

Designing a multichannel shopping experience for Marimekko

Laura Heinisuo

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ABSTRACT

Tampereen ammattikorkeakoulu
Tampere University of Applied Sciences
International Business

LAURA HEINISUO:
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This thesis is commissioned by Marimekko, one of the leading fashion and lifestyle brands in Finland. The main objective of this thesis was to strengthen the commissioner's marketing strategy and to create new ways to increase its multichannel nature. This is achieved by identifying the most efficient and beneficial means in order to combine "brick and click", the offline and online shops.

The thesis consists of three main parts: the theoretical framework of the study, research of the subject, and the final strategy proposal for the commissioner. The first chapter of the thesis presents the commissioner and the research problem. It also introduces the fairly new concept of multichannel, and sums the main research questions as well as ways to meet the objectives. The second chapter forms a theoretical framework for the thesis and will go deeper to the theory behind multichannel retailing and marketing. In the third chapter, all the different ways of collecting information are shown, including designing new ideas as well as doing benchmarking. Also, the results of the research are presented. Lastly, the final chapter of the study will sum up the most crucial ideas for the commissioner. Those findings are presented as a multichannel strategy plan, by means of which the commissioner is able to maximize revenue, customer loyalty and the amount of new customer groups.

Key words: multichannel strategy, shopping experience, social media, strong brand image, added customer value, differentiation

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis, commissioned by a Finnish fashion and lifestyle brand Marimekko, concerns designing new strategic measures to combine the company's online and offline stores. That is achieved by not only researching and exploring the fairly new –but extremely topical- concept of multichannel retailing, but really understanding the value of it. The need for a multichannel strategy is urgent for companies in order to compete in today's hectic and social-media-filled business environment. Endless new social media channels are taking over consumers' daily lives, and so it seems that only the companies that completely understand the power of social media survive in the brutal competition of growing business and customer loyalty. As Bob Fernekees states it, a smart multichannel strategy starts with a solid and company-wide understanding of what that strategy is and who owns it (Fernekees, 2015).

The importance of understanding the possibilities of utilizing social media in a company's multichannel strategy shows especially in today's consumer's expectations; the consumer presumes to easily find the company in social media, and expect to get what they want, where, and when they want it. The consumer attention is precious since it seems that today's increasing distractions can make the consumer lose its interest really quickly if the company doesn't do enough to earn their engagement.

Instead of developing brand new technologies, the objective of this study is to discover the most essential changes needed in order to compete with existing and future competitors. The research aims to strengthen the commissioner's brand image in both online and offline world and therefore help them to successfully create clear target segments and loyal customer base around the globe.

The thesis consists of three main parts: the theoretical framework of the study, research of the subject, and the final strategy proposal for the commissioner. The first chapter of the thesis presents the commissioner and the research problem. It also introduces the fairly new concept of multichannel, and sums the main research questions as well as ways to meet the objectives. The second chapter forms a theoretical framework for the thesis and will go deeper to the theory behind multichannel retailing and marketing. In the third chapter, all the different ways of collecting information are shown, including designing new ideas as well as doing benchmarking. Also, the results of the research are presented.

The fourth chapter of the study will sum up the most crucial ideas for the commissioner. Those findings are presented as a whole multichannel strategy plan, by means of which the commissioner is able to maximize revenue, customer loyalty and the amount of new customer groups. Lastly, the fifth chapter consists of discussion on the reliability of the results and my own thoughts about the research.

1.1 The commissioner

This thesis is commissioned by Marimekko, a famous Finnish design house. Since Marimekko's foundation in 1951 by a visionary woman Armi Ratia, the brand has been known for its original colours and prints. Marimekko is a lifestyle brand that not only concentrates on fashion, but combines it with bags, accessories as well as home decoration. As they declare in Marimekko's website, they want to cherish their values and remain true to their original mission of encouraging people to express personality and happiness through fashion and decorations. The company's vision is to be the world's most well-known and inspiring pattern designer with high social responsibility. Marimekko's headquarters is located in Helsinki, Finland, where also stands the company's own textile printing mill. In addition, products are manufactured by suppliers in Europe and Asia. (Marimekko website)

Marimekko is a public company, with products sold in more than 150 stores and in about 40 countries worldwide. In 2015, overall brand sales amounted to EUR 186 million and the company's net sales were EUR 96 million. Their key target markets are Northern Europe, Asia-Pacific region and North America, where there is a natural demand. According to the company's long-term growth strategy it aims to continuously grow and succeed in both domestic and international markets as a strong Finnish design brand. The president and CEO is currently Tiina Alahuhta-Kasko. (Marimekko website)

The future objectives for the commissioner is to compete with their skills as an expert in colours and patterns. Increasing profitability by expanding the distribution channels, opening more concept stores and shop-in-shops and improve operational efficiency is included in the company's strategy (Marimekko website). Since the online world has settled its place in everyday shopping, only successful multichannel strategy will help the company to combine all these objectives and maintain its competitiveness in the markets.

1.2 Study objectives and research question

The commissioner has set a goal overall understand the fairly new context of multichannel marketing and retailing, and how it affects business. Therefore, the main objective of this study is to design new ideas for combining their online marketing, online store, mobile applications, and flagship stores. The desired results include strengthening the brand image, attracting and engaging new and old customer groups, as well as adding value for both the consumer and the company. The main research question of this thesis is:’

How to create a successful multichannel shopping experience by combining ‘the brick and the click’?

In order to be able to answer to the main question, the following sub-questions are to be answered:

1. How to create added customer value?
2. How to improve customer engagement?
3. How to provide alternative and futuristic purchase solutions for the customer?
4. How to offer new shopping experiences without the brand-consumer relationship suffering?

The findings of this study will assist the commissioner to increase the company’s profitability and operating efficiency. Improving data collection, Marimekko will also gain valuable information on customer needs and preferred shopping methods and channels.

1.3 Execution of the research

As the concept of multichannel retailing is fairly new and there is no particular theory behind it, the research part of this study is mostly based on secondary data. This includes research on the topic through online publications, previous studies and books. The objective was not to create entirely new innovations, but to find ways of improving sales by existing ideas. This is done by benchmarking; examining similar big companies that have succeed in their multichannel strategy and interacting with customers through different

channels, and finally adapting the findings to fit into Marimekko's own strategy. Benchmarking for improvement is described as follows:

Benchmarking means finding out who is the best in an area, studying how they work, and adopting the best practices that are suitable to your own organization. (Dew, J. & Nearing, 2004)

Some of the ideas are also based on the preferences and data collection which the commissioner revealed during the interviews at Marimekko's headquarters. The benefit of the data is to find the most valuable purchase channels and sale methods for Marimekko to use in order to reach all of their target customers.

Reflection of own experiences and belonging to the target group in the future played a major role in finding the best possible solutions for the commissioner. Since multichannel studies are based on customer behavior, a psychological standpoint can also be used in reasoning.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Multichannel marketing and retailing

A study by Microsoft Corporation claims that in over a decade humans' attention span has shortened from 12 seconds to eight seconds, due to growing amount of external stimulations, digitalization and use of smartphones. On the other hand, the research also shows that the ability of multitasking has significantly improved. (Lizette Borreli, 2015) Therefore, it is no wonder why the concept of multichannel marketing and retailing is grown to be essential for today's businesses.

Multichannel marketing, simply put, is all about choice. It provides customers with various ways to browse, shop and interact with the company. Being customer-oriented way of marketing, multichannel is also about creating customer value. Value is to be added to all functions possible, as well as to products and services.

Due to multichannel, customership can arise whenever, wherever regardless the timing or channel used. This brings the companies new challenges: how to meet the customer needs in the channels they prefer, and how to create a consistent customer experience through all the channels?

2.1.1 Building a multichannel strategy

Like any marketing strategy, multichannel strategy concentrates on finding the right techniques and channels to interact with customers. Only this time it also focuses on combining these channels in order to provide customer value, engage customers, and minimise operational costs. A carefully tailored marketing strategy is required to keep in touch with the customer through the time of information and telecommunications revolution. What are the basic tools for building an effective multichannel strategy?

First of all, the company needs to focus on buyer personas. Knowing your target audience will help you to identify the channels that they are most likely to use. (Daniella Richt, 2015) This includes understanding how different demographic groups (i.e. age, gender

and lifestyle) influence demand and consumer behaviour. Also, the knowhow of collecting customer data via specific media channels and most importantly the ability of using it via media channels is vital part of a multichannel strategy.

Secondly, the company must understand what differentiates each channel and how to utilize the specialities and focus from each channel to best meet with the company's own needs (Richt, 2015). For example, Facebook is a way to engage your customer through pictures, texts, polls, offers, and raffles, whereas Instagram is more about beautiful photos and videos that are quickly glanced through. Pinterest could represent a way of lifestyle; you virtually pin photos you like, build inspirational mood boards and share your innovative side with people.

Lastly, no matter which channels the company ends up using, they should concentrate on creating a congruent picture. This means staying true to the brand identity and being consistent through all the channels. (Richt, 2015) The company should be inventive but value the brand voice and reputation it already has. In order to stand out among the endless number of creative pictures and videos nowadays, the company's story has to show. Stories stay in people's minds and give the company a powerful tool to use throughout their multichannel strategy. Media person Gil Klein underlines that the company also needs to find a right marketing partner and concentrate on creating a single platform instead of combining many. This will enable fluent management of multiple channels, reducing costs and consolidating data. (Klein, 2014)

2.1.2 Benefits of multichannel

As stated before, multichannel marketing and retailing aims to create customer value. Even so, it also has huge impact on business and could be addressed as a win-win situation. Only by weighing the benefits and challenges of multichannel, can the company customise its strategies accordingly (Moshe Demri, 2016).

Added customer value can show in multiple benefits that come with using multichannel marketing. *Choice* is a benefit that implies to both consumer and marketer. While the consumer has multiple ways of getting to know the brand and different channels to purchase products or services, the seller can choose from many digital advertising options

available to them. (SAS website). A choice of the place and the time is in key role in multichannel marketing. When it is done right, the customer is offered with multiple ways to purchase the products and they can place the order in any time of the 24 hours. This will not only give the seller more orders, but increase customer satisfaction and therefore improve the brand image. When talking about improving the brand image, the quantity of different social media channels will also give the company the possibility to use imagination, and build some unique marketing tactics.

