

# **How to use inbound marketing to increase organic website traffic**

## **Case: Youredi**

Barbara Babati



<b>Author(s)</b> Barbara Babati	
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<p>Generating high-quality website traffic is one of the prerequisites to be able to attract people with a specific interest to a webpage and convert them into high-quality leads. To acquire leads, in the digital age, companies are increasingly using pay-per-click digital advertising or inbound marketing tactics that embrace content marketing and search engine optimization best practices.</p> <p>The researcher had the hypothesis that growing the traffic to the case company's website could be beneficial. By creating useful content, prospects would be able to find the company, and the visitors could be turned into leads. On the long run, this could significantly improve the marketing and the sales funnels.</p> <p>This current thesis was conducted as a research and development project throughout 2018 and the beginning of 2019 for the case company, Youredi. The research aimed to evaluate whether inbound marketing, content marketing, and search engine optimization could create long-lasting results in terms of obtaining organic website traffic and thus generating more qualified leads. This thesis presents and analyzes in detail the development of the project and Youredi's marketing funnel throughout 2018 and the first quarter of 2019. The thesis also provides a detailed analysis of the situation before the project to help the readers understand what impact inbound marketing, content marketing, and search engine optimization could have on a business-to-business company's marketing and sales.</p> <p>The results of this research helped the researcher to identify whether inbound marketing was a feasible option for the case company and what content the company could use in the future to continue acquiring traffic and prospects. The researcher also identified recommendations for the case organization regarding what actions they could take to continue to increase sales by utilizing improved digital marketing tactics.</p>	
<b>Keywords</b> inbound marketing, content marketing, search engine optimization, marketing strategy, marketing plan	

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# **1 Introduction**

The present thesis discusses how Youredi, a global provider of integration platform as a service (iPaaS) used inbound marketing to fuel the company's growth by generating more website traffic and thus equipping the sales team with more high-quality leads that can be turned into prospects, opportunities, and sales.

To conduct this research and development project, the author was working on improving Youredi's inbound marketing as a vital part of the marketing plan by creating content and focusing on search engine optimization (SEO). The project started in January 2018. Youredi supported this research because previously the company was actively investing in paid marketing since March 2015, but the quality and volume of the leads and sales lacked behind especially after not spending in paid traffic any more. Youredi identified the need for a change, and the company needed to develop a plan that would ensure that the organization could sustainably generate website traffic, leads, and prospects.

The introduction discusses the case company in detail at the end of this chapter to help the readers understand the background in more depth. Prior to that, the author elaborated on the research problem considering the marketing challenges that business-to-business (B2B) platform as a service (PaaS) companies encounter. The section after, the author comprehensively explained the work development project. The evaluation of the project that started in January 2018 and lasted until December 2018 was based on secondary data regarding. The available results and secondary data analyzed from 2019 helped the researcher to evaluate the success of the project and conclude what actions Youredi need to take in the future to impact its sales and revenue.

The author also provides the theoretical framework for the research, and she elaborates on how the theory can be applied to this research and development project.

In the empirical part of the thesis, the author describes the methods she used during the project. She provides the analysis of quantitative secondary data before she would move forward with the recommendations and the discussion part.

## **1.1 Research Problem**

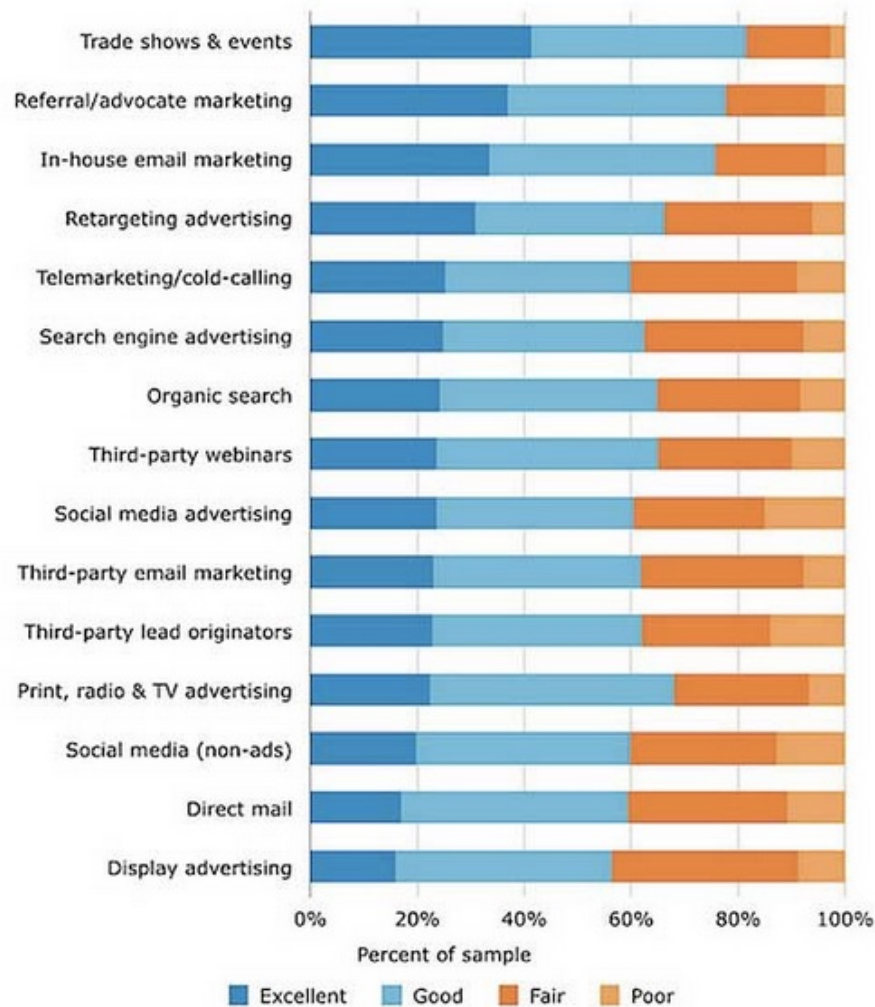
The problem at the beginning of the research and development project was that Youredi marketing needed to ensure the company was generating leads and opportunities while

taking into account that the company had a limited marketing budget and the lack of positive results of pay-per-click (PPC) advertising. In 2018, the marketing budget was 54 000 euro for the whole year which could be relatively low for a B2B tech company. (Youredi 2018a) The monthly 4500 euro budget meant that the company needed to find a way to acquire leads cost-efficiently.

While the marketing budget was limited, there were also other challenges that are typical for software as a service (SaaS) and platform as a service (PaaS) businesses. Selling and marketing B2B services is more complicated than selling products, partly because people need to be sure that the service they are purchasing will work for them and secondly because of the typical high prices of professional services in the IT industry (Adomavicius 2016). Marketers in the SaaS and PaaS businesses face challenges of needing to target many different buyer personas (compared to companies that are selling products and may have one specific targeted buyer persona) that can come from various units within the business. The higher the position the potential buyer has within an enterprise, the more difficult to reach her/him. The decision-making is also typically a long process in B2B, therefore the sales cycles can even be 6-12 months long. (Cohn 2015.)

In Youredi's case, there were also about a hundred competitors on the market (G2 Crowd 2019) currently which meant that either the company needed to significantly increase its marketing spend to be able to create brand awareness and acquire traffic and leads or it had to create a niche marketing strategy. (Shewan 2017.)

While in the SaaS and PaaS businesses the customers tend to be long-term customers, therefore their customer lifetime value (CLV) is a lot higher than for example in retail or e-commerce, but still, the customer acquisition cost (CAC) should be minimized (Price Intelligently 2018). Acquiring new prospects through events is very typical for B2B businesses and while trade shows and events tend to deliver high quality leads according to Borowski (2014.), but these events also come with high costs.



Source: B2B Demand Generation Benchmark IndustryView, 2014, Software Advice

Figure 4. Quality of Leads by Channel. (Borowski 2014)

For Youredi, besides the event presence, another method of acquiring leads and prospects was to use social media marketing predominantly through LinkedIn (but also utilizing Twitter and Facebook). According to the chart in Figure 4 social media provides businesses with lower quality leads than other methods. While LinkedIn's Ad Services can be excellent for account-based marketing or for a company whose buyer personas (Golden 2018) are well-defined and exact, this did not work for Youredi due to the variety of the buyer personas that the case company identified. Besides being unable to define the precise target job titles, the company's messaging was not resonating well with the audience. The reason for that was that while Youredi was providing the global logistics and financial industry stakeholders with integration services, the core messaging did not need to be around supply chain and logistics. Instead, the messaging should rather focus on how Youredi's services can solve the integration challenges that stakeholders of the industry face with the company's products and services. In addition to the difficulties of LinkedIn

advertising, the pricing of LinkedIn ads is pay-per-click (PPC) and relatively high. Thus, LinkedIn advertising can absorb the budget very quickly without the guarantee of getting a lead if the visitor decides not to leave her/his information and does not download the offer which could typically be an e-book or a whitepaper (Patel 2019).

Using PPC advertising as the primary source of traffic and leads in 2015 and 2016 meant that Youredi paid for the website traffic and leads relatively high prices, while the organic traffic was minimal (this claim will be supported and explained with secondary data in Chapter 4.). Once Youredi stopped paying for social media advertising and search engine marketing, the website traffic significantly decreased, as well as the number of leads the company obtained. Youredi marketing needed to develop a plan for acquiring organic website traffic sustainably. According to the hypothesis of the researcher, having traffic from people that are looking for data integration services would be a good opportunity to generate more leads and sales.

## **1.2 Statement of Goals and Research Question**

The goal of the research and development project was to help Youredi to find adequate marketing tactics to create a sustainable way to obtain website traffic that revolves around acquiring new leads and prospects cost-efficiently.

Understanding and acknowledging all the challenges above, the researcher defined the research question:

- Can content marketing and search engine optimization increase the case company's website traffic and generate more qualified leads and prospects cost-efficiently?

The researcher had the hypothesis that acquiring more organic website traffic attracted by relevant content to the company's core business will also enhance the number of leads generated as well as their conversions to sales. To help to answer the research question, the researcher conducted a research project for 12 months between January 2018 and December 2018 and looked also at the results from January to March 2019 to evaluate the feasibility of inbound marketing, content marketing, and SEO and whether these marketing activities could help the case company to achieve its financial goals in the future.



### 1.3 Work Development Project

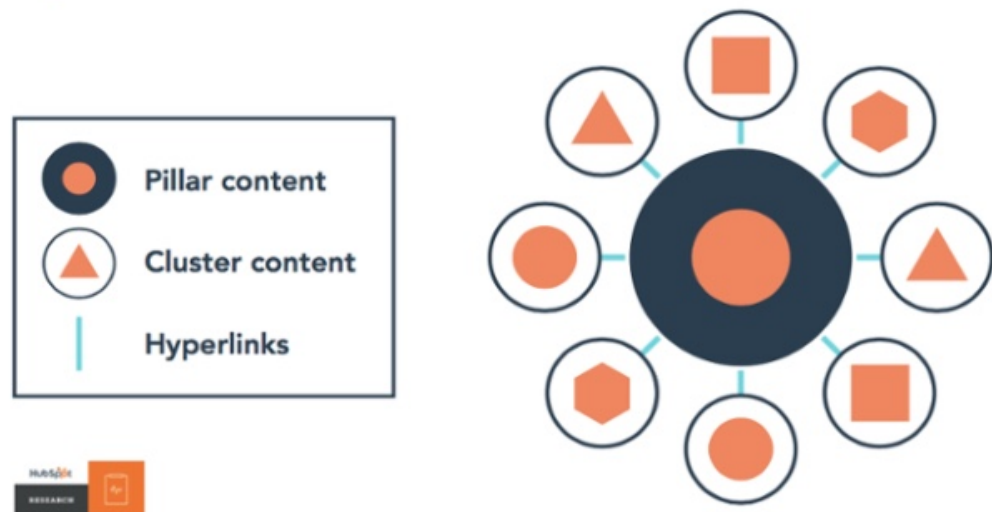
Understanding Youredi's marketing tactics before January 2018 (discussed in Chapter 4.) helped the researcher to define the scope of the present research project. The actions that the researcher took during the project phase and data that she gathered from January 2018 to April 2019 helped her to define whether Youredi should use inbound marketing, content marketing, and SEO as part of its marketing plan to support the execution of the marketing strategy in the future and provide the case company with recommendations regarding the best way forward.

