



**Inbound Marketing Strategy:
Content Marketing and Blogging
Case: Cloud base mobile application**

Mircea Hotoleanu

Tino Parkkinen

Bachelor's thesis

February 2017

Business administration

Degree Program in International Business

Jyväskylän ammattikorkeakoulu

JAMK University of Applied Sciences

Author(s) Mircea Hotoleanu Tino Parkkinen	Type of publication : Bachelor's thesis	Date May 2017 Language of publication: English
	Number of pages: 33	Permission for web publication: x
Title of publication Inbound Marketing Strategy: Content Marketing and Blogging, Case: Cloud based mobile application		
Degree programme International Business		
Supervisor(s) Piotr Krawczyk		
Assigned by Piotr Krawczyk		
Abstract <p>The purpose of the research was to see if it is viable to use blogging and content marketing to boost the popularity of a company's product, in this particular case the product was a cloud based application. The tasks and objectives were to create a blog, implement it to the official website of the company and create relevant content aimed at the target market that the start-up company was focused on through the blog.</p> <p>The method used for this research is an action research. Pragmatism was assumed for the philosophical stance.</p> <p>The findings of the research were relatively small, but indicate a concrete and positive change, underlining that blogging can be used by companies to boost their product's awareness.</p> <p>In conclusion, the results were found to be positive and in line with previous hypotheses. The blog was found to create real impact in the product's awareness. However, the blog had to be a part of a larger digital marketing mechanism where social media was used as a content distribution platform.</p>		
Keywords/tags (subjectshttp://vesa.lib.helsinki.fi/) Inbound marketing, digital marketing, content marketing, blogging, digital marketing.		



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Miscellaneous

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1 Introduction

In today's world, marketing has reached new pinnacles. Traditional marketing has been left behind and the field is largely dominated by digital marketing and inbound marketing methodologies. The purpose of the research is to go into depth and discover if content marketing through blogging can affect the promotional status of a company, a product or both.

This research was conducted as an action research, where we as the authors implement the blog as a solution to a problem and monitor the final outcome. The main goal for this research is to use this blog as a mean to create relevant content for the company's digital marketing strategy and increase the awareness of the product.

This research is a part of a bigger effort on the company's marketing strategy. As such, another research is also being carried out by Ksenia Devyatkova as an alternate perspective to the company's digital marketing strategy. Thus, this research doesn't examine the aspects Ms. Devyatkova's research does. Some of the data presented in results section is shared between these two researches, which namely consists of the data for the traffic of the commercial website of the product.

The company in question is a start-up company with one product, the mobile cloud based application whose main purpose is to function as a data gathering tool for different organisations or individuals. The product is mainly aimed at businesses and as such, this research is done about the effects in a business-to-business (B2B) marketing environment.

1.1 Background

The main focus of this research is to examine if blogging can affect the awareness of a product. Also, the research will analyze how blogging could affect the company's potential of generating visits, creating new leads, and the nurturing of already existing leads of the company's official commercial website. The research's theoretical framework is focused on increasing the popularity of a cloud based application by using blogging as an inbound marketing tool. The company is already

operating on a steady basis, but a comprehensive digital marketing strategy was not created until last year in the autumn of 2016. The company leaned on a team of young students, interested in the challenge to help in the creation of the strategy and to research the effects of said strategy from different angles in order for the business to increase their website traffic as well as general product awareness which hopefully leads into generating new customers for the company.

In this paper, we will use the inbound marketing strategies established in relevant literature for blogging and in order to achieve the best outcome for the blog, and subsequently the best outcome for the company. Before this digital marketing project, the company was operating mainly through their website and an email marketing system facilitated by a cloud-based customer relationship management tool (CRM). The final goal of this research is to establish the blog as a strong channel for the company's digital marketing strategy. We also hope that our findings will become relevant and applicable to other fields and industries.

1.2 Motivation for the research

A lot of research has been done on how blogging can open new fronts in conjunction with a proper digital marketing strategy. Because of this quite well-researched topic, we decided to see if blogging is an applicable method as a marketing tool for a product and a company of this nature. Because of the broad functionality of the product it would prove difficult to tackle all its use-cases simultaneously from a marketing point of view, which is why it was decided that the focus for this research is on the business-to-business (B2B) market environment. The ultimate motivating factor for this research is to see if content marketing through blogging is a viable tool for the digital marketing strategy for this company and this particular field.

1.3 Research questions

This research is designed to answer the following questions:

- Can a blog increase the awareness of a product such as a cloud based mobile application?

- How can a blog be designed to increase the product's official website traffic and lead generation?
- Can a blog be used for lead nurturing of the product?
- How effective is content marketing for the product?

The objectives of these questions are as following:

- To identify the impact of a well-constructed blog on the product's awareness;
- To measure the results (new visitors) after the implementation of the blog to the products' official website;
- To measure the results (returning visitors) after the implementation of the blog to the products' official website;
- To compare the results before and after the blog implementation on a timeframe of 2 months.

