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# Online Marketing Plan for a Travel Company

Melamed, Michal

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## Online Marketing Plan for a Travel Company

Michal Melamed  
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Michal Melamed

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The subject of this thesis is online marketing in a travel company. The objective of this study was to create an online marketing plan for a travel agency that organizes travels and tours for Finnish tourists in Israel. The tours concentrate on historical, biblical and cultural aspects and thus, the target customers are mainly religious, Christian tourists.

This thesis adds value to the company since it does not have an online marketing plan. The objectives of the online marketing plan were increasing the company's online visibility, enhancing the conversion rates on the company's website and on social media platforms and this way growing the number of customers.

The thesis consists of a theoretical section and a functional section. The theoretical framework covers the tourism industry and online marketing, whereas the functional section concentrates on creating an actual online marketing plan for the travel agency. The functional section is based on theory and specialists' interviews that were conducted during the study. Other methods exploited were benchmarking, SWOT-analysis and web analytics that were carried out to gain knowledge and to help with defining the current situation of the company.

As main results, this thesis provides information and a concrete online marketing plan, which includes the company's situation analysis, objectives, strategy and an action plan for the company to follow up with. Thus, the travel agency will be able to systematically carry out the online marketing plan according to its own resources and to use it when planning its online marketing again in the future. Therefore, this thesis provides the information needed for the company to improve its web presence, traffic on its different online platforms and hereby to sustain and raise its customer base.

Keywords: Online Marketing, Online Marketing Methods, Tourism-marketing, Travel Agency

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Tämän opinnäytetyön aiheena on matkailuyrityksen verkkomarkkinointi. Työn tavoitteena oli luoda verkkomarkkinointisuunnitelma matkailualan yritykselle, joka järjestää suomalaisille kohdennettuja matkoja Israeliin. Matkat painottuvat Israelin Raamatun aikaiseen historiaan sekä maan kulttuuriin ja luontoon.

Yrityksellä ei ole aikaisemmin ollut verkkomarkkinoinnin suunnitelmaa, minkä vuoksi opinnäytetyö on heille tarpeellinen. Verkkomarkkinointisuunnitelman avulla yrityksen olisi tarkoitus pystyä laajentamaan verkkonäkyvyyttään, parantaa konversiota nettisivuilla ja sosiaalisen median kanavilla ja näiden myötä kasvattaa asiakaskuntaansa.

Opinnäytetyö on toiminnallinen ja sen rakenne koostuu teoreettisesta osuudesta ja toiminnallisesta osuudesta. Työn teoreettisessa osuudessa tuodaan esille sekä matkailualan että verkkomarkkinoinnin keskeisimpiä aihealueita, kun taas toiminnallisessa osuudessa paneudutaan yritykselle luotavan verkkomarkkinointisuunnitelman tekoon ja toimenpiteisiin. Toiminnallinen osuus pohjautuu teoriaosuuteen ja asiantuntijahaastatteluihin, jotka toteutettiin opinnäytetyötä tehdessä. Opinnäytetyössä on lisäksi käytetty benchmarking, SWOT-analyysi ja internetaanalytiikan menetelmiä sekä yrityksen tekemän markkinointikyselyn tuloksia nykytilaa kartoittaessa.

Opinnäytetyön tuloksena kehittyi verkkomarkkinointisuunnitelma, joka rakentuu yrityksen nykytila-analyysistä, tavoitteista ja strategiasta sekä varsinaisista verkkomarkkinoinnin toimenpiteistä eri verkkokanavilla. Matkailuyrityksen on tarkoitus hyödyntää verkkomarkkinointisuunnitelmaa resurssiensa mukaan pikimmiten ja systemaattisesti jatkaen sekä käyttää suunnitelmaa pohjana kehittäessään verkkomarkkinointia tulevaisuudessa. Verkkomarkkinointisuunnitelma antaa yritykselle hyvät valmiudet verkkonäkyvyytensä -ja liikenteensä parantamiseen ja näin myös asiakaskuntansa säilyttämiselle ja kasvattamiselle.

Keywords: Verkkomarkkinointi, Verkkomarkkinoinnin menetelmät, Matkailumarkkinointi, Matkatoimisto

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## 1 Introduction

Marketing is one of the primary focus areas when it comes to managing any business, no matter which field is in question. Marketing stands for entering and obtaining the company in the market field, creating and managing relationships. By the means of marketing, the company strives to raise the sales of its products and services.

In today's world the role of online marketing is growing, especially in the tourism industry where more and more people are reserving trips by surfing online. Therefore, online marketing tools and channels are the key points in this thesis. Website management, content development and online marketing communications are all important parts of online marketing. These terms, together with other important concepts, are defined and explained more profoundly so that the connection with the travel agency's online marketing will be set out to the reader.

This study focuses on identifying the central aspects that are vital for the online marketing of travel agency X. Thus, the study carries out research, but the main objective is a functional output. Despite its long existence, the travel company does not have a written online marketing plan, and therefore, this thesis is of great purpose to the company. The online marketing plan will not be bound to a detailed schedule or budget and the company will be able to utilize it according to the available time and resources.

## 2 The tourism industry

A theoretical framework has been defined to find out as much valuable information for the study. In the following parts I will open the so-called key concepts that are the core subjects involving the study. It is highly important to do a research and clarify the marketplace's current situation, such as consumer desires, tourism flows to the destination, online marketing in general and how is everything connected to the final online marketing plan.

Tourism is one of the world's most important economic sectors and can be defined as a field of environmental and sociocultural forces. In 2016 the travel and tourism industry contributed over six trillion euros to the global economy, being equal to 10,2 percent of the world's GDP and approximately one in ten out of all jobs. (WTTC 2017.)

Weaver and Lawton (2014, 2) have defined tourism as "the sum of processes, activities and outcomes arising from the relationships and the interactions among tourists, tourism suppliers, host governments, host communities and surrounding environments that are involved in the attracting, transporting, hosting and management of tourists and other visitors". (Weaver & Lawton 2014, 1 - 3.) Tourism is a constantly growing, large-scale industry that consist of the collaboration of multiple firms of the tourism and hospitality industry. Consumer needs is what influences the alliances between airlines and travel agencies, and makes the relationship dynamic. In addition, the intermediates and financial and technical satisfaction by the suppliers have their own impact. (Buhalis & Crofts 2012, 2 - 3.)

### 2.1 Tourism product

From a customer's point of view, a tourism product is an intangible service product with a certain destination/transportation/accommodation with a certain content and price. The customer selects the service experience to satisfy his or her needs, wishes, expectations and yearnings. A tourism product is often a package that includes the attraction towards the destination, the services in the destination, accessibility, visions about the destination and price. (Puustinen & Rouhiainen 2007, 212.) However, travel does not always qualify with tourism, and according to Weaver and Lawton (2014) "The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) and most national and subnational tourism bodies hold that the travel must occur beyond the individual's 'usual environment'." (Weaver & Lawton 2014, 23.)

There are several distribution channels for tourism products. Naturally, tour operator and travel agency websites are such channels, but today's consumers have a lot more options and one can book a trip via many different sites and applications. The most common distribution sites for tours include for example TripAdvisor, Viator, Expedia, TourRadar, Skyscanner and

Booking.com, just to mention a few. These websites are so called Online Travel Agencies that help the consumer to independently research and book their own trips by suggesting tourism products like tours, flights and hotels according to the customers' preferences. (Trek Soft 2016.)