The work development project needed to understand Youredi's buyer personas and align all communication and content activities accordingly. Previously, all communication on the website, blog, events, social media advertisement campaigns, and Google AdWords campaigns were based on the wrong persona that was targeting decision makers from the supply chain department. In reality, Youredi's buyers have traditionally been from the IT department (like enterprise architects or software architects) or C-level decision makers, such as Chief Information Officer (CIO), Chief Technology Officer (CTO), Chief Digitalization Officer (CDO), Chief Executive Officer (CEO) depending on the size of the organization.

Understanding the buyer persona helped to define what content would work to attract organic traffic and leads from the right target audience. As for marketing tactics, the researcher focused on inbound marketing, explicitly using content marketing and search engine optimization (SEO). Youredi used Hubspot for all marketing activities and SEMRush and Google Search Console to monitor the content marketing and SEO results. The researcher utilized the Hubspot's topic cluster model (Figure 5) to create content topics. The idea of the topic cluster model is to have a single pillar page that discusses the main topic and build relevant content around it, so-called supporting content. (An 2017) This ensures that the company answers all the questions of the searchers regarding a specific theme. For the project, it meant that the researcher needed to create content weekly that was focusing on the buyer persona and reflects on their interests and needs. The content had to follow Hubspot's topic cluster model to ensure the best possible impact.

The work development project started with two test topics. The first one was around electronic data interchange (EDI), while the other item was focusing on Youredi's core technology, integration platform as a service (iPaaS). For the success of the project, it was essential that there would be a strong link between all the content that was under the pillar content.

## Topic Clusters



Source: Matt Barby

Figure 5. Hubspot's Topic Cluster model for improved content strategy. (An 2017)

Creating new content as part of the work development project was also vital because most content that Youredi earlier produced had to be deleted as with the new buyer personas they were not relevant anymore for the company's website visitors that the project would acquire.

Writing useful content ensured that the company provided helpful information so that searchers could find it when they are seeking information on a topic (Hubspot 2019). In 2018, the project needed to focus on acquiring new site visitors organically. In January 2018, organic traffic was meager as it is shown in Figure 6 and the traffic also did not come from keywords that would be valuable for the business, but these were either related to logistics or branded keywords, such as the company name or website address as Figure 7 shows (Youredi 2018d).

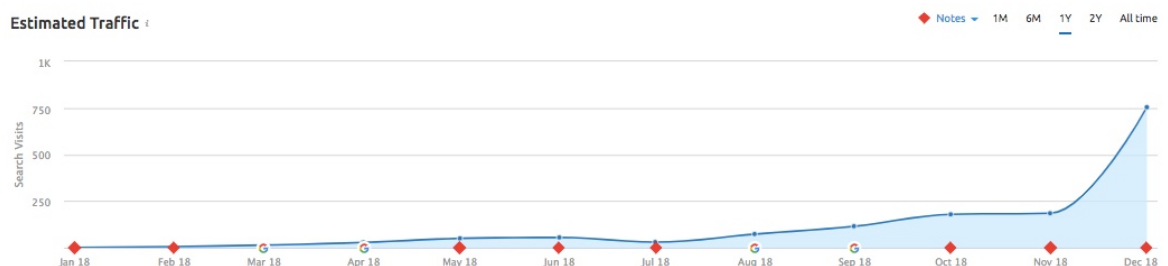


Figure 6. The development of Youredi's organic search traffic throughout 2018. (Youredi 2018c)

This was something that Youredi needed to change and experiment with keywords related to EDI and iPaaS were the first step. As part of the project, the researcher wanted to focus on developing content that would be searched by people with buying intent so that it could also help to reach people that would be interested in purchasing Youredi's services.

QUERIES	PAGES	COUNTRIES	DEVICES	SEARCH APPEARANCE	
Query				Clicks	Impressions
youredi				140	238
logistics trends 2018				44	307
yoredi.com				13	222
youredi.com				9	20
logistic trends 2018				8	45
global logistics trends				8	20
merchant analytics				7	34
logistics trend 2018				7	26
2018 logistics trends				6	38
ipaas				5	828

Rows per page: 10 1-10 of 999

Figure 7. Search queries that Youredi received organic traffic from. Data is from January 2018 when the development project has started. (Youredi 2018d)

The work development project was strongly focusing on whether the case company could embrace inbound marketing so that it would further improve its marketing and sales funnels by ensuring that the company keeps acquiring new leads that can be turned into prospects and sales.

#### 1.4 Structure of this Thesis

The research first presents the theoretical framework of the research and development project. The conceptual framework includes topics, such as marketing strategy, marketing

plan, marketing tactics, digital marketing, inbound marketing, as well as content marketing, and finally search engine optimization (SEO).

After the theoretical framework, the empirical part explains the projects in details. The chapter first focuses on the objective of the problem and the analysis of Youredi's marketing prior to this research. After that, the author elaborates on how this action research was implemented, what marketing tactics were used, what were the data collection methods, as well as how the data was used to conclude the discussion part. The discussion part will reflect on how Youredi could elevate its marketing plan even further in the future by focusing on digital marketing to keep acquiring organic traffic and leads.

### **1.5 Delimitations**

The project aimed to generate organic traffic so that Youredi could also obtain new marketing and sales qualified leads, sales prospects, and possibly new customers with minimal or close to zero investment. Nevertheless, the project could have been more successful if Youredi would have invested in more content to accelerate the project. Youredi could have also hired a good SEO agency or an SEO consultant to help to define a content and SEO optimization plan early on. However, it was also a challenging task to find a good digital marketing agency. During the project phase, after experiencing the initial positive results, in September, Youredi decided to hire a digital marketing agency. The purpose of this was to test whether they can help the case company to speed up reaching people via search engines. Unfortunately, after a month and a half trial, the company needed to stop working with the agency as they were not fully aligned with Youredi's goals and the company saw better results doing everything on its own.

Also, during the project Youredi redesigned and relaunched the company's website to improve the user experience and the mobile responsiveness as these are essential ranking factors for the Google algorithm and the Google crawlers (Randolph 2018). Nevertheless, the company did not invest in a technical SEO consultant due to budget constraints. The website relaunch was a high-risk factor considering Youredi's SEO efforts as it could have broken the achievements of the first eight months of the project. The website relaunch project started in August 2018 and was finalized in November 2018.

However, the website relaunch had unexpectedly positive results regarding technical SEO. Youredi's website has been working very well after the relaunch, however, in terms of technical SEO further improvements such as optimizing mobile friendliness, creating both internal and external linking architectures, log files, crawling and indexation, interna-

tional SEO, or setting up schema markups, could be useful (Cojocariu 2019). Nevertheless, due to budget constraints, this was something the company and this project were unable to focus on, but these could be considered in the future.

Having a significantly higher budget could have also helped Youredi to invest in high-quality content marketing, for example, industry experts writing blogs, e-books, or whitepapers. Another limitation of this research and development project was that the author has done most of the work by herself, except for occasional help with writing content from the rest of the team.

The researcher could have set specific goals for this reach and development project, however, as she did not have previous experience from content marketing and SEO and the project itself was a learning curve, it was difficult to anticipate what results could the project have in a year. In the future, goals, and objectives should be set more strictly. Also, a project that focused on generating more organic traffic and leads could have considered conversion rate optimization more promptly, however, this is a research that the company could conduct during 2019.

## **1.6 About Youredi**

Youredi is a global provider of a cloud-based Integration Platform as a Service (iPaaS) solution with a focus on global trade and logistics industries. Youredi as a data integration provider enables quick connections and message translations between trading partners and customers. Integrating with communities, carriers, shippers, consignees and the systems that they use, Youredi provides scale, speed, and agility. This seamless real-time flow of 100% accurate data, provides organizations with the ability to analyze and optimize all supply chain processes. Youredi operates globally from Finland and the United States of America (USA). (Youredi 2018a.)

Youredi's vision is to help companies globally to create a seamless data connectivity between all trading parties and their systems in selected industries (global trade and logistics and financial services). Youredi's mission is to provide data integration as a utility so that it would be accessible for companies of any size that were previously unattainable due to high prices of integration and integration tools, as well as the lack of integration skills. The vision and mission of the company are visualized in Figure 1.



## VISION & MISSION

Our vision is to become the de facto data integration backbone globally in selected industries. Youredi's mission is to provide easier, faster and cheaper data integration and become an integration utility.



Figure 1. Youredi's vision, mission and values. (Youredi 2018a)

Youredi's vision goes as far as that the iPaaS platform could be the preferred technology choice for electronic data interchange (EDI) in the focus industry verticals by this replacing a 60 years old technology that has been used for business-to-business communication and information exchange. The Youredi iPaaS is an adequate tool for global enterprise customers to help them overcome their complex, many-to-many integration challenges and help them designing real-time information flow across any two or multiple systems, advanced process orchestration, and improved data integrity by enhancement of the data. (Youredi 2018a.)

Youredi currently has customers, such as Maersk, Inditex, Alibaba, Finnish Posti, Lavia Post, US Bank, Loadsmart, NYSHEX, Procountor, Accountor, Hartela, and many more. (Figure 2)

















			
			
			
			

Figure 2. Youredi Customers. (Youredi 2019a)

A cloud-based integration platform helps integration architects to easily and rapidly develop, test, deploy, and maintain data-, application and system-, API or process integration projects involving any combination of cloud-resident and on-premises endpoints.

iPaaS capabilities include the following key features:

- Communication protocol connectors such as FTP, HTTP, Advanced Message Queuing.
- Application connectors/adapters for SaaS and on-premises packaged applications.
- Data formats such as XML, JavaScript Object Notation (JSON), and others.
- Data standards such as Electronic Data Interchange for Administration, Commerce and Transportation (EDIFACT), CargoIMP, SWIFT and others.
- Data mapping and transformation.
- Data quality management tools.
- Routing and orchestration tools.
- Integration flow development and lifecycle management tools.
- Integration flow operational monitoring and management. (Youredi 2018a. & Gartner 2018.)

According to industry analysts from Gartner (2018) and Forrester (Peyret 2018), the global iPaaS market is growing at a 30% annual rate on average as it also is shown in Figure 3. Data integration between cloud-based applications and legacy applications (on-premise)

is an enormous challenge for companies, resulting in poor data quality, slow process delivery, poor customer and partner experience (Kadadi, A., Agrawal, R., Nyamful, C., & Atiq, R. 2014, 38-39) Although Application Programming Interfaces (APIs) have been trending over the last couple of days as a saving grace for easy connectivity management (Lee 2016.), large companies need to create a lot more complex integrations than what APIs can eventually tackle. In these cases, customers will need to rely on an Enterprise iPaaS (EiPaaS) that among others Youredi provides. Gartner (2018) considers an iPaaS to be EiPaaS when it is:

- Designed to support enterprise-class integration projects; that is, projects requiring, high availability/disaster recovery (HA/DR), security, service-level agreements (SLAs) and technical support from the provider.
- Provides appropriate user experiences to the end user of the platform to allow the subscriber to develop integration capabilities independent of the iPaaS provider's professional services.
- Can be used for multiple integration scenarios including application integration and data integration use cases.
- Is marketed for a broad range of use cases, verticals, and industries.
- Is fully managed by the vendor for patching, and upgrades.
- Provides flexibility for the deployment of the runtime engine for a number of hybrid deployment options. (Gartner 2018.)