Reach is another factor counted among to benefit both consumer and seller. Where the customer is able to reach the company more easily –preferably whenever and wherever– the seller can make their business potentially visible using range of different channels and so reach more and more customers. The increased visibility attracts even more customers, and as a snowball effect it will increase the company's sales and therefore business growth. (Robert Walker, 2014)

Data has a significant status in multichannel marketing. Without a multichannel strategy there can't be inclusive data collection, and without valuable data collection there can't be successful multichannel strategy. As Walker states, there are range of platforms the companies can use to effectively measure customer behaviour and the impact the brand has through specific channels (Walker, 2014). Data gives the seller clearer picture of customer preferences, and help making the combination of channels as effective and profitable as possible. Data collecting is discussed further later on the research.

All businesses strive for *cost effectiveness*, and targeted marketing enables to keep operational costs down (Walker, 2014). With a well-planned multichannel strategy, companies can compose best possible mix that delivers the lowest Cost Per Acquisition (CPA). This means engaging new customers at lower input, which will automatically result in better returns from the company's marketing investments. (Jomer Gregorio, 2016) Facebook as a marketing channel could be used as a good example. Today a free post can easily reach tens of thousands of people even in a relatively small country like Finland. If company sets up a pole, raffle or competition where there is a product price, a flood of likes and comments is almost guaranteed. With a simple marketing trick as this, the company has reached priceless visibility and therefore plenty of new potential customers, with only a price of a product or service. Also, the more information the seller has about customers' purchasing preferences, the easier it is to manage their stock. When the different

channels and the supply chain are well-integrated, there is less inventory tied up capital, and the company can save on production and distribution costs with careful planning.

2.1.3 Challenges of multichannel

Multichannel marketing can also have its drawbacks from both consumer's and seller's point of view. All these given choices may be frustrating to some marketers. It can be difficult to keep track of all of these new channels and stay consistent and inspiring. Other problems may include targeting issues, data issues, and management issues.

Multichannel marketing bringing a whole lot of new channels to manage, targeting issues might arise. New technologies being already expensive, the company needs to budget their multichannel strategy carefully. But which platforms to choose to invest in? Another targeting issue might be reaching the right audience at the right time. The company needs to take simultaneously customer's preferences, demographical as well as behavioral factors into consideration in order to ensure that customers don't just get your message but are willing to act. (Demri, 2016)

Multichannel marketing might also fail due to data issues. The problem can be a weak knowhow either in collecting or analyzing the data. Also, if the data is not centralized or is not real-time, it does not help the company. (Filenius, 2015) Even if the data collection works well, there can be all kinds of integration and measurement challenges. How to know which channel inspired the purchase in the first place? Or how many of the social media likes and shares actually leads to a customer engagement? (Demri, 2016)

Management issues are the reason for many operational failures, but are also in a key role when it comes to multichannel marketing. Filenius (2015) states, that if the management is missing relevancy and is not up-to-date, it cannot be successful in multichannel strategy. Consistency can be another management issue, since it can be extremely challenging to coordinate the marketing across departments, operations and channels. Also, keeping the offers, prices and message consistent and equal through all the channels can be hard. This is usually the problem if there is lack of common technology, such as integrated platforms, combining the channels. The managers should ask themselves: do they know

their customers and industry better, or should they use an outside provider for multichannel strategic services? And after all, do they have the budget for it? (Filenius, 2015)

In the end, the benefits of multichannel marketing outweigh the challenges. With the right tools and knowhow, multichannel strategy can yield to significant results. (Demri,2016)

2.2 What is a strong brand?

There are various ways to define a brand, but one definition is: a brand is a name, term, sign, symbol or design, intended to identify the goods or services of one seller and to differentiate them from competitors. Still, a brand includes much wider content than just a name or a logo or a design; brand covers also the intangible features that the consumer associates with. Brand represents the personality and identity of a company, and everything from customer's opinion or feelings about the company, service or display of products should be considered in branding. (American Marketing Association)

But which characteristics make a strong brand? Even though creating a brand is unique process and cannot be done by strict guidelines, there are some qualities that in most cases make a brand stand out from its competitors. In the following chapter, some most common features -no matter the situation or the size of the company- for successful branding are listed.

The first factor that strengthen a brand is competitiveness through differentiation and new innovations. Differentiation simply means how the brand differs from its competitors. When aiming for positive differentiation and successful branding, the brand needs to be better than the competition in any way possible. Even if their products are same between two competing brands, a unique branding can make the consumer to choose one over the other. In order to keep the brand alive and relevant in consumer's eyes, differentiation is mandatory for a brand. Differentiation is much easier if the company has the knowhow and skills for new innovations. In today's technical-based world, being the first to invent something big, will most likely make the brand a market leader. (Filenius, 2015)

Therefore, the second factor that makes a brand stronger is relevancy. Relevancy means offering the customer enough value and benefits for them to choose the brand over the

others, and most importantly keep doing so in the future as well. Another way of stealing customer's attention is by emotions. The company story and brand ethics should be clear and relevant to the target customers and the company should share their values with the target audience. Keeping the customer-company relationship blooming by understanding the customer's needs, is the key factor in order to stay relevant. (Kotler and Keller, 2012)

When it comes to the third important factor, consistency, a brand should keep it in mind with all their actions. Whichever values the brand possesses, or whichever strategies they choose to use, they should be consistent throughout all the channels. (Filenius, 2015)

The fourth, but just as important factor, is trustworthiness. When it comes to making business, no customer will choose a brand they don't trust. The trust must be earned with all functions of the business, as well as with products and services; the customer expects quality in products, reliable and safe service and fluent and quick operations. Most of all, customer expect to gain value in exchange for their money. Being trustworthy will automatically increase customer loyalty, and therefore makes the brand stronger. (Kotler and Keller, 2012)

2.3 “The brick and the click”

Brick store, also referred as mortar store, is the physical presence of an organization in form of a building or pop-up store where they offer face-to-face customer service. In today's extremely competitive search engine appearance, it is only a positive factor for a company to also have a concrete place to sell – and market – their products. Companies that aim to increase awareness by traditional brick stores, are suddenly growing also online. It seems that letting customers buy products in person still has its appeal and practicality. (Walsh, 2016)

Online store is the opposite for the physical brick store. It is a website or application where goods or services can be bought via Internet (Ince, 2009). Over the years online shopping has become from a trend to consumer's necessity, and nowadays few retailing companies survive only with a brick store. As stated above, the brick is making its comeback as an important sale supporter, but online store is the key to really find the big markets and target customers. The manageable and affordable nature of online selling, and

the easiness and effortless of online shopping makes online stores a win-win situation for both sellers and consumers.

‘Brick and click’ is a term for a business model by which a company integrates both offline (bricks) and online (clicks) presences (Ince, 2009). Companies should provide customers with a seamless experience whether shopping at a traditional retail store or online via desktop or mobile device (Walsh, 2016). If the company succeeds with combining brick and click, the brand image covers both stores, and so they are the one and the same thing in customer’s mind. Consistency throughout all the channels is the key; prices, offers, and information should be the same, and the company story should state clear in both physical store and online store. (Wilson, Street, Bruce, 2008)

Addition to consistency, there are many cross-channel actions to pursuit in order to create more customer value for the combining of brick and click. This covers different delivery and ordering options, such as orders made online being able to pick up at store, or products purchased in physical store being delivered home and so on.

2.4 Creating a multichannel shopping experience

Experience is defined as an event or occurrence which leaves an impression on someone. Shopping experience therefore is the experience a customer gets during the overall buying process, and it consists of many factors. Since it depends highly on the place, time and people involved, it is sometimes hard to control from retailer’s perspective. The retailer is, however, responsible for their customer’s shopping experience, and should remember that customer always has an experience, negative or positive. The key is giving this experience a meaning. (Martinez-Ribes, 2009)

This ‘meaning’ could come from physical factors, customer service, or from any added customer value, and is very important part of company’s multichannel strategy. Consumers expect a seamless shopping experience across devices and channels. Retailers must meet this expectation or lose customers. (Jim Davidson, 2014) Again, differentiation plays the key role in offering comprehensive customer experience; it needs to be something the customer won’t forget. The following chapters introduce more closely how to

create a positive multichannel shopping experience and what needs to be taken into consideration while creating it.

2.4.1 Consumer behaviour

Retailer who aims to create a positive shopping experience must fully understand the concept of consumer buying behaviour. Consumer behaviour is the study of how and why people buy, when they buy and what they buy (Kotler and Keller, 2012). Consumer behaviour literally describes consumer's ways of buying and disposing of goods and services in order to satisfy their needs and wants.

From marketers' point of view the most important thing is to identify with the reasons behind the purchases and specific factors influencing the patterns of purchases, as well as analysing what kind of impact the environment and society might have on the buying behaviour. (Dudovskiy, 2013)

As Kotler and Keller (2012) states it, it is sometimes impossible to fully forecast the buying behaviour of consumers, because of the emotional factors that even the consumers themselves are not totally aware of. Then company must take some role in influencing the consumer buying behaviour for example by different kind of advertising and strong branding (Dudovskiy, 2013). Recognizing some of the simplest psychological factors that "lead" consumers to choose certain good or brand over the other, increases organization's competitiveness in today's branding combat. Some psychological factors to take into consideration when analysing consumer buying behaviour apart from pure need, could be motivation, perception, beliefs, attitude and learning (Elizabeth Mott, 2017). Mott believes that if you can convince consumers that your product or service meets one of their motivations, manage to get their undivided attention, and success in letting them believe your brand is more beneficial to them than competition, you can convince them to buy whatever you're selling.

As mentioned before, the tightening competition makes analysing of consumer behaviour crucial for marketers when trying to differentiate. When creating a shopping experience based on customer buying behaviour, companies need to remember that customer is not only right, but it has the power.

2.4.2 Customer service and relationship

Customer service is often regarded as physical face-to-face service. However, with the explosive amount of online shops and desired multi-channel business models, customers expect of getting much wider range of customer service. This means that companies are expected to be present throughout the entire shopping process from marketing to sales and from technical support to returns and feedback. The goal -and sometimes the struggle- is turning customer service into a customer relationship. For that reason, companies need to invest in steady Customer Relationship Management system.

Customer Relationship Management concentrates on tools that keep current customers satisfied while finding new customers and making them returning customers. Long-term customer relationships are beginning to be more and more valued within companies, and this is often achieved by placing customers' needs above company's needs. The base of long-term customer relationship is engagement; the company needs to give the customer time, real interest and power, in return of their attention, money and loyalty. After all, it is far less expensive to retain an existing customer than it is to acquire a new one. (Hindle, 2008).

Data-collecting is the most common, yet the most important, tool for companies to get to know their customer better in order to create long-term relationship. This includes finding out customer's personal profile, sales history and preferred communication channels. In addition, customer should be provided with simple and active feedback channel. It gives the company valuable information when improving customer service. Lastly, no matter where the customer is, online or brick store, they should be served equally and well.

