

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Key words: customer service, new technological template, multichannel service, consultation, customer experience, Finnish construction industry

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1   INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the research problem

Stark functions as a retailer and a wholesaler in the construction industry, meaning that the company does not produce the sold items itself. This makes it impossible to compete with differentiated products and leaves little room for price competition as other stores offer exactly the same products, usually with almost the same price. This competition has brought the main competitive advantage down to exceeding customer expectations by creating a united shopping experience for the customers thus enhancing customer loyalty. These affairs are most commonly met by uniting quality products with excellent and seamless customer service (Lucas 2012, 26 & 57).

The technologies, i.e. platforms, behind customer services are currently developing at an incredible pace. The development has moved increasingly towards fast, easy to use technological solutions enabling the integration of many communication channels (Nordic First Goal Oy 2015, 5). As the technologies improve and evolve, the customer services have to add programs and tools to the existing ones consequently. Stark has multiple customer service channels in use and the representatives have to switch the programs and tools in use according to the contact channel in question. This eats away a lot of working hours and makes it sometimes hard for the representatives to respond in a fast enough manner. The company is now thinking of investing in a new customer service platform that would make working easier and faster, which in turn would help the customer service representatives serve the customer better.

1.2 Research objectives

The objective of this research is to find the best-suited multichannel customer service platform according to the company needs. The aim is to find a platform that is easy to use, helps in prioritization of different tasks and makes data collection effortless. In order to find the best fit, I did a series of interviews to find out what worked well and what was

considered in need of improvements. The interviews were done in a way that enabled the customer service representatives as well as the manager state their perspectives.

1.3 Research scope

As the purpose of this thesis is to find a technological solution that is still a new concept in the market, the more commonly known theoretical framework is integrated in the text and all theories and glossary are explained when mentioned the first time. The theory is more commonly used to explain why and how bettering the service from a technological view will help in exceeding customer expectations and creating customer loyalty. The conclusions of this research are limited to this specific company as it is generated purely based on the particular needs of the issuing company, Stark.

2   CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY IN FINALND

2.1 General information

The construction industry is a business sector that includes groundwork of land, actual constructing of buildings, alterations and repairs of buildings and other property as well as material manufacturing and sales. The construction and real estate industries are responsible for about a third of the Finnish gross domestic product being the single largest business sector in Finland (Hyyppä 2012). In this case gross domestic product, often referred to as GDP, measures the worth of final goods and services produced within Finland's national boundaries over a one-year period (Gillespie 2014, 319).

The golden era of the Finnish construction industry was when the bilateral trade with the former Soviet Union was strong. A bilateral trade is a trade agreement between two countries where hard currency, i.e. money, is commonly not used as goods or services are directly exchanged for other goods or services. This method of cutting out the medium of exchange, in this case money, is called a barter trade. This trade agreement was at its busiest up to the 1980s (Ollus & Simola 2006, 16-19). After this there has been a decline in the international building activity and the main deals have been made nationwide. There has been an internationalization of some sorts as many of the construction material and equipment companies have been bought under large-scale international corporations from the 1990s. The construction companies' ownership began to move into foreign hands in the 2000s and engineering companies at the end of the 2000s. This also led for the R & D departments to be moved out of Finland (Hyyppä 2012).

Nowadays the whole construction industry employs roughly 250 000 people in Finland. The amount of people employed at the construction sites rounds to about 175 000 – 185 000 employees. This number includes employees involved in construction of buildings, infrastructure and special contracting, as well as white-collar workers and entrepreneurs. Out of these, civil engineering and infrastructure construction employs 45 000 – 50 000. In addition to the actual construction of buildings, the construction products industry employs

around 80 000 people in Finland. This sector includes the construction supply manufacturers, wholesalers, suppliers and retailers (Rakennusteollisuus RT ry).
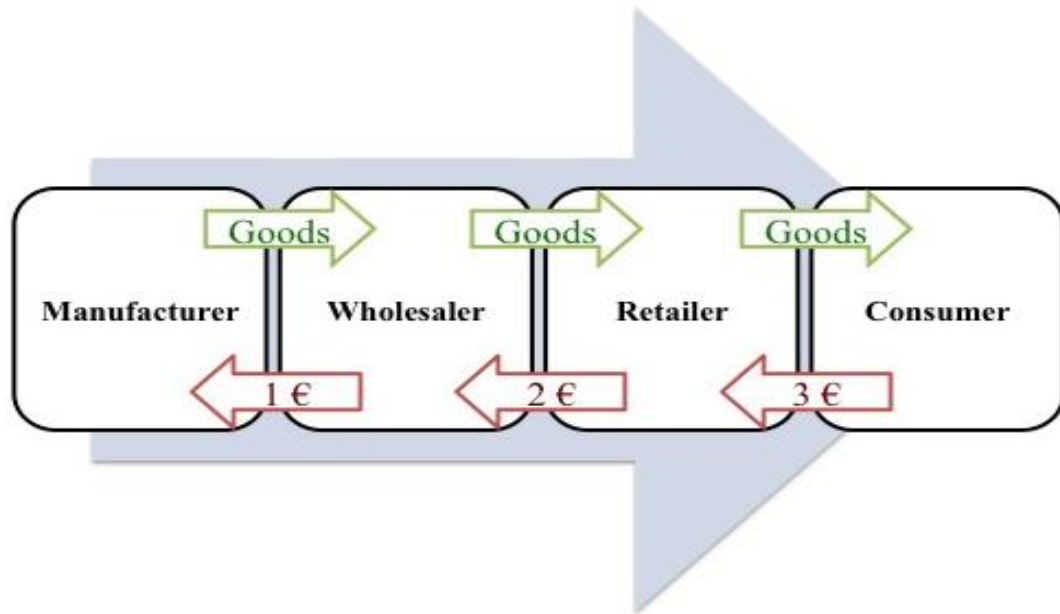
FIGURE 1. Movement of money and goods in a wholesale channel. Adapted from Lamb, Hair & McDaniel (2012, 206).

Figure 1. illustrates well the basic movement of goods and money in the construction industry. A manufacturer is a company that actually produces products. A good example of one in the construction industry is Metsä Wood that manufactures laminated veneer lumber used for heavy load-bearing structures. Wholesalers and suppliers are companies that do not manufacture products themselves but buy a product from a manufacturing company and sell it to another company with a profit i.e. a higher price than it was originally bought for. An example of this could be how Stark caters its business customers. Laminated veneer lumber is bought from Metsä Wood and sold to big and small building companies that are building new houses for consumers. The last type of a company involved was a retailer. Retailing companies are almost the same as wholesalers except they sell products to the end user, or in this case, consumer (Lamb, Hair & McDaniel 2012, 203-206). If continuing using the same example, the consumer can buy the laminated veneer lumber from Stark

without there being another middleman in between. In this way, many construction supply companies act as wholesalers as well as retailers.

2.2 Current trends

The number of employed has indeed remained fairly stable in recent years, although the number of new constructing projects had a significant decline in 2012 and 2013. The industry is cyclical thus the number of employed will vary within the business cycle. This means that whenever the whole economy is at its peak, so called cyclical unemployment will be low because whole economic output is being maximized. If the economic output that is measured by GDP falls - the unemployment will rise (Gillespie 2014, 439).

The Federal Association of the Construction Industry, Rakennusteollisuus RT Oy, made a survey in June 2016 concerning the future estimations of construction of houses. According to the replies, the industry will continue to grow this year. The constructing companies estimated that they will start building a bit over 14 000 residential units this year. This record high housing production estimate can be explained by more people wanting to live in apartments as well as a decrease in the size of a regular apartment. Out of these planned units, more than 65 per cent would be privately financed and owner-occupied and the rest would belong to market-financed rental housing. The major construction cities are Helsinki, Tampere, Turku, Jyväskylä, Oulu and Kuopio. See table below for specific numbers (Pakarinen 2016).

TABLE 1. The development of new construction projects for non-subsidized terraced houses and apartments between the years 2012 - 2016. Adapted from Pakarinen, Rakennusteollisuus RT (2016).

Sub-region	2012	2013	2014	2015	1/ 2016	6/2016
Helsinki	3 891	4 328	3 782	5 412	5 343	6 204
Turku	540	472	733	718	1 113	1 338
Tampere	1 531	1 211	1 371	2 026	2 371	2 721
Oulu	781	558	651	307	628	681
Jyväskylä	293	349	530	572	691	928
Kuopio	438	337	402	331	313	329
Other sub-regions	1 065	1 739	1 688	1 112	1 368	1 830
Combined	9 539	8 994	9 157	10 478	11 827	14 031

Also the turnover of the companies is grooving solidly. From March to May 2016, there has been an overall growth in the turnover of 10,6 % compared to previous 7,6 %. The strongest growth was in building of houses, where net sales rose by 11.9 %. The amount of specialized construction projects rose by 10.9 % and civil engineering by 5.5 % as can be seen from figure 2 (Tilastokeskus 2016).
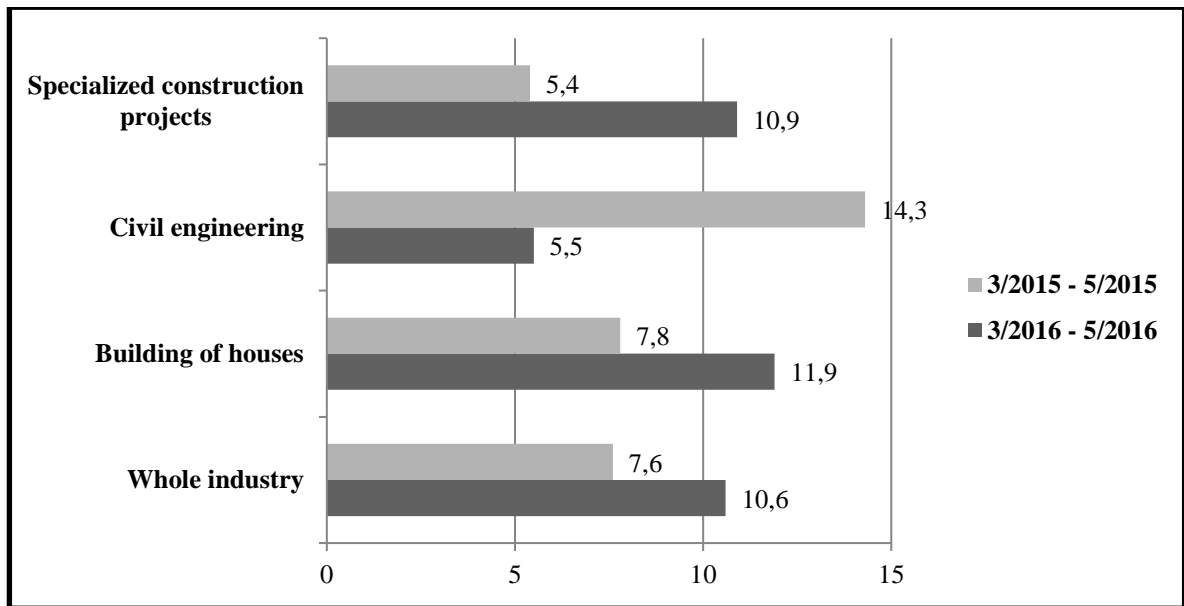
FIGURE 2. Growth of construction companies' turnover from March to May in comparison to the year before. Adapted from Tilastokeskus (2016).