Gartner's 2018 Magic Quadrant for Enterprise Integration Platform as a Service (Gartner 2018) lists the most important enterprise-level iPaaS providers on the market.

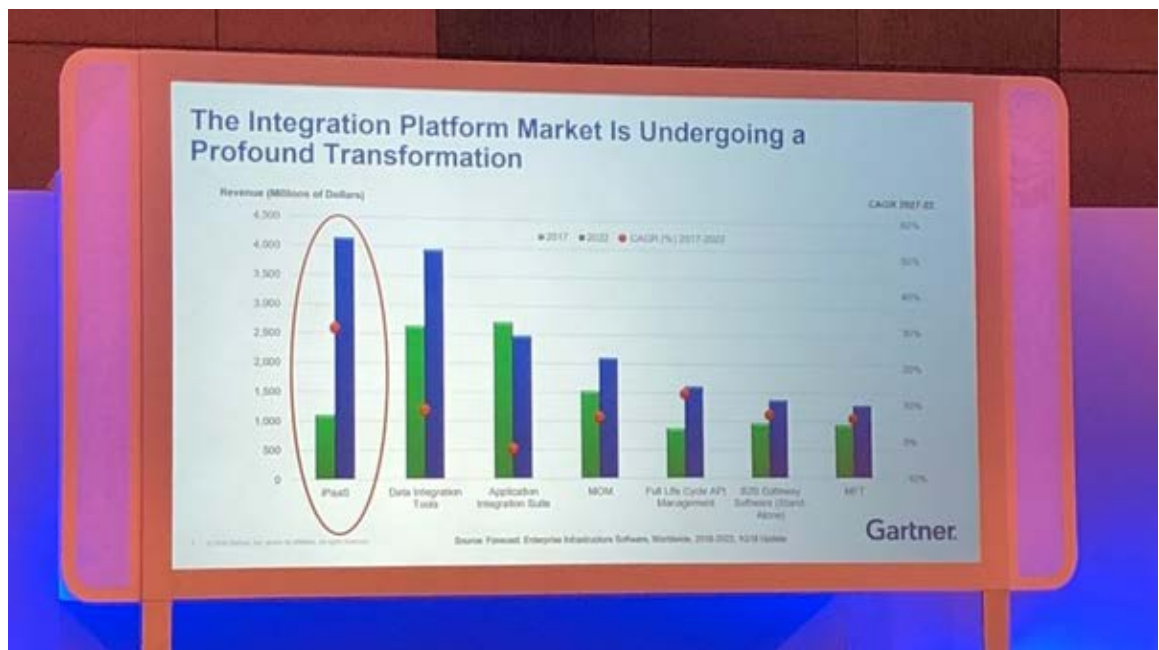


Figure 3. The Integration Platform Market Is Undergoing a Profound Transformation. (Gartner 2018)



These providers are typically horizontal solution providers that are not vertically focused in their offering, but they are serving almost any industries (Gartner 2018). The leading iPaaS providers (such as Dell Boomi, Informatica, and Mulesoft) (G2 Crowd 2019) are much larger than Youredi in terms of revenue and personnel, while some others are part of a much broader product offering (like Oracle, Microsoft, and SAP).

The Youredi iPaaS solution is horizontal by design. Nevertheless, we have decided to focus on a few chosen industry verticals, namely the global trade and logistics as well as the financial Operations industry. The primary vertical market for Youredi, the global trade, and logistics industry can be further divided into the following sub-sections:

- 1) Ocean Cargo and Maritime Logistics
- 2) Air Cargo Logistics
- 3) Road/Trucking Logistics
- 4) Rail Logistics, and
- 5) Postal & Parcel Logistics (Youredi 2018a.)

The needs of B2B collaboration and data sharing in this industry are business critical (IBM 2016), which raises the importance of prioritization and timing for the target audience. The target industry has recently attracted many startups to solve functional processes smarter, where the underlying data quality and timeliness are critical.

## **1.7 List of Abbreviations**

**API** – Application Programming Interface

**B2B** – Business-to-Business

**CAC** – Customer Acquisition Cost

**CDO** – Chief Digitalization Officer

**CEO** – Chief Executive Officer

**CIO** – Chief Information Technology Officer

**CLV** – Customer Lifetime Value

**CTA** – Call-to-Action

**CTO** – Chief Technology Officer

**CTR** – Click-through-Rate

**DA** – Domain Authority

**EAI** – Enterprise Application Integration

**EDI** – Electronic Data Interchange

**EDIFACT** - Electronic Data Interchange for Administration, Commerce and Transportation

**EiPaaS** – Enterprise Integration Platform as a Service

**HA/DR** – High Availability/Disaster Recovery

**IMC** – Integrated Marketing Communication

**iPaaS** – Integration Platform as a Service

**JSON** – JavaScript Object Notation

**PaaS** – Platform as a Service

**PPC** – Pay-per-Click

**PR** – Public Relations

**Q1** – First Quarter

**SaaS** – Software as a Service

**SEM** – Search Engine Marketing

**SEO** – Search Engine Optimization

**SERP** – Search Engine Result Page

**SLA** – Service Level Agreement

**SME** – Small- and Medium-Sized Enterprises

**USA** – United States of America

## 2 Theoretical framework

Today, customers are in control as they have access to a large amount of information as we are living in a knowledge economy and business-to-business (B2B) marketing strategies need to take into consideration how the buying behavior and buyer's journey are changing and what effect it can have on the marketing strategies and marketing plans. (Taylor 2018, 9.)

Digital is part of people's lives today, thus focusing on new digital channels could be essential for B2B marketing strategies (Taylor 2018, 10). While this research project does not aim to redefine Youredi's marketing strategy, nor develop a marketing plan, the present paper still gives a theoretical overview regarding marketing strategy as the execution of the company's marketing strategy strongly relies on the marketing plan that includes tools and tactics such as digital marketing, inbound marketing, content marketing, and search engine optimization that can be better understood when these theories are presented together with the concept of marketing strategy and marketing plan. Digital marketing, inbound marketing, content marketing, and SEO are today an integral part of B2B marketing plans. The theory will start with the broader concept, and it will narrow down the topic.

Today, business-to-business buying decisions sometimes can be made long before even a sales representative would contact the prospect. This is all possible because of the newly emerging digital marketing channels and the information the buyers can possess. According to the statistics, up to 80 percent of people start their buying journey with a web search, and more than half are two-thirds through their decision-making process before they would engage with a salesperson. (Taylor 2018, 10) This is something that marketing strategies and plans need to understand and plan marketing actions around changing buying behaviors. Businesses that want to remain competitive in the digital age need to look at digital marketing and how they could deliver useful content that influences the buying decision to individuals that are looking for a solution or product.

The theoretical framework will explain how a marketing strategy is essential for B2B businesses and why it should be aligned with the business goals and how it should determine what the marketing plan would include. The framework also explain why a marketing plan should define clear objectives and goals. After that, the reader will get an overview of how digital marketing should be integrated into a company's marketing plan, as well as how the inbound marketing method can be beneficial for businesses and how it relies on con-

tent marketing. The content marketing chapter will elaborate how content can be developed strategically to help companies to achieve their goals, as well as why content marketers should learn, use, and apply search engine optimization when creating content and what are the best practices that should be considered during a project like the one the researcher conducted.

The conceptual framework of the project is shown in Figure 8 below. The researcher used a pyramid to show that the most basic tools for the project were content marketing and search engine marketing that are embraced by the inbound marketing methodology. Inbound marketing has been a popular digital marketing tactic among B2B marketers and it has been widely adopted in marketing plans. A marketing plan that embraces new emerging digital marketing tactics can be essential for the execution of a marketing strategy.

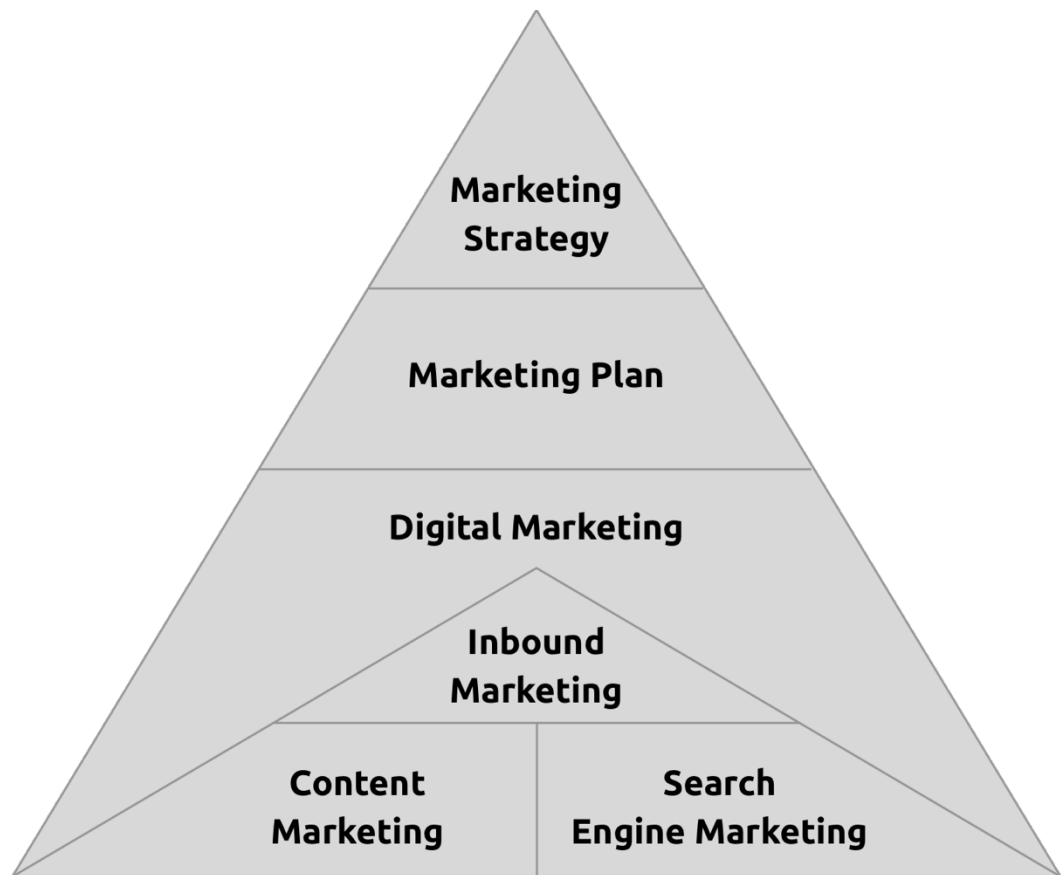


Figure 8. Conceptual Framework. Image created by the researcher.

## 2.1 Marketing Strategy

Business strategy and marketing strategy are entirely different, still, the marketing strategy needs to be aligned with the business strategy to ensure that the marketing actions will

support the goals of the business (Taylor 2018, 60). At the same time, Taylor also believes that the marketing strategy should have an influence on shaping the business strategy.

A marketing strategy should be the result of careful planning, preferably planned simultaneously with the business strategy, as aligning them can make a difference on what results the business receives from marketing. The results of marketing can determine how a business performs in the market among the competition. (Taylor 2018, 61) A marketing strategy that is done well will help a company for the long term. Taylor (2018, 62) also suggests that businesses should only consider the marketing strategy as the only strategy related to marketing and they should forget about creating content strategies, social media strategies, or SEO strategies, but instead, they should regard content marketing, social media, or SEO as marketing tactics and include these in the marketing plan. The author of this thesis agrees with Taylor (2018) and believes that a company should have an overarching marketing strategy and a marketing plan with clear goals (long-term) and objectives (short-term) that use different marketing tools and tactics to execute the marketing strategy and achieve the goals that are aligned with the purposes of the business strategy. Taylor (2018, 62) writes that only 68 percent of high performers and less than half 46 percent of the rest have a marketing strategy and goals aligned to the business.