2.4.3 Added customer value

Where the definition of 'value' is often hard for companies to explain, its realization is more important than ever. Value in business is the worth of the technical, economic, service, and social benefits a customer gets in exchange for the price it pays for a product or service. (Anderson and Narus, 1998) As today's consumers are flooded with options, should businesses therefore utilize the highly studied concept of 'customer value' in their marketing of products and services.

Marketing today is about delivering the most relevant offer that will ensure the maximum margin for your business over the long term – it's a continuous conversation with the customer. Getting that conversation right creates loyal customers. In other words, it's about serving the right cookie, to the right person, at the right time. (Burek, 2014)

Basically, anything businesses can add to their product's expected value, is added customer value. Then, how can extra value be created? Some most basic steps include utilizing technology in data collection and making your actions as effective as possible. Another crucial step is taking customer centric approach, and therefore considering each customer as an individual. The company having throughout multichannel concept closes again the circle – the more options, the more value, the more satisfied customers. Third step is delivering what is promised. Businesses should never lie, exaggerate or withdraw, but conversely positively surprise the customer. As the newest trend seems to be 'lifetime value for lifetime customer', needs customer value management (like any other marketing area), also continuing up-dating. (Burek, 2014) But as known, when being creative only the sky is the limit.

2.5 Social media

If breaking down the concept of social media, the 'social' part is referred to interacting with other people by sharing and receiving information. The "media" part stands for an instrument of communication, networking, and interaction, in this case the internet. Therefore, Social media can be defined as applications and websites that make possible for users to network by creating and sharing contents. Classic social media sites and applications have common features like user accounts and profiles, news feeds and notifications, friends, groups and followers, as well as posting, commenting and review sections. (Nations, 2017)

As Harto Pönkä (2015) puts it, addition to the characters above, social media also functions as a distribution channel, having enormous influence on society, economy and culture. Social media's importance and huge impact on people's everyday life cannot be overstated. As part of globalization social media has grown to be present in all areas of people's life around the world – work, pleasure time, hobbies and social life. The beauty

of it is that through social media people are able to share their thoughts, ideas, feelings and knowledge with like-minded people around the globe. (Pönkä, 2015)

In terms of marketing and businesses, social media have become a must-have tool. It is natural, since business should be where the consumer is – online. Addition to connecting customers, it is an easy way to do product marketing, promote brand, and keep up-to-date with markets. (Beatrice Whelan, 2015)

When such huge masses use social media, businesses cannot afford to ignore the opportunity. With social media constantly bringing businesses new ways to contact and communicate with customers, it therefore enables them to improve their products and services to the right direction. They are also able to pass on brand identity and company values in a way that was not possible before. For retailers, the first things to understand is why are their customers using social media and where (customer behaviour). After that retailers need to figure out how could they reach the customer online, and how to profit from it. The answer, once again, is multichannel marketing. Operating in multiple channels the customer is using, gives a better chance to draw their attention, pass on brand story, and finally gain popularity. (Whelan, 2015)

Social media have enormous impact especially in fashion and lifestyle industry, as it has changed the industry dramatically over the years. Where the famous designers and fashion editors have always been vanguard and trendsetters, has social media brought the ball to consumers – like any other retailers, the designers have to interact with the consumers now, too. The companies also must accept that fashion has become more reachable to everyone, faster changing, and is controlled by social media influencers like celebrities and bloggers. The key problem now for fashion businesses is the loss of control and influence and hence the loss of sales. This is why fashion retailers should above all be in the top of social media marketing and its evolution. (Azhar Fateh, 2017) Depending on social media channel used, the benefits social media bring customers include ease of browsing, shopping and identifying with the brand. Most of all, social media works as inspiration to both consumer and retailer, and brings together the entire fashion business industry. Different social media channels and their importance for multichannel strategy are introduced further in the later part of the theoretical framework.

2.5.1 Benefits of social media

There are several benefits for both the consumer and the company using social media. Consumers are getting used to the idea that everything relating to companies can be found online – products, services, opening hours, contacts, feedback forums and so on. The availability of information is the most beneficial fact about the fast-growing social media. Other benefits include easier and more cost-effective shopping, faster responses and feedback channels, as well as immediate knowhow about the company news, sales and promotions. In other words, company provides the customer richer customer experiences. (Rob Harris, 2016)

According to statistics, more than half (56%) of Finns are using social media (Tilastokeskus, Väestön tieto- ja viestintätekniikan käyttö, 2016). This information solely gives businesses a reason to use social media. Not only do they get a bigger audience with social media, but a cheaper one, too. Company's social media marketing costs are much lower with the same input hours than regular marketing (Jayson DeMers, 2014). Because of its low cost, social media is an ideal marketing and branding tool for small and medium sized businesses.

DeMers (2014) also claims that the brand will get a rapid boost with social media. Increased brand recognition and authority as well as brand loyalty are surely desirable pros of social media marketing. Additionally, studies have shown that compared to outbound marketing, social media has higher conversion rates, and a 100% higher lead-to-close rate. Improving trust and credibility in the brand is naturally resulting in higher number of engaged followers, and therefore more customers. As the customer base is widening, the company's online search traffic gets busier as well. Being active on social media shows search engines that the brand is credible and trustworthy, so they give the company better rankings. (DeMers, 2014)

If social media can easily improve a brand image, it can as easily destroy it. Especially SME companies should realize that active social media usage does not guarantee increased sales or all mentioned benefits. If the company performs poor social media appearance, i.e. with badly updated channels or home pages, ignorance in customer feedback or acting politically or ethically incorrect, the customer

2.5.2 Most popular social media channels

Facebook

Facebook is a social media and social networking service. According to Facebook's founder Mark Zuckerberg, the company's mission is "to give people the power to build community and bring the world closer together". The company claims that the site's popularity comes from users' will to stay connected with family and friends and to share and express what matters to them. (Facebook, 2017)

Facebook has over 2 billion registered users (June 2017), which makes it the most popular social media channel. Therefore, Facebook gives companies an ideal marketing channel for their products and services, and its ease of use helps to connect with the customers all over the world. Facebook's business pages enable real-time interaction with the current customers, engagement of new customer groups, advertisement and creating strong content marketing, and therefore help building a stronger brand image. The channel is also developing constantly, which means that the companies should stay up to date with it. The importance of Facebook as a part of a marketing plan should not be underestimated, and all the businesses no matter the size should be present and active there. (Facebook, 2017)

Instagram

Instagram is another rapidly growing social media channel that has over 800 million active monthly users (September 2017). It is a mobile application for photo and video sharing, and according to the CEO Kevin Systrom it is all about visual content and capturing moments (Instagram). When compared to Facebook, it is much more momentary and engages people with short and unique content -in this case photos and videos. It is not to show all business information or stories, but to work as a source of inspiration. Instagram is a popular social media channel especially amongst young people, celebrities, newsrooms and it-brands, which makes it constantly growing and fresh. (Instagram, 2017)

The goal of an Instagram account is to gain followers and likes. As mentioned before, the content should be inspiring in order to attract followers and engage potential consumers.

Therefore, Instagram allows the company to show and promote their products, service and values in a whole new, creative way. For a fashion and lifestyle brands it is an exquisite tool and one of the best marketing channel. It enables both the company and the consumer to share, like and comment on the business posts, and to create a unique customer relationship. Instagram posts are also possible to share on other social media platforms, so it is perfect for a multichannel marketing strategy. With passionate and interesting presence on Instagram, the company can improve its competitiveness and strengthen its brand image. (Instagram, 2017)

Snapchat

Snap Inc. is a camera company that has created a highly popular mobile application with over 173 million active users (June 2017), Snapchat. The company states that their goal is to improve the way people live and communicate by reinventing the camera. With different camera and communicating elements, Snapchat allows people to express themselves, live in the moment, learn about the world, and have fun together. (Snapchat, 2017)

As Instagram showed the way of living in the moment and being creative, Snapchat followed and has now become more and more popular especially amongst millennials and celebrities. The businesses have followed since, and so it has become another fun and effective way of inspiring and engaging consumers. The application is originally made for funny content sharing including pictures, short videos, and as its name says, chats. Its main idea is to share images and videos that are short-lived and self-deleting, and according to the creators it is the temporary nature of the pictures that emphasizes a more natural flow of interaction. (Snapchat, 2017) Again, for fashion and lifestyle brands it gives a great tool to stay up to date, market their products and pass on the company story in a creative way.

Pinterest

Pinterest is a mobile and web application and a social media platform that has also been made for inspiring. The company's CEO Ben Silbermann describes the company as a "catalog of ideas" that inspires users to "go out and do their own thing". On Pinterest the users can collect ("pin") and share photos and content they like, and create either private or public photo boards around themes such as events, styles or hobbies. Pinterest does not

engage the users (and in terms of business, the costumers) the same way as other social media platforms, but rather works as inspiration. (Pinterest)

Pinterest is also growing social media platform, and has more than 170 million active users (2017). Majority of the users (81% in 2017) are female. Even though the channel addresses smaller and more specific customer segments, it can be a useful add to fashion and lifestyle brands' multichannel marketing strategy. It can help to put the company story, products and feelings together and therefore inspire and reach the right customers. It is also a great product promoting tool for retailers, since the studies have shown that 93% of active pinners said they use Pinterest to plan for purchases and 87% said they've purchased something because of Pinterest (Pinterest statistics 2017).

Blogs

Blog is a short form for the word weblog, and is an online website with a personal journal or a diary that is frequently updated. Blog is written by individual and is usually about specific subject such as lifestyle, food, fashion, design or sport. It is a place to express oneself, and to share thoughts, passions and pictures with people.

As bloggers have the ability to reach hundreds or even thousands of readers daily, it has become a popular marketing channel for companies, as well. Business has two options using blogging as a social media tool: it can keep a blog itself, or use famous bloggers as advertisers of the brand. Both ways can act as an effective promoter, depending on the expected outcome. If the company wants to engage new customers by telling the company story and values, or want to keep current customers frequently updated, they should definitely have their own blog. If, on the other hand, their goal is to promote specific products, or to engage specific type of customers, the use of multiple popular bloggers as the company's ambassadors could be the best choice. Sometimes consumers tend to trust the brand more if they can identify with bloggers who likes them. Either way, fashion and lifestyle businesses should include blogging to their marketing tools for higher visibility, targeted customer segmentation and long-term customer relationships.