1.4 Structure

The research is structured in 5 chapters. The first chapter is meant to clarify the underlying motivation and the main issue that it will be researched, the background, and the motivation of the research followed by the research questions. The second chapter is meant to evaluate the previous research on the topic, which will be used as a basis to formulate the plan of action for this research and understand the principles behind the larger topic of the research. The third chapter goes over the methodology, the research approach, the research philosophy, the nature of the research design, data collection, and data analysis. Chapter four outlines the results found in relation to the topic of the research. The results will be presented in figures and text. The final chapter will go further in detail of the results through the discussion where the results will be explained and evaluated in order to get a more in-depth understanding of the results. This chapter will contain the answers for the research questions alongside the practical and managerial implications, assessment of the results in relation to existing research, the limitations that were faced, and future recommendations for the research.

2 Literature review

2.1 Inbound marketing methodology



Figure 1. Inbound Marketing Methodology, Hubspot.com

Inbound marketing is a method, that is required to use marketing to bring potential customers to you, rather than creating marketing that fights for the customer attention. “Sharing is caring” and inbound marketing is about creating and sharing relevant content with the world and of course with your target customer. By creating content specifically designed to appeal to your dream customers, inbound attracts qualified prospects to your business and keeps them coming back for more (Hubspot Academy, 2016).

In traditional marketing companies focus on finding customers, generally they use technics that are interruptive, technics could be anything from cold calling, and print advertising to TV commercials and junk mail, but because of technology, these traditional technics are becoming less effective and more expensive. Caller Id’s are blocking called calls, spam filters block mass emails. Of course, it is still possible to send out a message using these channels but they are not cost efficient. Traditional marketing is marketer-centric, because they can push content whenever they want, even when those potential customers don’t want it, this might not help in terms of the experience that the user (the potential customer).

Inbound marketing is a new way of doing marketing, instead of that interruption based message, where the marketer or sales person had all the control, inbound swifts the tables, empowering the potential customers, instead of interrupting people, with television ads, inbound marketers might create videos that the potential customers want to see. Instead of purchasing display ads and print publications they can create a business blog that people would look forward to reading. Inbound marketing is marketing focused on getting found by customers, it is customer focused. (Thibeault, 2016, 4)

In this research, the main focus will be to see how effective can content marketing can be for a company, creating a blog, on to which we will be creating different relevant and educational content for the mobile cloud application, and the distribution of this content will be through social media, more specifically, Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter.

2.2 Content marketing in B2B

2.2.1 Definition of Content marketing (the what?)

In the past, there has not been to many articles, papers or researches per se, however, some marketing research agencies did several surveys (Handley & Chapman, 2011, 154) and of course some books that offer advice on digital content marketing (Handley & Chapman, 2011; Wuebben, 2012; Rose & Pulizzi, 2011).

In traditional marketing the notion of “content” applied in the publishing world, where words, images and motion graphics have to be interesting for the target audience to seek out the right publishing platform whether it is a newspaper, magazine, TV commercial or radio channel. However, the concept of content as used in B2B digital marketing is less familiar, and hence less clearly defined. For example, Handley and Chapman (2011, 21) presents the notion of content as “anything created and uploaded to a website: the words, images or other things that reside here”. On the other hand, Halvorson and Rach (2012, 13) suggests that content is “what the user came (to your website) to read, learn, see or experience”, and Wuebben (2012, 5) identifies content as one of the components to tell the brand’s

story, “the story of your product or service and propels your brand into the hearts and minds of your prospects, customers and others”.

That being said, an important step would have been to how people perceive the notion of content marketing. Pulizzi and Barrett (2008, 8) referred as one of the first definitions of content marketing: “the creation and distribution of educational and/or compelling content in multiple formats to attract or keep customers”. (2008, 8). After a couple of years Rose and Pulizzi, the definition took form and they suggested that: “content marketing is a strategy focussed on the creation of a valuable experience”. (Rose & Pulizzi, 2011, 12) Others like Halvorson and Rach (2012), Scott (2011); Bloomstein (2012), Odden (2012), each suggest different angles where content marketing that shines in different focus.

Over all it comes all to the customer, and creating interesting content for different customer segmentation, which varies from the kind of product you are creating content, and the target customer that you are targeting. In lesser words, no matter what kind of product a company tries to sell, content marketing should be the bridge of information linking the target customer to the product, offering them a new perspective.

2.2.2 Content marketing Objectives (the why?)

Moreover, content marketing objectives can be defined according to Bloomstein (2012, 101) as: “the practice of planning for the creation, delivery and governance of useful, usable content”.

Some of the key objectives identified by Rose and Pulizzi (2011, 15-16) are:

- brand awareness or reinforcement, where you create content for your product and reinforce your products identity, even create a story that might help your customers’ challenges to see the solution that your product resolves.

- Lead conversion and nurturing, where you while creating content you develop a relationship with your customers and it can include itself in every stage of the sales funnel, and through every step of the buyer's journey.
- Customer conversion, when you include in the created content a Call-to-action, which can encourage a customer to take a specific action to engage with your product.
- Passionate subscribers, where you create content that keep the ongoing subscribers happy, and engaged with your business.