The marketing strategy is the foundation of the marketing plan. The marketing strategy provides clarity and purpose on what is the ultimate goal that the company's marketing department needs to achieve and the marketing plan focuses on how to execute the marketing strategy. The marketing strategy should be clear and well defined so that it would also help the marketers to identify activities that they should not include in the marketing plan. Many talks about marketing strategy and marketing plan as they would be interchangeable concepts. Nevertheless, marketing strategy is what organizes the thinking and goals, and it serves as the base to support the execution of the marketing plan. A strategy is an approach to achieve a long-term goal, while a plan is a detailed blueprint of short-term activities that includes specific marketing tactics and objectives to support the strategy. While an objective is a measurable step, tactics are tools that marketers need to use. A marketing plan without a strategy can realize short-term goals, but without a concrete direction, it could be less effective than a plan that is based on a clear strategy and goals. (Taylor 2018, 59-60.)

Taylor summarizes her definition of marketing strategy and plan as the following:

“Strategy is for the long term, no matter how the business environment may change, and should form the touchstone against which every marketing decision is made. The plan is for the short term, agile and flexible, responsive to changing market conditions, but always in complete alignment to the strategy.” (Taylor 2018, 62)

Brennan, Canning & McDowell (2011, 99) similarly explain marketing strategy, but they refer to a marketing strategy also as strategic marketing planning that is used to create a competitive advantage:

“Strategy is concerned with big, long-term decisions that will have a substantial effect on the future of the organization. What we will here call the ‘rational planning approach’ to strategy development is the idea that a formal strategic planning process is the mechanism that is most likely to create a successful strategy. In the marketing field this will usually be known as strategic market planning, or simply marketing planning (McDonald, 1996). The aim of strategic market planning is to create a competitive advantage over rival firms.”

According to Brennan et al. (2011, 92), strategic marketing includes three key features:

- Emphasis on long-term implications. Strategic marketing needs to have a long-term perspective; nevertheless, monitoring the external environment should be an integral part of strategic marketing planning.
- Corporate inputs. Strategic marketing decisions have implications on the standpoint of the whole firm.
- Varying roles for different products/markets. Different products and different markets need to be managed differently yet so that they would be still aligned with the company's overall goals.

Mintzberg argued in 1998 that strategy needs five definitions and he used the five Ps for the strategy to elaborate on this idea. The five Ps model include plan, pattern, position, perspective, and ploy:

- Strategy as a plan gives direction as for where the organization stands now and where it wants to be in the future and what does the organization identifies as a goal that it needs to achieve is the strategy.
- Strategy as a pattern as it should be consistent over time; nevertheless, it is not stagnant, as it can change as incidents occur.
- Strategy as a position meaning how a company can establish itself in a market based on its values and uniqueness.

- Strategy as a perspective is a company's fundamental way of operating. Strategy as a position is looking at the external world, the market, strategy as a perspective is looking at the internal world, such as the purpose and values of the organization.
- Strategy as a ploy means that organizations need to find smart ways of competing with the competition in the market. (Brannan et al. 2011, 89-90.)

Brennan et al. (2011, 91) argue that business and marketing strategies need to create value for the business by focusing on customer value. This is something that a marketing strategy needs to encompass together with the changing customer behavior. Customers have control over the conversation and the engagement with businesses as they possess an extraordinary amount of knowledge about products and services available on the market since they can access information easily through the internet. B2B marketers need to reflect on this shift in buying behavior in their marketing strategies. The fact that buyers have more knowledge about specific markets, products, and services means that the buyer's journey has become more complicated. It also puts pressure on B2B marketers as the marketing plans and the marketing tactics they use should be aligned with the changing buyer's journey. While previously, B2B marketing relied on PR, trade shows, events, collaterals, and advertising, today, B2B marketers need to change their lead generation approaches by using a mix of marketing tactics. This is partly because B2B buyers have adopted buying habits from the consumer side and thus they want to ensure that they make well-informed decisions, as well as they, find the best offer on the market both in terms of price and service. Therefore, today, the marketing department/team has an enormous role in owning the sales funnel. However, most organizations have not yet consumed the idea that marketing has a role in driving prospects through the buying journey within the sales funnel. Today, marketing goes way beyond just creating brand awareness and PR. (Taylor 2018, 11) A marketing strategy that recognizes the role of marketing in generating more sales and thus revenue can be more precise in terms of goals as well as it can help to focus the marketing plan better to ensure that the company uses marketing actions that will push the prospect through the buyer's journey.

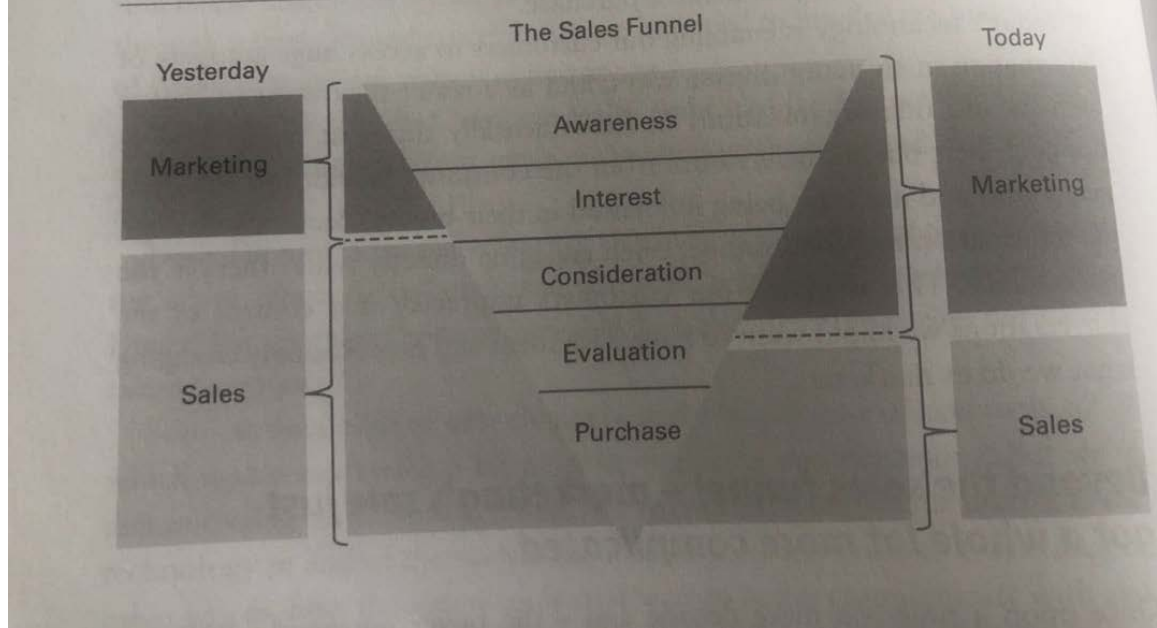
**Figure 1.1** The sales funnel yesterday and today

Figure 9. The sales funnel yesterday and today. (Taylor 2018, 12)

As Taylor (2018, 12) exhibits in Figure 9 previously, marketing was only responsible for the 'awareness' and 'interest' elements of the sales funnel. Today, B2B marketers are also responsible for the 'consideration' stage. Understanding how the sales funnel has changed is fundamental for an effective marketing strategy. The modern interpretation of the sales pipeline helps marketing teams to redefine their marketing activities at each stage of the sales funnel to navigate the prospects through the buying journey to support them throughout the decision-making process regarding a purchase. (Taylor 2018, 12.)

Taylor emphasizes that marketers need to understand that customers do not want to be sold to (meaning that cold calls and purchasing email lists do not work anymore) so the marketing strategy should consider this buying behavior and preference of individuals. While the sales funnel (Figure 9) may give the impression that the buyer's journey is simple, in the case of B2B, it is never as linear. B2B purchases are complex as they often carry high risk as well as typically the products or services sold are expensive, thus the decision-making process usually involves many individuals across different departments. This is also the reason why ensuring that people can engage with the company's content during the buyer's journey can have significant importance in influencing the final decision. (Taylor 2018, 12-13.)



Taylor points out that although digital marketing is increasingly popular and essential, it should not be considered as the only way to marketing, but it should be an integral and vital element of the marketing mix. Also, the marketing strategy should take into consideration the opportunities that digital marketing can offer and how it can accelerate a company's growth. (Taylor 2018, 28.)

Also, Brennan et al. (2011, 111) regard new technologies as important facilitators of marketing strategies:

“It is, of course, widely accepted that the new information and communication technologies that have emerged during the last three decades have had, and will continue to have, a substantial effect on marketing practice.”

As the present research was conducted by focusing on digital marketing, the paper will discuss the topic in more details after the marketing plan chapter. New technologies, tools, and tactics need to be integrated into marketing practice (Brennan et al. 111), thus digital marketing tactics should be a core part of any marketing plan today as newly emerging technologies will impact the execution of marketing strategies. (Brennan et al. 2011, 112.)

## **2.2 Marketing Plan**

In the book, *Essential Guide to Marketing Planning*, Wood (2017, 4) defined marketing planning as the following:

“Marketing planning is the structured process that leads to a coordinated set of marketing decisions and actions, for a specific organization and over a specific period.”

Luther (2011) refers to a marketing plan as strategic planning and explains that it is a detailed long-term plan that should not merely look at the marketing actions that the company needs to take, but it should also analyze and examine the external world.

Others agree with the thoughts of Luther (2011). A marketing plan should include the analysis of the internal and external situation, such as an analysis of the market and the customers. Besides the review, it's essential to define a clear marketing direction, objectives, strategies (although, Taylor (2018, 62) talks about having only a marketing strategy,

and all the rest of the actions should be viewed as marketing tactics and tools) and programmes for the target audience. The marketing plan should also explain how marketing activities would be implemented, evaluated, and controlled. (Wood 2017, 4.)

Halligan & Shah (2010, 22-23) suggests that a company should watch its competitors closely, but should not follow them. A market leader tends to define a rule within the marketplace, and others tend to follow their example. Halligan and Shah suggest that a company should focus on creating a winning strategy by being remarkable and utterly different from the ones of the competitors. They explain that in the era of inbound marketing it's possible to create a winning marketing strategy by defining the market more narrowly. Understanding what the competitors do in terms of marketing and what is their focus will help marketers to prioritize their actions.

Having a clear focus and target market is especially crucial for small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs). Having a clear, sharp focus, often referred to as a niche, will help marketers to identify the marketing tools and tactics that will help them to achieve their goals. It is also vital for budgeting reasons, as marketers will be able to confirm better where to spend money to reach the audience. Choosing a niche does not only help a company to dominate that segment, but it may also enable them to charge higher prices. (Dib 2018, 35-38.)

Marketing planning is essential to remain focused on goals and objectives. Planning also determines how and what to communicate to the customers and evaluates what the market and the competitors are doing. Marketing planning allows marketers to systematically plan their activities and tactics, set goals, measurements, and have a clear understanding and perspective on the competition. Marketing planning gives answers to the question of who, what, when, where, how, and how much the organization is going to market. Nevertheless, the marketing plan is not merely a list of activities to accomplish throughout the year, but it should also set up clear goals for measuring progress to identify if adjustments should be made in the plan. While the plan needs to be specific, it also needs to be flexible so that the marketers can act upon any internal or external variants that could require a changed direction regarding the marketing activities. A good marketing plan anticipates changes and sets guidelines for how to handle these situations. Marketing plans should also be reviewed periodically to ensure that they reflect on the changing expectations of the customers. (Wood 2017, 5-6.)