Nowadays there is a shortage of experts in the construction industry because of the age structure of the Finnish population - many experts have already retired (Hyyppä 2012). At the end of 2015, every fifth person in Finland was at least 65 years old (Findikaattori 2016). Thus it is no surprise that also the proportion of foreign workers has gotten quite significant in the construction industry. For example, in the segment of constructing private houses, one-fifth of all workers are foreign on an average but the proportion has remained nearly the same for a while now (Rakennusteollisuus RT).

Other topical trends are globalization, population growth, urbanization, technology development and sustainable development. Globalization is the integration and connection of different economic systems in the world arising from improved communication, trade, multinational corporations etc. (Hornby 2005, 659). In the construction industry, this means that supplies are easier and cheaper to get as there is going to be even more competition and logistical aspects get better as new trade deals are done more frequently. Population growth, as mentioned before, is not too drastic in Finland. Never the less, according to the Finnish Bureau of Statistics, Tilastokeskus (2014), our population is estimated to reach 6 million around 2050. Urbanization refers to the trend of people moving towards bigger cities (Hornby 2005, 1688) and this has already affected the construction industry, as the

major construction places are Finland's biggest cities. Technological development will better the construction materials especially for the harsh conditions we face in Finland. Also, many people have conditions such as asthma and the technological improvements will further improve the materials currently in use. The changes in the values occurring in the society deal with ethical behaviour, doing the right thing (Lucas 2009, 65). In the construction industry, this translates to sustainable building as the natural resources are slowly draining and more and more people feel that they want to live in houses that have been build respecting the environment. I see this on a weekly basis at work as customers and construction site developers require certifications for this type of things.

2.3 Analysis of the current situation

Staying on top of things in the construction industry requires a lot of effort. Urbanization is one of the key factors at the moment as the difference of construction projects in provincial and urban areas has increased over the time. As can be seen from table 1, constructions are being built to the biggest cities in Finland that also happen to be big university cities and thus draw a lot of young habitants. As can be concluded from the statistics above, there are quite a few areas where construction of new buildings is non-existing and renovating houses is rare. The growth of urban areas might not be enough to compensate the whole industry as provincial places are going down the drain.

There is an improvement in the consumer confidence in 2016. The overall unemployment rate in Finland should not rise further, which has encouraged a more positive attitude. The time is also favorable for borrowing, as the interest rates have stayed down. The quarterly national accounts on residential investment grew during the first quarter by as much as 8.1 per cent from the previous year (Pakarinen 2016).

Although the forecasts are good, there are some serious bottlenecks for certain tasks in the industry. Project management and site foremen are in short supply, and offer calculations have shortages as well. According to the main economist of the construction industry, Sami Pakarinen, the structural changes in the construction education that took place after the recession in 1990s made an educational gap for one generation of construction workers.

The industry is currently suffering from this, as there are not enough qualified employees after the retirement of the previous site foremen. In March, the amount of unemployed was 22.8 %, which is only 2.4 % lower from the previous year (Isotalus 2016). Some of this can be explained by regional differences as can be seen from table 1.

The development numbers also include the bigger infrastructure projects such as Länsimetro and Kehä kolmonen that are government projects. This is an important fact to keep in mind. The figures also swing on the pace companies are monetizing revenue, i.e. informing the revenue in terms of currency, as some companies tend to do this at a time that looks the best on the company figures (Pakarinen 2016). When thinking of my own experience in the industry, I have seen many lay-offs, loss of credit as well as a few bankruptcies even though the industry is doing seemingly well. Because of these factors, my own personal approach and hopes for the industry are somewhat cautions and on tiptoe.

3   STARK – DT FINLAND OY

3.1 History of STARK

In it's current form, Stark became to be in 2014. Prior to this there were two separate competing companies: Puukeskus Oy and Starkki. Both companies were in the construction industry but Puukeskus was more inclined to providing building materials and wood-based products for other businesses, when Starkki was more inclined towards providing construction materials for consumers.

Starkki was founded in Vyborg in 1868 under the name of Starckjohann & Co. As a result of the 1990's building recession, Starckjohann-Telko was forced to corporate restructuring and was basically taken over by the Union Bank of Finland. During the restructuring the company was incorporated, and was sold to Danske Trælast A / S (DT) in 2000. In 2003, Danske Trælast in turn was sold to an investment company CVC, as well as its executive management. British Wolseley Ltd bought the DT company in 2008 (Yrittäjälinja 2013).

Puukeskus was founded in 1929 and became a part of UPM (United Paper Mills) in 1977. After many years, Puukeskus was sold to Triton and Puukeskus' management in 2006. At this point, Puukeskus had 23 outlets in Finland, three in Russia, as well as one subsidiary outlet in Estonia (UPM 2006). The Danish DT Group A/S, which also owned Starkki, bought Puukeskus in 2014 and the final merger with Starkki took place in 2015. After the final merger, the names of the companies also changed to Stark (STARK 2015).

As explained in the second chapter of this thesis, many construction related companies fell under foreign ownership starting from the 1990s. The same happened first to Starkki and then to Puukeskus. Nowadays the combined company enjoys resources from outside of Finland's borders but also the sales target is now set abroad.

3.2 Present-day STARK

After the integration, Stark has maintained its place as one of the biggest chain retailer and wholesaler for construction supplies with a 20% market share (Mustonen 2015). Stark combines the expertise in timber and building materials as well as long-term expertise of the Finnish construction industry. Clientele consists of private as well as corporate customers.

At the moment Stark has 35 branch offices and employs roughly 1200 members of staff. The company's sales totaled 780 million euros in 2014. The history of Stark is strongly rooted in Finland but as a part of the Nordic region's largest building materials company DT Group and global Wolseley Group; resources are not limited to only domestic ones. The number one goal in the coming years is to be stronger than any of its competitors (STARK 2015).

In 2015, the turnover of Stark was 606 624 163 €, operating profit 652 769 € and equity ratio equaled 27% (Asiakastieto 2015). Turnover, or total revenue, refers to total amount sales done within a particular time, in this case a year. The operating profit signifies the company's earning power in regard to the revenues that are generated form ongoing processes. Companies preferably use the operating profit compared to the net operating profit as the latter contains the effects of interest payments and taxes thus it is a seemingly smaller figure. The debt-equity ratio shows how much debt the company is using to finance its assets compared to the amount of value in equity provided by shareholders, the higher the ratio the higher the risks in investing in such a company (Gillespie 2014, 179 – 186).

Stark has a market share of 20% in the construction wholesale and retail industry. The major competing companies are Byggmax, Bauhaus and K-Rauta. There is a massive competition in the industry and thus the prices do not differ too much. Byggmax is the cheapest when comparing listed prices but the company does not do offers like the other companies. The best way these companies can differentiate from one another is to create added value to the customers by exceeding their expectations. (Yle. 2014).

3.3 Existing departments

All Stark's branch offices have various departments to keep the company running smoothly. Each branch has at least the following departments: sales, warehouse and management. Each branch has differentiated sales personnel depending on whether they serve businesses or consumers. B2C salesmen are located in the store and B2B salesmen usually near the warehouse. B2C refers to any trade done between a business and an end customer where as B2B refers to any trade done between two businesses (Hornby 2005, 203). The sales personnel make most of the orders that the warehouse personnel then collect ready for the customers to pick up. On top of collecting ready-made orders, the main tasks of the warehouse employees are to unload delivery trucks from suppliers, load trucks for customers and well as serve customers who go straight to the yard looking for goods. Managers are responsible for sales in terms of profitability, inventory as well as work shifts.

The headquarters, or so-called "chain", differs from the other branch offices and has several other departments. These departments include purchasing, marketing, finance, human resource, web shop, nationwide sales service, offer calculations as well as executive level members of staff. The focus of this thesis is one of these departments, customer service, which manages both web shop as well as the nation wide sales service. As the main focus of this thesis is the customer service, chapter 4 will mainly focus on that particular segment of the company.

3.4 SWOT analysis

There are many different analyzing tools that could be used, but I choose to use SWOT because it is one of the most commonly and frequently used in studies. And it has gained 63.1 % rating on each tool, thus ranking it extremely or very effective. SWOT analysis is an analyzing process, which examines the internal and external factors helping the company to create and/or improve its strategic planning. The need arises from change, such as an increase in competition, and helps the organization in acting effectively. The process also helps in discovering solutions to existing problems, evaluating the best approaches for

specific initiatives and in weighing the organization's internal competencies and how well it can respond to external forces (Ferrell & Hartline 2008, 117 – 119).

The name "SWOT" comes form the words strength, weakness, opportunity and threat. These different sectors aim to help in identifying the organization's internal strengths and weaknesses and well as recognizing the external opportunities and threats. All separate parts are specified below:

Internal factors – The resources, finances and experiences of the organization.

- Strengths: the existing organizational factors that have stimulated exceptional performance and/or adds value, such as highly competent employees or having the latest ultramodern equipment.

- Weaknesses: the organizational factors that will increase the costs or reduce the quality of the products or service, for example, uneducated employees, poor internal information flow. An important note here is that weaknesses feed and create new weaknesses as poor information flow leads to unqualified employees and on to poorer quality of customer service and so on.

External factors – The whole environment the organization operates in, market, ecosystem an all third parties included.

- Opportunities: substantial original and new business initiatives available for the organization, such as, cooperation, technological improvements increasing quality and efficiency.

- Threats: even the smallest factors that could, given the circumstances, have a negative effect on the organizational performance. Examples of these include political and economic instability, a rise in manufacturing or cargo prices (Ferrell & Hartline 2008, 125 – 128).