Needed to be mentioned that these objectives are very in tune with the social media marketing in small and medium-sized B2B brands as mentioned by Michaelidou (2011, 1153-1159). But as follows the social media is being seen as only channels of distribution of the content creation.

Building a stance where the brand can be seen as a trusted authority is widely up for discussion as it is one of the main reasons of success in content marketing (Pulizzi, 2012; Fill, 2009; Silverman, 2012; Scott, 2011). However, Peppers and Rogers (2011) have discovered four key elements of a content creation to sustain its credibility and enhance the trust of your target audience:

- (1) Shared values (with the customer)
- (2) Interdependence (mutual value in the relationship; shared interests)
- (3) Quality communication, and
- (4) Non-opportunistic behaviour.

2.2.3 Creating content, content selection (to whom? And how?)

According to Pulizzi and Barret (2008), Halligan and Shah (2010), Handley and Chapman (2011) any content created needs to be in a way great and remarkable, however Davis (2012) argues that: "you need to create content that your audience wants and needs. Often content will have little to do with the actual products you sell and more to do with the audience you are looking to attract." (2012, 23).

That being said, choosing the content creation taking into account what your target segmentation is interested in, content can become monotonous, dull for some readers, however if you choose a story, that might be interesting, or choose to write some kind of educational content, or situational, by presenting challenges that your buyer persona might find themselves in, and presenting them with a solution to their problem implementing your company only as a call to action to the challenge. This not only might increase the interest of the readers, but even increase credibility, if the content is relevant and high quality.

2.3 Blogging

To further elaborate on content marketing, blogging is a way to put your content in front of potentially interested clients. Practices vary between companies, but normally corporate blogs contain articles on development stages of their products or other news regarding the company in question. They can also be used to create an online community within the reader base and thus facilitate a two-way communication line between the company and the customers (Marken, 2005, 31). Two-way communication – in which the customer communicates with the company and the company with the customer – is sometimes regarded as the ideal form of public relations (PR) strategy (Grunig & Hunt, 1984, 287). The following blog types corporations are most likely to use were originally proposed by Dearstyne (2005) and furthermore reaffirmed by Lee S., Hwang and Lee H. (2006):

- Employee blog – An employee blog is a personal blog that is maintained by an employee of the company. Sometimes they are written purely from the employee's perspective and are not company-endorsed, other times these are sponsored by the company and thus represent the views of the company. (Lee S., Hwang and Lee H., 2006, 319)
- Group blog – While an employee blog is operated by one person, a collaborative blog or a group blog, is maintained by several people. These

most often focus on a project within the company, such as the development of a new product in its different stages. Furthermore, these blogs are sometimes hosted and maintained under the employees' own free will and thus are not necessarily company-sponsored. (Lee S., Hwang & Lee H., 2006, 319)

- Executive blog – As the name suggests, these blogs are maintained by a high-ranking individual in a company, or even the CEO. These highly ranked individual can attract an instant reader base since the writer is a well-known person. Executive blogs thus generate a near-instant return on investment. (Lee S., Hwang and Lee H., 2006, 320)
- Promotional blog – The idea behind the promotional blog is to generate interest about products and events hosted and/or launched by the company in question. These blogs are less well regarded and can end up creating negative attention for the company. As an example, when Dr. Pepper/SevenUp launched their Raging Cow blog (a blog that was supposedly written by their mascot, a cow), it was met with an outrage on “fake bloggers” with no authentic writer among the general public. (Lee S., Hwang and Lee H., 2006, 320)
- Newsletter blog – Putting aside personal blogs, some companies have taken the approach of launching their newsletter in the blog format. These blogs are official company standpoints on their products and opinions. These blogs are informative and rely less on personal relationships. Examples of these are Google's blog or Red Hat Magazine. (Lee S., Hwang and Lee H., 2006, 320)

These different types of blogs represent different ways in which companies can interact with their customers, ranging from interpersonal to mere advertising to informational news.

We will be looking into some of the best practices of blogging and with that, comes a choice of the blogging platform. According to a research from 2013, out of the top

100 blogs, over 50 percent was using WordPress as their platform of choice (Pingdom AB, 2013). We will thus be choosing WordPress as our platform of choice. Of course, every blog has its own goals and objectives. Some are run by individuals, and some by companies which use blogging to attract customers. However, you can find a blog covering stories about anything there are several categories that different blogs can fall into:

- Corporate blogs
- Person/diary
- Hobby or interest
- Professional
- Community/communal

That being said, it is important to keep in mind that everyone can create a blog, and there is no right way to do it, but sustainment of the blog is an important key to keep it as a viable possibility to grow.