## 2.2 Travel agency

Travel agencies' main function is providing retail travel services to customers by cooperation with other operators of the industry. Travel agencies usually sell these services on a commission basis from airlines and other sectors. They also provide the customer with informative and contributory material such as travel insurance and passport services. Travel agents operate between the consumers and other tourism businesses like tour operators. Travel agencies can modify the tourism systems as an intermediary. However, the digitalization has affected on the importance of travel agents by the phenomenon of disintermediation. This is due to the increased accessibility of the internet that helps hotels, tour operators and other businesses to communicate directly to the consumers, free from the agent's commission. The same phenomenon has led to the creation of online travel agencies, "OTAs" like Expedia, among many others. In contrary, the more traditional travel agencies are emphasizing personalized customer service, peer networking and often have strategies to build continuous customer relationships. (Weaver & Lawton 2014, 140 - 141.)

Travel agencies that sell travel services from the traveller's home country to a destination overseas are called "outgoing travel agencies". On the contrary, agencies located in the destinations are so called incoming travel agencies. Outgoing travel agencies provide the customers the information about the destination, recognize the customer needs, present the tour selection to the customer, do the selling of the travel services and hands the required documents to the customer. (Renfors 2008, 22 - 23.)

Specialized travel agency is usually specialized in a certain country, destination and/or type of travelling. Independent specialised travel agencies are often linked to a niche market, and provide the customers with specific travel packages rather than many separate forms of services. In addition, these agencies usually have a contract with major airlines servicing the destination. (McChelland 2009.)

Specialized travel agencies have usually gained experience by research and relationship building, and are therefore able to assist the customers and answer their questions concerning the destination, travel, diet requirements and others (McChelland 2009). A specialized travel agency is the one noticing its customers in case of airline schedule changes and unique requirements and issues that the customers need to be aware of.



Tour operators are mainly working hand in hand with the travel agencies, suppliers and carriers as they provide the customers with travel packages that include services like transportation, tour guiding and accommodations. One of tour operators' main tasks is developing their products and services according to the consumer desires and keeping them innovative. Hence, tour operators have an important effect on the development of tourism schemes. (Weaver & Lawton 2014, 144 - 145.)

### 2.3 About travel agency X

This study will be made for a Finnish tourism company that is administering and operating religious and cultural tours in Israel. The company is providing the services typical to both, travel agency and tour operator. However, in this thesis I am going to refer to the company as company/travel agency X. Travel agency X's clients are mainly Finnish people going on a holiday in Israel. Departing from Finland, they are part of Finland's outbound leisure tourism.

Company X's core products and services are highly related to Christian tourism, and therefore the tours are organized in holy areas and landscapes of Israel. In addition to this, the company arranges hiking tours and cultural trips that give the customer an authentic experience. Most of the company's clients are middle-aged or seniors, but the company is looking forward to extend their segment group and target the younger generation as well. The youth trips are mainly arranged for youth groups from churches across Finland. As well as the older customers, these groups are focusing on the biblical aspects and visiting of holy places. During their stay in Israel, they are often studying the bible together with their youth leaders.

The travel company has been on the market already for many years, which makes it experienced in the field of managing Finnish tourism in Israel. According to the company's findings, most of the customers are middle-aged or older, often traveling together with their spouses. Most of the customers are assumed to have an average income and belong to Evangelical church communities. The customers have highly interested in Christianity and enjoy seeing the historical and biblical places in Israel. Company X's clients have often returned multiple times to the trips organized by the company, or have visited Israel once or more in advance. This has also affected on the company's travel programs, as they tend to create as much variety and renewing all the time to meet the customers' wishes and satisfaction. The trips are mainly lasting from one to two weeks and are part of Christian tourism as they include tours to numerous holy sites of Israel. All the tours are also guided by the company staff that are experienced and well-educated.

Moreover, the tours let the tourists explore the natural, historical and political aspects of country and are organized by the company itself. They are run throughout the country from the northern Galilee to the Negev desert and Eilat. Other central destinations include Jerusalem, the Dead Sea and Tiberias, among others. Most of the trips include the traveling (flights and bus rides) and accommodation costs in their package price. The tours are operated during the spring and fall, mainly from March to May and during October and November. These are also the high seasons of Christian tourism in Israel. However, there are a few travel packages for the summer and winter time, as well.

### 3 Consumer motives

We are living in a so-called dream society where service and experience economy have impacted on the structure of the traditional economy that affected agriculture and industry. Today's consumers have various choices when making buying decisions. Buying decisions are also a way to communicate and express one's values, as voluntary, ethics, dreams and socializing are influencing in the background. Consumers are looking for extraordinary experiences and use more time and money on their free time, cultural events, luxury services and traveling. (Puustinen & Rouhiainen 2007, 214.)

One of the main internally influencing factors for consumers' behaviour is the motivation for traveling. Motivations answers questions like "Why does a person want to travel, what does he/she want from the trip and why is he/she choosing a certain destination?". Reasons for traveling can vary a lot and have been divided for example to escape from everyday life, relaxation, escape from socially accepted daily roles, soul-searching, raising of status, sealing of family relations and increasing social communication. Identifying these motives can help when planning tourism marketing, as they can design the content of the products and services as well as marketing communications according to the customers' desires. Another important aspect is the approaches of the consumers. The approaches and attitudes of the consumer are highly related to learned behaviours and personal experiences. It is important for a travel company to sustain the customers' positive mind that directly influences their buying behaviour. (Kotler, Bowen, Makens et al. 2017, 181 - 187.)

The leisure experience has also been defined by social psychological terms as perceived freedom, internal control, optimal arousal, intrinsic motivation and flow. People are looking for experience and want to enjoy a series of engaging, meaningful and memorable events. (Scott, Laws & Bocksberger 2010, 158 - 159.) As Company X's most clients have already reached their middle ages and some are retired, it is important to understand leisure and tourism experiences in retirement too. Many retired people are looking for new experiences that they have not been able to enjoy during their working life.

Retirement usually brings new feelings of freedom, wishes and opportunities for individuals. Researches, Wei and Milman (2002), have found out that older people mostly enjoy sightseeing, visiting historical places, restaurant dining and shopping when leisure traveling. Hunting, fishing and sunbathing were found to be less popular activities among the older generation. Tourism products to older people are usually designed to have less physical demands and the providers' offerings include for example shorter walking tours and lighter backpacks. Especially adventure tourism providers tend to warn their clients of the risks and burdensome, and might even offer training beforehand for more taxing activities like biking and hiking. Some companies require their customers to inform about their medical condition or even run physical examinations. Providers must take the older people's preferences in consideration and thus provide slower paced tours and schedules. (Scott, Laws & Bocksberger 2010, 161 - 165.)

### 3.1 Travelers' online behaviour

After recognizing a need or a motive to travel, the traveller starts to search for more information. The sources where the traveller looks for information can be either personal (e.g. family or friends), commercial, public (like reviews, travel editorials) or online sources. Typical online sources include for example the company website and possible comments from previous customers. The consumers look for information about the company and available choices and product features and then evaluate the alternatives. (Kotler, Bowen, Makens et al. 2017, 193.)

The consumer often uses a brand name and location while searching. The traveller is usually ready to book a trip when finishing researching and exploring destination ideas. According to Google, around half of travel searches are done by using smartphones and around half of leisure travellers have booked travel on a smartphone. However, 46 percent of the mobile searchers switch to another device for the actual booking of the trip and tend to ensure things more in detail on their laptops or desktops. (Google 2016.) As the digitalization and Web App technology is on the rise, travel products are very often sold on metasearch sites like Booking.com and Skyscanner, that help the consumer to find the cheapest airfares and travel packages available. These, among many other sites, scan between different airlines, accommodation and other service providers, and suggest the consumer a certain packages, flights or hotels according to his search. (Lonely Planet 2016.)

According to Phocuswright's report "Channel Surfing: Where Consumers Shop for Travel Online" in 2016, online travel agencies' (OTAs') popularity is globally in increase among the travel bookers. Consumers tend to surf on OTAs as it releases them from browsing between many separate supplier sites and gives them the possibility to read reviews, compare prices

and multiple possibilities available on one site. Other reasons that travelers have booked with OTAs are the easy usability of the website, trusting the brand, price matters, wide scale of selection and already formed booking habits, as it is also brought out in the photo (Figure 1). (Phocuswright, 2016.)