2.6 Data collection through multichannel

Data collection is defined as a systematic approach used by companies to gather and measure information from a variety of sources in order to get a complete and reliable

picture of an area of interest. When taking the business objective, data collection is an important tool for the companies to make informed business decisions, learn more about their customers and ensure quality of their services. Different data can be used to improve products, marketing and branding, evaluate and predict outcomes, keep orders and stock up-to-date, and target sales and campaigns better. (Rouse, 2016)

Data collection is almost a vital activity for businesses in order to have efficient and profitable marketing strategy and demonstrate return of investment. At best data collection gives the company a proper 360-degree view of the customer –who they are, which channel they use and when. Using this information marketers can ensure the right message and offer is delivered via the right channel at the right time. (Moth, 2013) Data might be collected from different server databases, website visits, mobile applications, analytics tools and online surveys (Rouse, 2016).

As a multichannel strategy, a data collection process can be simple or wide scale, depending on the time and effort put into it and the type of technology used. Also, the results and the amount of useful information data collection can bring depends highly on the marketer's data collection and analysing skills. (Bowden, 2014) Data collection is in a key role for successful multichannel marketing, and yet multichannel marketing is in a key role for pervasive data collection. Bowden (2014) also states that for competitive and cost-effective multichannel marketing, businesses need to find data collection strategies that best fit their marketing plan and learn to utilize technologies that will enhance their data collection process.

As mentioned before, data collection is essential for more profitable marketing and higher return of investment. The importance of data collection can be seen in all areas of business from finance and planning to production, marketing and sales. Consumers are expecting tailored and adapted communication, and businesses need to be ready to correspond accordingly. (Moth, 2013) Even though the collecting, analysing and responding to the endless data can be time-consuming and challenging, the benefits and opportunities are certainly greater.

The main benefit, as mentioned before, is targeted marketing. With data collection businesses are able to reach the right customers, at the right time, through the right channel and with the right offer. In addition, businesses success much more likely in enhancing

the quality of customer relationships as they know the customer's history with the company. As important as getting a new satisfied customer, is re-engaging a lost one. Retailers can, for example, find out why the customer has left the site or has not finished their purchase, and then try to persuade them to come back with personalized marketing. (Moth, 2013) In this case the data works as “wordless feedback” to which the company should respond quickly.

According to Moth (2013), with up-to-date data the company can improve the effectiveness of their communications and operations and be more predictive with sales, and therefore might be able to reduce the inventory and stock capacity and react quickly to changes in demand. Another factor that increases cost-efficiency is integration. When all the channels are tightly connected, the data collection can actually reduce marketing costs, since all unnecessary and inoperative tricks can be cut out. That been said, companies should not get frightened by the high costs of database marketing, but bravely invest their marketing budget to something that can maximize their revenue.

2.7 How to success in multichannel?

This chapter is for summarizing the question “how to success in multichannel marketing strategy?” It combines all the findings of the theoretical framework in order to continue to benchmarking, the second part of the thesis. As in all marketing strategies, the key is to build a solid strategy that is consistent, no matter the channel or place. Marketers should be thorough, repetitive but creative at the same time. Budget and efficiency is also to be taken in consideration, and that is why the company should concentrate on few solid solutions and channels that focus on adding customer value, engagement and higher return on investment. (Kimbrell, 2015)

After the company has chosen best tools and social media channels for them, it is time to start doing cross-channel marketing. This is to build stronger brand recognition by being unique and inspirational through all the channels. (Wilson, 2008) Being unique does not mean, however, that the marketers should come up with whole new ideas, but could also follow industry leaders. Seeing what they are doing right, adopting the hottest technology and ideas, and even hiring them as consultants can be a vice strategy. (Kimbrell, 2015)

Working with social media influencers, such as bloggers who post content about the company, is also crucial nowadays for boosting brand recognition.

The previous chapters covered the importance of data collection, and it surely is one of the key figures in successful multichannel strategy. Using tracking tools to reach the right audience and being able to target them with customized CRM guarantees higher engagement and customer loyalty. As stated before, in multichannel marketing approach the customer always comes first. Adding customer value to products and services and showing appreciation towards the customer will automatically raise the company's competitive edge. (Wilson, 2008)

Kimbrell (2015) and Wilson (2008) also highlight that building excitement around the brand “by hook or by crook”, is the only way of surviving in today's highly competitive and cruel business world. In other words, this is achieved only by being innovative and different from other brands and striving for industry leadership.

2.7.1 Omnichannel

Omnichannel is another commonly used concept when talking about multichannel marketing. Omnichannel, simply put, is multichannel done right. In omnichannel, all the channels of a multichannel strategy are integrated and connected somehow. In today's retailing business, ‘multichannel’ as a concept is widely known. But how to actually build a solid multichannel concept where the customer comes first but the company benefits simultaneously, requires a true know-how.

2.7.2 Differentiation through innovations

Business dictionary defines differentiation:

“result of efforts to make a product or brand stand out as a provider of unique value to customers in comparison with its competitors.”

As there is endless amount of new technologies and business ideas, is there also endless amount of ways of differentiation. The only limit is imagination. The commonly used

differentiation elements include pricing and product differentiation. Organizational differentiation, such as maximizing the power of a brand or concentrating on customer loyalty, relates closely to a successful multichannel marketing strategy. Another important way of differentiation is through innovation. This means being different in ways that really matter and delivering greater value to consumers. Marketers should remember that since the studies show that more than 99 percent of all new ideas are based on existing knowledge, it makes all people capable of being innovative. It is all about being creative and relevant by scanning the environment for new technology and ideas, and connecting with competent people. (Michael Porter, 1998)

When comparing the company to its competitors or market leaders, they should not compare the company as a whole but concentrate on certain areas of business. Companies should also know for certain what their customers are looking for, to be able to know what areas should they differentiate in and what type of innovation is relevant. (Greg Fisher, 2009) The purpose of new innovation could be, for example, improving the delivery services with shorter lead times or alternative delivery options. Or it could be high quality products with quality materials and high-end technology. As from the company's point of view, with new innovations they could be looking for minimizing the stock capacity, linking their online and offline services, lowering production costs, or simply gaining more engaged customers. Retailers with multichannel marketing strategy should remember that innovation doesn't mean small improvements but innovation is about finding new ways of combining things. (Porter, 1998)

2.7.3 Flawless services both online and offline

In order to stay up-to-date and relevant with the brand, companies should concentrate on consistency. As mentioned before, consistency across channels and their elements, such as content, visual design and functionality, builds trust with consumers. (Flaherty, 2016) If the customer gets inspired by company's social media channels, they should be provided the same excitement level when walking into the brick store. Or conversely, if the customer gets great customer service by salesman in brick store, they should get the same experience when later browsing the online store. The company values, offers and investment should be clear through all the channels when aiming for successful multichannel strategy. (Flaherty, 2016)

As all the businesses aim for as high profit and efficiency as possible, it is important that it is not done at customer's expense. Trustworthiness is essential in order to keep the brand alive and competitive. The company should keep its promises by all means not only with its products but with all its functions. In addition to keeping company promises, trust can be built for example by offering professional customer service, having consistent branding, posting and replying to customer reviews and engaging customers on social media. (Flaherty, 2016)

Fluent management can be a challenge for today's businesses with all the numerous areas of business that should stay consistent and high-quality, and the growing number of employees that require. It is, nevertheless, the most crucial factor in order to have all the pieces staying together. As stated before, multichannel strategy is no strategy without solid system. Fluent management should cover everything from marketing and inventory to innovations and employee and customer relationships. CEOs and managers need a single, overall view of their practices. Another similarity with successful multichannel marketers is pure professionalism. Business should know exactly what they are doing, and where and when. Professionalism should also be seen in all areas of business; fluent management, strong knowhow of technology, and true customer service.

Technology can be a cornerstone, stepping stone or a stumbling block for a retail company. Sometimes innovation is happening so fast that by the time a retailer adopts new technology a new one has already occurred. When aiming for a successful multichannel marketing, though, new technology should not be feared. No matter if the technology is new or already commonly used, a business should conquer it fast if it helps to reach their own goals. All the used channels could not work together without an effective technology. Most important technologies for retailers include different databases, integrated e-commerce platform, a real-time stock feed, logistics systems and different applications that makes browsing, purchasing and returning easier for the consumer.

In multichannel approach, technology is used to combine the online and offline shopping. Sometimes it's not good to push everything online, since it might end in lost sales. Therefore, technology can also be used to help customers who does not like to make orders online to find other channels and ways. A great example of this in retailing business is a possibility to order online but try on and pick up the products later in a brick store. Or

when seeing something customer likes in a brick store window, they could immediately have it delivered home. Other examples of sale-boosting services and technology is presented later in the research.

3 RESEARCH

In this chapter, all the different ways of collecting information are shown, including benchmarking and designing new ideas. Also, the results of the research are presented. Later the case company's strategy is evaluated and both the benchmarked companies and the leading multichannel marketing innovations are shortly introduced. In the end, the best observations are adopted to the commissioner's own strategy.

3.1.1 Benchmarking

As defined in the introduction, benchmarking is a process of finding market leaders in certain area of business, studying how they function, and adopting the best practices that are suitable to the case organization. (Dew, J. & Nearing, 2004) Many companies use it to discover hidden opportunities and improve their competitive advantage.

Even though the benchmarking process vary slightly from author to author, it is commonly divided into three stages: planning, studying and acting (Sarah L. Collie, 2008). Collie (2008) sums that benchmarking research process starts with determining what and whom to benchmark. This includes analysing the case company's (benchmarker) own system and its strengths and weaknesses, and comparing them to other companies' (benchmarkees) processes. Comparing can be done internally, across the own industry or within all the market leaders. In this phase, the goals and areas of improvement are also set.

The second stage of benchmarking is the study process. As the name says, it includes studying the benchmarked companies further, collecting comparative data or supporting documentation. After data collection, it is time for analysing and questions: "why are they better?" and "what practices could be adopted?" (Collie, 2008)

The third and last stage of the benchmarking process is acting. This includes an action plan for implementing improvements that best fit the company. It is important to schedule the planned changes carefully – not everything has to happen at the same time or immediately. (Collie, 2008)

3.1.2 Own experience as a consumer and retailer

The objective was not to create entirely new innovations, but to find ways of improving sales by existing ideas. In addition to benchmarking, some of the ideas are based on the preferences and data collection which the commissioner revealed during the interviews at Marimekko's headquarters. The benefit of the data is to find the most valuable purchase channels and sale methods for Marimekko to use in order to reach all of their target customers. Also, own experiences as a retailer worker and the company's future target customer played a major role in finding the best possible solutions for the commissioner. Being able to step into both the company's and customer's shoes gives the advantage of creating a practical strategy to benefit both ends.