In this paper, we will use blogging as a part of the companies inbound marketing strategy, hoping to increase popularity of the product, increase website traffic of the mobile cloud based application and subsequently sales of the product. So far, we have established that blogging facilitates two-way communication between the audience and the company, resulting in deeper interpersonal relationships with the audience. While this two-way communication can be facilitated by more traditional social media platforms, such as Facebook or Twitter, companies sometimes experience loss of control because on these platforms, the audience takes part in creating the content. This happens in the form of comments on posts, potentially resulting in negative response from the audience and mob-mentality (Wade, 2009; Smith, 2012; Lee, 2013; Galea, 2007; Ryan & Jones, 2009). Blogs are susceptible to this behaviour from the crowd as well, but it's possible to hypothesize that due to the nature of blog posts – which are longer than posts on social media

and carry insightful ideas over to the audience – the audience is more inclined to take the post as a learning experience rather than a discussion opener. Furthermore, these findings have mainly been examined from the perspective of business-to-consumer (B2C) market and thus it is possible that they aren't completely applicable to business-to-business (B2B) market.

3 Methodology

The major objective of the study was to look at the effects of creating relevant content marketing and applying it to the product to increase product awareness. In order to create relevant content, we had to identify the right market target. The first step to identifying the target market led us to create a buyer persona. Together with the company's co-owners, my colleague and I started identifying the target market and created the buyer persona. In the end, the end conclusion was to target consulting companies, customer engagement companies and ultimately companies that employ or put emphasis on open innovation. In terms of the distributing the content, we mainly focused on 4 social media channels:

- Facebook
- LinkedIn
- Twitter
- Instagram

It is important to note that since this research is a joint co-operation with Ksenia Devyatkova for the company in question, our research does not incorporate these distribution channels as part of the data for the results. Ms. Devyatkova's individual research largely examines the same aspects of the company's digital marketing strategy, but from a different perspective – namely through customer relationship management (CRM) and social media angles.

3.1 Research approach

This research was approached in an inductive manner. In inductive reasoning, we begin with specific observations and measures, detect patterns and regularities, formulate some tentative hypotheses that we can explore, and finally end up developing some general conclusions or theories (Trochim, 2006). Because of the nature of the phenomena under study (Blogging and content marketing) as part of action research, we have chosen inductive approach.

3.2 Research philosophy

In this research, we assumed pragmatism as our philosophical stance. The purpose of the study was to find out the real impact of the digital marketing tool in question – the blog – on the awareness of the product (a cloud based mobile application). As such, most of the theory building is in exploratory phase, left to the speculation stage for this research.

3.3 Research design

This research was carried out as an action research. As such, we as the researchers first acquired the most accurate understanding of the problem after which a plan to fix that problem was executed while monitoring the outcomes. As per the nature of an action research, the plan was cyclical in nature and was revised a few times during the research. The type of content posted on the blog ended up shifting from very basic descriptions of marketing strategies to very in-depth analyses on the use cases of the mobile cloud based application.

3.4 Data collection

The collection of the data started from December 2016, to allow for time to analyze the results and formulate reasonable conclusions. Gathering was done from two separate Google Analytics properties and the integrated statistics system of the blog itself. The data from the product's commercial website was gathered through Google Analytics and the data from the aforementioned blog was gathered from the integrated statistics system as well as Google Analytics. The data from the blog

represents the overall activity in the traffic of the blog to allow for causality and correlation conclusions to be made. It includes two months of data from February 1st to the 31st of March. The website's data was collected in two different sets. Two months of traffic to the product's commercial website before the blog was implemented in its fullest was chosen as the reference data. This included the data from the 1st of December to the 31st of January of 2017. The dataset to compare against the reference was chosen to be the 1st of February to the 31st of March. This is the time period of the blog's biggest activity and as such, data from this period should represent any increase in awareness directly or indirectly caused by the blog. Furthermore, this allows for fair comparison of a two-month time period against a two-month time period while also diminishing the margins of error.

The data collected represents the data needed to answer the research questions. As such, we collected data from the blog and the commercial website in the following categories:

- Overall traffic to the website
- New versus returning visitors
- The amount of time spent on the website
- The bounce rate, which is an indicative of the percentage of visitors who simply left the site instantly upon entering
- From which channels the visitors entered the site

The data from these categories represent the data needed to answer the research questions and as such, any further data – while useful for other purposes – was left out of this research.

3.5 Data analysis

The data was compared against the reference data number-by-number. While it doesn't provide more intricate information to the correlation and causality of the datasets, it allows for concrete evidence of change. The results were then carefully

thought over and analyzed from multiple different perspectives. The data from the blog was used as an additional dataset in our analysis.

4 Results

The findings of this research were based on an evidence of change and impact of the implemented blog. The results presented here are from the two datasets described in the data collection.

Starting with the most general data from the commercial website, divided into before and after the launch of the blog as an integral part of the website content. The latter time period – during the blog’s activity – shows an increase of 174 sessions as well as an increase of 106 unique users who initiated at least one session during the time period. The amount of pageviews is nearly double in comparison with the reference time period – an increase of 575. The increase in time spent on the website is 1 minute and 24 seconds. Most importantly, the amount of new sessions (sessions initiated by new visitors) increased by 102 new sessions – nearly doubling from 110 new sessions to 212 new sessions. However, the bounce rate (the percentage of users who simply left the site without any interaction) rose from 61.09 percent to 74.94 percent (Figures 2 and 3).