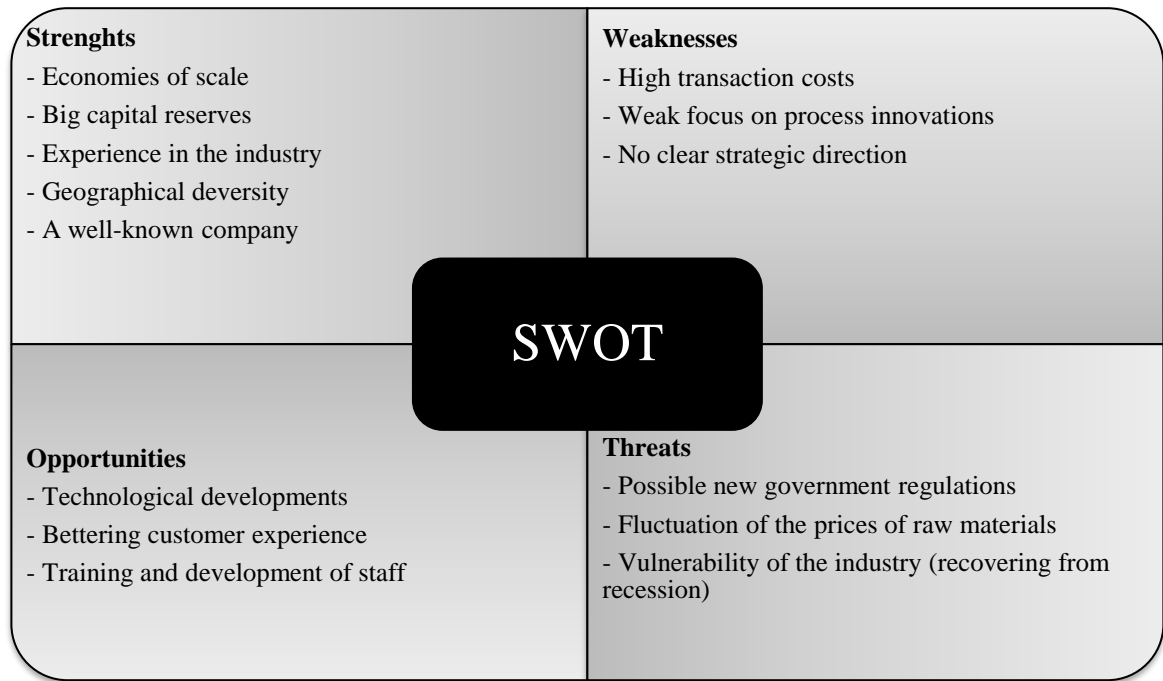| Strenghts	Weaknesses
- Economies of scale - Big capital reserves - Experience in the industry - Geographical deversity - A well-known company	- High transaction costs - Weak focus on process innovations - No clear strategic direction
SWOT	
Opportunities - Technological developments - Bettering customer experience - Training and development of staff	Threats - Possible new government regulations - Fluctuation of the prices of raw materials - Vulnerability of the industry (recovering from recession)

FIGURE 3. SWOT –analysis of Stark

The strengths of the company are economies of scale, big capital reserves, experience in the industry, geographical diversity and a well-known name. Economies of scale refer to the fact that as production or bulk buying of products increases, the average production as well as purchasing price goes down. In this case, the merger enabled bigger purchasing volumes thus bettering the bargaining position with manufacturers lowering the cost per unit prices (Gillespie 2014, 167 – 170). Stark also has many branch offices scattered around the country, thus the geographical diversity enables wider range of customers and bigger capital resources resting in the warehouses. The company has been working in the industry for a lengthy time, making it a well known and experienced in its own field.

High transactional costs, weak focus on process innovation and no clear strategic direction are the weaknesses at the moment. A transactional cost is an expense arising when a service or a good is being sold or bought and it shows the amount of labour needed to provide that service or good in question. These costs can usually be lowered by trainings, improved technology and/or bettering communication (Gillespie 2014, 154 – 161). As the merger happened not too long ago, there has been a slow focus on new process innovation as well as strategic planning. The company also functioned without a general manager throughout the summer and important decisions were made from outside of Finland's borders. The new

general manager has a big pair of boots to fill, as his/her job description includes making a new strategic plan for the nationwide company.

The remaining parts are classified as external factors. Opportunities of Stark include technological improvements, focusing on creating a better customer experience and training the staff. These factors will diminish areas of weaknesses, as they would all improve the efficiency as well as customer loyalty towards the company, bettering the entire competitive position. Threats of the company arise from possible new government regulations, fluctuation of the prices of raw materials and vulnerability of the industry that is still recovering from recession. There are no new regulations in sight, but the possibility still exists as the construction industry develops and new ethical as well as safety regulations evolve. The last big regulation was in 2013 when the VAT rose to 24 % raising all prices. A possible fluctuation of the price of raw materials affects straight to the manufacturers who are forced to raise prices forcing all retailers and wholesalers to raise their prices by the same amount. Thus new contract terms (price, payment terms, delivery terms etc.) are usually negotiated once or twice a year. The last threat was the vulnerability of the whole construction industry. As mentioned in chapter 2, the industry is doing seemingly well but there is a buzz below the surface. Lay-offs are common and the unemployment rate is still rather high.

4   CUSTOMER SERVICE – WHY IS IT IMPORTANT

4.1 The basics of sales: demand and supply

The basic rule in sales is a mutually beneficial exchange; both parties receive a desired outcome. A customer spends two hundred dollars to buy new phone and is satisfied in receiving what was expected – i.e. a new phone. The seller's ultimate goal is to get money and make profit. If one of the parties feels like they received less than the other, changes will emerge. The customer would most likely take her business elsewhere in hopes of getting her expectations met and the seller would most likely raise prices. When thinking about the customers, changing to another retailer or a wholesaler is super easy but raising the store prices is quite challenging as other retailers and wholesalers sell the same products (Gillespie 2014, 50). Judging from this, it is easy to say that the power in retail and wholesale usually lies within the customer.

The basic law of supply and demand applies in many fields of business, especially when thinking of retailers and wholesalers as so many businesses sell quite similar or exactly the same products. If a company raises its prices, a customer can easily swap to another company. This is known as the substitution effect. The rule is that the higher the price, the more the company is willing to buy/produce and the less the customer is willing to pay/buy. When all substitute goods are similarly priced, customers tend to choose the company in which they believe then can get the most out of. This brings us back to the first paragraph of this chapter – receiving an expected outcome. Substitute goods are goods that are exactly or quite comparable and can easily be bought instead i.e. Coca-Cola and Pepsi. If the customers can get the same product for about the same amount of money, they choose the company they believe they can get the most out of; in the retail and wholesaler industry this comes usually to the reliability and service (Gillespie 2014, 45 – 51).

4.2 Customer service in creating extra value and long lasting customer relationships

Customer service can be defined as all interactions between a customer and the service or product provider. The interaction can take place before, during or after the sale – sometimes in all three phases. Nowadays companies invest in customer service in order to exceed customer expectations and add value to the product or service in question. This will help building up enduring relationships between the provider and the customer. This model is called the customer-centric model. Customer-centric organizations focus on the customer needs and all efforts are done to increase loyalty towards the organization. The loyalty turns into a long-term relationship, which is a lot cheaper for the organization than acquiring new customers each time and it also increases the bar for the customer to take her business to another organization. Customer loyalty is the likelihood in which customers will return back to the same organization repeatedly because of the satisfaction they received from the quality of service (Lucas 2012, 7 & 334 - 335).

Because the competition is so high and most products can be substituted, companies have started adding value to their products and services. Some companies do this by marketing and branding. Retailing companies, such as Stark, do not produce any of the products they sell, thus other construction supply retailers have exactly the same products. The biggest differentiators retailors can use are campaigns, convenience and customer service. Campaigns are quite seasonal thus convenience and customer service are the major points at hand (Lucas 2012, 26).
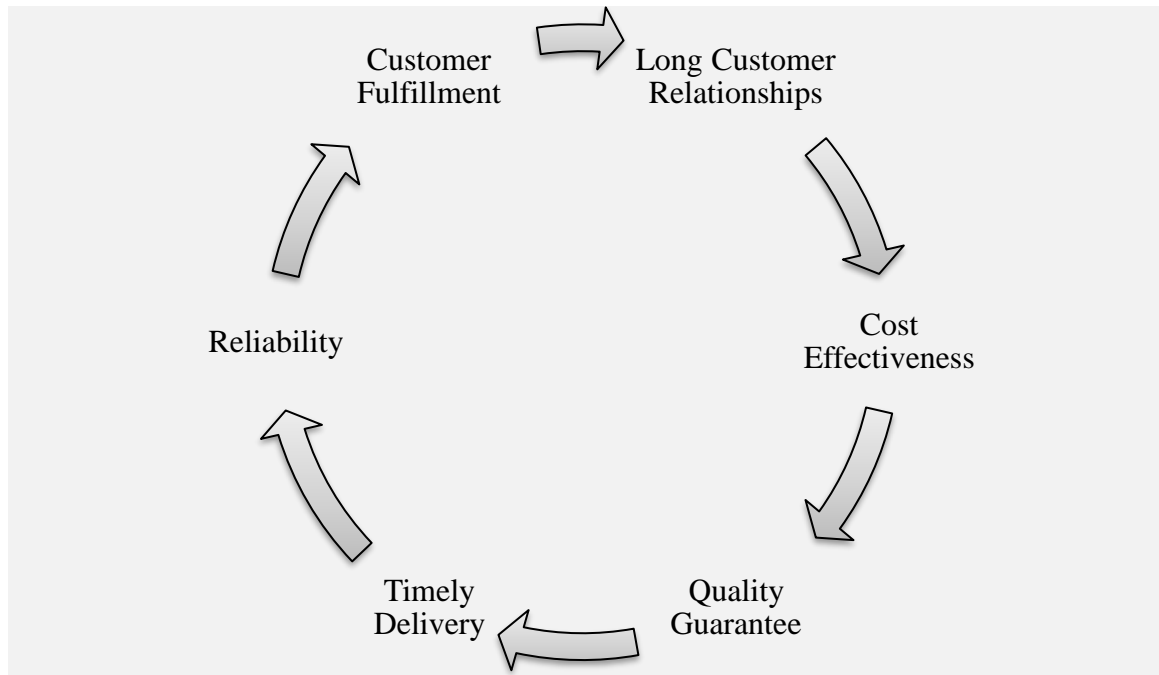
FIGURE 3. Components of customer service strategy. Adapted from Lucas (2012, 26 & 57)

Figure 3 demonstrates how several different components create a united loop in designing a good customer service strategy. Cost effectiveness refers to getting good results without spending too much money on the process. Of course the whole concept depends on the productivity of the channel and what is considered to be "a good amount of money" to be spent on that by the company. Nevertheless, as customer service usually does not bring direct profits to the company, but rather is used as a tool in creating better customer relationships, the costs of the service are usually kept as low as possible. Quality assurance refers to assuring that the quality of the sold items is good, for example in accordance with ISO 9000 quality measurement set by the international standard screening committee. In Stark's case this means checking the items when they come from the manufacturer as well as before transportation to the end customer. Timely delivery refers to an appropriate delivery time, which leads to reliability – keeping the promises made. When the customers are happy with the service they received, the service satisfaction leads to longer customer relationships, which are important in today's business world (Lucas 2012, 26 & 57).