Creating marketing planning should always start with the analysis of both the external and the internal situation as it dictates what tools and tactics will work the best for the organization. The internal analysis should take into consideration the company's mission and vision, resources, offerings, capabilities, as well as business relationships. It should also analyze the previous marketing plans and learn from those in terms of what worked well and what did not. The external analysis, on the other hand, should focus on competitive factors, threats, and opportunities. (Wood 2017, 6-7.)

Wood (2017, 28-29) also suggests including a PESTLE (political, economic, social, cultural, and ethical, technological, legal, and ecological factors) analysis, as well as a SWOT (strengths weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis to best audit the external situation.

The marketing plan should include research and analysis of the markets and the customers. For marketers, it is essential to understand the trends in market share, product demand, customer needs, perceptions, buying patterns, and customer satisfaction. This part of the marketing plan should analyze what the customers need today and what they may need tomorrow. (Wood 2017, 8.)

As part of the marketing plan, the market segment that the company wants to focus on should be clearly defined. Segmenting the company's existing customers based on their characteristics, behaviors, and needs, can help with this part of the plan. After that, the plan should elaborate on the positioning of the product or services to create a competitively unique position for the company in the mind of the customers. (Wood 2017, 9) Failing to segment the market results in undifferentiated marketing that means that the marketing activities treat the entire market the same, thus the marketers use the same marketing mix and ignore the differences between segments. Differentiated and concentrated marketing work more efficiently, as the marketing tactics are focused and tailored to meet the needs of the target segments. As part of the segmentation, it's vital to segment personas and identify the company's buyer personas so that the marketers understand better the pains and demands of the customers, as well as their behaviors and the channels that they use to influence their buying decisions. (Wood 2017, 79-82.)

Defining these elements of the plan will give a direction to identify the goals and objectives of the marketing activities. The goals should be the long-term targets while the objectives should be the short-term targets that pave the road towards achieving the goals. To ensure the effectiveness of marketing tactics, companies should set performance indicators to help them measure the effectiveness of their marketing efforts. (Wood 2017, 9-10) The goals should be effective, so these should be relevant also the higher-level strategies,

such as the marketing strategy and the overall business strategy. The goals should also be specific and measurable; thus, it should be something more concrete than merely just the goal of growing. The goals should also be set in a particular time, for example, the objectives could be achieved in 12 months. At the same time, the goals and objectives should be realistic and achievable. (Wood 2017, 98) Once the goals and the objectives are set, the plan can move on to elaborate on how the marketing program is going to work, what is the product, what is the brand, how much the product or the service is going to cost, what channels the company is going to use, what is the communication plan, what is the tone of voice of the company, what support marketing needs, how the marketing actions will be evaluated. (Wood 2017, 11-14.)

The typical content of a marketing plan is an executive summary, analysis of the current situation (external and internal), SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis, segmentation, targeting, and positioning, objectives and issues, marketing strategy, marketing programmes, financial plans and budgets, metrics and implementation control. (Wood 2017, 14.)

Today, technology allows marketers to plan for two-way communication and build a relationship with customers even before talking to them in person. Therefore, it's critical to define targeted communications as part of the marketing plan and thus influence how customers think, feel, and act towards a brand. (Wood 2017, 172) The marketing communication mix may involve tools such as creating word of mouth and buzz marketing, using advertising (both traditional and online), sales promotion, mobile marketing, personal selling, direct marketing, public relations (PR), or digital marketing. Before choosing any of these tools, the marketer needs to define the target audience and identify whether they want to reach them via a pull or push strategy. As marketers use different methods, tools, and channels to execute marketing campaigns, all messages should be tailored to the specific outlet. Nevertheless, all messaging should be consistent to ensure that it gives the right image of the brand, yet, it resonates with the audience, and it will catch their attention, interest, and hopefully, they will respond to it regardless of the channel. An adequately coordinated integrated marketing communication (IMC) approach will increase effectiveness and efficiency, as the messages across all outlets amplify and strengthen each other. (Wood 2017, 172-180.)

## 2.3 Digital Marketing

Digital marketing has been increasingly popular during the last years. As buyers are using the internet more to research products and services, marketers also started to regard digital channels with higher priority compared to traditional marketing methods.

Digital marketing can be defined as the following:

“Digital marketing formerly referred to as e-marketing or Internet marketing is at the heart of the digital business – getting closer to customers and understanding them better, adding value to products, widening distribution channels and boosting sales through running digital marketing campaigns using digital media channels such as search marketing, online advertising, and affiliate marketing. It also includes using the web site to facilitate customer leads, sales and managing after-sales service. As with mainstream marketing, digital marketing is a way of thinking, a way of putting the customer at the heart of all online activities.” (Chaffey & Smith 2017, 13.)

Another definition summarizes digital marketing as:

*“Digital marketing is used as an all-encompassing term for the marketing of products and services through the use of digital technologies.”* (Taylor 2018, 27.)

Summarizing the definitions, all marketing actions that are happening online via websites, online ads, opt-in emails, mobile apps, or emerging platforms can be considered as digital marketing activities (Chaffey & Smith 2017, 13). When an organization uses digital marketing, they do not only communicate with the customer, but they also allow the customer to communicate with the company thus encourage dialogue or a so-called two-way communication with the prospects. This dynamic dialogue is the heart of digital marketing. The goal of digital marketing is to acquire a database of customers, prospects, or simply just followers and facilitate communication with them through constant marketing actions. A critical element of building a follower base is building digital marketing on the foundation of search engine optimization (SEO) which ensures that potential prospects find the website of a business and if the site is built right, the two-way dialogue can start between the company and the individual for example when they sign up for receiving marketing communication. (Chaffey & Smith 2017, 13-14.)

In B2B, the most relevant digital marketing activities are search marketing, both organic that can be achieved through optimization and paid search engine marketing (SEM), behavioural targeting and online advertising, multi-touches across different digital media

channels for acquisition, or delivering relevant offers and promotion (based on segmentation and using tactics such as email marketing). For digital marketing, it's crucial to identify the right channels where prospects can be targeted. (Chaffey & Smith 2017, 17-19) Digital marketing aims to identify, anticipate and satisfy customer needs efficiently (Chaffey & Smith 2017, 20). This is very similar to the inbound methodology (attract, engage, and delight) that the author will discuss in the next chapter. Both digital marketing and inbound marketing want to engage with the buyers before even getting in touch with them.

Chaffey and Smith (2017, 23) suggest that just like a marketing plan, digital marketing efforts also should focus on clear goals and objectives. Defining the purposes of why a company is doing digital marketing will allow them to focus their efforts and choose what digital tactics, tools, and activities they are going to use.

Just like in traditional marketing, in the case of digital marketing, we can also talk about paid media, earned media, and owned media. Nevertheless, traditional marketing tactics are usually built on a push strategy, while digital marketing is based on the foundation of a pull strategy, meaning that prospects would find a business and digital marketing activities should support the findability of a business and that the prospects would want to take action. Once a company is found through a search engine, applying the inbound marketing methodology can be an effective pull marketing tool to engage with the prospect and start the two-way dialogue with them. Content marketing is a powerful way to reach people through search engines and engage with them on the website as the first touch. (Chaffey & Smith 2017, 34-36)

While Chaffey and Smith (2017, 42) talk about a digital marketing strategy and how it should be developed and what it should include, but the author of this paper prefers to have a high-level marketing strategy and a marketing plan that embrace digital marketing tactics and tools. The digital marketing actions should support the entire marketing plan and should help to execute the marketing strategy.

Doing digital marketing builds on the following:

- Planning what digital tools and actions the company need to employ to reach the target audience.
- Reach prospects by generating traffic to the website and creating brand awareness.
- Act to ensure that the website visitors are taking their next step in the customer journey and engage with the content of the website and get familiar with the company and its products and services.
- After that, the aim is to convert them into leads and start forming relationships with them.

- Engage with them whether the prospects already turned into customers or they are just on the customer journey. (Chaffey & Smith 2017, 44.)

Digital analytics (or formerly called web analytics) helps marketers to control their digital marketing actions. Tools like Google Analytics ensure that the marketer knows how digital marketing activities are performing and what adjustments need to be made to ensure that the goals and the objectives can be achieved. (Chaffey & Smith 2017, 46) Digital marketing should use KPIs to ensure that marketers can clearly identify what is working and what is not and how they could improve their digital marketing efforts.

The online buying process is the foundation of the inbound marketing methodology that will be discussed in the next chapter. Understanding the online buying process is essential to address all the stages with different marketing tactics. While this chapter discusses digital marketing, the purchasing process should be supported both online and offline. (Chaffey & Smith 2017, 192.)

The online buying process most typically starts with the prospect recognizing the problem. Once they understand that they have a pain, they need to identify ways to solve it, thus they will search for information. Once they found the information they needed, they will evaluate the products and solutions to ensure that it will help to resolve the issue that they have. When they have all the information about key features and benefits, they can move on to making a decision. When they made the decision, they will progress with the purchase. In the post-sale phase, marketers need to ensure that they exploit the relationship to maximize customer lifetime value (CLV). The process is visualized in Figure 10, and it also opens up some of the digital marketing tactics that marketers need to use to maximize sales. (Chaffey & Smith 2017, 192-193.)

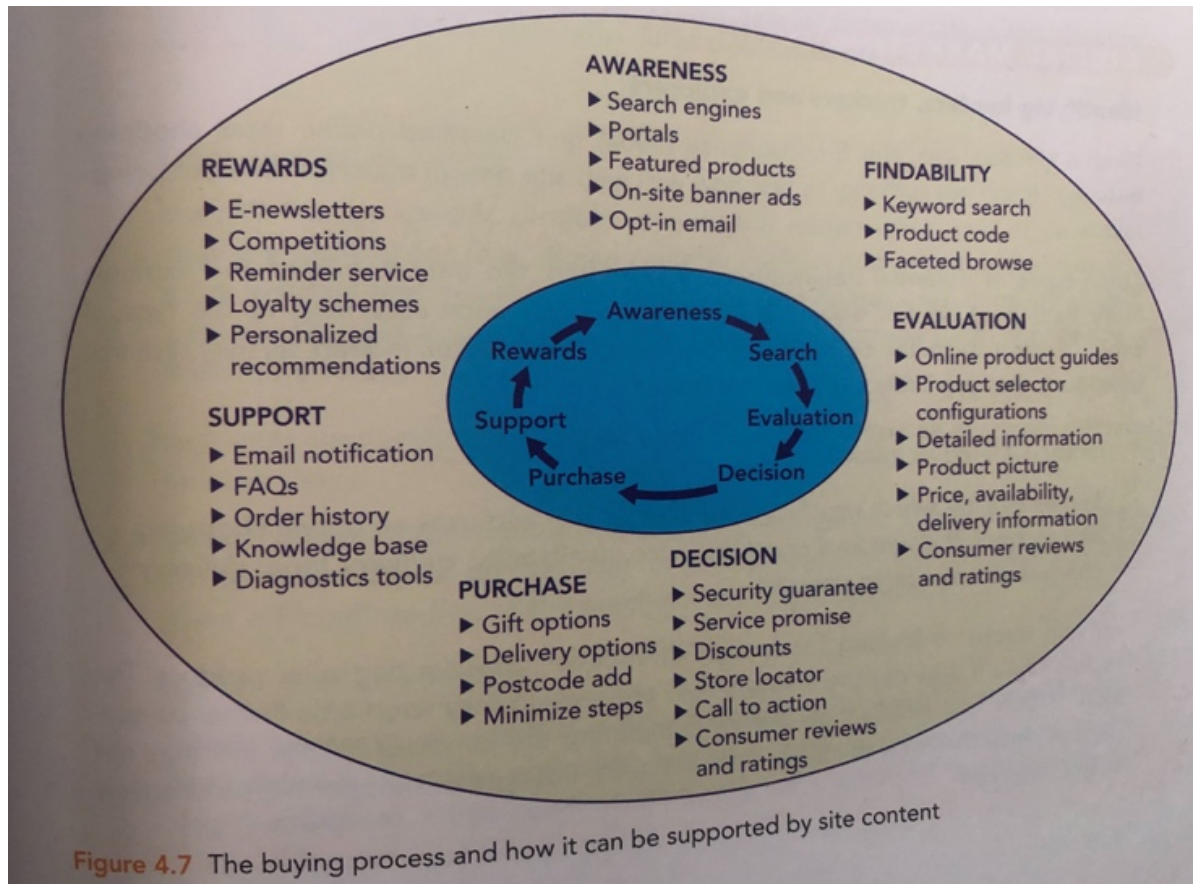


Figure 10. The buying process and how it can be supported by site content. (Chaffey & Smith 2017, 193)

## 2.4 Inbound Marketing

Halligan and Shah (2010, 5) explain that buyer behavior has been changing, thus businesses need to review and update their marketing strategies to reflect on this fact. As this idea was also described in the chapters above, it indicates that the changing buying behavior has a consequence on all aspects of marketing from strategizing to planning digital marketing actions.