Figure 2. In-depth look at the overall traffic before the blog



Figure 3. In-depth look at the overall traffic during and after the blog

Continuing with the examination of new vs returning visitors before and after the blog implementation, a clear increase in both categories can be seen. Both the amount of returning visitors and the number of new visitors increased by a considerable margin – an increase of 72 and 102, respectively. An increase can also be seen in the average number of pages browsed during each session, going up from 2.28 pages to 2.70 pages. The average session duration also lengthened among both new and returning visitors, an increase of 1 minute and 30 seconds (Figures 4 and 5).

User Type	Acquisition			Behaviour		
	Sessions	% New Sessions	New Users	Bounce Rate	Pages/Session	Avg. Session Duration
	257 % of Total: 100.00% (257)	42.80% Avg for View: 42.80% (0.00%)	110 % of Total: 100.00% (110)	61.09% Avg for View: 61.09% (0.00%)	2.28 Avg for View: 2.28 (0.00%)	00:02:22 Avg for View: 00:02:22 (0.00%)
1. Returning Visitor	147 (57.20%)	0.00%	0 (0.00%)	54.42%	2.76	00:03:11
2. New Visitor	110 (42.80%)	100.00%	110 (100.00%)	70.00%	1.65	00:01:18

Figure 4. New versus returning visitors of the website before the blog

User Type	Acquisition			Behaviour		
	Sessions	% New Sessions	New Users	Bounce Rate	Pages/Session	Avg. Session Duration
	431 % of Total: 100.00% (431)	49.19% Avg for View: 49.19% (0.00%)	212 % of Total: 100.00% (212)	74.94% Avg for View: 74.94% (0.00%)	2.70 Avg for View: 2.70 (0.00%)	00:03:52 Avg for View: 00:03:52 (0.00%)
1. Returning Visitor	219 (50.81%)	0.00%	0 (0.00%)	68.49%	3.00	00:04:38
2. New Visitor	212 (49.19%)	100.00%	212 (100.00%)	81.60%	2.39	00:03:04

Figure 5. New versus returning visitors of the website during and after the blog

To fully understand the phenomena, the traffic routes were examined in-depth. These routes show how the user(s) traveled through the internet to the commercial

website. The visitors were separated in 4 distinct categories based on the route they took:

- Direct traffic – 182 to 277 sessions
- Organic Search – 33 to 87 sessions
- Social – 41 to 62
- Referral – 1 to 1

The categories refer to a few different ways to reach the commercial website. Direct traffic is the amount of sessions initiated by typing the address of the commercial website in the web browser's address bar. Organic Search refers to search terms directly relevant to the website. Social refers to links from social media platforms and referral refers to links from uncategorised websites, emails and such (Figures 6 and 7).

	Default Channel Grouping	Acquisition			Behaviour			Conversions
		Sessions ? ↓	% New Sessions ?	New Users ?	Bounce Rate ?	Pages/Session ?	Avg. Session Duration ?	Goal 1: How does social me
								How does social media marketing compare to email marketing and SEO (Goal 1 Conversion Rate) ?
		257 % of Total: 100.00% (257)	42.80% Avg for View: 42.80% (0.00%)	110 % of Total: 100.00% (110)	61.09% Avg for View: 61.09% (0.00%)	2.28 Avg for View: 2.28 (0.00%)	00:02:22 Avg for View: 00:02:22 (0.00%)	0.00% Avg for View: 0.00% (0.00%)
<input type="checkbox"/>	1. Direct	182 (70.82%)	45.60%	83 (75.45%)	61.54%	2.41	00:02:20	0.00%
<input type="checkbox"/>	2. Social	41 (15.95%)	2.44%	1 (0.91%)	56.10%	2.24	00:03:20	0.00%
<input type="checkbox"/>	3. Organic Search	33 (12.84%)	75.76%	25 (22.73%)	63.64%	1.67	00:01:30	0.00%
<input type="checkbox"/>	4. Referral	1 (0.39%)	100.00%	1 (0.91%)	100.00%	1.00	00:00:00	0.00%

Figure 6. The traffic routes taken before the blog

	Default Channel Grouping	Acquisition			Behaviour			Conversions
		Sessions ? ↓	% New Sessions ?	New Users ?	Bounce Rate ?	Pages/Session ?	Avg. Session Duration ?	Goal 1: How does social m
								How does social media marketing compare to email marketing and SEO (Goal 1 Conversion Rate) ?
		427 % of Total: 100.00% (427)	49.18% Avg for View: 49.18% (0.00%)	210 % of Total: 100.00% (210)	75.18% Avg for View: 75.18% (0.00%)	2.70 Avg for View: 2.70 (0.00%)	00:03:52 Avg for View: 00:03:52 (0.00%)	23.89% Avg for View: 23.89% (0.00%)
<input type="checkbox"/>	1. Direct	277 (64.87%)	55.96%	155 (73.81%)	76.17%	3.36	00:04:34	21.30%
<input type="checkbox"/>	2. Organic Search	87 (20.37%)	58.62%	51 (24.29%)	74.71%	1.40	00:02:01	27.59%
<input type="checkbox"/>	3. Social	62 (14.52%)	4.84%	3 (1.43%)	70.97%	1.61	00:03:24	30.65%
<input type="checkbox"/>	4. Referral	1 (0.23%)	100.00%	1 (0.48%)	100.00%	1.00	00:00:00	0.00%

Figure 7. The traffic routes taken during and after the blog.