The figure below illustrates the Gap Model of Service Quality that was first introduced in 1985 and has been updated since. The module is used in measuring the quality of service and if one or more of the marked gaps are large, the quality is deemed to be low. The first gap is between customer's expected quality of service and management's believe in what is expected. A company specific survey research helps in determining whether or not there is a too large of a gap. The second gap deals with what the management thinks the customers want and what the management provides to have these wants met. A large gap between these two arises from problems in the service design. Gap three exists between the service quality specifications and the actual service delivered. If gaps one and two have been taken care of, this split arises from the inability of the employees and managers to deliver what is needed. Gap 4 is a communication gap as the split results from differences in what the company provides and what the customer is told it provides. Marketing and bettering external communications can correct these situations. The last gap is dealing with is the difference between what customers receive and the quality of the service they wanted. For example, if the promised delivery is within 3-6 business days and the customer receives the order in 1-2 business days, the evaluation of the quality of the service is high. If the delivery is beyond 6 business days, the evaluation will most likely to be low (Lamb, Hair & McDaniel 2012, 190 - 191).
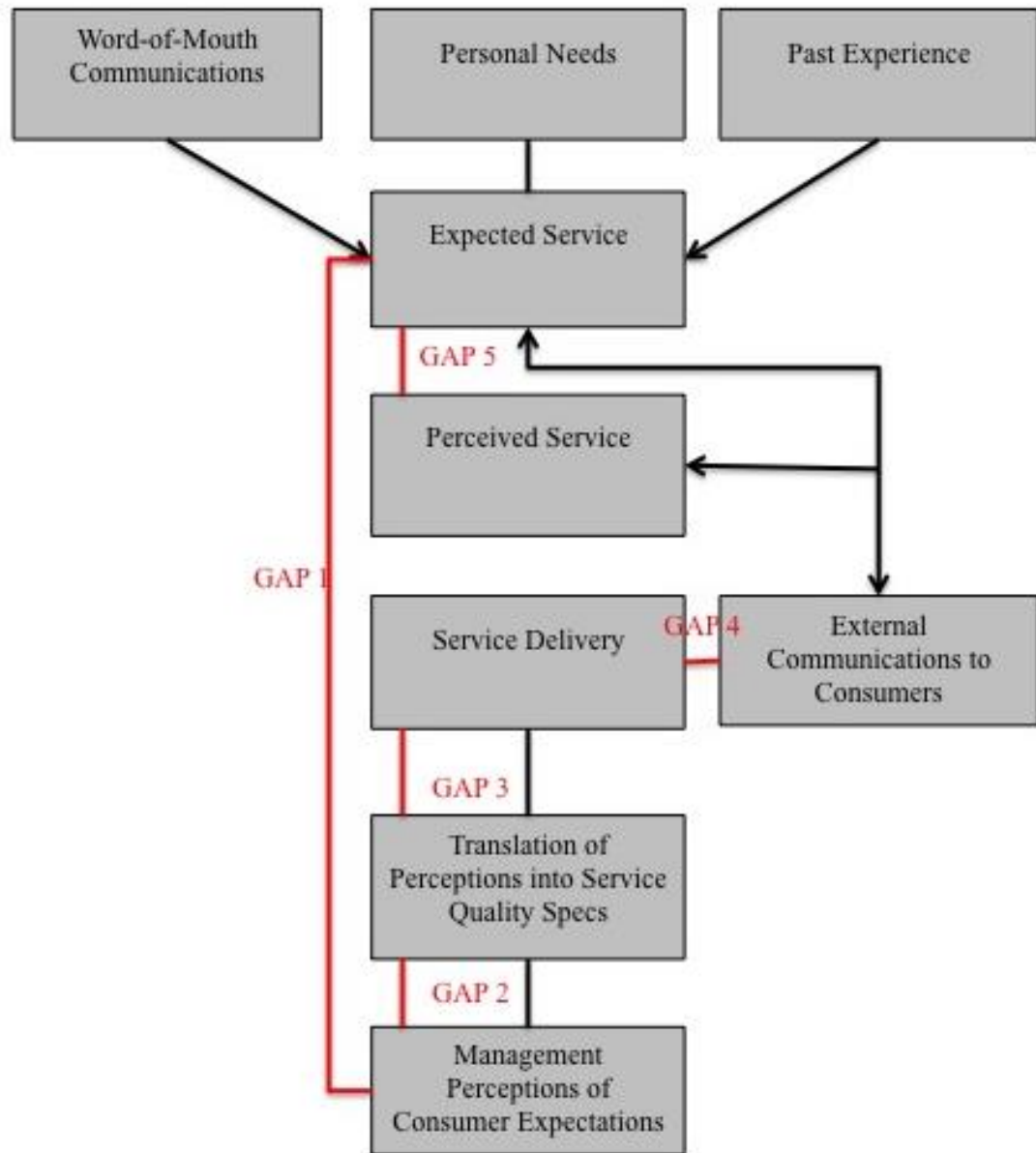
FIGURE 4. Gap model of service quality. Adapted from Lamb, Hair & McDaniel (2012, 190).

This thesis deals with gaps three and five. Gap three because it investigates the best multichannel customer service provider to make sure that the employees have all the tools needed to preform their jobs and makes it easier to do so. By bettering this, the employee-technology fit will be increased and thus channel conflicts are easier to detect and handle.

The aim is to make the working conditions easier for the employees, which would better the whole process and also the overall quality of service concerning gap 5.

4.3 Customer service at Stark

Before the integration, the national sales department used to be a part of Puukeskus. Thus it has expanded tremendously within the past year. Previously there were only two full-time workers and two part-time workers and at the moment there are eight full-time workers. The service was aimed for business customers as well as for the internal use of the company. If the B2B salesmen were out of office, they got all of their orders in by calling the national sales service. During this time, there was no nationwide customer service for private consumers but they got served through the closest store personnel.

The first big change for the department was in the spring of 2015 when the processing of the web shop orders were little by little transferred to the national sales service. Later that year, all the web shop phone calls got transferred to this segment as well and the previous web shop employees are now focusing on campaigns and modifications on the page. Nowadays the department is more often referred to as customer service rather than national sales department. The utilization of the customer service is growing quite rapidly. When comparing the number of sales done by the department in June 2015 and June 2016, there is a 17% growth. The amount of phone calls received has grown by 42% (Laakso 2016).

When thinking of money, this whole sector of the business is not making profit for itself; all the sales are done for the branch offices as well as individual salesmen. The whole point of the department is to better customer experience – there is always someone answering the phone and helping the customers. The phone service is on 24/7 of which Stark's own staff answers the phone between 7 am and 5 pm. Outsourcing has been used outside of these hours. All in all 7,5 % of all sales went through this department in April 2016 (Laakso 2016).

At the moment there are many factors driving towards an integrated customer service platform. For example growing complexity across the distribution network, pressure to control costs by improving channel efficiency, growing popularity and adoption of self-service channels as well as changing customer behaviour and channel usage patterns that makes customer service more complex. The commissioner of this thesis is the company's Head of Customer Service, Heli Laakso.

4.4 Customer service channels

Customer service is usually done via multiple channels. Phone, mail, e-mail and chat are the most popular channels used in modern customer service (Guffey & Almonte 2009, 35-37). The most important ones at Stark are phone calls and e-mail. Most of the interaction with the customers happens via these channels. E-mail is the busiest customer service channel in this particular segment at Stark. E-mails have mostly overruled faxes, memos and letters as pictures as well as documents can be scanned and sent as an attachment.

When thinking of the customer service channels that are in use at the customer service at Stark, phone calls are still the fastest way of getting information as the e-mail usually gets quite full and prioritization is done. Orders and order inquiries are handled first, product information and offer inquiries second and everything else after. The aim is to answer the inquiries within 24 to 48 hours (excluding weekends).

Another handy channel is the Chat service on the web pages. The service is outsourced but three of Stark's employees have accounts to an online tool called Snap Engage. If the chat service personnel are having a rough time answering any questions, they can easily transfer the chat conversation to one of the representatives or take a contact inquiry and forward it to the customer service. This service has been price-value optimized and there are no intentions to quit outsourcing the service (Laakso 2016), price-value optimization meaning it would end up costing more if the service was handled by own staff all the time.

The same service provider that handles the chat service handles the phone calls between 5 pm and 7 am. They have access to the company's extranet where they can see all products, inventory as well as listed prices but they have no access to the operating system. This is because Solteq Merx, the operating system of Stark, shows sensitive information such as purchasing prices and margins. This is why all orders are forwarded to the national sales service's e-mail address between 5 pm and 7 am and Stark's employees make the final orders in the morning.

The final channel for customer service is the "give feedback" –form on the webpages. The customers can choose a topic, a specific branch office, leave a message plus their contact information. If a customer chooses a specific branch office, the feedback goes straight to the head of that specific branch office but if the feedback is just general concerning the webpages, products, etc., the feedback comes to the customer service and is either handled there or forwarded to a better handler.

All these channels have their own specific user groups according to how fast the replies are needed. The only exception is the elderly, as they most commonly only call the service. The table below specifies the different channels according to response time, operating hours, optimized utilization, pros and cons.

TABLE 1. Comparison of different customer service channels in use

	Answer time	Operating hours	Good for	Pros	Cons
Phone call	Max 30s.	24/7	Quick questions and orders	Fast	Normal phone call cost, someone has to be at the other end of the line
E-mail	Max 48h	6.30 – 17.00	Orders, specific questions that need more information	Quite fast, allows attachments, convenient.	Sometimes reply time takes as long as 48h

Chat	Max 2 min.	24/7	Quick, non-specific questions	Fast, convenient, optimal cost-value ratio	No professional knowledge - complex questions are redirected
Give feedback - template	Max 48h	24/7	Store specific questions, general feedback	Feedback goes straight to the right branch office	Sometimes feedback is unclear and not store specific, customers might not leave contact information

4.5 Upcoming trends

All organizations having customer service should further focus on customer expectations and built their operational competences upon it. This will result in higher customer loyalty affecting positively on the company revenue. Customers expect an even easier and more effective communication through the interoperable customer service channels. The three main software categories will be queuing and routing, customer relationship management, and workforce optimization. Queuing and routing time should be minimized so the customers feel special and appreciated. Customer relationship management should be planned in accordance with customer expectations as it includes all interaction with current as well as potential customers (Leggett 2016). Stark aims to better the workforce optimization, make work easier and faster enabling the staff to serve the customers in a better manner, which in turn will yield in higher customer satisfaction.

The three major points at hand in the future are ease, effectiveness and emotion. Many companies have included these into their customer experience strategy thus emphasizing the technologies behind the customer service. This is the main reason why the technological aspects are quite high on the investment priority list. Getting replies should be easy for the customers through various channels. It is vital that the needed information is easy and fast to access and that customers can easily switch between the service channels. Companies are

likely to use proactive engagement in this, trying to offer assistance before the customer has had time to require assistance (Leggett 2016). Stark already launched the chat service not too long ago and it uses a basic proactive engagement. When a customer shuffles through the web pages, the chat icon pops up automatically after a certain period of time with a text "Welcome to the Chat –customer service. How may I be of an assistance?". This was done in order to assist the customers immediately, before or at the same time as questions emerged.

In addition to these, there are still two major trends coming: using analytics to better route a customer to a customer service representative and omnichanneling. Analytics would be used in matching a customer with the representative who is able to answer the matter at hand in the most effective way based on the representative's skills and the customer's behavioral data (Leggett 2016). Omnichannel is a rather new term and refers to the seamless overall customer experience whether the customer shops online (computers, tablets and mobile phones included) or in an actual store. True integration exists between all the channels meaning that all the customer service representatives, whether in store, online or on the phone, are able to access the customer's former purchasing lists as well as preferences. Another example is how a customer can check the store inventory online, buy the desired item on a mobile device and pick the item from a desired location (Piotrowicz & Cuthbertson 2014, 5-16). In Stark's case, the channels are somewhat integrated but as the chat service is outsourced, the representatives cannot access all of the information in-store and phone/e-mail representatives can. Sometimes the in-store personnel are a bit lost concerning the web shop orders as they are pre-paid and customers just come and pick them up. This is something that the company is working on and frequent internal information letters as well as trainings take place. Also the web pages do not show the amount of inventory in real time, just if a specific store has the product or not. These are just some smaller details that separate the existing multichannel approach from a omnichannel one.

5   RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research method of this thesis is based on semi-structured interviews. This is because I was previously aquatinted with the interviewees and came to the conclusion that a non-formal interview that gives the respondent a possibility to answer each question in their own words would be the most suitable approach.