While twenty years ago buying an email list, having a cold calling sales team, and attending trade shows worked well to acquire new customers and sell them products and services, today, buyers are skeptical towards these sales methods. People have the tools at their disposal to gather information on their own about products and services that they are looking for. This empowers them to be able to make a buying decision and a purchase without any intervention from companies or salespeople. Buyers are increasingly using the internet to determine the best possible solutions for their needs and pains, and they tend to use different channels to find all the information they need. Most often, potential buyers use search engines, such as Google or Bing to find information and start their



buyer's journey. Blogs have also become increasingly popular to help individuals to learn more about products and help them make a purchase decision. During the past years, social media channels, such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, or YouTube have also been shaping the shopping habits of the buyers. Therefore, it's increasingly important to understand how one's target segment behaves, how do they acquire the information they need to make a decision, as well as where one can find the potential prospects. (Halligan & Shah 2010, 6-7.)

The inbound methodology is a digital marketing tactic to reach the modern buyer that likes to collect all necessary knowledge to make a purchase that will resolve their problems the most efficiently. Hubspot (2019) defined the inbound marketing methodology as the following:

"Inbound is a method of attracting, engaging, and delighting people to grow a business that provides value and builds trust. As technology shifts, inbound guides an approach to doing business in a human and helpful way. Inbound is a better way to market, a better way to sell, and a better way to serve your customers."

The inbound methodology contains three stages: attract, engage, and delight. The present research focuses on the 'attract' phase of the methodology, however, all stages are essential for ensuring that a company can sell and keep delighting its customers. The core idea of the inbound methodology is to keep delivering value to the individuals regardless of which stage of the customer's journey they are at. First, the marketer needs to attract the new prospects to the company's website as it is described on Figure 11, then they must ensure that the prospect engages with the company through the website, and once they turn into customers, the company can keep delighting them by using content tailored for them and delivered through their preferred channels. (Hubspot 2019.)



Figure 11. The Hubspot methodology illustrated as a flywheel. (Hubspot 2019)

At the attract phase, inbound marketers need to ensure that the right target segment can find the website of a company and that they find the information so useful that they would turn into leads and eventually customers. To attract the right target segment, companies need to deliver content that is tailored for the buyer. To attain this goal, it's essential to define a content marketing plan that can help a company to be found on the search engines by ranking on the top of the first page. Inbound marketers may also use paid tools to ensure that the right prospects find their useful content and turn into leads faster. Publishing helpful content for the right buyer persona can help companies to build their trustworthiness among the audience. Ultimately, good content is answering the questions of the prospects even before they would have the initial meeting with the representative of the company. Providing answers on how one can solve their problems can be extremely useful, and thus individuals could be turned into buyers by the end of the buyer's journey. (Hubspot 2019.)

Once a visitor turned into a lead through call-to-actions (CTAs), forms, and lead flows, inbound marketers need to keep engaging them by using email marketing or even live chat. Throughout the engage phase, marketers want to ensure that the prospects have all the knowledge on a product or service at their disposal. (Hubspot 2019.)

The last phase of the inbound methodology is delighting the customers, and typically this happens through using marketing automation to initiate a conversation with the contacts, deliver them remarkable content that provides them with value, and encourage them to make further purchases from your company. (Hubspot 2019.) This can help to initiate a purchase, but even after a lead turned into a customer engaging with them can be useful to encourage them to buy more products or services, thus improving the customer lifetime value (CLV) of a customer. Ensuring that already acquired customers buy more from a business helps to lower the bottom line of marketing by minimizing customer acquisition costs.

Inbound marketing emphasizes the importance of a website that is not brochure-like, but instead, the website should be a broadcasting type of outlet where people can find information about topics they care about. This type of website could be referred to as a marketing hub. It is increasingly important to have a well-working, customer-centric design focused and informational website where people will return after their initial visit. A website needs to be interactive for the visitors to help them find knowledge and ensure that they keep coming back for more. The content that is published on the website should be syndicated across all the channels that the company has so that the material would reach a larger segment of the audience. A website also needs to be correctly interlinked with tens of thousands of links, while it should also link to external webpages so that visitors can find even more information and learn more also about the company's products and services. (Halligan & Shah 2010, 11-16.)

When moving from outbound marketing to inbound marketing, it is essential to stop interrupting people and focus all efforts on the visibility and findability of the business by creating a remarkable value proposition, messaging and content. (Halligan & Shah 2010, 21) The excellent content helps companies to be found on Google by prospects. Being found on Google helps a company to attract more traffic, and these organic visitors could be turned into leads throughout their journey on the website. (Halligan & Shah 2010, 29) This is where the attract and engage phases of the inbound methodology play a vital part. Inbound marketing emphasizes the importance of blogging, as well as creating a variety of content for the different stages of the customer journey, such as white papers, videos, webinars, podcasts, or webcasts. Creating content is relatively affordable to other marketing tactics, and it can be beneficial for smaller companies also that do not have a significant marketing budget. (Halligan & Shah 2010, 30-31.)

Publishing blog posts is an excellent format for creating informative content. It helps companies to establish themselves as thought leaders, and by releasing blogs frequently it will ensure that the website gets indexed by Google regularly so that searchers can find useful information and the website will receive more traffic organically (Halligan & Shah 2010, 35). For inbound marketing success, it's essential to create a content marketing plan, apply search engine optimization, and track the progress continuously.

## **2.5 Content Marketing**

Content marketing is an interesting marketing tactic as it builds on the fact that humans enjoy content whether it is in written, image, sound or video form. Content is all about designing a set of key messages that will resonate with the audience. Besides telling a story to the audience or helping them learn more about a particular topic, written content can also be optimized for search engines for findability, but we will discuss the search engine optimization topic in the next chapter. (Busche 2017.)

According to Busche (2017), there are ten essential steps to successful content. First, marketers need to state what they want to achieve by creating content. This means that whenever using content marketing, the marketing team should define the goals and objectives to clarify why the company needs to invest time, money, and energy in content marketing and what they could achieve. The second step is to understand the target audience. Understanding the audience is essential for tailoring the content for them. Designing personas will help to create content that resonates with the right audience. The third step is to decide where the material will be distributed. Before even starting content marketing, one should determine what channels the company should use to reach the right audience. Once all these steps are established, the fourth step should define themes, tones, and voice. To create engaging content, one should pre-define the tone and the voice they are going to use as well as plan the themes. The fifth course of action is to develop a brand image for the content. It can help people to identify the company based on the content regardless of the channel. Most companies have a clear brand defined in the marketing plan, so content marketing should use that as a guideline. The following step was to apply best practices of content formats and structure. Best practices vary from using compelling headlines, specific words, formats, or design. The author of this research paper focused on SEO best practices when developing content. The seventh suggestion was to design or create a content hub. Creating a blog or similar with excellent user-friendly design to ensure that consuming the content is easy for the readers can be beneficial for companies. Once there's a place for hosting the content (preferably on the company's digital premises) the marketing team should scale the content production process. Creating and

maintaining a blog for a company can be invaluable for the business, as it works as a content hub and it is easier to control as well as to measure the results. The blog can be and should be integrated with Google Analytics to have accurate data on all content marketing efforts. For this, it can be helpful to identify what content is working and replicate that. Marketers need to identify which pieces are underperforming and stop creating those to ensure that they achieve the best possible results. The ninth step is to shape and consolidate the content team. Managing the content team is essential to get the right content done and in a format that is successful. The final step is to secure earned, owned, and paid distribution. Content needs to be distributed across channels, and people need to be able to find the content. Content marketers need to identify whether the material will be distributed through earned, owned, or paid channels. The researcher focused the case company's content marketing efforts on organic visibility and findability, thus the content was distributed through owned channels. In some cases, the content was also distributed in earned channels, such as in magazines. (Busche 2017.)

Lieb (2017, 21-29) also proposes ten steps for building a content strategy. Prior to that she suggests to make a complete content audit and remove and identify what was done right and what could be improved. The pillars of the content strategy she suggests are the following: page tables, editorial calendar, style guide, personas, keyword list, brand brief, editing guidelines, graphics and/or digital asset repository, submission brief, maintenance plan. The researcher has been using page tables (content outlines), editorial calendar, personas, and keyword lists to define the content. Nevertheless, the content outline that the theory suggests includes elements such as content title, template type, business area, stakeholders, expiry date, audience, objectives, key messages, services and products, calls to action, authors, and resources. Using these elements as guidelines could help companies to write more consistent content. In addition to these, creating a maintenance plan could be essential so that the content would remain fresh and relevant.

A content marketer (or as Busche (2017) calls it a 'content strategist') should develop an essential foundation for creating a content machine (or as some may call, a content strategy). Content marketers need to understand the audience, choose the adequate channels to distribute the content, find the themes that help the company the most, define the tone of voice and the brand (or align the content with the brand). While the personas and the tone of voice should be set in the beginning and ideally, these are not changed once they were established, as new channels are emerging, the content marketer needs to update the content marketing plan accordingly and evaluate whether it is feasible to use other distribution channels as well and what format and tone would be ideal for those. Yet, the

message should be consistent across all channels. The content marketer should also define in the beginning the goals and the objectives of doing content marketing. (Busche 2017) Why is content marketing important to a company? What are they trying to achieve? What benefits the company will see from content marketing? Without clear goals and objective, a content marketer may publish content but never realize concrete results. Lieb (2017, 87-93.) emphasizes that currently we are living in a “culture of content”, nevertheless, delivering quality, strategic content requires leadership, clear vision and support from the organization. All business units should understand why creating content is important and what impacts it can have on a business (Lieb 2017, 93-94).

Most companies create content to generate more traffic, however, generating more traffic is a very vague goal. Marketers need to define why they want to create more traffic more precisely and what results they want to achieve by having more traffic. (Busche 2017) For example, in the case of this research, having more traffic was essential as previously while the company paid for ads, it received traffic and leads, but once Youredi stopped paying for ads, the traffic also significantly dropped. The researcher wanted to generate more traffic in a sustainable way using content marketing and SEO. The researcher assumed that being able to drive more traffic will be an excellent foundation to also generating more leads and start a dialogue with them to push them through the buyer’s journey. While many content marketers create content for social channels for building brand awareness, for example, this chapter is not going to discuss that aspect of content marketing.

Content marketing metrics should not be business goals, because they are just indicators of how the content is performing. Still, the key performance indicators (KPIs) should be meaningful. While generating more traffic is important, getting rather less traffic, but generating high-quality interested leads can be more valuable than generating a lot of traffic, but no results on acquiring new leads and turning them into customers. Goals can be related to generating more traffic, increase SEO visibility and generate more traffic and interest by that, improve engagement rates, create more signups, or use content marketing to enhance revenue. (Busche 2017) All goals that are set should be justifiable as to why they will be meaningful for the company.