As mentioned before, the blog project started in early November 2016 as a project for the company to boost their product awareness. By looking at the views and visitors shown by month, a distinctive popularity increase can be seen in February and March (Figures 8 and 9).



Figure 8. Blog views and visitors in February, Blog stats.



Figure 9. Blog views and visitors in March, Blog stats.

Looking at the data from February, the blog's integrated statistics registered 46 views and 24 visitors with an average of 1.92 views per visitor. In March the results were significantly higher and the blog analytics recorded a total of 98 views and 43 visitors with an average of 2.28 views per visitor. However, in the integrated statistics system of the blog, there is no way to determine the number of new visitors and returning visitors, which is why Google Analytics data was used to provide a more accurate and reliable statistics on the number of visitors, showing the total number of unique users to be 55 with 135 sessions in total during February 1st to March 31st (Figure 10).

User Type	Acquisition			Behaviour		
	Sessions	% New Sessions	New Users	Bounce Rate	Pages/Session	Avg. Session Duration
	135 % of Total: 100.00% (135)	40.74% Avg for View: 40.74% (0.00%)	55 % of Total: 100.00% (55)	64.44% Avg for View: 64.44% (0.00%)	3.33 Avg for View: 3.33 (0.00%)	00:03:24 Avg for View: 00:03:24 (0.00%)
1. Returning Visitor	80 (59.26%)	0.00%	0 (0.00%)	61.25%	4.29	00:04:17
2. New Visitor	55 (40.74%)	100.00%	55(100.00%)	69.09%	1.95	00:02:07

Figure 10. Visitors of the blog divided into new and returning

5 Discussion

The research indicates that there was a positive change on the company's incoming traffic on the official website during the research. It is, however, difficult to produce the proof on the blog's direct impact on the matter. Looking at the results, it is clear that only 55 unique visitors visited the blog during the whole 2 months of activity. This can easily be explained by the fact that in the field of business-to-business marketing, prospective customers are more difficult to find and get interested in the marketed product. While this number might seem little, there is also evidence that the number of sessions initiated on the commercial website of the product grew by nearly 68 percent, from 257 sessions to 431 sessions when comparing the two-time periods. It is largely a mystery on how these results came to be, but tentative conclusions can be drawn. Firstly, we need to establish a few core properties of the blog. The blog did not feature a direct link to the commercial website, which is why the amount of traffic to the website from the blog is marginal (Figures 6 & 7).

Secondly, the blog was largely advertised on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, which explains the rather large amount of traffic gained from social media referrals (Figures 6 & 7). Paid Facebook advertising was not used and is not part of the results. One could reason that the increase in visitors should be attributed to the Facebook advertising and not the content generated for the blog. However, it is important to keep in mind that had the quality content for the blog not been produced, there

would have been little to no sensible marketing posts to publish on Facebook as most of the posts made were advertising the blog posts in itself.

Organic search might have been influenced by the blog as well. As was previously established, the blog was designed without a direct link or button to the official website. Thus, the increase in the number of organic searches can be explained as the visitors that were curious for more information or interested in the product in itself would have used a search engine to find the website and access it. This all might apply to the direct traffic as well. Direct traffic is described as the action of a user inputting the web address of the website directly to the address bar of the browser and entering the site that way.

5.1 Answers to the research questions

The answer to our main research question and ultimately the main reason of the research, was answered. Blogging was found to have improved the awareness of the product and to have increased the commercial website's awareness, both of which are evident by looking at the visitor and session count. As mentioned above the blog was designed to encourage visitors to visit the website by organic search or by direct entering. As such, the blog did not have a means of a lead generation apart from small call-to-action messages at the end of some relevant blog posts which took the visitors to the commercial website where they had the option of trying out the product for free. However, this was done simply to aid the company to generate sales and was not a part of this research. Lastly, content marketing has proven itself an asset for the company's digital marketing strategy, as the content created was fitting with the purpose of the product and ended up exposing more customers to the product. However, an increase of returning visitors (Figure 4 and 5) might be taken into account as well, and kept in check because one of the future responsibilities of the blog would be lead nurturing. And of course, social media made it possible for the company to have a stable online presence and functioned as a distribution channel of the blog's content.

Content marketing and blogging worked in this particular context, but as mentioned in almost every research done on either topic (content marketing and blogging), it is meant as long-term solution for the company's inbound marketing strategy.