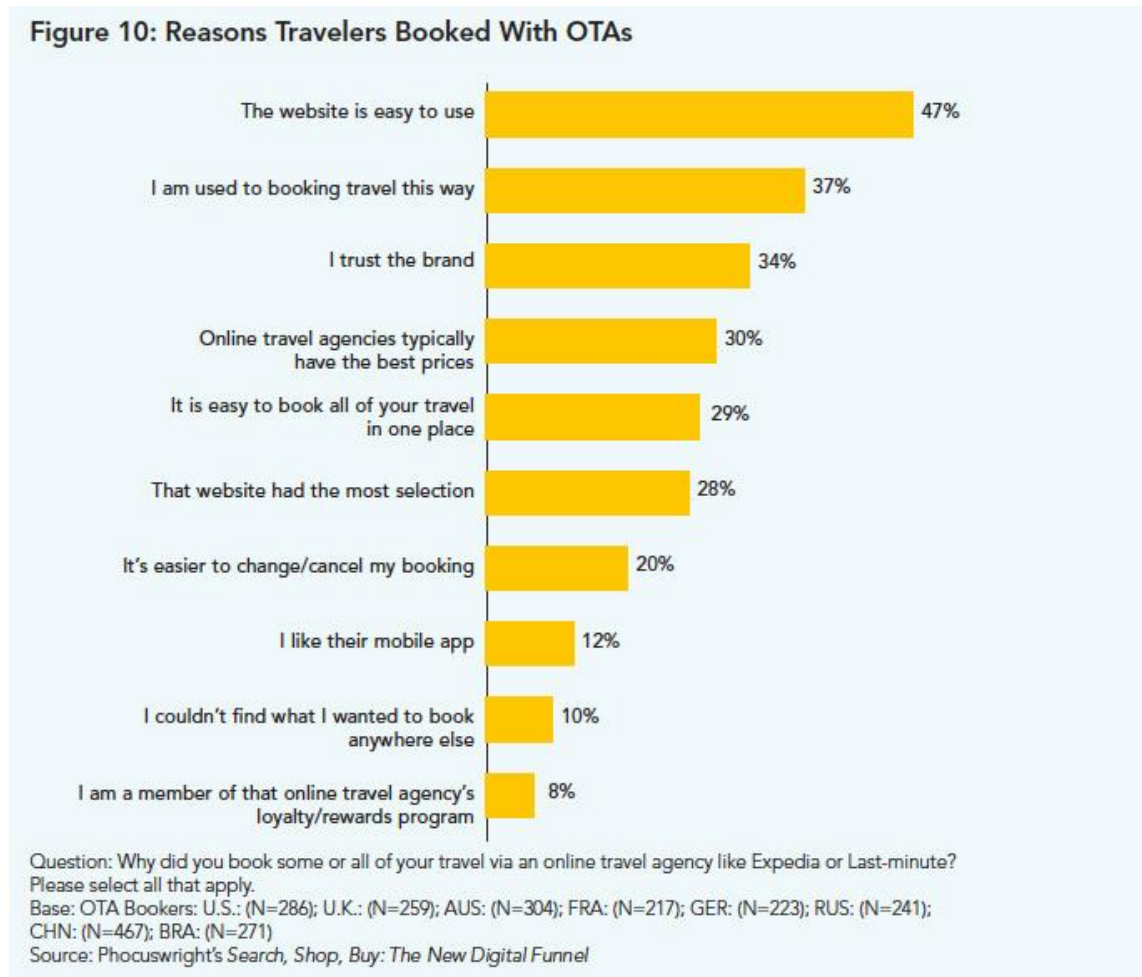


Figure 1: Reasons Travelers Booked With OTAs (Phocuswright 2016)

OTAs provide the consumer a wide selection of travel products, but the numerous options are not always convincing the travelers that are loyal to a certain brand. In those cases, the consumers often prefer browsing and booking directly through the supplier's website and/or mobile applications. This also applies to travelers that have more narrowed parameters concerning the travel they are looking for. (Phocuswright, 2016.)

### 3.2 Special interest tourism and its different forms

Special interest tourism (SIT) is part of leisure tourism where special interests are the reason and motivations behind the traveling. The special interests can be of various aspects like adventure, nature, culture and heritage or events. SIT has also been defined as a contrary to

mass tourism as it usually includes more specific interests and needs. SIT tourists are mainly driven by the activities and interests, and thus select the destination in which they can pursue them. (Tourism Management 2006.)

Heritage tourism is an essential way of cultural tourism, and heritage sites are usually part of the destination's culture. Heritage tourists might be seeking for heritage places and events during their leisure holidays and they have been labelled by Stebbins (1996) as so-called serious cultural tourists. There are also "casual cultural tourists" that are mainly interested in different cultural sites like museums, and with hindsight. Religious tourists are mainly considered to represent casual heritage tourism, as they tend to join spiritual pilgrimage tours, events and visit holy sites. These experiences often have high importance for religious tourists since the locales and surroundings have sacred and weighty significance for the religion and its history. (Journal of Heritage Tourism 2013.) Heritage tourists have different motivations for their visits, and examples of these are learning, curiosity, spiritual growth, relaxation and spending time with their close-ones away from home. Some might go "discovering themselves" in a spiritual and/or a religious way. (Timothy & Nyaupane 2009, 7 - 8.)

Pilgrimage is also a form of cultural and heritage tourism as it often includes pilgrim routes along different religious sites. Pilgrimage's central aspect is getting closer to God, getting healed and/or receiving forgiveness for sins. Islam, Hinduism, Christianity and Buddhism are the main religions that encourage pilgrimage and Middle East, South-Asia and Southeast Asia are the main destinations for this form of travel. Most of the sacred localities are situated in these areas. Diaspora is another common form of heritage tourism and it stands for traveling to homelands and searching for one's roots, family and socio-cultural events. (Timothy & Nyaupane 2009, 8 - 9.)

The majority of cultural, heritage and religious tourists are looking for authentic experiences that have not been altered for touristic purposes. Authenticity is therefore a central aspect of these tourists' motivations and behaviour as they are interested in seeing real cultural heritages instead of staged experiences and places. Heritages are usually also defined authentic by certain criteria of different heritage or local associations, like for example The Council for Conservation of Heritage Sites in Israel. (Pearce 2005, 140 - 143.) The seek for authenticity is not as common for other post-tourists that might not care about the authenticity of experiences (Timothy & Nyaupane 2009, 9).

### 3.3 Israel as a tourism destination

A central reason for the loss of tourism in Israel is naturally the unstable geopolitical situation of the country. However, the Israeli Tourism Minister Dr. Uzi Landau said in 2015 that despite

Operation Protective Edge in 2014, the country succeeded in maintaining the same number of tourists and hotel overnights, mainly because of the Israeli response to the “Vacation in Israel Now” campaign, which was arranged during the operation. The cost of vacationing was brought down by increasing supply and encouraging the construction of camping and budget accommodation possibilities, among other things. Altogether, there were 3,3 million visitors in 2014 and 3 percent of them were from Nordic Countries. (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2015.)

The wave of terror in Israel between 2015 and 2017 has affected the incoming tourism to Israel on its own way. Despite the decrease of tourism in 2015, 2016 had a turning point for tourism in Israel. During September-December, the country got an all-time record in incoming tourism, which was according to the Tourism Minister Yariv Levin, a result of strategical plans and investments in different marketing campaigns and development of sub-brands for various target markets, that attracted the targeted segments. Attracting campaigns for the Netherlands, Scandinavia and Spain were also ran after many years of break. This lead to altogether 2,9 million incoming tourists in 2016, which was a 3,6 percent increase to the previous year. China, Croatia, Belarus, Latvia, Malaysia and Philippines represented the countries with the biggest increase in tourist entries to Israel in 2016, as the USA and Russia continued to be the majoring countries with the biggest number of incoming tourists to Israel. The following countries with the most entries to the country were France, UK, Germany and Ukraine. (Ministry of Tourism 2017.)