As it is difficult to concentrate on all of these goals at the same time, content marketers should always focus on one goal at a given time. For example, one quarter could concentrate on improving page views, and next quarter could be about increasing the quality of inbound links. (Busche 2017.)

For this research, goals related to SEO were highly influential. It was essential to build a content machine for the case company that would ensure that the right target audience finds the company and they would turn into leads and possibly customers. By creating optimized content for search engines, Youredi could ensure that its content ranked on the top of Google, thus receiving more traffic and more marketing and sales qualified leads. With focusing on so-called “money keywords” (keywords that have buying intent), the company can also impact its bottom line by increasing revenue by improving its conversion funnel also. (Busche 2017.)

The main goal of content is to bring people to the place where conversion can take place – most typically the website. Often, goals related to content associate traffic and revenue together, because in certain cases traffic can equal with revenue, like in case of a news outlet that is selling advertisements, thus the more visitors they get, the more money they make. However, in a B2B business, traffic is only the first step towards creating revenue later on. Each stage of the buyer’s journey should utilize a different type of content. While using blog posts and articles to generate more traffic, a company most likely need to create a detailed comparison white paper to convert visitors into leads and then eventually into sales. This is why conversion rate optimization can be a vital part of content marketing. Content marketers need to create pieces that would be engaging enough for individuals visiting the website to take the next action in the buyer’s journey. Ultimately, the content also builds trust across the audience so that they would be more willing to do business with an organization. (Busche 2017.)

While creating content is the primary task of content marketers, understanding, analyzing, and taking actions based on the data they have available, is equally important. Content marketers need to analyze the data and identify what works well and what not and how they can create more content that will work well. Content marketers should follow the data daily and make informed, data-driven decisions. Having data on all content also makes tracking the goals significantly easier. Justifying how content marketing helps the business to achieve its goals can also bring more credibility to content marketing operations. (Lieb 2017, 184-186.)

Some may want to create a content persona for their business. In the case of this research, the author has relied on buyer personas. The two things are the same, but the content persona takes more into consideration what type of content the individuals would want to consume. Personas in B2B rely on corporate buyers, managers, or entrepreneurs.

Identifying who is the decision-maker in an enterprise could help content marketers to create content for that specific persona and reach the individual within a corporation that could be the most interested in a particular offer. (Busche 2017.)

When people convert into leads, they may not be ready to make a purchase immediately, thus it is essential to create content for them to ensure that they have all the information they may need to make a decision. Content marketers need to identify what format and message will resonate the most with people when they are further along in the buyer's journey and what is the best channel and way to deliver the information to them. (Busche 2017.)

Content marketing should be working in an organized, almost a production-like manner. While content marketers need to ensure that they deliver a large number of content pieces, they also need to ensure that these are high-quality and engaging items. Content marketers need to create a content calendar to determine what needs to be produced and when they need to identify how they will deliver it, what systems, applications, and routines they will use and have a plan for quality assurance so that the articles and other content pieces that are published are always the best quality. To ensure that the content gets found, companies need to focus on search engine optimization, and the content team should have someone that understands SEO. While previously SEO was writing for bots, Google spiders/crawlers now look for content that is written for humans to ensure that the content that Google shows answers the questions of the searchers and the material also has a human voice. While this paper will explain SEO in more depth in the next chapter, content marketers should focus on SEO when they create their content calendars. First of all, they need to rely on keyword research to identify content that people are looking for. They should also understand SEO best practices to ensure that the content has the best possible chance to rank well in Google. The content also must be engaging and exciting, so people want to share it. This is important because when people link to a content it gives signals to Google about the quality of the content, and it can help to improve a website's domain authority. Improved domain authority will give a boost to the visibility of the content in the search engine and will ultimately make the job of the content team easier. (Busche 2017.)

## **2.6 Search Engine Optimization**

Search engine optimization (SEO) is the practice of increasing the quality and the quantity of website traffic, as well as increasing brand awareness, through appearing on the top of



non-paid, organic search engine results. To optimize content for search engine, it's essential to understand what people are looking for, how they are searching for information, and how the material can best answer their questions accurately. Understanding the intent of the audience is just as equally important for SEO than understanding how search engines work to best serve searchers. (Moz 2019.)

Search engines want to answer people's question, and they curate billions of contents to find the best possible answer for a search query. Search engines will crawl and index all relevant content. The more relevant the content is for the searcher, the higher the search engine crawlers will rank it. Delivering useful content will improve a company's chances to rank high on the search engine, thus receive organic traffic (non-paid traffic). While paid advertising can generate traffic for websites, it is only sustained until a company keeps paying, once they stop advertising, the traffic also disappears. Appearing on top of the search engine among the organic results also gives credibility to a company. According to Moz (2019), only 2.8% of people that use Google Search in the US click on paid advertisement. Moz (2019) also claims that SEO has twenty times more traffic opportunity than pay-per-click (PPC) advertising. Investing in SEO can have long-term benefits for companies, as good content with the right keywords (Coombe 2017, 77) can deliver traffic to a website even after years of publishing it, however, frequently refreshing the content will help to remain competitive for the keywords the article includes.

SEO professionals (SEOs) should follow SEO best practices. Some of these are summarized in the Google Webmaster Guidelines (Google 2019), some of the items mentioned in the guidelines are recommendations that content marketers should consider such as writing for people and not for search engine bots, do not deceive users, avoid tricks to improve rankings, focus on how to help searchers, and create content that is unique, valuable, and engaging. SEOs should also avoid copying content from other websites, participating in link schemes (e.g., exchanging links or paying for links), creating articles and blog posts with little to no content, do not hide texts or links, and avoid keyword stuffing. Focusing on the interests of people and answering their questions is the best advice that content marketers can have. They should also evaluate the top-ranking contents and aim to write and deliver better articles than those so that the searchers would get answers to all their questions from a single article. (Google 2019.)

SEO should also focus on the goals of the business. By understanding what the purposes of a business are, the SEO efforts can be focused on helping the company to achieve its goals. In the case of this research, the most critical step was to create traffic to a website that was previously getting very little organic traffic. This is why the most important key

performance indicators (KPIs) of the project was the growth of website traffic, as well as the growth of organic traffic. (Baxter 2010) While it is not strongly aligned with the business goals, in the future it will be helpful to align the SEO goals and objectives with the business strategy and the company's goals. Undoubtedly, SEO also needs to focus on other metrics than just generating more organic traffic, and on the long-run, it should be looked at as a tool that can help to improve conversion rates and thus sales and revenue. While getting more traffic is essential, getting less traffic and more leads (especially marketing qualified leads (MQLs), and sales qualified leads (SQLs)) can be more beneficial than a lot of traffic and little to no leads. (Moz 2019.)

Search engines crawl billions of results of websites that submitted their sitemaps to be indexed for the search engine. The search engines index the results and rank them to ensure that the most relevant results show up on the first page. (Robson 2017, 5-6) When someone does a search for a query to find an answer for their question, the search engine will look at all the indexed content, and they will rank all the results based on relevance. (Moz 2019) Having a good information architecture on the website and setting up the sitemap and robot.txt are prerequisites for being found and indexed by Google (Clarke 2018, 51-54). Google will analyze the page content, thus creating informational content that gives the answer to all the questions of the individuals is one of the most critical factors for ranking high on the search engine. While there are also other factors for ranking, the author of this paper found relevancy to be one of the best advice for creating content that can rank well on Google. (Jantsch & Singleton 2016, 41-42) Another important ranking factor for Google is the backlinks or "inbound links" to the content. Having links to the article or the website means for the search engine that the piece contains high-quality and valuable information. (Jantsch & Singleton 2016, 112-114) Typically, SEOs are focusing on written content, also videos, images, or even audio content can be optimized for a search engine, or they can be included as part of a written article and users may find it valuable.

Determining what SEOs and content marketers need to focus on can be difficult as Google uses thousands of ranking signals. There are no strict rules for example how long a blog post should be or how header tags should be written or organized, but the more precise and useful the content is, the better it could rank. Besides the quality of the content, search engines also consider clicks, time on page, bounce rate (sessions that only viewed one page), pogo-sticking (sessions that returned to the search engine to choose another result meaning they did not find the content useful). (Jantsch & Singleton 2016, 25-29.)

### 2.6.1 Keyword Research

Content marketers and SEOs need to identify strategic keywords that the website content should focus on and craft around these strategic words useful content for searchers. Doing keyword research will help to understand the audience better and identify what products, services, or solutions they are looking for. Keyword research should answer questions such as what people are searching for, how many people are searching that specific term, what would be the most suitable type of content to deliver the information for the audience, and what is their intention when they are searching for a keyword or phrase (often referred to as long-tail keywords). (Clarke 2015, 25-38.)

Keyword research should always start with understanding the target audience of the company so that one would know their pains, needs, demands, as well as their goals. A company should rank for keywords that its target audiences and segments are looking for. Focusing on the needs of the audience as opposed to just keywords and keywords data will result in a much more successful SEO campaign. (Moz 2019.)

Keyword research tool (e.g., Google Ads or SEMRush Keyword Tool) will help SEOs to find the keywords that the searchers enter the most into the search engine. Keyword research tools provide data on average monthly searches, similar keywords, difficulty to rank for the keyword, as well as the average bidding range that advertisers are paying. Entering the seed keyword (e.g., in the case of this project 'iPaaS') will help SEOs to discover other keywords, frequently searched phrases or relevant topics. While one keyword may have larger search volumes, that does not necessarily mean that it is something the company would want to rank for. Keywords with lower search volumes are often less competitive but may carry more buying intent than more generic keywords. During the keyword research, SEOs should identify which keywords could give a company the most prominent strategic advantage and create content around these words. (Jantsch & Singleton 2016, 81-83.).

Using tools like SEMRush for keyword research will allow SEOs to analyze which keywords the company's competitors are ranking for and this can be useful for developing a strategic approach to identifying niche keywords, their missed opportunities, or keywords that help them sell more. Once an SEO identified a list of keywords, it can be useful to see what others write about that keyword as it can determine the searchers' intents. The researcher uses Google Keyword Planner, Google Trends, Google Correlate, as well as SEMRush Keyword Planner and Organic Research tools to identify keywords for the case company that could help them to achieve their goals.

### **2.6.2 On-site Optimization**

On-site optimization was vital for the success of the present research project. Creating content for SEO needs to follow specific rules to boost the ranking chances of blog posts or articles. On-site optimization is more than just using the right keyword in the content. While the keyword should be in the center of a piece of content, one should also consider what form of content would work the best, how long it should be, how should the content be organized, and what unique value could the author provide to the searchers. Back then, companies would create a new piece of article for each keyword, however, today, it is advised to include all relevant keywords in a single article (Clarke 2018, 42-44). For example, Youredi has articles that rank for 20-40 different keywords, yet the articles talk about one single topic. This is a good practice to deliver high-quality content to the users, instead of short, low-quality materials. Still, an article should never be stuffed with keywords, meaning that one should instead use synonyms than the same keyword repeatedly. Keyword stuffing lowers the user experience as repeating the same words do not sound human to the readers. Moz (2019) suggests creating 10X content which means that the author aims to write a better article than the top results in the search engine result page (SERP). While Youredi focused on creating high-quality and relatively long articles (as long as 1200-2500 words), depending on the topic, an item could also be rather short, if it still answers the question of the users.

Local, national, and international SEO can be very different in terms of on-page optimization. This thesis does not discuss local and national SEO, as the researcher was focusing on international SEO, because of the business strategy of Youredi, thus the project aimed to reach people from multiple countries.