5.2 Practical and managerial implications

Besides demonstrating the positive effects of blogging as a digital marketing tool, this research also highlights the practical and managerial implications of maintaining such a blog in a real-world scenario on a steady basis. Firstly, the quality of the blog matters a lot. In the later stages of the research, a native English-speaker was utilized to proofread the blog posts before posting them on the blog itself. Visitors were generally more plentiful and spent more time on the blog when the language and flow of the writing was excellent, highlighting the fact that language and overall writing quality is of utmost importance when trying to implement a blog as a digital marketing tool. The topic must also be something that is of relevance to the field the company or the product is in. The content should also not be too simple for advanced readers, but also not too complicated and academic that a normal worker in the particular field could not comprehend it. It is also of good practice to keep the blog posts comparatively short, of one to two pages in length. Readers seemed to spend just enough time on the site to read one to two posts per visit.

Creating a posting schedule and sticking to it also proved to be a valuable asset. A posting schedule should also include a plan to distribute the content. In the case of this research, the posts were generally made a week apart from each other, and then distributed on the company's Facebook page. For the managerial implications, a couple was identified. When generating content for the blog – especially if the content must be carefully tailored to the target audience – it is important that the person generating the content is aware of the company's wider goals so as not to end up creating content that on the surface seems appropriate, but goes against the wider goals of the company's strategy. For this reason, it is of utmost importance that the content is either approved by a senior employee or that the person put in charge of generating the content is aware of the company's strategy.

5.3 Limitations of the research

Upon the creation of the content and the blog, it was significantly difficult for the created content to be distributed to the target audience because of the non-existing social media presence of the company. This also applies outside the social media as well, since the company generally does not have many followers that are interested in the developments of their product.

Time also ended up being an issue. There was a time limitation as the project and research time period was limited to the 4 months in total, of which two functioned as the baseline and two latter functioned as the results for the research. The positive effects can be speculated to have been significantly higher had there been an extended time period. The schedule and topics of the blog posts developed with time. However, this led to difficulty in content creation, and to delays in the posting schedule. Although these problems created an imbalance in the schedule, it helped the authors to have a more concrete view on what the future topics should be about.

The cyclical nature of an action research became apparent during the content creation stage and a more polished form of utilizing the blog only became clear towards the end of the research. This most certainly affected the results in a negative way, since the blog wasn't utilized to its best extent for the entire duration of the research. In addition, the authors had no prior experience with writing nor content marketing, which further dampened the positive effects of the blog. Because the product is so unique, the best practices found in the literature review proved themselves to be accurate, which is to say that there does not exist one correct way of doing this type of marketing. However, it can be always changed in the process. Sometimes the changes can be positive, sometimes the changes can be negative. This is why the best option would be for the creators to observe the changes in the behavior to identify and analyze the causes and effects. Thus, in the real world this process ends up being as cyclical in nature as this research.

5.4 Recommendations for future research

There still exists a number of unanswered questions involving content marketing and blogging in B2B environment that came with our findings. However, a few recommendations for future research can be made. To start, a longer time period would be very beneficial for a research of this nature. Building a reader base for a blog takes multiple months at best. A longer time period allows for building a steady reader base and should guarantee more reliable results.

A competent writer should be employed where possible. This eliminates the margin of error due to the malpractices of the potentially unskilled writers. The effect can also possibly be combatted by utilizing proofreading by a native speaker to at least establish a sufficient quality of language.

Moving into the distribution channels, it would be a good idea to link further research with active distribution to see the effects of marketing. A posting schedule should be created with additional schedule for publishing the posts in a distribution channel of choice, for example a social media page. This brings more readers to the blog and thus gives access to a wider sample, normalizing the results.

This research could also be used as a basis for a more in-depth review of blogging as a tool for active lead-generation. As this research focused on generating awareness, it would prove an interesting topic to research the functions of a blog as a tool to increase sales.

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7 Appendices



Appendix 1. Inbound marketing methodology by Hubspot.com



Appendix 2. In-depth look at the overall traffic on the commercial website before the blog, gathered from Google Analytics



Appendix 3. In-depth look at the overall traffic of the website after the blog's implementation, gathered from Google Analytics

User Type	Acquisition			Behaviour			
	Sessions	% New Sessions	New Users	Bounce Rate	Pages/Session	Avg. Session Duration	
	257 % of Total: 100.00% (257)	42.80% Avg for View: 42.80% (0.00%)	110 % of Total: 100.00% (110)	61.09% Avg for View: 61.09% (0.00%)	2.28 Avg for View: 2.28 (0.00%)	00:02:22 Avg for View: 00:02:22 (0.00%)	
1. Returning Visitor	147 (57.20%)	0.00%	0 (0.00%)	54.42%	2.76	00:03:11	
2. New Visitor	110 (42.80%)	100.00%	110 (100.00%)	70.00%	1.65	00:01:18	

Appendix 4. New and returning visitors of the website before the blog, gathered from Google Analytics