5.1 Data collection

Research falls into two categories: primary and secondary research. Whenever new or original data is collected for a specific purpose, the research is primary. Primary research is carried out by conducting surveys, interviews, observations, tests and/or panels. Secondary research is research that is based on existing published information, such as, books, academic journals, newspaper articles, government reports etc. All research should start from secondary research as it is a lot cheaper than conducting a primary research. Many of the issues at hand have been previously looked into and it using secondary sources cuts the amount of primary research that needs to be done (Blythe 2009, 31 – 32).

When secondary data is not sufficient and does not solve all the issues, primary research needs to be carried out. As it turns out, primary research is also divided into two categories: qualitative research and quantitative research. Qualitative research is either unstructured or semi-structured and encourages the respondents to explain themselves by using their own words. Qualitative research is commonly used when needed to gain in-depth information. Quantitative research is usually quite or very structured and used to collect vast numbers of information that can be conveyed in numbers (Blythe 2009, 32 - 33).

Qualitative and quantitative research are both vastly used, the choosing usually comes down to the type of information needed as well as amount of responses. Please see table below for a more specific assessment of the two methods.

TABLE 2. Differences in quantitative and qualitative research. Adapted from Blythe (2009, 31 – 33)

	Qualitative research	Quantitative research
Focus of the study	Focuses on understanding and discovering something new	Based on logical positivism, focuses on validation
Sample	Small number of cases	Large number of cases
Questions	Free floating, open-ended	Controlled
Analysis	Subjective	Objective
Results	Exploratory and descriptive	Confirmatory and deductive
Data	In-depth data, non-statistical	Solid and repeatable data, statistical
Generalizability	Usually not generalizable	Generalizable

The more commonly used theoretical framework chapter is missing from my thesis as the topic is fairly new and not much theory is accessible around it. Thus the necessary theoretical aspects of each chapter can be found within the text. All the introductory and theoretical aspects of this thesis are carried out through secondary research. The secondary research is done by using relevant literature, online articles, company web pages as well as government statistics.

The primary research of this thesis is conducted as qualitative interviews. In my opinion, an interview is a better choice than using a survey as it allows adding of extra questions, it motivates the interviewee more than a sheet of paper and it allows the usage of examples. More specifically, I chose to use an interview method called "a semi-structured interview". According to Hirsjärvi & Hurme (2009, 47) when using this method, the same questions are asked from each interviewee but the order and wording might change slightly depending on the direction the interview takes.

Let's go a bit more in-depth into the pros and cons of using an interview as one's source of primary research. Interview is a good way of making the so-called study subject an active

part of the conversation. All questions have an unmapped area and the subject might lead the interview, or conversation, any direction what so ever. The method is also know to be useful when it is desired to place the interviewee's speech to a larger context. A semi-structured interview also allows the interviewer to ask additional questions, for example, the interviewee's in-depth arguments on a matter they only scratched the surface. The cons of this way of doing primary research are the interviewer's experience in the field, time, cost and errors arising from behavioral norms. This is to say that the interviewer should know a lot of the matter in question, not pend too much of the employees working time as well as pay attention to social norms, such as the interviewee's likely tendency to give socially desirable answers (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2009, 35).

I chose to use a semi-structured interview because I had worked in the same position and knew what the job was all about. Thus it is safe to say that this wipes away at least one of the cons. All questions were open-ended and gave the subjects a good opportunity to truly express their thoughts. We also knew one another so I consider it to be very unlikely that any of them altered their answers towards a more socially desired one. By gaining other's in-depth thoughts on the matter, I could think of all employees and choose the best outcome for them. As the aim of this thesis is to find a multichannel customer service provider that would make the employees work easier, customers were not interviewed. Instead three customer service representatives were selected, as well as the manager, to participate in one-on-one interviews. The three interviewees were selected from a total of eight based on the amount of time they had been working in that particular position as well as their age.

The interviewees had all worked a different time at that specific position. The newest member had only started six weeks back but had worked in the company for six years. He was chosen because it was important to get fresh information on how he thought the systems worked. The other two had worked in the position for six years and one and a half years. They, on the other hand, were able to give answers based on expertise and experience. On top of this, they were all from different age groups: 30s, 40s and 50s. I wanted to hear their different perspectives as I know that learning to use a new tool or a program is a lot easier for someone in his 30s than 50s. I also interviewed the manager, as the new customer service platform has to have tools that only she needs to be using. I do not think that interviewing more people would have given the results any added value.

The interview had all in all eleven questions of which three were background information. I had to add some questions for the manager, including questions on the budget, future plans on outsourcing and types of indicators needed from the customer service platform. Both interviews can be found from appendix 1 and 2 and the notes taken during each interview from appendices 3 to 6.

5.2 Data analysis

All of the interviews were done in person. After data collection, I analyzed the interviews and chose the multichannel customer service providers based on needs, wants and wishes of the interviewees. More specific findings are analyzed in chapters 6 and 7.

6   INTERVIEW RESULTS

I constructed the interview to have two separate parts, the first of which included only the necessary background information such as name, age, job description, mapping of program and tool usage per day as well as work history at the position in question. Rest of the questions were open-ended questions giving the interviewees the possibility to express their thoughts thoroughly. The answers and results of these responses are analyzed in this chapter.

As the aim is to find a multichannel customer service platform that makes the employees job easier, all the questions were aimed to figure out what works well at the moment and what could work a tidy bit better. I also gave the interviewees my e-mail address in case they would have felt like a great development concept emerged within a few days after the interview took place.

6.1 Jobwise required programs and tools

At the moment Laakso, as well as customer service representatives, have to use many tools simultaneously. They serve B2B customers through a nationwide sales service as well as B2C customers through the web shop. These "departments" are separated, they have different e-mail addresses, and different guidelines for order processing etc. but use the same tools at hand.

The several programs and tools each representative has to use each day are:
- The operating program Solteq Merx
- Outlook e-mail
- Call ring for receiving phone calls
- Microsoft Office, including Excel, Word and Lync
- Adobe Reader
- Internet based programs and tools: Intranet for internal information, Snap engage for chat service, Schenker delivery tracking, Basware for handling invoices and Extranet for creating customer user IDs

Merx is a charismatic operating system from the 1990s and it is the most important tool in use. It stores and shows all the information for purchases, inventory of every branch office, customer orders, customer and supplier information, purchasing and selling prices, pricing profiles, contact information etc. The program has updates all the time but the basic commands are from the past. Most commands are done by using the F –shortcut key buttons which probably tells just how charming the program truly is.

Every employee has access to three e-mail accounts; their own personal one, national sales service e-mail account as well as web shop e-mail. It is quite easy and simple to jump between these e-mail accounts as they are integrated into only one separate window. Sometimes there are too many e-mail messages and the accounts freeze for a minute or two. This is quite annoying as well as frustrating. All the e-mails have to be stored up somewhere that is easy to access as customers tend to inquire after their e-mails and orders and it is easy to check who handled that particular case and what has been done to it. After a certain time, they are transferred to the company's hard disk.

Phone calls are distributed evenly by using a technique called automatic call distribution system. This, often referred to as ACD system, distributes the incoming calls according to settings i.e. time of day, customer ID, automated attendant selections etc. An automated attendant refers to the pre-selected questions one gets when usually calling a service line. The caller has to press buttons according to the matter at hand and the phone call is then directed to the best handler (Lucas 2012, 294). At Stark's customer service, the ACD system directs the calls based on which employee has been without answering the phone the longest and automated attendant is not used at the moment.

Everybody uses Microsoft office. Some data as well as some orders come in in Excel sheets. Also the expenditure sheets are done and send to the financial department as Excel documents. Word documents, such as information letters, belong to everyone's daily routines. But luckily orders can be send from Merx to any e-mail account as PDF files. This is good as PDF files can be opened almost on any digital device. The last of Microsoft's everyday tool in use is Lync. Lync is a tool used for different types of internal communication: quick conversations, video chat conferences and video chat training.

The only programs that do not require a username and a password when signing in onto one's desktop are Merx and Office tools (Lync and Outlook). Lync opens automatically and Outlook as well as Merx only need a click on the icon to open up. Both are linked to the registered computer user unlike the other programs.

6.2 What functions well at the moment

All interviewees were in an agreement that most of the tools used for internal communications function well at the moment. Lync is handy for quick questions and the employees can see who is currently online, for example if they wish to take a lunch break. The operating system, Merx, is considered easy to use after the initial learning. The F – shortcut keys function reliably and missing a few clicks does not do too much harm.

Concerning Internet based tools; everybody mentioned that they use the company's regular web page every single day. This is because there are no pictures on Merx and sometimes customers only vaguely explain what it is they are looking for. A good example of this "do you still have that toilet seat that was on sale at Herttoniemi store" as Stark has a lot of options and usually the customers cannot remember the brand nor model, it is easy to go check from the web pages and describe from the various options on sale. Another very positive tool is the Intranet that gets updates quite frequently. The sales service has it's own file and all interviewees found this very useful as all necessary information can be found here: hours of work, customer-specific agreements, product categories, spare part lists, B2B customers eSTARK IDs etc. The employees have access to other department's files too, if they need to check some specific information.

The Outlook e-mail works well and the employees really like the colored indicators on Outlook so they know who's handling which e-mails and orders. This has prevented making double orders and replying inquiries multiple times. It also makes it easier for the manager to check if some e-mails have been unprocessed and need attention as soon as possible.

6.3 Current issues and challenges

The biggest challenge by far was remembering all usernames and passwords. Almost every single program has its own username and password, and remembering the frequently used ones is easy. The small challenge arises when some Internet based tools, such as Basware, are not necessarily used on a daily basis. So when they are needed, a new password request might have to be sent to one's e-mail. This is sometimes frustrating, as the tools should be used as soon as possible but requesting, waiting, and creating a new password might take some time.

Even though e-mail was mentioned to function well, shuffling between three e-mail accounts was mentioned to be challenging at the same time. Usually e-mail replies take longer and sometimes one might forget that they are waiting for a reply to a certain question and it might slowly fade to oblivion. Also the amount of e-mails per day is really abundant so it is no wonder one e-mail is easily forgotten.

As the customer service representatives answer to phone calls for the national sales service for B2B customers as well as the customer service for the web shop, it was mentioned that some find it difficult that they cannot see which service the customer is calling before answering the phone. By knowing which service the customers are calling before answering, the representative could open the correct e-mail folder and answer the phone more specifically. Also two employees do not handle the web shop orders at all as they have so much work as it is. Thus a better ACD call system would be a welcomed improvement as all B2C calls could be directed to the right handlers.

Every single employee has at least on "special" assignment: updating campaigns, calculating volumes for certain customers, making sure when some deliveries are made by calling the customers etc. This requires making personal files. It came up that some find it difficult to remember to be on top of these assignments on a daily or a weekly basis. For example campaign prices, one member of staff has all the dates for the customer-specific price lists in it's own excel. She has to check them weekly to see if a campaign is coming to an end, contact the B2B salesperson responsible for the pricing and continue or discontinue the reduced prices. Some sort of reminders or automatic lists would be highly appreciated.