4 COLLECTING AND ANALYSING DATA

4.1 Analysing Marimekko's marketing strategy

As stated earlier, Marimekko is famous especially from its patterns and colours. The company's own vision is to be the most recognized and fascinating pattern designer in the world. The company has a long run growing strategy which concentrates on their busiest markets in Northern Europe, Northern America and Asian-Pacific region. The corner stone of their strategy is to build more international and known brand by utilizing the uniqueness of Marimekko designs. The knowhow of pattern and colour use is their main differentiation factor. The company also wants to highlight their high-quality products and innovative designs as a part of their branding. The company aims for new customer groups and profitability by new product innovations and increase of small everyday products. They also want to increase the brand loyalty and competitive edge by creating better multichannel marketing and distribution networks. This includes increasing the amount of brick stores and shop-in-shops, and making the efficiency and coordination as high as possible throughout all the channels. (Marimekko website, 2016)

From Finnish customer's point of view, Marimekko's brand image is quite simple but clear. The brand has followed many Finns through their life from childhood stripe shirts to school time shoulder bag to iconic Unikko bedlinen. It is hard for an old and iconic brand to change its brand image or to be identified by new customer groups with no emotional bond of the brand. Yet Marimekko's marketing strategy concentrates on gaining new customer groups and becoming a lifestyle brand. Being a lifestyle brand, though, both limits and widens the customer segmentation and is risky by the means of finding the right target audience. This makes marketing more time-consuming and differentiation more challenging. Since the company orthodoxly values its long-term customers, it is a challenge to engage both old and new customers with the same strategy. For Marimekko, therefore, it is crucial to have a solid multichannel strategy where all the different customers can find their own preferred way of interacting with the brand. Right now, the brand can be found in brick stores, shop-in-shops, online store, and social media.

Marimekko stores and shop-in-shops are visually a good reflection of the brand; simple, colourful and unique. Its store display with fewer products and sizes shown and with a

spacious, open view goes hand in hand with the company's high-quality style. The sections of clothes, accessories and lifestyle goods are clear. In the pictures 1 and 2 the atmosphere of the store and product display can be seen. The stores are usually located in the shopping malls or busy city centres, which of course is good for attracting bigger and variable customer groups. When visiting the store, the service is customer oriented, but little shy compared to the bold brand image. The customer service should also reflect the products; high-quality, inspirational and unique. When aiming for more effective multi-channel marketing, the brick stores should also have more connections to the online world. Marimekko should offer more services connecting the brick and the click, use more technological solutions, advertise online store and persuade customers to join their social media channels.

The company's website and online store likewise has a simple and sophisticated look. The most prominent -and marketing wise most important- factor that can be seen on the online store is the unique company story. It is linked with all the products and company info and clearly considered in the company values and strategies. Clear and identifying company story is one of the strongest advantage of the company, and they should definitely utilize it more and throughout all the channels. With moderate quality pictures of entire outfits or modern decorations gives the idea of a true lifestyle brand. The customer can immediately find Marimekko products to fit their daily life and make it even more luxurious. This competitive edge is demonstrated in the pictures 3 and 4.

Marimekko has started to be more and more active on social media. Currently their social media channels include Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, YouTube, Pinterest and LinkedIn. The content is yet again true to their style, but could be more consistent. Marimekko being a brand of inspiration, they should concentrate on more unique and prominent content in each channel. They should also make more cooperation with social media influencers and famous people around the globe to make the brand seen and influential. In a solid multichannel strategy, the company should choose multiple channels where they put their effort and time into, and only concentrate on creating regular and frequent content there. With Marimekko, having seven different social media channels, it seems quite a lot. It can be working; however, they would need a "red thread" that holds all the channels together and the company values alive.

As with their online store photos, Marimekko posts colourful and arty, yet moderate pictures and videos in social media. This is a good thing, and should be taken even further. For example, Instagram showing millions of photos daily, it's become more and more crucial to have more memorable or even shocking content in order to stand out. In all the channels, the Finnish heritage is well presented, and makes the brand more special. The pictures give the viewer a feeling of warmth, harmony and quality.

The company's social media channels are updated frequently, and they are synchronized well. Marimekko having around 270 000 followers on Facebook, and 240 000 followers on Instagram, shows that the brand have gotten visibility, but the customer engagement could be better. This can be seen in likes and shares, when out of 270 000 followers only 100-700 likes the company's Facebook posts and 10-30 shares them on average. The engagement on Instagram is a little promising, when out of 240 000 followers 3 000-8 000 likes the posts. However, the number of followers and likes are increasing ascendingly, so it is safe to say that the content is appealing to consumers. The company should also take into consideration, that their social media contents get more likes when they are in English. This fact tells that they should indeed have the internationalization high on their growth strategy. The pictures 5, 6 and 7 show the atmosphere of Marimekko's social media channels.

The company should use multichannel strategy to gain new customers, but above all to engage them. For this they should have a so called red thread to combine all their strategies, actions and channels.

4.2 Introducing the benchmarked and leading companies in multichannel

There are many fashion and retailing companies that have absorbed the idea of using technology as a part of their multichannel strategy, and in many cases, that indeed is their key to success. But what makes these companies unique and different? Is it a one innovation or the sum of all? In the following chapters, the three benchmarked companies are introduced, each of them carrying out a special multichannel strategy or innovation that other retailing companies should get inspired from. The benchmarked companies were

selected as they all have something in common with the case company, Marimekko; Burberry is a high-quality fashion design house, Zara is an internationally successful fashion retail company, and Uniqlo is a small but fast-growing specialty fashion retailer.

4.2.1 Burberry

Burberry is one of the world's leading companies in multichannel marketing and retailing. It has been established in 1856, and has since grown to be one of the leading high-fashion houses with more than 500 stores in over 50 countries. The company's focus is on ready-to-wear clothes, accessories and fragrances.

What makes Burberry a great benchmarking company, is that the company has made a broad effort with their multichannel strategy as a whole. Lot of their strategies are now being used as models by other businesses. These successful strategies concentrate on being beneficial for both the company and the customer. Such services include wider online services, more functional mobile site and optional ordering, returning and payment methods. As they improve the ease of shopping for the customer, they also enhance stock availability, inventory and shorter delivery times, which immediately improves the company's cost-effectiveness. The company has also made huge effort with customer engagement through social media, and has been a leading company in real-time engagement and live-streaming. Above all, Burberry has gone where the customer is rather than waited for the customer to come to them. A great example of this is them engaging Asian fans via their own platforms instead of popular ones.

Since one of Marimekko's strategic areas include Asia, they should also consider adopting Asian's most popular social media platforms such as WeChat and Line, that have more local users (almost one billion) than many platforms have internationally.

4.2.2 Zara

Another benchmarked company is a Spanish fashion chain, Zara, established in 1975. It belongs to the world's largest apparel retailer, Inditex group, and is one of the best known

fast-fashion brand with up to 20 clothing collections a year. In addition to its fast-changing collections, Zara's success is mostly based on its effective and well managed multi-channel marketing. They have implemented few key technologies that have made their functions as effective as possible.

These successful technologies include an application for mobile device and a RFID system. Zara's mobile application has been successful (10-50 million downloads) because of its simple usage but diverse content. The app consists of different pages that help customer to browse, shop, track purchases, find items and stores, contact the company and most importantly get inspired. With the lately added scan feature, customer may scan the barcode on items and immediately see all item information from available sizes and colours to direct links to online store. This gives the customer the freedom to finish their shopping whenever they like.

The other innovation Zara is a forerunner in, is the RFID (radio-frequency identification) system they are using in brick stores. RFID uses electromagnetic fields to track and identify objects. A little chip is attached to items, and can be used for better data collection, more precise inventory, faster restock, increased security, and reduced pirate designs, just to name few. After seeing the benefits of the technology, Zara purchased 500 million reusable RFID chips and has been a role model for many other fashion companies since.

Marimekko already having multiple channels in use, they should definitely implement some of these must-have applications that help not only to engage customers but to make purchasing and returning easier for them. At the same time, it makes inventory more exact and functions more cost-effective for the company. A mobile app could be the "red thread" the company needs in their multichannel strategy, and only sky is the limit with its content possibilities.

4.2.3 Uniqlo

The last benchmarked company is Uniqlo, a Japanese casual wear designer, manufacturer and retailer. Uniqlo has gained its reputation and competitive edge by clever campaigns and high-tech innovation that brings shopping experience to a whole new level. The brand's vision is to become the world's biggest specialty retailer of private label apparel,

meaning that they produce own clothing which they already sell exclusively in over 1900 stores worldwide.

The reason the brand was selected as benchmark, is its history of embracing new technology and using it to create a multichannel shopping experience. Uniqlo became one of leading fashion brands in 2012 as it launched its Uniqlo Magic Mirror, a virtual dressing room. It allows customers to try on clothes virtually in front of screen, and save the pictures for later browsing and sharing. This idea could be taken further with a virtual dressing room application for mobile devices, so that customers could shop better online, too. As today's challenge for retailers is how to make the shopping experience seamless between touchpoints, Uniqlo has solved the problem with personal WeChat account and Uniqlo App. They enable the customer not only to browse products online, but to check the availability of stock, receive offline store coupons and share the virtual dressing room pictures. These two innovations boost their multichannel strategy by driving the customers both online and offline. In addition to Uniqlo's consistent strategy, the company's unique digital campaigns, low-cost operations, and high customer engagement online have created considerable distance between the company and its competitors.

Marimekko should learn from example how to increase customer engagement both offline and online by using the right technology. An overall lesson for today's marketing strategies is that the multichannel already exists, now it's all about connecting with the customer across all the touchpoints with real-time, behaviour-based marketing.

4.3 Introducing the benchmarked and leading ideas of multichannel

The following ideas for a better multichannel strategy are both benchmarked ideas and ideas that are based on own experiences as a customer and a retailer. All the ideas are given keeping in mind the case company's needs and purposes. Some of the ideas are also based on the data and information Marimekko revealed during our project plan meeting.

4.3.1 Mobile Card application

Company based mobile applications have lately grown to be a norm rather than rarity. That is why every company with a multichannel strategy should have an application where they can combine at least company information, company story and online store. This is what the consumers are expecting at minimum, and what can differentiate companies quite easily from another. On the other hand, if the company wants to compete on higher level, they should put time, money and effort in adding extra factors into the application.

One added factor could be a personalized account for the customer, where they can see their previous purchases, track orders and see personal shopping points in one page. Another factor could be a page with different ordering, returning and payment options listed. It could also include direct links to the online store, a search of nearest brick stores and company's social media channels. Then the app could include a promotion site showing inclusive offers, invites to customer happenings, and latest company and production news.