User Type	Acquisition			Behaviour			
	Sessions	% New Sessions	New Users	Bounce Rate	Pages/Session	Avg. Session Duration	
	431 % of Total: 100.00% (431)	49.19% Avg for View: 49.19% (0.00%)	212 % of Total: 100.00% (212)	74.94% Avg for View: 74.94% (0.00%)	2.70 Avg for View: 2.70 (0.00%)	00:03:52 Avg for View: 00:03:52 (0.00%)	
1. Returning Visitor	219 (50.81%)	0.00%	0 (0.00%)	68.49%	3.00	00:04:38	
2. New Visitor	212 (49.19%)	100.00%	212 (100.00%)	81.60%	2.39	00:03:04	

Appendix 5. New and returning visitors of the website after the blog's implementation, gathered from Google Analytics

Default Channel Grouping	Acquisition			Behaviour			Conversions
	Sessions	% New Sessions	New Users	Bounce Rate	Pages/Session	Avg. Session Duration	How does social media marketing compare to email marketing and SEO (Goal 1 Conversion Rate)
	257 % of Total: 100.00% (257)	42.80% Avg for View: 42.80% (0.00%)	110 % of Total: 100.00% (110)	61.09% Avg for View: 61.09% (0.00%)	2.28 Avg for View: 2.28 (0.00%)	00:02:22 Avg for View: 00:02:22 (0.00%)	0.00% Avg for View: 0.00% (0.00%)
1. Direct	182 (70.82%)	45.60%	83 (75.45%)	61.54%	2.41	00:02:20	0.00%
2. Social	41 (15.95%)	2.44%	1 (0.91%)	56.10%	2.24	00:03:20	0.00%
3. Organic Search	33 (12.84%)	75.76%	25 (22.73%)	63.64%	1.67	00:01:30	0.00%
4. Referral	1 (0.39%)	100.00%	1 (0.91%)	100.00%	1.00	00:00:00	0.00%

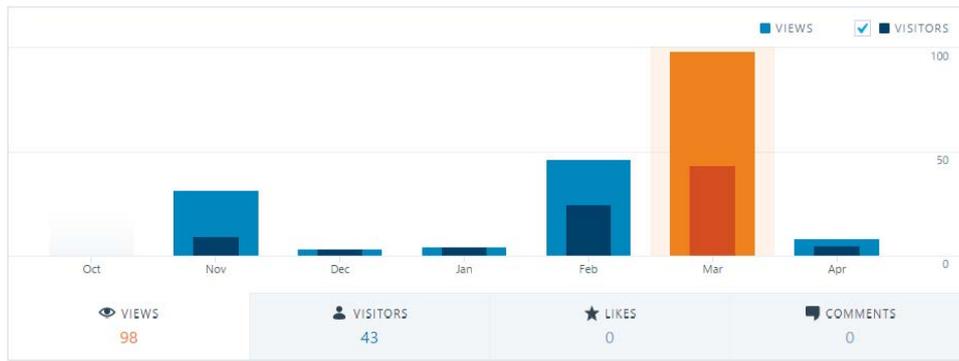
Appendix 6. The web-traffic routes taken by visitors to the website before the blog, gathered from Google Analytics

Default Channel Grouping	Acquisition			Behaviour			Conversions
	Sessions	% New Sessions	New Users	Bounce Rate	Pages/Session	Avg. Session Duration	How does social media marketing compare to email marketing and SEO (Goal 1 Conversion Rate)
	427 % of Total: 100.00% (427)	49.18% Avg for View: 49.18% (0.00%)	210 % of Total: 100.00% (210)	75.18% Avg for View: 75.18% (0.00%)	2.70 Avg for View: 2.70 (0.00%)	00:03:52 Avg for View: 00:03:52 (0.00%)	23.89% Avg for View: 23.89% (0.00%)
1. Direct	277 (64.87%)	55.96%	155 (73.81%)	76.17%	3.36	00:04:34	21.30%
2. Organic Search	87 (20.37%)	58.62%	51 (24.29%)	74.71%	1.40	00:02:01	27.59%
3. Social	62 (14.52%)	4.84%	3 (1.43%)	70.97%	1.61	00:03:24	30.65%
4. Referral	1 (0.23%)	100.00%	1 (0.48%)	100.00%	1.00	00:00:00	0.00%

Appendix 7. The web-traffic routes taken by visitors to the website after the implementation of the blog, gathered from Google Analytics



Appendix 8. Blog views and visitors in February, gathered from the blog



Appendix 9. Blog views and visitors in March, gathered from the blog

User Type	Acquisition			Behaviour		
	Sessions	% New Sessions	New Users	Bounce Rate	Pages/Session	Avg. Session Duration
	135 % of Total: 100.00% (135)	40.74% Avg for View: 40.74% (0.00%)	55 % of Total: 100.00% (55)	64.44% Avg for View: 64.44% (0.00%)	3.33 Avg for View: 3.33 (0.00%)	00:03:24 Avg for View: 00:03:24 (0.00%)
1. Returning Visitor	80 (59.26%)	0.00%	0 (0.00%)	61.25%	4.29	00:04:17
2. New Visitor	55 (40.74%)	100.00%	55 (100.00%)	69.09%	1.95	00:02:07

Appendix 10. Blog visitors divided into new and returning, gathered from Google Analytics