The operating system is getting small updates frequently but still a few minor challenges got mentioned. Firstly, as I mentioned before, finding the right product from vague descriptions is a bit challenging so the product search would be nice to get simplified. This is mostly a problem arising form the created product names that should be done using a bit better descriptions and logic. Most products are easily found but finding the correct construction steels, for example, is very difficult. Another challenge that came up is that when making a purchasing order with a delivery straight to a construction site, the end user specific billing numbers and information showing on the sales order cannot be found easily on the purchasing orders.

6.4 What do the employees deem important and their wishes

All interviewees deem ease of use and clear view as the highest priorities. One example of this would be that the new customer service platform would enable the same username and password to be used in all tools, or better yet, signing in would automatically open up all programs and tools in disposition simultaneously.

One wish was that it would be nice to find all required information from one place as at the moment the employees use Intranet, company web pages and Merx as their search engines. All these are required to find information on product categories (Merx and Intranet), wide range product information (web pages), internal contact information (Intranet), manufacturer information (web pages and Merx), past orders and customer information (Merx) etc. This wish is almost impossible to implement, as it is nearly impossible to integrate all these tools. A few possibilities would be to create one clear search engine to be used on the Intranet, including pictures of the products or updating Merx to a newer operating system. Both of these solutions are quite dear to execute and thus unlikely to take place - at least for now.

A few other wishes came up during the interviews: the internal contact information in intranet as well as e-mailing list is not up to date and missing some job titles, prioritization of the tasks that come through different channels is sometimes challenging and sending the

PDF order confirmations to one's e-mail is wished to get automatized with a slight 5-10 minute delay. Updating the contact information should be easily delegated to the heads of the branch offices. It makes the job so much easier and faster when one can see who is, for example, head of logistics straight away and not having to call a few people before getting to the right one. Updating Merx might be a bit challenging but I do not see why these updates could not be done. At the moment, one has to insert their e-mail address separately to Merx to get the order confirmation. This can be automatized according to everyone's login ID and the delay would help with some quick modifications. At the moment most orders print out immediately to the various dispatch departments and it takes a lot of time to modify the order as one needs to call or e-mail the dispatch department that the referral has been invalidated and a new one is about to be printed out. Prioritization, on the other hand, is something the new customer service platform should be able to help with. I will get back to the topic in chapter 7.

6.5 Managerial aspect

Laakso's job differs from her staff but she uses mainly the same tools and programs in her job. On top of that, she ensures the functionality as well as quality of the customer service, solves many problems and challenges for the staff, develops new functions and operating models, manages different projects, makes sure that the upcoming tasks are divided according to the expertise of the staff. These extra functions add up three more programs on her daily routine.

When it comes to data collection and analysis, there are several factors to be measured. Factors affecting phone calls are measured on a weekly basis: amount of phone calls received, response percentage and the average waiting time. Factors dealing with orders, on the other hand, are measured every two weeks; amount of orders made, number of item rows on each order as well as amount of offers made. This is done in order to scale and measure the rate of customer service at the moment.

A few main criteria are to have a customer service template that is easy to use and has a possibility for modifications according to the company needs and priorities – preferably modifications are included in the price. Also prioritizing tasks according to urgency and level of users' skills, ie. phone calls, is required. Reporting should be easy and it is really important that the service can be developed and improved based on the obtained results. These are the key factors from Laakso's point of view.

There are a few possible additions including Net Promoter Score and video conferencing. Customer satisfaction can be measured by using Net Promoter Score (NPS). According to the Net Promoter web pages (2016), the service works in a way that a customer gets a text message after calling the representatives to evaluate how likely they would recommend the service to someone they know on a scale from 0 to 10. This would make the customer service satisfaction measurable. The NPS meter reacts quickly and strongly to changes providing the management with information on any changes in the customer experience. The rate would be measured on a personal as well as departmental level. This is because it indicates if someone needs training on certain matters and gives an overall score to the whole service. The score would be sent only to Laakso and she would evaluate the needs for trainings, rewarding and development directions. Video conferencing could be offered as a new service channel in the future. Customers could book a service time for a particular vendor according to location and department without the need to physically visit the store.

6.6 Limitations and budget

The first limitation is the budget for the customer service platform. There is no set amount of money that the service can cost but the cost needs to be a monthly fee. This makes it easier to change the direction in case the platform malfunctions, is too difficult to use, needs too many modifications etc. Another key aspect to the budget is that there should be no initial or establishing cost or that the cost could be divided and paid with the monthly fee.

There is a wish that no ticketing system would be placed on e-mails. Most commonly the ticketing system creates a number for the e-mail that is being processed and sends an e-mail

to the customer in a form of "thank you for contacting us, your e-mail in under processing and we will get back to you shortly". These are found to be annoying and unnecessary, as the reply times for e-mails happen to be a lot shorter than in most companies. Also it is hoped not to have an automated pre-selection in the ACD call system as the service is meant to keep down to earth and have as much human touch as possible.

All in all, the company needs a technological solution for its customer service including process management, prioritization and better task division according to skills. The biggest need is to find a technological solution that caters the company perfectly or at least more easily than at the moment. The aim is to implement an integrated multichannel customer service system in order to get everything under the same roof – easy for the representatives to use and easy for data collection.

7   MULTICHANNEL CUSTOMER SERVICE PROVIDERS

I chose to introduce, compare and contrast three customer service system providers after initially starting from a wider range of operators. I chose to introduce three companies that offer a bit different kind of solutions. The first one up is one of the leading multichannel programmers and developers, the second one a consulting agency with their own programming options and the last one being a bit of a light-weight multichannel operator. This is because all the multichannel service providers offer a similar solution and the initial screening was quick to do based on the most important criteria discussed in chapter 6. The customer service representatives also were fairly or very happy with the way e-mails and chats are handled – the only mishap was separating phone calls from B2B and B2C customers in order to be better prepared when answering the phone and remembering all user IDs for the programs.

The companies that I chose are Provad, First and LeadDesk. Information was collected through the company web pages, introductory brochures as well as consulting with company representatives because some information, such as policies on expenses and modifications, were not available publically or needed clearance.

7.1 PROVAD

7.1.1   Background information of the company

Provad has been helping companies in improving their customer service since 2003. The first seven years it functioned as a wholesaler for one of the world's leading telephone and call center systems provider. In 2010 the company was forced to make a choice as the principal announced that the wholesales agreement was to be withdrawn. The company decided to change rather than quit operating altogether. The new idea was to focus on the so-called "service bottlenecks" arising from multichannel customer service. When there are many channels and no prioritization, the customer service will clog and show as a weakened service quality for the customers. Thus Provad decided to generate added value for their customers through technological solutions that would facilitate these service clogs (Provad 2016).

The new operating model has proven to be successful. The customers have gained significant benefits from the solutions, such as improved quality of customer service, more efficient operations and increases in sales. When comparing to the downfall of 2010, Provad had almost doubled its turnover in less than five years. In 2014, net sales rose by nearly 16 per cent, and profitability remained at a good level. The number of employees rose to fifteen (Provad 2016).

Provad wants to remain true to its philosophy – to show that focusing on customer centricity and service is more than profitable. These two factors will not only benefit the company providing the service but their customers too. Also, genuine efficiency is another key advantage for both parties. The goal is to help businesses implement what is usually only promised during orations; to ensure the production of real added value and to enable business customers in the production of exceptional customer experiences. And on top of this, Provad naturally wants to be the best in this specific industry in Finland (Provad 2016).

According to the Customer Experience Advisor, Jouko Kujala, the company will continue in its proven path: renewing the customer service – one company at a time by providing the best practices and technologies. The realistic aim is to raise the efficiency and time management by 20%. It is no wonder that the company has been provided with the Kauppalehti Highflyer awards in 2014 and 2015. The programs and solutions Provad is offering are Intelligent Contact Center, Communications Interaction Manager and Interactive Messaging System. I will explain each and every one of these in detail separately.

7.1.2   ICC – Intelligent Contact Center

Provad ICC is a multichannel customer service solution that helps in sharing customer service resources optimally between the different programs or tasks. All customer contacts are directed straight to free customer servers one at a time. This allows improved service

levels across all channels. The solution distributes work more equally between customer servers, thus evening out the workload and enhancing the use of resources (Provad 2016).

What does the ICC do:

- Eases the allocation of resources - ICC manages incoming contacts from all channels and distributes them to free employees based on the employee's knowledge and know-how. This evens out the contact centre's workload, as well as equalizes the congestions.

- Takes into account all channels - ICC is built around a multichannel approach, the aspect has been taken into account in everything, from the resource allocation to reporting. The phone system is a built-in feature in ICC. In addition, the ICC takes care of all contact centre channels from e-mails to social media.

- Functions as a management and development tool - ICC releases the manager from time and resource allocation and enables them to focus more on the daily management of the whole customer service. ICC also produces multichannel reports that support the development of specific activities.

- Supports the employees' work - The customer service representatives do not need to pick up electronic contact lists or open a number of different back-end systems/programs as ICC will bring relevant information available to the representative automatically and in a timely manner. All contact centre work can be handled together in the same user interface and by using the same program.

- Enables seamless customer experience - ICC enables the customers in receiving expert replies to their cases quickly, regardless of the channel. The customer in question can be identified and the customer's transaction history is automatically imported into the use of the customer service representative. Intelligent Contact Centre helps you to create a superior customer experience for your customers (Provad, 2016).

How does the program ease the customer service representative's job? All the customer service work is handled together in a clear interface. This eases the work of the customer service representatives. The ICC can be programmed to handle the following digital service channels:

- Incoming & outgoing phone calls, callback function (the phone system is built into the ICC)

- E-mails

- Chat messages

- Social Media messages (eg. Facebook, Twitter)

- Online contact forms

- Text messages

- Faxes

In addition to these, the ICC can be used to direct other additional tasks, such as the processing of electronic signatures. The program can be adjusted according to the prioritization needs of the company. Handling e-mails according to order of arrival – if a phone call comes in, the system opens up the customer information on top of the e-mail being handled automatically. When the phone call ends, the representative can take his/her time to do the needed back-office tasks, click the available button and continue where the previous task was left. This bypasses multitasking and enables a more effective approach to each individual task. Tasks that cannot be handled straight away can be left unfinished and in waiting for a response. If doing so, the program will remind the representative every set time of the tasks that are not completed yet (Provad 2016).

ICC automatizes the repetitive work steps in the customer server's work, thus optimizing the working hours. Workloads are directed based on the customer server's skills and availability thus everybody will have an equal workload. Also, the customer service representatives no longer need to open various job specific back-end systems but these needed background information will open up automatically and in a timely manner. The program recognizes the customer by the phone number (phone calls) or e-mail accounts (e-mails) and open up all the previous contact history through various channels at the time of the new contact. This will also make it possible to separate the B2B and B2C contacts and make it easy to direct them to certain representatives, if needed (Provad 2016).

ICC enables the representatives to manage their own workspaces as the representatives always mark themselves as "available" or "on a break". The program will only direct tasks

and calls to them when they are being available. The ICC system allows the representatives to see the current status of other representatives as well as all service queues and the amount of incoming customer service contacts. From the managerial aspect, the ICC makes resource allocation easy, offers present time built-in reporting that eases operation development and improves the customer experience. The ICC also makes it really easy to check on employees' time management and effectiveness. The manager can see, on a personal level, how much time is spent on everything. This information can be further used in access control, performance bonuses and working schedules (Provad 2016).