Israel attracts Christian tourists as they get to see the biblical landscapes and walk where Jesus was born, lived and died, and thus get to feel closer to Jesus (Timothy & Nyaupane 2009, 9). These specific authentic experiences are possible to face only in Israel, as it is the “Holy land” for Christians as well as it is for Jews and Muslims. Christian Tourism also stands for one of the main types of tourism in Israel. In 2014, 56 percent of all the incoming tourists were of Christian tourism. According to the Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 21 percent of all incoming tourists in 2014 defined their journey as pilgrimage, 26 percent as tour and travel and 23 percent as family visit. The leisure and business tourists represented both 11 percent of all incoming tourists. 27 percent of the tourists came to the country as part of an organized tour, 10 percent on a package deal, and 63 percent came as frequent individual tourists. (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2015.)

In addition, the religious sites stand for the most visited places and areas in Israel. Jerusalem with its different religious sites is clearly the most popular place to visit among the tourists, with 82 percent of all tourists in 2014. The Mediterranean metropolis, Tel Aviv, follows with

67 percent of visitors and the Dead Sea area as a third most common destination with 54 percent. Tiberias and the Sea of Galilee and the Galilee area were the third and fourth most visited places in Israel in 2014. (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2015.)

### 3.4 Finnish income tourism to Israel

According to Statistics Finland, 3 519 trips from Finland to Israel were made during the year 2015. The number of trips to Israel had decreased by 57,2 percent in comparison to the previous year. (Statistics Finland 2016.) The reason for this could be the popularity of the other travel destinations and economic reasons, as the New Israeli Shekel (NIS) is now stronger than ever. According to The Bank of Israel the currency rate of NIS was 3,8874 per one euro on March 16th, 2017 (Bank of Israel 2017). Interestingly, in 2010 there were approximately 27 000 leisure trips from Finland to Israel, of whom 12 000 had reported to be overnight stays in the destination (Statistics Finland 2011). It is relatively easy for Finnish people to travel to Israel, since there are no visa requirements for short trips and the traveler can get a 3-month traveler's visa from the Embassy of Israel located in Helsinki, Finland. Israel has agreed on visa freedom with several countries, including Estonia. (Embassy of Israel 2017.)

Journalist Partanen has written in the *Seurakuntalainen* magazine (2015), that leisure trips among the Finnish Christian communities have increased lately. The Holy land (Israel), Rome and Santiago de Compostela have all interested the travelers. As other tourism is increasing, so is the religious tourism in the Finnish community. Low budget airlines and the availability of the services and tours and the affluence of people have all affected the increasing tourism industry. According to tourism geography professor Jarkko Saarinen, the selection of different religious tours and destinations has increased because there are monastery tours, pilgrimage, courses, seminars and tours offered in the Holy land. (Partanen 2012 *Seurakuntalainen*.)

The first Finnish group journey to Israel was made in 1954 which quickly lead to increasing tourism. This was also seen by the establishment of the Finland-Israel association (*Suomi-Israel Yhdistysten Liitto ry*) during the same year. In the 1960's the Finnish outbound tourism to Israel increased even more and in the 1970's approximately 15 000 Finnish people travelled to Israel. This was an internationally significant amount in relation to the population. Young Finns were among the first foreigners that traveled to Israel for kibbutz voluntary work, and the first journeys were arranged by the Christian Karmel association in 1962. There were up to 25 000 Finns traveling to Israel a year, but the Second Intifada lead to a collapse in the number of visitors in the early 2000's. Since then, the tourists have increased and Finnair has operated direct flights to Tel Aviv already for several years. (Embassy of Finland 2016.)

#### 4 Marketing in the tourism industry

Consumers' high demand and awareness for price and quality, different international changes and trends are all affecting also the domestic market in Finland. The invisible and process-based features of a tourism product only make it harder for a company to market it. To find out the right marketing solutions, the company needs to identify the environmental factors that affect the business in one way or another. Many companies in the tourism industry find researching the market and creating a marketing plan useless and time-consuming. They might think that the business idea and action plan are already defining for who, what and how is the business operating. Despite these common assumptions, it is good to have a clearly thought-of marketing plan that has considered the different environmental aspects. (Puustinen & Rouhiainen 2007, 26 - 27.)

A marketing plan must be adjusted to the marketplace and customer needs. The customer could be looking for certain social needs such as affection, belonging and relaxation. Other needs are for example recognition and fame, that enhance the person's esteem. Both, social and esteem needs, are built in the human nature. Other principal factors are wants and demands. The customer wants can vary a lot among different situations and people despite having the same need as a customer might be in need of relaxation but wants to go to a different destination than the last relaxing one. It is important for companies to recognize the underlying needs behind the surface of the wants, to meet the need as a whole. Resources are affecting the customer demands, which is usually equivalence for their money. Finding out the needs, wants and demands of the customers enables the company to create a productive marketing strategy. (Kotler, Bowen, Makens et al. 2017, 30 - 32.)

As the tourism products are mainly experiences, the companies must take the experience economy in consideration and adjust the design of the products to match the customer preferences. According to King (2002) it is important to focus on developing a strong brand image, engage directly with the customer and establish two-way consumer communication channels. In addition, it is good to link the promotion to the brand values and assets and to the key needs of the customers. (Scott, Laws & Boksberger 2010, 7 - 9.) The key for tourism marketing is to find out what are the experiences that individuals are looking for and to create categorized offerings of these experiences. As most of the offerings are partly staged experiences and partly unstaged, it is becoming more and more important to transform the experiences into more personalized ones. This is the main challenge when marketing a destination. (Scott, Laws & Boksberger 2010, 23.) When choosing a certain marketing strategy, the company must adjust it to fit the business idea, resources, knowledge and skills of the people. It should be also adjusted to the external market and competition and it should be a constantly developing process. (Puustinen & Rouhiainen 2007, 56.)



Tourism companies are usually initiating the marketing process by analyzing the starting point (customers, company, environment, market studies etc.), and by the findings that arose in this step they are choosing certain marketing strategies according to trust and connections, sales and profitability, image and utilisation rate. After this, the company creates a plan that includes competitive techniques for the products and segments of the company and puts the plan in action. The last but not least stage of the typical marketing process is the follow-up and evaluation by analyzing for example the received customer reviews, meters, goals and service strategies. (Puustinen & Rouhiainen 2007, 57.)

#### 4.1 Marketing communications

Although this study does not focus on marketing communications, it is necessary to briefly explain how it is strongly related to online marketing. When it comes to marketing, especially in the service industry, understanding the company's customers is vital. Services are relationship-focused and therefore the company needs to market and manage the customer relationships. (Grönroos 2015, 272.) The success of a company is highly dependent on its interaction quality when communicating with its environment (Rope & Vahvaselkä 2000, 251).

One of the core features of good marketing communications is being able to stand out from the other similar brands. This can be affected by using diverse types of promotion allocations and instead of sticking into the same type year after year. Measuring these promotion and brand-building strategies and investing in the most effective ones is also of high importance. (Kotler 2004, 92 - 93.) Measuring the effectiveness can be done by using different analytics programs and sites, which are needed in the planning stage of marketing. They help the company in recognizing its current position in the market, by measuring for example the number and demographics of website visitors, source from where they came to the site, conversion rates and other important aspects. Thus, web analytics help in figuring what areas of marketing are in need of improvement (more about web analytics in chapter 6). (Suomen Digimarkkinointi 2017.)