If gone further, some of the latest technology could be implemented to the application. These could include scan tag, online fitting room, as well as online chat. As mentioned before, the scan feature enables the customer to scan the barcode on items at the stores and immediately see product availability. It will also show the availability in the closest store or give a direct link to the online store. Online fitting room will benefit both the customer and the company. For the customer, it makes the decision making easier as they can see how the size or model fits them rather than seeing it on someone else. It also makes it easier to combine products. All this makes it profitable for the company as well, since the amount of returns decrease while the amount of orders increases. An online chat is an investment every company should adopt nowadays. It is one of the easiest, yet most relevant multichannel tool, as it raises the customer service to the next level and adds extra value to products. Online chat is also important from the company's point of view, since it offers a straight customer feedback and marketing channel.

Different sites offer multiple ready platforms for mobile application, if the company is not able to make it by themselves. Of course, the visual limitations might get in the way of trying to make the application look unique. Another problem this will bring are higher

costs. Despite of these drawbacks, a mobile application gives an effective tool to boost sales, data collection, customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, and most of all strengthen the company's multichannel marketing strategy.

4.3.2 RFID System

RFID (radio-frequency identification) system is fairly new and expensive technology used by large retailing companies. RFID uses electromagnetic fields to track and identify objects. A little chip is attached to items, and can be used to improve many functions from logistics to sales and to inventory. With the trackable chips, the company can perform better data collection; which items are tried on, purchased or returned more often, and which items need to be restocked quickly and which product lines should be finished altogether. RFID technology also enables more precise, faster and cheaper inventory, as the products does not have to be counted one by one. The system can also be used to increase security, catch shoplifters and reduce pirate designs. All in all, this technology is one of the most advanced and effective innovations in today's retail business, but the implementation is expensive and therefore is not suitable for many companies.

4.3.3 Scan Tag

Scan tag is a tag that has been added to all the sold products. With an application, the barcode can be scanned, and various information of the product seen. Information included to the scan tag could be information on available colours, sizes, models, locations and offers. It also enables saving the product for later browsing or shopping online. Matching items can be shown immediately, making shopping easier and inspirational. All this information provided will save time for the customer and create a better shopping experience. Another important factor today is company responsibility. With the tag customer sees clearly the used materials, place of origin and recycling options. It could also show how many people have scanned or purchased the tag already, as well as customer feedback. This will build trust between the customer and the company.

Scan tag technology has become more and more popular mostly because it is once again beneficial for both the consumer and the retailer. Where it brings the consumer more

pleasant and time-saving shopping experience, it also gives the retailer keys to a faster inventory, smaller stocks and time-saving actions. Another benefit (especially for a unique company such as Marimekko) is to be able to pass on the stories behind each product. This will automatically increase uniqueness and identification, and lead to better sales. In order to make the scan tag technology work, it needs to be marketed well so that people will truly adopt it.

4.3.4 Virtual Fitting Room

Customers who are shopping online miss out on the chance to touch the products and to make an emotional connection with it. Therefore, companies should concentrate on including elements that make the product more real and identifying, such as definite descriptions and photos, videos and 360-degree views. From multichannel marketing's point of view, a great and fairly new technology is a virtual fitting room. It is an online tool that allows shoppers to experience an item more personally, as they can see it on themselves or on their own home. For example, the customers can see how different styles, colors and sizes fit their own body, rather than just looking at it on a super model. Or they can see how a pair of curtains fit to their own living room's style. In addition to making the purchasing easier for the customer, the online fitting room also gives them more personalized and fun shopping experience, increasing customer loyalty and satisfaction.

When it comes to the company, an online fitting room will not only increase the sales but also decrease the amount of returns as the products most likely please the customer. Virtual fitting room is not just a tool for online retailers, but it can enhance the shopping experience in-stores as well. As mentioned with the introduction of the benchmarked company, Uniqlo, a virtual mirror in a brick store's fitting room can be very practical. At the store the customer can just see how clothes would fit them without taking own clothes off and therefore saves time. Interactive mirrors or screens can also offer product information, alternative items, as well as sharing and save-for-later options. For the retailer, interactive fitting rooms can offer valuable information. It can alarm when clothes need to be taken away, or collect data such as which products are tried on often, which are tried on but purchased rarely, et cetera. In addition to mirrors and screens in-store, the store windows can also be interactive. This means that displayed products can be scanned and

the customer can see the product information right away and possibly order it to be delivered home even if the store is closed. This will make purchasing easier and therefore increase impulse shopping.

Again, the company has the choice to either invest in their own virtual fitting room technology, or then buy it from another company. There are nowadays also own fitting room applications for mobile devices. As an example of this is the application called Zeekit, which allows the consumer to try anything on virtually. The trend of virtual innovations is clearly growing, and therefore every company aiming for modern look should consider adopting them to their own strategy. Virtual fitting room is definitely creating a multi-channel shopping experience for the consumer.

4.3.5 Online Chat

Online chat is a tool on company's website and online store, where the customer is offered a real-time customer service by a professional worker of the company. A small pop-up window is popping to the corner of the site immediately as the consumer enters the web site. As in brick stores, also in online chat the customer should be greeted immediately and asked how they wish to be helped. It is almost a vital tool for multichannel marketing nowadays since lot of companies have adopted it, and the consumer is expecting to have this real-time service.

Where Online chat makes the customer's shopping experience yet again more time-saving, it really adds customer value to the products as the customer can get more information, professional help, and therefore easier get through the purchasing process. Another great factor is that it is totally optional for the customer and there is no pressure if they want to shop alone.

Online chat is one of the easiest ways of creating a multichannel shopping experience for the customer. In addition to being easy customer service, it is cost-effective and efficient. If this online service is done right with quick responses, professional guidance and result-oriented attitude, it will lead to increased sales and customer engagement.

4.3.6 Ordering and Returning services

Creating multichannel shopping experience can also be done without huge technological innovations. One example of this is improving and diversifying the ordering and returning services. With lot of retailers doing it already, all companies should include these in their multichannel strategy in order to increase customer value and their competitiveness.

In multichannel marketing, ordering services should include something else than the basic in-store or online store ordering options. When trying to combine the brick and the click, ordering, delivering and returning should be combined, too. Examples of different ordering options: customer ordering items online and they are ready in the fitting room as they arrive to the store, customer ordering items in-store but they get delivered home, or customer ordering items not available to pick them up from the store the next day. Returning should include mutually options such as returning online orders to the brick store or getting returns picked up from home.

4.4 Key findings

Based on the benchmarked multichannel ideas, the following chapter will discuss the key findings of the research and answer to the research question from the first chapter of this study: “how to create a successful multichannel shopping experience by combining the brick and the click?”

As there is no guarantee that the same multichannel strategy works for all companies, this conclusion is made by researching different successful companies but keeping in mind the case company’s vision and strategic goals all the time. In a conclusion of the research, the answer to the question “how to be successfully multichannel?” is with a solid, consistent and unique strategy that covers all the used channels. All the chosen strategic elements should concentrate on increasing customer engagement, adding customer value and strengthening the brand image.

The findings of this research support the outcome of the theoretical framework. A successful multichannel strategy can indeed be separated into three main parts: choosing the

right channels both online and offline, using new innovations to inspire and engage customers, and having a red thread to combine them all. Concentration on these factors should automatically increase profitability and customer satisfaction.

The benchmarked companies had all some admirable strength in their multichannel strategy and how they have succeeded in differentiation. The key is they make the gap between the brick and the click disappear, so that a customer could choose to use any channel because they all work equally. The companies were presented in different social media channels and were truly active on them all. When using multiple channels together, posting inspiring contents, and passing on unique company story, they can ensure the reach of different customer groups. After reaching the target audience, the companies concentrate on making them long-term customers by keeping the channels fresh and modern.

Creating or adopting new innovations make all the benchmarked companies to stay on the crest of a wave. Consumer's get inspired by new technology, and are expecting more and more from the companies. Even one well-working technological tool can make the brand more interesting, as was seen with the benchmarked businesses. It was also clear, that the technology does not have to be self-invented, but can be adopted from others. The key is to include something unique for the customer while gaining valuable data for the company. The knowhow of collecting and analyzing data is often a turning point whether the multichannel strategy succeeds or not.

After having enough touch points and useful technologies, so called red thread is needed to finalize a successful multichannel strategy. For all the benchmarked companies, it was either an amazing technology that becomes part of the brand image, or a mobile application that combines all the channels and technologies used. Whatever the red thread is, it should primarily make the multichannel concept more clear and practical for the customer and more cost-effective for the company.

5 SUGGESTIONS FOR MARIMEKKO

Marimekko is already present in many social media channels, have multiple successful concept stores and is known internationally. These suggestions are given to further strengthen the brand image, engage new customer groups and improve the multichannel strategy by seamlessly combining the brick and the click.

5.1.1 Shopping experience starts online

As Internet has grown to be part of people's everyday life, it can clichély be stated that the online users are the future. In today's shopping, the process often starts long before the consumer even gets to the online store or brick store. The consumer browses different channels for inspiration and to find the best products to meet their needs. In order to answer to the demand and encourage customer to make the purchase, the products should be well presented and most of all stand out from others. Social media can be used as a tool to create the need as well as to fulfil it. With consistent and unique content through all the channels the company can strongly impact the consumer's image of the brand and its products, and therefore guide them towards the offline shopping as well.

As the online advertisement has increased with the consumers moving online, it is good to remember that there is a fine line between inspiring content and pure commercial. The consumer can easily get tired of over floating advertising and can ignore the brand for good for making that mistake. Therefore, multichannel marketing is the most powerful tool nowadays; even if the content is not commercial but the consumer bumps into the same brand via multiple channels, the company most likely gets their attention. It is also good to realize, that there still are customer groups that prefer the offline shopping. That is why the multichannel strategy should include brick stores as well. Aiming for minimum costs, many businesses are moving more and more online. Marimekko could also change some of its brick stores into showrooms, where customers could still feel the materials and try on clothes but could order them to come home.

5.1.2 Clear target groups

Marimekko labeling itself as a “lifestyle brand”, it is quite hard to define specific target groups. The company also wants to concentrate more on the income level than specific age groups when it comes to their customers. Therefore, it might be hard to find the right channels and tools for their multichannel marketing strategy, as it needs to be targeted for a wide age range. Wanting to attract more younger customers, the brand should definitely invest in the latest technology. On the other hand, they should keep the concept simple for their loyal older customers, who follow the brand for the sake of their long history together. A question arises: should Marimekko have more clear customer segments, or is the “lifestyle branding” enough? As this could only be specified with better data collection and analyzing, a solid multichannel strategy is essential.