The ICC program can be delivered as a cloud service or on-premises delivery. ICC's special strength is the capacity to adapt to different production environments. In order to fit into the individual needs, the product is easily and freely customizable. ICC also provides the most comprehensive basic features for customer service needs:

- Open databases and interfaces
- Fully customizable
- Architecture that guarantees the reliability of the voice traffic
- Routing support for all electrical works
- Built-in CRM / ERP capabilities
- Centralised maintenance tool
- Scalability 1 - 10,000 users
- Integrates with any back-end systems
- Language Finnish / English, support for other languages (Provad 2016)

7.1.3   CIM – Communications Interaction Manager

Provad CIM is a tool that allows the collection of customer information through all the channels. CIM application integrates directly with the used operating system and it can be used with the ICC system or separately on a browser. CIM saves all new contact information automatically and supports all digital service channels (Provad 2016).

By having CIM, the customer service representative will get the customers information and previous contact history automatically no matter what channel is in use. This will improve

the service experience, as well as the efficiency of the service as the representatives do not have to do the same background check every time. This also allows the representatives in taking advantage of the customer's transaction history in serving the customers individually. This program makes it possible to put the settings in a way that if one customer server replies an e-mail inquiry and that same customer decides to call the service line, he/she will automatically be directed to the same customer server. This fastens the service and erases repetition from both sides. CIM supports the same channels as ICC (Provad 2016).

CIM will offer completely new opportunities for the utilization of multichannel transaction history. CIM allows the managing and collection of transaction data from any point of customer contact. This will again delete work duplication and efficiency thus bettering the whole service that leads to increased customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. CIM offers automated multichannel marketing and sales recommendations as well helps to boost sales (Provad 2016).

7.1.4   IMS – Interactive Messaging System

IMS offers the easiest tool for sending SMS campaigns and inquiries. The program can be used to send interactive SMS campaigns easily, quickly and completely independently. It is used to selling more by utilizing timely customer communications. IMS can send automated marketing messages on the basis of the customer's operations: for example, sending an automated reminder message to the client, who has not yet used an offer that was send out. The SMS target groups can be determined by using Excel sheets or the existing CRM program (Provad 2016).

The program can be used to measure customer satisfaction as well, by sending service satisfaction inquiries to the customers that, for example, called the customer service recently. This enables fast reactions to negative feedbacks and service corrections. Works in a similar was as the NPS but the questions can deal more with the service at hand and not with the company. This will further help in developing the service in all channels (Provad 2016).

7.1.5 Costs

One of the main wishes was to have the new program plan set as a monthly payment. According to Kujala, Provad offers this as one of their fundamental payment plans. Naturally there is an initiation cost for the service. This is because a lot of programming needs to be done before the program is fully customized. The cost depends largely on the amount of integrated channels as well as the background systems. The initial cost, however, can be divided and paid along with the monthly service fee. A new agreement is most commonly set to 36 months.

I went through the needed functions with Mr. Kujala and the costs are as follows. When thinking of modifications, all defects will obviously be fixed free of charge. If new background integrations are needed, there is going to be some sort of a cost depending on the extend of the addition. The estimated costs are all mentioned separately below, one man-day equals 1275€.

- Initiation cost: 3-5 man-days
- Programming with the desired back-end tools: $15 - 18$ man-days (500-600 € along with the monthly payment)
- Licenses:
    - ICC, 1 pcs, 1000 € / month
    - ICC manager, 75 € / month / per person
    - Administrative applications (control panel, analyser), 179 € / month

The total cost would be roughly 2 400 € / month with this solution. Then again, it is possible to just pick the ICC phone service lowering the cost significantly, if wished.

7.2 Nordic First Goal Oy, First

7.2.1   Background information of the company

Nordic First Goal Ltd., more commonly known as First, is a consulting company that specializes in designing and technologically producing best-fit customer service solutions. This staff-owned company was established in 2007 and the company's turnover and the number of customers are growing steadily (Nordic First Goal Oy 2016).

First is based in Vallila, Helsinki, and operates in whole Finland with some of the country's largest companies and government organizations, including industries such as banking, insurance, and healthcare. The company specializes in providing solutions according to customer needs and focusing on the long-term goals of the customer in terms of exceeding customer expectations. The smooth and effective functioning of the customer service does not only consist of handling contacts but all the background programs need to run effortlessly. A lot of these are still done manually which increases the workload of managers. First focuses on automating back-office processes, whereby increasing the efficiency and meaningfulness of the work (Nordic First Goal Oy 2015, 5-7).

The company believes that in the current economic climate, most companies have been unable to define their needs and comprehend the overall synergies arising from an overall architectural solution. Thus there are no real savings. Partial optimization of the processes can bring the efficiency up by a few percent but an overall optimization of the process usually achieves a ten per cent increase in efficiency. Cost efficiency can be obtained by making large modules and by breaking down barriers. The existing systems on the market have large enough capacities and can handle big traffic of customer service communication, it is just about finding the best solutions for an organization specific needs and wants (Nordic First Goal Oy 2015, 33).

7.2.2 Solutions

Most of First's projects have included a new approach to the subject area. As their customer, one can choose the customer service channels in use as well as telephone routings. In addition to this, First will take care of any competitive biddings, if needed, and thus offers the whole new design of the customer communication architecture. All the offered services can be found below (Nordic First Goal Oy 2016).

Customer service channels:
- Speech
- E-mail
- Contact platforms
- Callback services
- Instant messaging / chat
- SMS / MMSv
- Online conferences
- Fax
- Social media
- Workforce planning
- Voice recognition
- Text-to-speech

Telephone routings:
- Numbering plans
- Telephone connections
- Regulatory acts

Other:
- Communication architecture design
- SIP technology
- IVR integrations
- Repair and clearance of old integrations
- Adoption and making of interfaces for the browser
- MS Lync

I contacted the company concerning their program suggestion as for the solution and price evaluation for Stark so that the customer servers' needed programs and tools would be integrated in the same program, with easy reporting tools and prioritization options. The company's suggestion to this type of an approach would be a product called Zendesk. The solution would offer all the needed functions, such as customization, customer satisfaction ratings (CSAT), internal knowledge base and admin controls, with an affordable monthly payment. The service also supports social media functions if they are planned to move into the hands of the customer service. But none of the Zendesk's offers support integration with Merx.

7.2.3 Costs

The company offers a free 30-day trial. After this the deal for the "professional Zendesk" is 49 € / month / agent if the service is billed annually and 59 € / month / agent if the service is paid on a month-to-month basis. The platform can be customized according to the needs but lacks training from the company's side and most of the familiarization would be done quite independently with the help of a self-service help center and community and a quota amount (25 x 4) contacts on e-mails and phone calls (Zendesk 2016).

The "enterprise version" only adds value to Stark's customer service by a pathfinder app (routes calls according to skill) and more initial support as it includes a launch guidance program for the first 60 days. The price, however, rises up to 99 € / month / agent if paid annually and 125 € / month / agent if paid on a month-to-month basis (Zendesk 2016).

7.3 LeadDesk

7.3.1 Background information of the company

A software company based in Helsinki, ComDashboard Ltd, developed LeadDesk program in 2009. At the moment, the company is headquartered in Helsinki, Finland, and R & D unit is located in Lappeenranta. The company's turnover amounted about one million USD in 2011. The company changed its name from Comdashboard Ltd to LeadDesk Oy in 2013 and nowadays has offices in other European countries (LeadDesk 2016).

LeadDesk products were sold by a total of EUR 700 000 (in subscription fees) in 2011. Talouselämä magazine wrote an article on the company in their publication on April 2012, telling how LeadDesk Oy got elected to the growth company competition finals by Slush2011 as well as by Red Herring 100 Europe 2012. The Finnish government innovation funding agency, Tekes, also listed the company in their growth program. According to Kauppalehti (2012), the ComDashboard Ltd's net sales increased by over 1000% and its "profitability measured by return on capital is excellent".

LeadDesk offers a solution to sales, telemarketing, telephone interviews and customer service. Its user base consists from freelancers to large corporations from all over the world. The product can be used as a all-in-one version, when all functionality from managing campaigns to phone calls take place within the same program or as so-called click-to-call version, in which contact management takes place within any web-based program (eg. in a separate ERP / CRM-program), and LeadDesk program manages only calls and the associated recording and statistics (LeadDesk 2016).

7.3.2 Solutions – LeadDesk Call System

LeadDesk Call System is a comprehensive solution for telephone sales and customer service functions. One of the pros of the call system is that it only needs a computer and Internet connection in order to function. Despite of these small requirements, the program is designed to withstand large amounts of phone calls, so that the customers receive a light and scalable program with great system reliability (LeadDesk 2016).

In addition to the basic functionality, LeadDesk offers a range of productivity-enhancing tools; SMS, e-mail, different call options, call recording and software interface. The offered reliable service is constantly evolving and a new version of the software is available approximately every two months. Benefits of the service include more efficient contacting, supported reporting, easy usage that saves time and resource and up to 80% savings on phone calls (LeadDesk 2016).

LeadDesk includes the following features:
- Cloud-based program: no hardware required
- Contact database: can be used as a CRM for customer acquisition.
- Contact intelligence: integrated with B2B/B2C data sources
- Quality control: enables listening of recordings and tracing of productivity
- Full agent interface: includes dialing, order-taking and time management
- Flexible operator choice: choose of any operator in possible
- Telephony options: supports VoIP, GSM, landlines and integrations with any PBX.
- Can be used for both outbound & inbound
- Campaign management: outbound campaigns are easy to set up and manage
- Easy timely reporting: tailored and ready-planned options in real time
- API: linking the program with existing ERP & reporting systems (LeadDesk 2016)

According to the CEO of LeadDesk, Timo Kättö, LeadDesk currently supports telephone channels (inbound and outbound), e-mails, text messages and chat channel. Social media can be integrated into the service through the Falcon Social. LeadDesk can be integrated with other an existing CRM –program via an open API interface. For example, customer information can be retrieved form the CRM-system on the basis of the phone number. The customer data can also be fetched to the LeadDesk contactor or the CRM can be modified to open up the right register upon receiving a phone call. The system is, all in all, a modern and a cost-efficient solution for any customer service. All these features create a tight coordination, more transparency and data-building in the service. It eases the customer servers' job with easy user view, contact database as well as contact intelligence. Reporting and quality control is made easy with the extensive data collections during operations.

7.3.3   Costs

The company has a ready set call mechanism that offers the most basic functions. This standard program equals 75,00€ per month per workstation. This price does not include additional functions such as database connection, API link to the existing ERP/CRM, on-site trainings etc. that are required so that it would actually do any good for Stark's customer service representatives. A trial period of 30 days is offered free of charge (LeadDesk 2016).

The customized LeadDesk solution starts form 1000€ + a monthly payment and an initiation cost (LeadDesk 2016). The initiation cost and the monthly payment depend greatly on the program responsibilities after the integration, for example concerning Merx.