Tourism marketing consist of both, commercial and non-commercial marketing communications, as part of the marketing communications is mainly informative rather than a way of direct selling. Brochures and articles on travel magazines are good examples of this type of tourism marketing communications. News concerning the traveller's destination can also be considered as part of non-commercial communications when it does not affect the buying decisions of the customers. The communication can also be divided to planned and unplanned communication, whereas planned stands for direct responses, websites etc. and unplanned for word of mouth and references. (Grönroos 2015, 312 - 314.)

The impact of tourism marketing communications on consumer behaviour can vary a lot. Both, commercial and non-commercial marketing communications have the same objectives, to provide information about the services and destinations and thus to create images of them. Other goals are for example influencing on the consumer behaviour, obtaining interest and positive thoughts, increasing sales and creating, developing and obtaining customer relationships, among others. The size and business idea of the company, the society's culture, themes and previous communication strategies are all affecting the marketing communications' decision, as is the competitors' marketing communications and the stage of services' and products' life cycle on the market. In turn, the types of marketing communications can be divided into advertising, sales promotion (SP), public relations (PR), direct and digital marketing and personalized sales, as seen in figure 2.

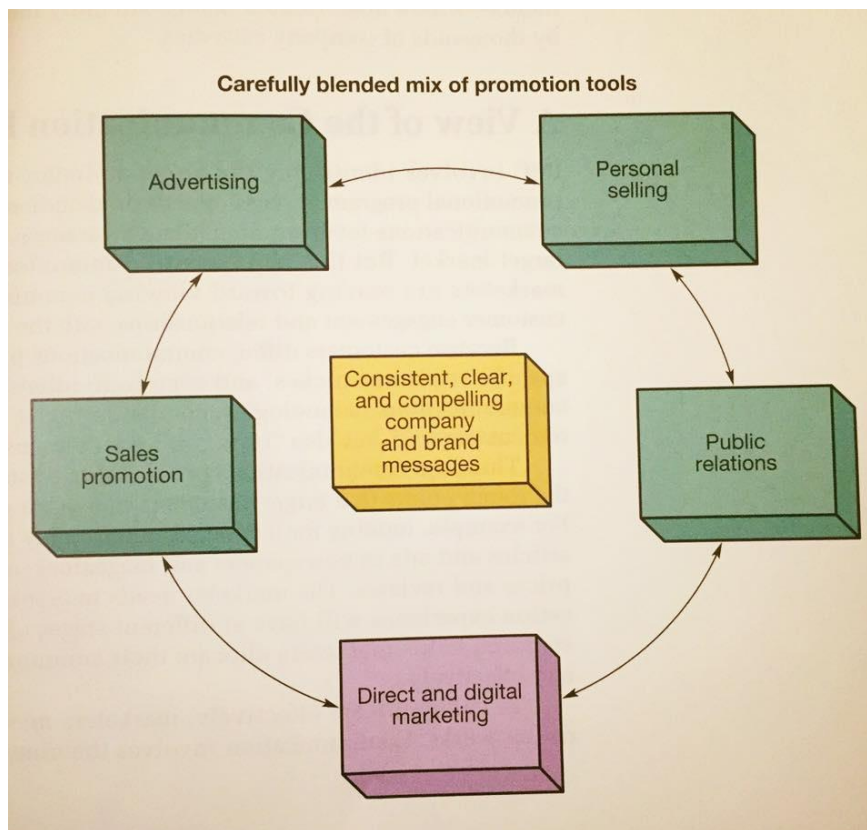


Figure 2: Integrated marketing communications (Kotler, Bowen, Makens et al. 2017, 377)

Naturally, the company does also so-called unplanned communicating as situations are constantly living and changing in unexpected ways. (Grönroos 2015, 310 - 314.) Nowadays the consumers are creating their own marketing messages by exchanging information online, using their smartphones and tablets. This new era of marketing communications is engaging the

customers much more than the once very popular mass marketing. (Kotler, Bowen, Makens & Baloglu 2017, 376.)

#### 4.2 Online marketing

The Internet has certainly changed the marketplace for many industries and equalized the size differences of companies. Internet is constantly changing the marketing environment for a more profitable direction, and enables local companies to compete with bigger international companies. The smaller companies can now create as impressive customer experiences as the bigger ones, hence the number of marketing tools with low cost level and thus are available for any company. The Internet is also enabling services for smaller segments' needs in an economically remunerative way, and specializing on a smaller niche-market can open valuable business possibilities as the buyers can be easily reached without the expensive intermediaries and geographical barriers. This way smaller communities can get their voices heard and reach the target audience. (Juslén 2009, 33 - 34.)

All the progressive marketing companies are now proceeding social media, user-generated content, web 2.0, web 3.0 or/and mobile marketing. Web 2.0 stands for sites that include similar mental and emotional involvement with their customers. The sites are mostly providing information and do not contain a lot of corporate tone in them, as the pages include many layers of detail. There are new programming techniques like Ajax (set of online development techniques that enable using a combination of HTML and CSS servers). The customers can quickly conclude whether they are interested in finding out more, based on the looks of the website. As Godfrey Parkin mentions in his book named Digital Marketing (2009), "a site built 3 years ago looks like it is 10 years out of date, and the immediate presumption is that its content is not current or the company behind it is out of touch." It is typical that web 2.0 sites are more customer-oriented in their navigation and use categories like "pay/live/see" instead of the old-fashioned ones such as "about/offers/services". Usually the used icons and logos are also younger-looking in contrary to the older, duller corporate designs. Navigation has become more multiform and there is no need to go through multiple intermediate pages. (Parkin 2009, 113 - 114.)

Online marketing and web 2.0 are ways of marketing to the new consumers, who now have the power to find out anything they are looking for about the companies, products and services, and can easily share the information on the web with their close-ones (Parkin 2009, 112). Web 2.0's key elements are the increasing power of buyers towards the companies' brand image and reputation, the importance of search engine optimization and content management, media's fragmentation, networking, multichannel marketing and investing in online marketing by being creative and imaginative. Web 3.0 represents the new digital age of the

internet. Marketers are nowadays investing in engaging the customers to participate more for example by adding photos and comments on the companies' platforms. The users are involved in the advertising and creation of the company products, and are usually commonly cheered on to do so by giving them some sort of reward like a possibility to win in a competition. (Strauss & Frost 2009, 13 - 15.)

The world has got smaller and thanks to the Internet, anyone can open a discussion about any topic, and get awareness by hundreds of millions of people. Different online communities, chat forums, blogs, wikis' social media platforms are increasing their contents rapidly. These platforms are enabling the audience to get and share information and thus influence on different issues and phenomena. People are no longer using physical phone catalogs, that have been outdated by the different search engines on the Internet. (Juslén 2009, 34 - 35.) According to the Statistics Portal, almost 3,5 billion were using the internet in 2016, whereas in 2015 that number of users was around 3,2 billion and in 2014 under 3 billion (Statista, 2017). This shows there are more and more people and countries becoming Internet-mature in a very high speed.

#### 4.3 Different ways of online advertising

Advertising is a way to raise directly and indirectly the sales of services of a tourism company by influencing on things that affect the demand. The effects could be divided into six steps that are ignorance, awareness, knowledge, liking, conviction and buying. The effects follow one another and end as the customer makes a buying decision. The final strategic decisions are those that define the goals and aims for advertising. (Albanese & Boedeker 2002, 190 - 192.) The key in online advertising is using the web in a way that works for the benefit of the company's vision while keeping the style more customer-centric and even letting the customers create their own content, as it has become a phenomenon in recent years (Parkin 2009, 172).