5.1.3 Diverse doesn't have to mean complicated

Nowadays consumers need to have more and more options to be satisfied. This is why the competition of engaging the customer is so intense. On the other hand, the consumer will lose their interest quickly, and therefore the concept -including technologies and channels used- should stay simple. As Marimekko's own style is simple and clear, the concept should be kept simple as well. The thing is to have few key strategic points and then concentrating on keeping them fresh and unique.

The technology used does not have to be complicated, either. In Marimekko's case they should see what best has worked within the current fashion leaders and then adopt some of the most cost-effective and simple (but powerful) technologies to their own strategy. They should invest on a simple but consistent technology that would combine as many channels as possible.

As mentioned before, without any bigger technological innovations the company can build more multichannel shopping experience for the customer. Then the concentration should stay in improving the services. Marimekko should start offering more options to their customers, including browsing, purchases, delivery, returns and fitting. Making the shopping experience easier and more personal for the customer immediately improves the brand loyalty. Even though Marimekko should offer more choices, they should above

all promote multichannel engagement: make all customers to interact in all channels and make it simple.

5.1.4 Keep up “Marimekko stories”

As stated many times, the uniqueness is the best advantage in today’s competitive markets. Being unique is getting harder and harder, but Marimekko has all the elements of standing out from the crowd. The long and colorful history of the company as well as the unique designs and patterns are their main advantage, which should be shown in all of their actions.

Marimekko has already add inspirational stories behind the products and designs, and has connected the brand to Finland well. They should keep up the company stories and value their heritage by continuously using Finnish nature, folks and culture as an inspiration. It will give an exotic label within the international markets. Therefore, the Marimekko stories should be included everywhere in their multichannel strategy: product information, social media channels, and technology used. As far as the new strategic suggestions go, the stories can be added to each of them, making the applications and technologies more interesting and to differ from competitors.

5.1.5 Products and services

Like the whole concept, the product lines should be kept clear and simple. Marimekko should continue its plain Scandinavian style throughout the entire production from fashion to textiles and to furnishing. The company is already having multiple areas of production, and the question is: should they increase or decrease the variety of products? Being a lifestyle brand naturally involves having multiple different production areas, but the company should concentrate on few successful factors. They should think about what they are famous for in Finland, and decisively bring that quality to international recognition. After all, the brand loyalty is easier gained if the company enjoys the homeland’s trust and support first. The brand could also launch some extra product lines time to time in order to keep the true fans interested and draw attention of new potential customers. The company should value their broad designs and their Finnish factory, and continue

making their prints and fabrics in Finland even though it's more expensive. They will lose the competitive edge, since it's rare to have completely Finnish made products nowadays.



PHOTO 1: Marimekko's fabric factory in Helsinki.



PHOTO 2: Marimekko's simple and clear displays.



PHOTO 3: Marimekko's unique patterns and famous dresses.

The pricing strategy is another factor Marimekko should concentrate on. If the company wants to have wider age range among their customers, they should understand that the younger students won't invest the same amount of money to their lifestyle as the older working people. Having variety price ranges could be risky. Is the wealthier part of the customers interested in the brand anymore if they lower the prices? The thing with high-quality products are, after all, that it is precisely the higher price that makes the product feel more quality. Yet the younger customers could be the potential customer group but they stick with cheaper brands. Marimekko should therefore concentrate on leaving the prices little higher, and concentrate on keeping the quality and uniqueness even if it narrows the customer groups.

As mentioned before, one of the cornerstones of a solid multichannel strategy is adding customer value. Marimekko should definitely increase their customer service level to meet up with their unique production. The service should be as inspirational and professional as their unique designs and colors. Making sure the sales people (online and offline) are well-trained and distinctive can only improve the productivity and is fairly easy step to a better multichannel strategy.

5.1.6 New multichannel strategy

In this chapter, the new multichannel marketing strategy for Marimekko is presented. Following the company's expectations, it is designed to be as simple as possible. All the suggested technology and services will improve the multichannel nature of Marimekko's strategy by combining the brick and the click. They will also enhance customer engagement and company performance. Mobile card application is selected to function as "the red thread" of the multichannel marketing strategy. Therefore, all the other suggested elements are connectable to the application, and can be implemented right away or later. The option for new features in the future is also considered.

Mobile Card

Mobile Card is a mobile application for smart phones and tablets. It combines the club membership, online store, company website, promotions, and social media channels. It serves as a core to the other multichannel elements.

What will it bring to the customer?

- Convenience at every stage of the purchasing process
- Faster purchases
- Control and self-involvement
- New modern, multichannel shopping experience

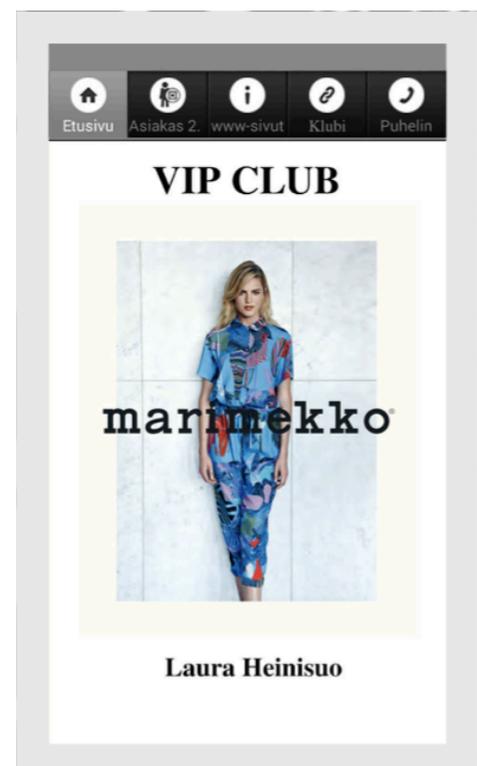


PHOTO 4: Mobile Card prototype

What will it bring to the company?

- Adds customer value to the products and services
- Brings valuable data
- Maximizes customer engagement and loyalty
- It is the answer to consumers' demand for technological development

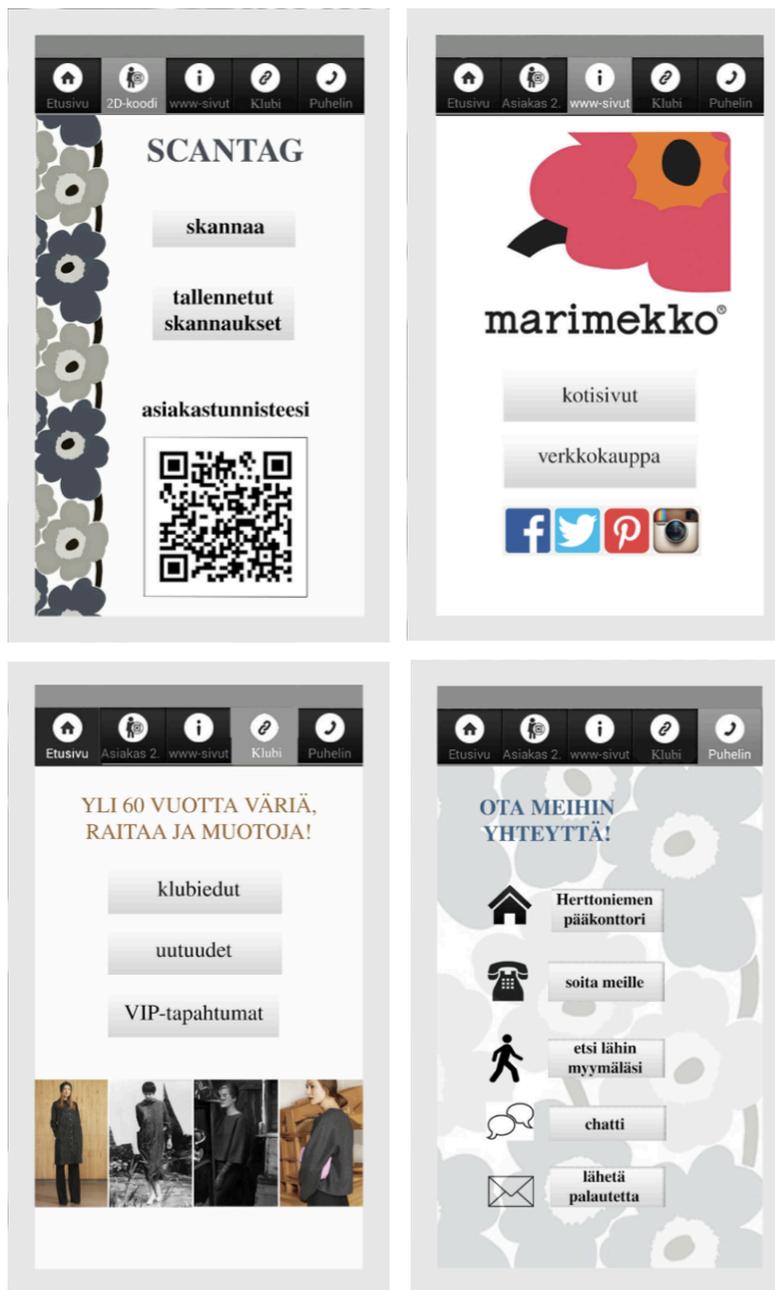


PHOTO 5: Mobile Card application prototype.

Scan Tag

Scan tag is a barcode enclosed to all the products online and in-store, and can be scanned with the mobile application. It enables the customer to see item information, background story, available sizes, colors, models and locations, as well as save the product for later browsing or order it right away. The customer can also share the products in social media, see which items are scanned the most, and get recommendations on matching items.



PHOTO 6: Scan Tag prototype.

The Scan tag technology is connectable with the Mobile Card and Virtual fitting room services.



PHOTO 7: Scan Tag prototype

What will it bring to the customer?

- Faster and easier browsing and purchasing both in brick store and online
- Modern Multichannel shopping experience
- Time- and place-independent shopping

What will it bring to the company?

- Easily generated multichannel tool
- Cost-effective way to segment the audience
- Better data collection with trackable barcodes
- Time-saving customer service
- Efficient inventory and monitoring of stock
- Reduced stock capacity

Virtual fitting room services

Virtual fitting room services can be used in brick stores or on online store. Different technologies include interactive mirrors and windows, and online fitting room application. With virtual mirrors in the brick store, the customer can see any clothes on them without actually trying them on. They can also see colors available, and save the items for later purchasing online.