7.4 Comparing and constructing

As Merx is a system based, separate program, the evaluation of the true costs is a bit tricky for all of the companies as the exact programming time for a possible partial integration is hard to evaluate beforehand. The other mentioned tools and programs are fairly easily integrated into the same template as they are Interned based tools.

All the introduced options in this chapter tackle down the faced issues of lack of prioritization, easier reporting and better-routed phone calls. Provad is clearly the most comprehensive solution out of these by offering the most integrated platform with the largest amount of support. The deal is, however, that the program can be seen only as a demo or a customer visit to one of their existing users. The service is also the most expensive one as it rounds up to 2 400 € / month compared to the lighter option such as Zendesk equaling 392 € / month with a free trial of 30 days. Both of the lighter options, LeadDesk and Zendesk, offer easy to use solutions with moderate pricing. At least a partial integration with the program based Merx is possible with Provad and LeadDesk. In both cases there would be an initiation cost as the programming takes some time and effort.

If there is a good incentive to retrain employees, a plan to add social media as one of the used channels and make investing in the customer experience one of the key aspects of the new strategic plan of the company, I would heartily recommend choosing Provad. I think that the template would really make a modern change for the better. The existing system needs to be updated in the near future in order to keep up with competing companies. A one-time investment into a good solution is also economically smart, as the solution will be used a lot within the years to come. On the other hand, if the budget is tight, I do not see why testing the other two options would do any harm. They might end up being sufficient enough for the time being and easy to switch if/when a heavier solution is needed. This switching between templates is going to end up being a bit more costly on the employee's training point of a view as they would need to be retrained multiple times.

8   CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

The objectives outlined in the introduction have been met in chapter 7 as three possible service providers were listed and recommendations were done accordingly. My own experience, observations, secondary research and interviews were, in my opinion, enough for choosing the service providers and making recommendations as I knew exactly how the programs and tools function.

The interview results were somewhat surprising as I got the impression that the representatives are happy as they are and there is only little hopes for improvements, mind again, many of these can be done with small modifications to Merx as mentioned in subchapter 6.3. These two updates should be easy enough to implement at the same time as updating the contact information on the Intranet pages (subchapter 6.4). These improvements have been hanging in the air for a while now and it seems that nobody really understands how much these modifications would ease, not only the customer service representatives', but also everyone's daily tasks. This is why I think that these should be made priorities immediately and modified as soon as possible.

Because the department has moved from a differentiated service aimed at business customers towards a one-department-serves-all type of approach, at least some technological improvements should be implemented. A few of the key aspects for the new template were customization and prioritization according to needs and skills. As mentioned in subchapter 4.3, the workload of the department has grown significantly and they need a solution for handling the increased amount of contacts and orders. There is a need for either hiring new staff or investing in a more effective technological solution. During these economical times, there is little incentive to hire new staff leaving the efficiency arising from technological improvements and trained staff as one of the only options to handle the increases in the workload (subchapter 4.3).

The commissioner was pleased with the results as now she has a better idea of what is needed and concerning the options and their functionality. The implementation and solutions will be discussed at the company's next performance reviews.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Interview questions of the customer service representatives

Quick introduction to the basic idea of the thesis.

Background information:

1. Name of the respondent
2. Age of the respondent
3. How long the respondent has been working in the current position and in the company

Job specific questions:

4. Please explain your job description by using your own words.
5. What programs and tools do you use on a daily basis?
6. In your opinion, what has been working well tool and program wise?
7. Do you find that you face some challenging aspects arising form some tools or programs in use?
8. What do you find important in your everyday work?
9. Do you have any hopes or ideals concerning a new possible customer service platform?

Appendix 2. Interview questions of the head of customer service

Background information:

1. Name of the respondent

2. Age of the respondent

3. How long the respondent has been working in the current position and in the company

Job specific questions:

4. Please explain your job description by using your own words.

5. What programs and tools do you use on a daily basis?

6. In your opinion, what has been working well tool and program wise?

7. Do you find that you face some challenging aspects arising form some tools or programs in use?

8. What data do you collect from the different programs and how often?

9. How do you measure the quality of the customer service at the moment?

10. Do you have any hopes or ideals concerning a new possible customer service platform?

11. What is the budget for the new customer service platform?

12. Is there a plan to move the Chat –service fully under Starks customer servers (in the future)?

13. Is there a plan to outsource other functions of the current customer service?

Appendix 3. Interview 1.

1. Name of the respondent
- Haaramo, E

2. Age of the respondent
- 43

3. How long the respondent has been working in the current position and in the company
- 1,5 years

4. Please explain your job description by using your own words.
Extensive customer service (external and internal, B2B and B2C), taking orders, maintenance of the campaigns &customer promotions & national deals, handling of reclamations, placing orders and tracking deliveries (for some specific companies), management of the Oulu warehouse (inventory balances and inventory transfers).

5. What programs and tools do you use on a daily basis?
- E-mail
- Merx
- Lync
- Microsoft Office (Excel and Word)
- Phone / DNA callback ring
- Intranet
- Snap engage -Chat utility
- Dashboard
- Schenker freight bill program
- Internet: Google and Stark's web pages
- E-stark – creating user IDs
- Basware – electronic handling of invoices

6. In your opinion, what has been working well tool and program wise?

- Lync - quick answers, one can see who is online

- Merx

- Workspaces (Intranet) - information is easy to access and search

- E-mail: can see who is doing and what they are doing

7. Do you find that you face some challenging aspects arising form some tools or programs in use?

- Intranet is not up to date concerning some parts

- E-mail - slow responses, might not remember that is waiting for a response, high traffic, the three email boxes in use

- When you answer the phone will never know that whether it is a B2B or a B2C call

8. What do you find important in your everyday work?

- Ease of use

- That all the information could be found in one place

- Finding the correct information fast

9. Do you have any hopes or ideals concerning a new possible customer service platform?

- Product search needs to be easier

- Search engine for product categories

- Updated internal contact information to Intra and e-mailing list

Appendix 4. Interview 2

1. Name of the respondent
- Kajaus, H.

2. Age of the respondent
- 56

3. How long the respondent has been working in the current position and in the company
- 6 years, from the beginning of the department

4. Please explain your job description by using your own words.
Making purchasing and sales orders, customer service through two channels: phone and e-mail, internal and external product and availability inquiries, giving delivery authorization numbers for manufacturers, giving internal contact information to external buyers and sellers

5. What programs and tools do you use on a daily basis?
- E-mail
- Merx
- Internet, mainly Google and Fonecta Finder
- Phone / DNA callback ring
- Intranet
- Lync
- Basware electronic invoice handling

6. In your opinion, what has been working well tool and program wise?
- Everything works fine
- Pen and paper are the most trusted tools

7. Do you find that you face some challenging aspects arising form some tools or programs in use?
- A lot of knowledge because been working so long in the industry, so no trouble there

- Using new programs and tools is sometimes a bit troubling because cannot learn so fast any longer

- E-mail and other programs sometimes freeze up too much

8. What do you find important in your everyday work?

- Ease of use, getting a bit older and adaptation to development is not to easy any longer. The use of new practices and programs is troublesome in the beginning.

9. Do you have any hopes or ideals concerning a new possible customer service platform?

- Functionality. So that the programs, especially e-mail, would stop freezing.

Appendix 5. Interview 3.

1. Name of the respondent
- Kauppi, L.

2. Age of the respondent
- 33

3. How long the respondent has been working in the current position and in the company
- 3 weeks, ten years in the company (worked as a B2B salesperson before)

4. Please explain your job description by using your own words.
National sales department functions (such as making purchasing and sales orders, replying inquiries, checking availability, product information), web shop orders and phone calls, calculating offer inquiries

5. What programs and tools do you use on a daily basis?
- Outlook, e-mail
- Merx
- Internet
- Intranet
- Lync
- Microsoft Office

6. In your opinion, what has been working well tool and program wise?
- E-mail and office work well
- Merx order processing program is working well, many ordering windows can be open at the same time (compared to the old program, Proteus)

7. Do you find that you face some challenging aspects arising form some tools or programs in use?
- Small changes and updates to Merx, product search is tedious and often illogical (the search has been improved a lot already)

- When using purchase orders browsing, the order number does not appear in the headlines (including any received e-mail PDF of the made order)

8. What do you find important in your everyday work?

- To make the programs work, and there would be no need to call helpdesk

- Basware –invoice handling program, the password is always tricky to remember

9. Do you have any hopes or ideals concerning a new possible customer service platform?

- The same user IDs to all programs, now needs remember so many different IDs

- Order Confirmations will be automatically be sent as an e-mail according to the user ID

- Print the order out with a small delay (5-10 min) -> would enable small editions and corrections because now a small error makes a lot of work to fix

Appendix 6. Interview 4.

1. Name of the respondent

- Laakso, H.

2. Age of the respondent

- 36

3. How long the respondent has been working in the current position and in the company

- 6 years in the current position and many in the company

4. Please explain your job description by using your own words.

- Ensuring the function and quality of the customer service

- Solving staff challenges and problems

- Development of new models and functions

- Projects and their management

- Basic customer service

- Management of future tasks and phone calls - all gets done according to the know-how of the staff

5. What programs and tools do you use on a daily basis?

- Outlook e-mail

- Merx

- QV

- Internet

- Intranet

- Web-based programs. sympa, time plan (shifts)

- Lync

- Microsoft Office

- Schenker

- Basware

- DNA, ACD system

6. In your opinion, what has been working well tool and program wise?

- Intranet

- Time Plan

- Everything works ok

7. Do you find that you face some challenging aspects arising form some tools or programs in use?

- Management of the tasks coming through various channels

- A vast amount of programs in which many have their own IDs - it would be easier if you logged into a single program, and it would open up all the others

- Prioritizing

8. What data do you collect from the different programs and how often?

- Phone calls: Call volumes, response rate, and the average waiting time - 1 time a week

- The amount of orders made, number of order lines, made offers – every two weeks

       - On the departure level as well as individual level

       - For example, the number of order rows put into Merx in a given period in a certain day.

9. How do you measure the quality of the customer service at the moment?

- The company does audits every now and then

- Customer Feedback System NPS is used on a branch office scale - not targeted only on sales service

10. Do you have any hopes or ideals concerning a new possible customer service platform?

- Probably one of the main criteria is an easy-to-use and a clear view for the users

- The second is the customization options according to the needs. It would be good to get it included in the price of the package, not as separate payments whenever something is requested

- Prioritization of tasks according to urgency and the possibility of defining users' skill levels / tasks

- Reporting and its ease is an important feature so that the service can be developed based on the results

- Not ticketing system to e-mails

- Integrated customer satisfaction measurement as a department and individually (possibly NPS), phone calls and e-mails

- Information concerning the NPS results only to Laakso -> used for development and rewarding

11. What is the budget for the new customer service platform?

- Monthly, no initial costs and no additional costs if modifications are needed

12. Is there a plan to move the Chat –service fully under Starks customer servers (in the future)?

- Chat –service is now optimized according to cost – value by outsourcing. There is no point to make changes.

13. Is there a plan to outsource other functions of the current customer service?

- Perhaps move some personnel problems and resources management to someone else, ease the workload

- Phone calls: outsourcing is used nighttime and during holidays, no changes to this. If there is an overflow of phone calls during the daytime, maybe outsource a service to help out.

- Outbound is outsourced

- Others - not topical