When designing online advertising strategies, the company must think about its segments and what kind of platform and style would suit them the best. Banner advertisements on mass sites are considered as an excellent choice for companies who are looking for a mass audience. However, these types of banner ads have been found to be quite ineffective compared to the costs of each impression and have not necessarily helped in raising the end customer amounts. In contrary, banners that are more interactive with the consumers are considered more effective when it comes to return on investment. (Parkin 2009, 178 - 179.) Google's AdWords is a good example of banner advertising and it consists of a Search, Partner and Display networks. The Search network is the most often used part of Google AdWords, and it stands for the ads that appear on the search result pages of Google. The Google Display Network

“GDN” consists of all the websites that have made an agreement with Google. These websites enable showing other marketers’ advertises on their own webpages for a certain commission price. (Suojanen 2017.) Google Partners is a company network of online professionals, agencies and marketers that have received a Google certification (Google 2017).

Email marketing is another way to advertise and it is usually seen as a type of direct marketing. Organizations often request a website visitor’s contact details, which is a way to get demographic information and contact addresses of the potential customer. These contact information, so called leads, are used for direct marketing and promotion purposes. (McCabe 2009, 265.) Email marketing has been said to bring one out of five visitors by clicking the email advertisement and thus stands for a significant marketing tool. However, the marketer needs to be careful with the information that is being sent as many of the receivers might take it as spam. Therefore, the information and headlines should not be misleading but provide truthful message headers, simple and clear unsubscribe process, provide an address of the sending company and accessible privacy policy, among others. These regulations, together with EU legislations and data protection initiatives, are important also to be within the law of any country and to gain the target customers’ credibility. (Parkin 2009, 182 - 185.)

## 5 Online marketing methods

Despite the Internet’s rising impact, many companies are still not taking in consideration the importance of managing and developing web presence. It can come from fear of computers too. First, the company managers should be aware of the significance of online marketing, and then create a strategy for it. (Charlesworth 2009, 36.) This chapter will concentrate on the key online marketing methods.

### 5.1 Website marketing

Creating a website starts with the creation of the right domain name. Often, the domain name is the same as the company’s name or could be a cut version of it. In this point, less is more and the name should be easy to recall and communicate forward. When a company has its own domain, it can also be used as an email address, which provides credibility from a customer’s point of view. A company must also register the domain name and remember to renew it, as the registration is only for a certain period. Companies commonly rent web space from other organizations, called Internet service providers (ISPs) that enable the access and usage of the Internet. Hosting ISPs provide different services like e-mail and online storage services and should be chosen according to their speed, downloading time, security and integrity. (Charlesworth 2009, 38 - 46.)

It would be ideal for a company to combine both IT and marketing professionals to develop its web presence. Very often, especially in small businesses, the amateurs are mostly in charge of the web presence. This problem started from the beginning of the commercial web, when businesses gave the responsibility to the "computer people" and the marketers were either afraid of computers or not in a position to take part of the ownership of web presence. Amateurs who were for example IT students and acquaintances of the managers were cheap to hire and did most of the web design tasks. Amateurs can sometimes provide very effective websites but the productive way for website development would be to include programmers, graphic designers, usability experts, content writers, copywriters, marketers and search engine optimization specialists. In bigger companies this is usually done and the companies' online and offline staff are consulted in the process since they have a profound impact on the potential customers. (Charlesworth 2009, 48 - 50.)

Rich Page speaks of website development as optimization in his book "Website Optimization" (2009) and underlines the importance of engaging the customers to the company's main goals and returning to the pages. Instead of just using one analytics tool, website optimization requires investing in many different strategies. It is important to focus on web analytics, website testing, online marketing and website usability that are all shaping the optimization of the website and improving the conversion rates, among others. (Page 2009, 2 - 3.) Parkin (2009) remarks that web design is another important part when developing a company's website. However, web design is not only about the coding or visual appearance of the site.

The website should be designed according to the needs, problems and expectations of the visitors, and include a clearly communicated vision of where the company wants to be, how it differs from its competitors and why the customers would want to use it. (Parkin 2009, 128 - 130.) The site should be easy to use, and preferably have a simpler structure that increases its usability. Therefore, it is important to use clear, understandable text, ensure that the site is possible to function from by keyboard, help the user to find out information and to have enough time to read it and use the site, ensure the site is operating logically and that it can fit the current and upcoming technologies. (Juslén 2009, 161 - 163.) Most importantly, one should not treat a website as a one-time investment and must constantly invest in developing it, especially if there are frequent changes in the inventory or pricing (Parkin 2009, 90).

## 5.2 SEO & keywords

SEO stands for search engine optimization, which consists of strategies, tactics and techniques used to increase the visitor amount of a website. It is a process where high-ranking placements are obtained in the search results page of the search engine. Google, Yahoo and Bing are good examples of major search engines. (Page 2012, 7 - 8.) However, according to

Parkin (2009) Google is the most popular search engine by getting over 91 per cent of the search queries (Parkin 2009, 150). The different SEO strategies could be divided into four categories; natural search engine optimization, contextual advertising, paid inclusion and conversion enhancement. Natural search engine optimization affects the rankings in search listings while contextual advertising can include "pay-per-click" features and enables the pages to appear on the search results of advertising or sponsored listings. Paid inclusion is responsible for the site's search engine index and conversion enhancement strategies ensure the visitors to make the wanted actions on the site. (Parkin 2009, 147.)

For a company website to get on the SERP (search engine result pages) the website needs to use certain keywords classifying the content of its pages. This way the search engines can also provide the searcher with the content he/she is looking for. The search engines identify the keywords for example from the context of the web page, the text of inbound links to that site, the title, description, keyword meta-tags in the page code and from the page's definition in web directories. (Charlesworth 2009, 186 - 187.) Meta-tag is a list of words attached to the code of the web page, describing the content of the page (Parkin 2009, 149 - 155). Despite the differences between paid advertising and SEO, they both are linked to keywords. As Charlesworth (2009) mentions "keywords are the core of all search engine marketing". (Charlesworth 2009, 187.) The results of SEO are usually seen in the natural listings, on the left side of the search engine and sponsored and paid ads can be seen on the right side. (Charlesworth 2009, 181 - 183.) This way, also the marketers profit from the ads that lead the searcher to their website (Parkin 2009, 149).

Websites' rankings can be improved in several ways. First, it is important to examine keywords by searching and analyzing the pages that were resulted in the search. Looking at the keyword themes, tags and quality of the sites is providing competitive intelligence. Second, the website's title, description tags and URLs should be polished up to represent the core of the page and reason to visit it. The most important part in this, is to highlight the keywords and solutions for the searcher, and not leading the title with the brand. One should not forget to put attribute tags to describe the main images of the website, especially for pages with more graphical and less textual content. Descriptions should be added to all the existing files on the page, as the search engines might not be able to read all the file types. Keywords can be added to website links, and the actual describing word like "tour packages" should include the link instead of the words "click here". In addition, JavaScript and videos can be defined with text to ensure more optimization as the web crawlers (robots) that search for text cannot open or click the buttons of the web pages. Another way to help the web crawlers to find and optimize your content is adjusting a site map that enables them to navigate on the web-

site. Search engines can figure out the content of pages more easily if less keywords are adjusted per each page. One keyword is enough for one web page, and the keyword can be repeated a few times to enhance the optimization. (Parkin 2009, 155 - 158.)

### 5.3 Content marketing

Customer loyalty can only be earned by providing honest, useful and complete information, that is valuable to the customer (Parkin 2009, 112). Thus, a company must constantly develop the content of its website. Depending on the company's objectives the definition of appropriate content varies. However, there are a few things every company must include to gain credibility to the customer. These are for example clear contact details, details about the staff, a "Questions and Answers" (Q&A) section that includes potential customer questions and answers to them, as well as an explanation of the company's email and data protection policies. In the case of a tourism company or travel agency, it is important to include clear travel conditions and laws. (Charlesworth 2009, 91.)