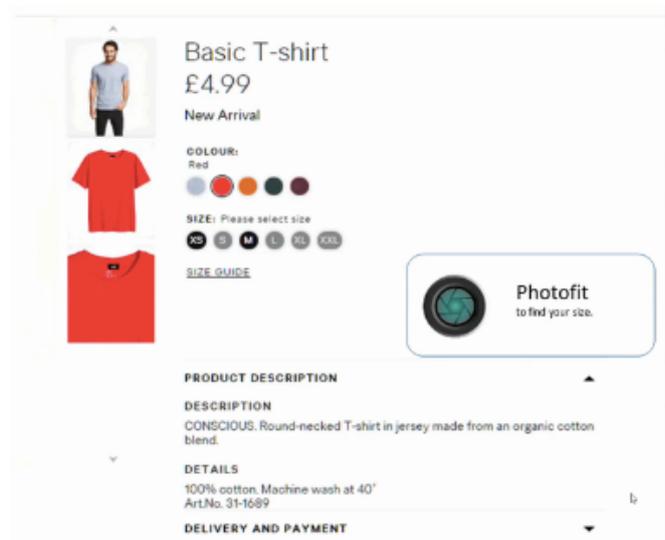


PHOTO 8: Online fitting room prototype. (Linda Leppänen, TCA presentation, 2015)

With interactive store windows, the customer may browse and purchase the seen products right away even if the store is closed by just scanning them. On online fitting room, the customer takes a photo of themselves, and the application suggests the right size and model for them after scanning their exact measurements.

What it brings to the customer?

- Allows shoppers to experience the product more personally
- Makes the purchase decisions easier
- Creates a multichannel shopping experience

What it brings to the company?

- Increases the amount of online purchases
- Decreases the amount of returns
- Develops customer loyalty

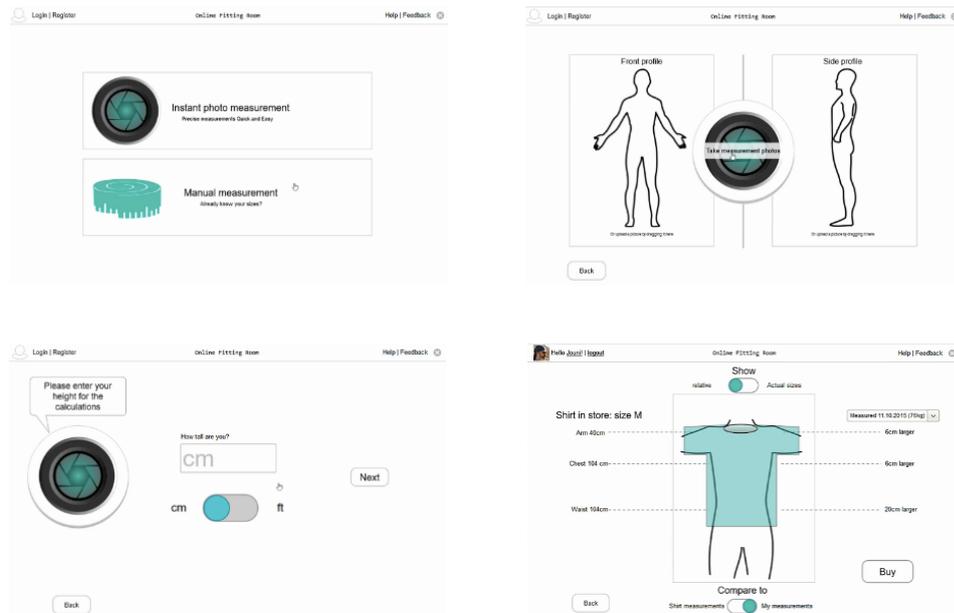


PHOTO 9: Online Fitting Room prototype. (Linda Leppänen, TCA presentation, 2015)

Purchasing, delivering and returning options

As mentioned before, improving the services can be the easiest and most cost-effective way of creating the multichannel shopping experience. Purchasing being the main goal for both the customer and the company, it should be made fast and simple. Helping the customer to decide by offering various purchasing, delivery and returning methods, the company can achieve a valuable competitive edge.

Options offered for purchasing should at least include an option where customer can try on clothes in-store, but order them to arrive home. Customer should also be provided the options where some size or color not being available (online or offline), the wanted item would arrive to the store later so that the customer can try it first without necessity to buy it. The third option should be that products ordered online will be ready for the customer in the fitting room as they arrive. This service can then be perfected with a great customer service and fitting assistance to create a consistent multichannel shopping experience.

With the progressive amount of online orders, delivery and returning options are very important as well. Delivery should be offered to home or to the chosen store as the customer prefers it. Similarly returning of the products should be easy for the customer.

The option where returned products are picked up from home shows the customer true quality service. If the products ordered online may be returned to the brick store, the store gets a chance to replace the item with another one.

What it brings to the customer?

- Added customer value
- Easy, independent and time-saving shopping
- Builds trust towards the company
- An easy first touch to the multichannel shopping experience

What it brings to the company?

- Reduced amount of returns via mail
- Cost-effective multichannel tool

Online chat

Online chat is a service where a customer is helped when shopping virtually. It is one of the easiest multichannel tool. The customer is offered the same quality service online as they would get walking in to the brick store.



PHOTO 10: Online Chat prototype.

A small pop-up window is opening to the corner of an online store or a website immediately when the customer enters the page. Various features, such as styling and gift planning services, might be included to this function. Online chat enables the company to do extra sales while the customer gets helped.

What it brings to the customer?

- Guidance and help
- It is totally optional, which leaves the customer to still be in control
- Time-saving shopping
- A great personal multichannel shopping experience

What it brings to the company?

- Easy customer service
- Added customer value
- Increased sales and reduced returns
- A great customer segmentation and feedback channel

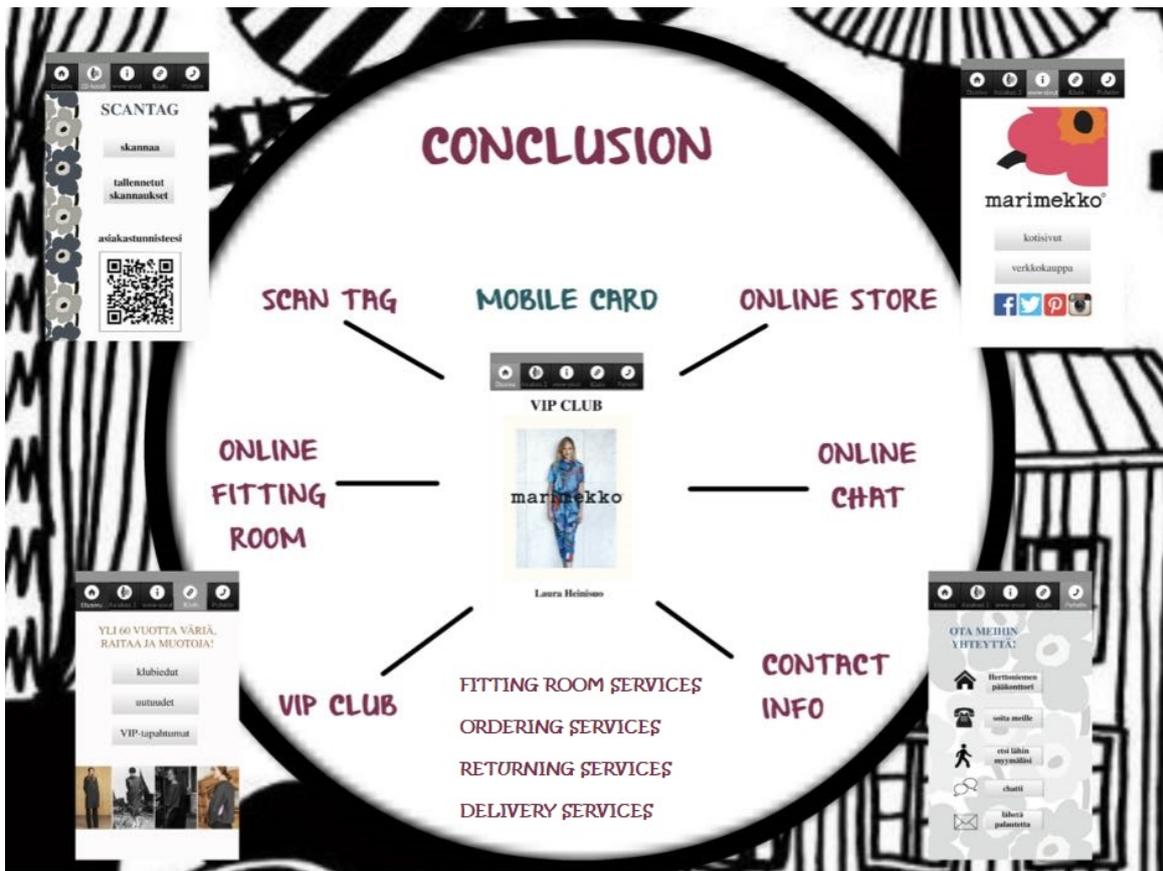


PHOTO 11: Conclusion of the multichannel strategy elements.

6 DISCUSSION

The goal of this research was to create a multichannel shopping experience for Marimekko's customers. At the same time, the cost-effectiveness and productivity was to be considered by keeping the strategy simple. Marimekko wanted tools to attract younger customers, as well as to better engage the current customers.

The sub questions in order to be able to answer the main research question were:

1. How to create added customer value?
2. How to improve customer engagement?
3. How to provide alternative and futuristic purchase solutions for the customer?
4. How to offer new shopping experiences without the brand-consumer relationship suffering?

With the research, I was able to answer to all of the questions, and they worked well as a frame for the main research question. The answers were reliable, and therefore usable for building a new multichannel strategy. When considered it afterwards, I would not have done it differently.

In my opinion, I have come up with a solid strategy, where the core is simple but can later be expanded limitlessly. For Marimekko, I don't think any high-tech innovations should be considered before these basic elements of multichannel marketing are executed. Nevertheless, some technology is required in order to create and improve the multichannel strategy further. The fact is, that the newest technology should be adopted sooner or later, and later means the competition might be over by then. As the company strives for better recognition in the international markets, the benchmarked companies are international. Therefore, Marimekko should adopt the elements which are afloat in markets abroad rather than in Finnish markets. On the other hand, the success in homeland is already an advantage when trying to sell the products by means of Finnish culture.

As mentioned before, Marimekko has all the skills and potency of becoming the most famous pattern designer in the world, as their vision states it. The main thing now is to quickly start improving their multichannel marketing, and I, of course, hope these suggestions are valuable for them during that journey.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Title