Even though the design and outlook of the website is important, it cannot overcome poor content. The visitor is the one deciding whether the content is good or not, and thus the content must be considered from a consumer's point of view. (Charlesworth 2009, 93.) It is highly important to optimize the navigation menus on the website, and let the customer get easily a clue about the content of the available subcategories. The current page of the visitor should be highlighted to increase clarification. The content must be easy to read and understand which requires using understandable language without too jargon or crusty word selections and font size of preferably at least size 14. (Page 2012, 146.) In addition, it is better to address the text to the customer and to use language that is typical for public relations. This means adding more appealing text as for example: "we will answer your call within four rings". The tone of language must also be considered according to the target customers. (Charlesworth 2009, 94 - 95.)

The textual content of the website is also a way of presenting the company character and personality. The content developers should always think of the user and his/her needs. The text must be designed according to the stage of the consumer and whether he/she is in "information search" step or closer to "purchase decision", and the website should rather try to meet the demand of both groups. In contrary to the common way that companies produce the textual content of their webpages, the person that is responsible for copywriting should be an experienced and preferably educated writer that knows to write properly and have an assistant to check the spelling and grammar. Most importantly, the copywriter should be enthusiastic about what he/she is writing about and be familiar with the company image. (Charles-



worth 2009, 96 - 99.) It is important to keep each web page's text short enough, as the credibility can decrease due to too long text. Another clever way to keep the visitor interested is bolding or italicize the main words that help the reader in finding out the information he/she is looking for. It is good to place the highlighted words in the beginning of the chapters, and to divide the text to chapters of a few sentences. (Juslén 2009, 188.)

#### 5.4 Social media marketing

Charlesworth describes social media marketing (SMM) as “a platform where the marketer engages in discourse with members of the general public in virtual communities or submits elements of consumer generated media”, and emphasizes its dynamism and variability (Charlesworth 2009, 287). Companies working in the field of tourism are affected by the information that the consumers are creating online. Social media are user-centered channels where consumers share their thoughts and opinions and thus have a high impact on a company or destination image. They are conversational communities where anyone can share different digital content like comments, videos photos and other posts. The shared information, for example subjective experiences, have a strong influence on the consumer decisions as they first seek for recommendations concerning destination, accommodation, activities and others. The personal recommendations play an extremely vital role in the tourism industry, where the products are mainly intangible and hard to assess beforehand. (Hays, Page & Buhalis 2012, 212.)

Facebook is one of the core social media marketing channels, as over 3 million people in Finland have a Facebook account. Most of the companies have their own Facebook pages on which they post about their services and/or products. (Suomen Digimarkkinointi Oy 2017.) In addition to company pages, Facebook has an advertising tool, Facebook Ads, on which the companies can design their own adverts to be seen on their target audience's Facebook. (Facebook 2017.)

Instagram is another common channel used for marketing purposes. Globally, over 300 million companies and individuals use it for visual storytelling. Instagram does not have any guiding algorithms yet, so the newest photos posted appear first. Thus, companies need to build their brand and Instagram design to stand out. Companies target their potential customers by uploading posts, co-working with celebrities (that advertise the brand on their own Instagram accounts) and promote the account on their Facebook pages. (Lahtinen 2017.)

## 6 Creating an online marketing plan

When creating an online marketing plan, it is essential to carry out an analysis of the current situation of the company, its marketplace and competitors. Analyzing these areas means finding out and defining the rules, threats and opportunities of digitalization. A general marketing strategy stands for the business strategies, purposes and main goals of the company and it usually defines the customer segments, customer needs, products and services as well as the latest trends and main competitors in the industry. All these combined with content and platform strategies enable the creation of a marketing plan. The marketing plan itself determines the detailed tactic sales and marketing plans, operations, channels and methods. Thus, a marketing plan is the practical tool for implementing the company's marketing strategies by ways of increasing the marketing and sales. Small businesses tend to seal the marketing strategy and plan, as it can be more reasonable to their smaller resources. (Pyyhtiä, Roponen, Seppä et al. 2013, 30.)

The actual online marketing strategy usually consists of different tactics like designing of the offers, values, distribution, communication and relationship management. The company is thus editing its objectives as warranted and with it creating an implementation plan that designs the actual tactics. The online marketing strategies and actions can be divided into categories like online advertising, database marketing, direct e-mail, online sales and viral marketing and thus compared to the online goals of the company. (Strauss & Frost 2009, 49 - 55.)

Most importantly, the company must take in consideration the rapid changes in the digital channels, devices and consumer behavior and adjust the planning of its online marketing correspondingly. Hence, they key is reacting quickly to changes rather than slavishly sticking to previous online marketing plans. The planning stages that are seen in figure 3 are opened in the following chapters.



Figure 3: Planning Stages of Online Marketing (Michal Melamed 2017)

## 6.1 Situation analysis

The first step when creating an online marketing plan is analyzing the current situation of the company in the market. This requires an understanding of the market place, target customers and their needs, competitors and partners. It is important to do research about the latest phenomena and trends that are affecting the market. (Gips 2017. Personal communication.)

Benchmarking, analyzing and comparing the current marketing to others in the same industry as researching the competitors and how they are operating in the market. This is of high importance as the rivals usually share the same target segments and might create ideas for development. Benchmarking does not mean copying the rivals' actions but reflecting different marketing strategies. It is a way to measure the quality of the company's own actions in comparison to other, possibly more ideal way of marketing. (Gips 2017. Personal communication.)

SWOT analysis is a common way to analyze the current situation of the company by looking and underlining the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats that the company is facing. The SWOT analysis is highly connected to the competitor analysis as the competitors often threaten the company. This helps in figuring what are the aspects that could influence, improve or possibly threaten the business in the future. The SWOT-analysis is in a way gathering all the information about the current situation and future insights together as seen in figure 4. (Gips 2017. Personal communication.)

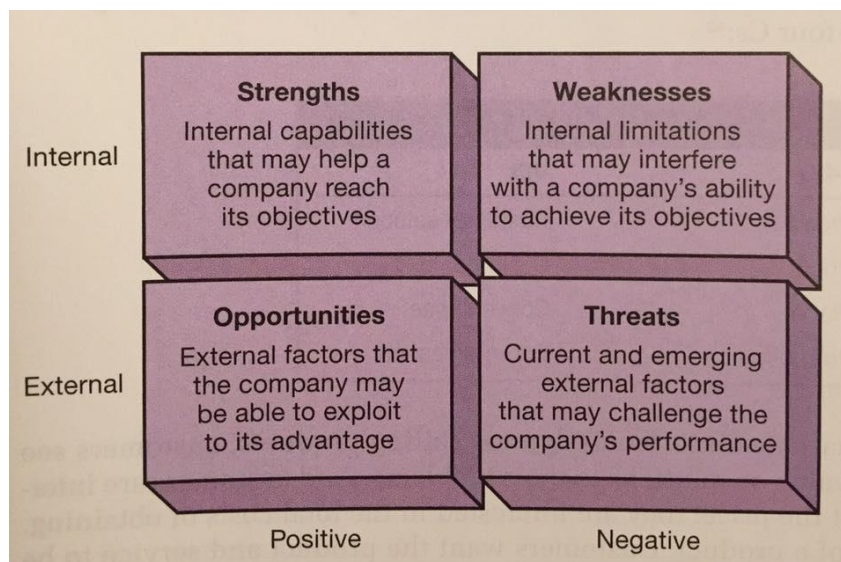


Figure 4: SWOT-analysis (Kotler, Bowen, Makens et al. 2017, 94)

To evaluate the business' website, one can use different online measurement sites and tools such as webrankpage.com. This is a way to get an analysis concerning the website's page

structure, linking, SEO, social visibility and other central aspects. (InkWired 2017.) Web analytics is strongly linked with website optimization, as it helps discovering and monitoring the key success metrics or in other words: e-metrics. Analytics tools can also help in prioritizing the aspects that are most in need of optimizing and provide innovative ideas for testing the website. (Page 2012, 10 - 11.) Web analytics collect different e-metrics that can be divided into different categories such as brand development, provision of after sales, lead generation, online sales and maximizing visitor numbers (Charlesworth 2009, 54 - 55).

Nevertheless, it is very important to research the consumer and online behavior of the target customers and to understand how they can be reached out. Therefore, a company must gain knowledge about the media activity of the target customers. This means, knowing on which platforms (like social media or radio) they are actively using. (Gips 2017. Personal communication.)

## 6.2 Objectives, strategy and actions

Before starting with the actual marketing strategies and action plans, the marketer must set the business objectives by thinking about the corporate business goals. Marketing objectives can vary from sales and turnover to market position, loyalty, image and awareness. The objectives define what is to be achieved by the online marketing plan and are usually strategic goals. (McCabe 2009, 182.)

The objectives' purpose is to guide the online marketing by directing it to the wanted outcome. The objectives should be specific enough and always linked to the customers' values and orientations. In the case of online marketing, objectives could define for example the wanted number of likes on Facebook and the daily, weekly or monthly number of visitors on the company website. In addition, when talking about business objectives, raising the number of customers' contacts and leads for sales are good examples of objectives. (Gips 2017. Personal communication.) Effective objectives have been defined as SMART-objectives, being specific, measurable, actionable, relevant and time-related. SMART is used when evaluating the objectives' suitability. (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick 2016, 203.)

Once the objectives have been set, it is time to come up with a strategy. Strategy stands for the ways of achieving the objectives. To raise the amount of sales, the company should focus on increasing the awareness among the potential customers. Unlike well-known brands, like Coca Cola, travel agency X is not known for many people and therefore must gain the awareness and interest of its target customers. This means, the company needs a plan to raise its online visibility and awareness among the target customers. (Gips 2017. Personal communication.)

Actions on the other hand, are the concrete marketing activities, changes and creations that are done to meet the objectives. These can include for example conducting viral campaigns, newsletters, co-working with partners (Sponsorship) etc. (Shifrut 2017. Personal communication.)

### 6.3 Control and follow-up

After proceeding a campaign or some other marketing action it is important to evaluate the results. Control stands for monitoring and measuring the success of the marketing strategies and actions. The achievement can be evaluated by looking at the stated objectives for return on investment, growth of sales or increase of awareness levels. (McCabe 2009, 197.)

Web analytics tools collect information about a website and send this information to the service provider's server where it can then be analyzed by using different tools (Juslén 2009, 360). The information is gained by the visitors' digital footprint that shows for example their activity on the website. This is a great way to find out what has happened and why, which helps companies to predict and plan their future online marketing more efficiently. Web analytics help in measuring the impact of advertising, and whether it has or has not affected on the consumers' buying behavior and hence is important part of the control and follow-up of online marketing. (Charlesworth 2009, 51.)

There are many different analytics tools, some of them free and some are budget tools. Google Analytics is seen as the most popular free analytics tool, and it is very easy to use. It offers information about the website visitor numbers, duration and type of visits such as returning and new visits, among others. (Page 2012, 12.) The analytics tools can also provide information about the page the visitor visited right before arriving to the website. In addition, analytics tools can help with selecting the right keywords by giving tips about the current advertising and optimization efforts effectiveness. It is also possible for a person to take the e-metrics analyzing to the next level by seeing the visitors' actions in real time, but this requires a lot of follow-up and time from the company and should thus be found to be beneficial enough before putting the resources into it. (Charlesworth 2009, 56.)

## 7 Online marketing plan for company X

The online marketing plan for company X was proceeded by the steps opened in chapter 6, meaning first the current situation of the company was analyzed, after which objectives were set. After this, objectives were set together with a strategy and followed by action suggestions for both, online marketing and measuring the marketing results.

The current situation of company X in the market was analyzed by measuring its website, Facebook page and other online marketing channels by using analytics tools, like WebrankPage and SimilarWeb. The measuring concerned the website's visitors' number, type and bounce rate, just to mention a few. The company had also proceeded a questionnaire about its marketing to the customers that attended the tours in spring 2017. The results of the questionnaire were reflected to understand the efficiency and lacks of the current online marketing. Based on these, a SWOT-analysis was done to describe the online marketing and the overall situation of the travel company in brief.

In addition, two specialists' interviews were conducted to understand what is important and needed to be done while creating an online marketing plan, and how could the case company improve its online marketing. The interviewed persons were Max Gips, digital marketing and advertising specialist, and Tzafirir Shifrut, a tourism-marketing specialist. Both interviews were implemented as a specialist's theme interview, meaning an open discussion with only a few main topics. Theme interview is often used as a qualitative research method that includes themes from theoretical framework of the studied area. The themes are usually edited to answer the questions and interests of the researcher, and the answers are analyzed by identifying and forming the key issues. (Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 2015, 205.) However, the interviews in this study were more of an open discussion to learn more about the tourism and marketing fields. In addition, the interviews helped to understand the different work stages that need to be followed when creating an online marketing plan.

A competitors' analysis was done based on different analytics tools' results and on checking the competitors' activities on their online platforms, as well as Google's search results for tours in Israel. The analysis was set out as a table comparing the rivals' online presence and activities with company X's.

Objectives and a strategy were set after analyzing the current situation of the company. The objectives included raising the web presence and awareness of the case company, with a certain goal number of visitors on the website, among other online platforms.

The online marketing plan consisted of the previously mentioned, situation analysis, objectives, strategy and actions, which are all seen in the Table of Contents in figure 5. The actions were divided into eight categories; Website, Video Campaign, Facebook, Instagram, Email marketing, Google Analytics and Others. All parts included concrete online marketing suggestions for the company to follow, and a table that summed up the actions and frequency of proceeding each one.

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Figure 5 Table of Contents of the Online Marketing Plan (Michal Melamed 2017)

Some of the online platforms were already used by the company and some were chosen as new ways and platforms for online marketing. The platforms and actions were picked according to the company's target audience, objectives of the online marketing plan and future opportunities. The actions included for example a Facebook campaign, suggestions for improving the website's design and content, Facebook and Instagram posts and using Google Analytics as a control and follow-up tool.

## 8 Conclusions

This study has showed the importance of online marketing in the tourism industry, and how it offers opportunities even for smaller companies to build up their web presence and online visibility. There are unlimited options for developing the online marketing of a company, but most importantly, one must adjust the marketing to reach the target customers and to fit the company's resources.

The idea for this thesis was to create an online marketing plan for travel agency X, who had not had an official plan for its online marketing. The goal was to come up with a logical and limited online marketing plan that the company could start implementing and following up with. The company wanted ideas that would improve its online marketing results, and did not set any certain budget for it.

To come up with an efficient plan, the theoretical framework had to first be set. The framework consisted of key subjects concerning the tourism industry, consumer motives, online marketing, methods and creation of an online marketing plan. The information was collected mainly from literature and up-to-date online sources. In addition, two specialist interviews were made to deepen the understanding about online marketing plan and its creation stages and important matters related to it. The final plan was based on the key subjects.

It was important to choose online marketing methods that could be easily implemented and measured. The suggested online marketing actions were divided to the main channels; Website, Facebook, Instagram, Email and other ways of marketing and advertising. Most of the methods were cost-free and thus easier for the company to carry out. The thesis gives a good basis for the company's online marketing and helps in planning it again in the future.

My personal interests towards online marketing and tourism between Finland and Israel really helped in meeting the goals of this thesis, and so did the company's real need for the online marketing plan. The company gave all the needed information actively via phone calls, emails and a meeting, which all helped the process a lot. The thesis met its goals quite well, although the marketing plan did not include a budget or a strict schedule, which are left for the company to decide about. However, the company got good frames for executing systematic online marketing. The different channels were studied well and chosen based on the target customers and the market.

I came up with the subject for this thesis because I thought the company would benefit from it and planning the online marketing of a travel company had always intrigued me. The whole study taught me a lot about online marketing, its diversity and importance in a business.



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