On-page optimization can be technical, and SEOs should have skills both in HTML and CSS coding languages. To fully optimize a page, it's important to use header tags (H1 to H6) logically and have the right code in place. It can be good practice to include specific keywords in the header tags. An article needs to add internal links, but it's vital to understand internal linking best practices, link architectures, link accessibility, how to use anchor texts, the ideal volume of the links, how redirected links work and why these are important. Another overlooked on-page optimization tactic is correctly optimizing images from image names to image sizes and using alt-text which tells the search engines what the image is about. (Jantsch & Singleton 2016, 94-95. & Moz 2018.)

One should also ensure that the title tags are correctly coded so that the crawlers of the search engine will understand what the article talks about. Title tags should include appropriate keywords, they should be attractive, not too long, and preferably include branding, not just for creating more brand awareness, but also for building trust and credibility among searchers. The meta description is a short introduction and lets the user know what they can expect from the article. This is important because it can improve the click-through-rates (CTR) of the article which can improve the rankings in the search engine. (Jantsch & Singleton 2016, 97-98. & Moz 2018.)

While technical SEO can severely impact a company's success in SEO, we are not going to discuss that in this paper in more details. Partly, because the project did not focus on technical SEO, although, the website redesign fixed a lot of serious issues the company's had, but also because this topic gets very technical and it is not straightforwardly relevant to this research.

### **2.6.3 Measuring Search Engine Optimization**

Continuous measurement of SEO can help to improve the campaign and the content, and it can be critical to success. Before starting an SEO campaign, one should set measurable and specific goals. Goals can be about improving organic traffic, engagement metrics, conversion rates, number of pages visited during a session or improving bounce rates. The purpose determines what one should focus on while creating new content. Google Analytics, SEMRush, or any other marketing analytics platform (in this case, Hubspot) can be useful for measuring the success of SEO. Perhaps, the most commonly measured metrics are the traffic to the website throughout a specific time, as well as click-through-rates (CTRs), and conversion rates. When a campaign focuses on creating backlinks, the metric that an SEO wants to focus on besides the number of new links is the domain authority (DA). (Moz 2019.)

In Youredi's case, following keyword rankings were also a part of the measurement. Measuring rankings helps SEOs to follow how they rank for the keywords that matter to the business and allows them to analyze pieces of contents that would need improvement. In this case, it's worth looking at content that performs well and analyzes why that content works better than the lower ranking ones and adopt those best practices to articles that do not rank as high. According to the researcher, the case organization could start using spreadsheets to mark what changes were implemented and when to see later whether the changes worked and how long it took to see results. Worksheets help with

prioritization, it's a good practice to mark actions that need to be taken as important or not important.

### 3 Research Methodology

Prior to the research project, the researcher hypothesized that using marketing tactics such as digital marketing, inbound marketing, content marketing, and search engine optimization ingrained into the marketing plan could help the case organization to acquire more website traffic from organic search sources. She also assumed that attracting visitors with interests in the company's business would help the company to generate better quality leads. The researcher formulated the research question:

"Can content marketing and search engine optimization increase the case company's website traffic and generate more qualified leads and prospects cost-efficiently?"

This chapter elaborates the research methodology to explain how the research was undertaken (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2009, 3). The author also reflects on the research philosophy, the research approach and design, the research strategy, the research methods, and the validity and reliability of the project to help her answer the research question described above.

Tranfield and Starkey (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009, 6) argue that management research is critical for developing new ideas and use theory to put the ideas into practice. According to them, this is a managerial practice blueprint meaning that managers need to engage with both theory and practice and the problems should be addressed through both worlds.

The world of practice governed this research project to create practical, relevant knowledge. (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009, 8)

Rousseau (2006, 258) proposes for managers to close the "research-practice gap" which means that organizations often fail to base practices on the best available evidence. Additionally, she emphasizes that 'evidence-based management' should use research evidence and use them for solving practical organizational problems.

Saunders et al. (2009, 9) believe that all managerial research projects can be placed on a continuum based on their purpose and context (Figure 12).

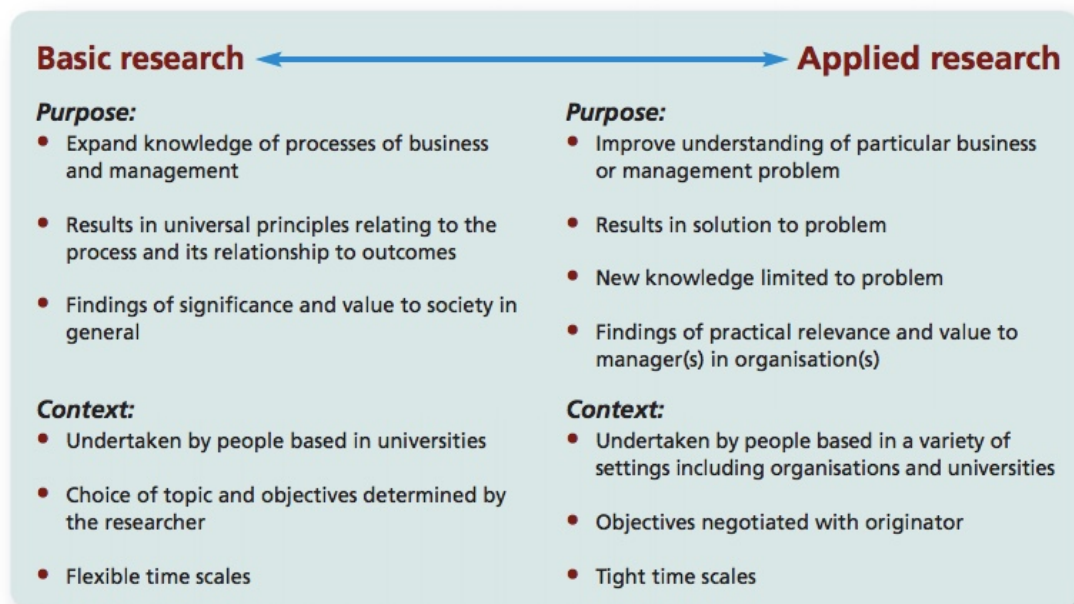


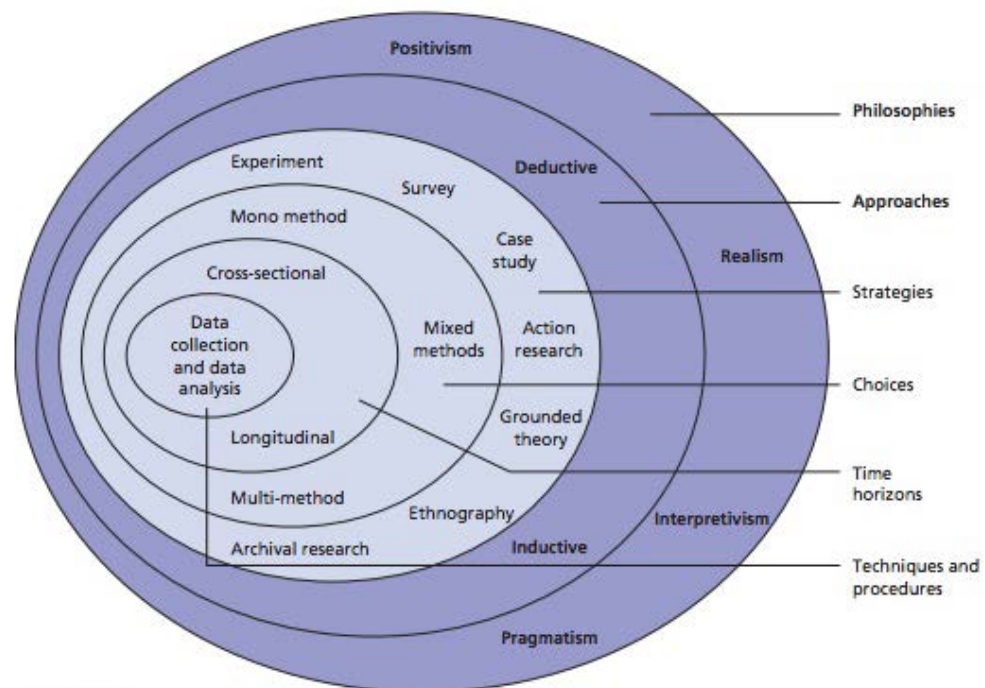
Figure 12. Basic and applied research. Saunders et al. (2009, 9)

In the case of the present research thesis, the author has used applied research, as the purpose of the project has been to improve a particular problem in Youredi's sales and marketing operations. The results also focus on providing a solution to the problem. The researcher studied relevant theory to the problem that will help to improve the operations and provides value to the organization. Sanders et al. (2006, 8) compare applied research to consultancy when it is conducted in an in-depth manner.

### 3.1 Research Philosophy

As the 'research onion' shows in Figure 13 (Saunders et al. 2009, 138) there are four types of research philosophies: positivism, realism, interpretivism, and pragmatism.





**Figure 4.1**  
The research 'onion'  
Source: © Mark Saunders, Philip Lewis and Adrian Thornhill 2008

Figure 13. The research 'onion'. (Saunders et al. 2009, 138)

The research philosophy determines the development of the knowledge as well as it embraces essential assumptions about the research problems that will provide support for the research strategy and the methods that the researcher selected. Nevertheless, the research philosophy that the researcher adopted will be influenced by the practicalities of the research project. The researcher's own view of the theory, and the process of the research can have the most significant impact on the research philosophy. (Saunders et al. 2009, 108) Wilson (2010, 8) states that the research philosophy strongly linked to what the researcher thinks about the development of knowledge. He adds that by understanding the research philosophy, the researcher can better identify the research approach and plan the research design (Wilson 2010, 8-9).

### 3.2 Research epistemology and ontology

According to Wilson (2010, 9), epistemology revolves around how the researcher conceives her surroundings and what she finds to be acceptable knowledge. The researcher in the case of this present project was considering the interpretivist and pragmatist approaches as the epistemology of the research. Nevertheless, regardless of the epistemology of the thesis, the researchers must develop a convincing set of findings, and she must be able to argue why the results are valid (Wilson, 2010, 10). The reason for not using

positivism is that positivism relies heavily on data collection and interpretation in an objective manner and it always leaves to statistical analysis. (Collins 2010, 38)

Interpretivism is entirely the opposite of positivism. The paradigm of interpretivism suggests that the researcher takes an active role in the research and typically only looks at one specific subject in depth. The interpretivist researcher does not try to generalize, but instead, wants to be engaged in the research to ensure that it finds the answer to the research problem. Interpretivists do not work with an exact system of measurement, thus their research is often considered as subjective compared to positivist research. (Wilson 2010, 19) (Figure 14)

Pragmatism, on the other hand, affirms that concepts should support action. Saunders et al. (2009, 109) define pragmatism as:

“Pragmatism argues that the most important determinant of the epistemology, ontology and axiology you adopt is the research question – one may be more appropriate than the other for answering particular questions. Moreover, if the research question does not suggest unambiguously that either a positivist or interpretivist philosophy is adopted, this confirms the pragmatist’s view that it is perfectly possible to work with variations in your epistemology, ontology and axiology.”

	<b>Research approach</b>	<b>Ontology</b>	<b>Axiology</b>	<b>Research strategy</b>
<i>Positivism</i>	Deductive	Objective	Value-free	Quantitative
<i>Interpretivism</i>	Inductive	Subjective	Biased	Qualitative
<i>Pragmatism</i>	Deductive/Inductive	Objective or subjective	Value-free/biased	Qualitative and/or quantitative

Figure 14. Positivism, interpretivism and pragmatism research epistemologies. (Wilson 2010, 19)

Pragmatism also relies on the importance of the research question and it claims that it is the most critical determinant of the research and based on these they consider the most appropriate approach for the thesis to ensure that they generate the best possible results. A pragmatist researcher emphasizes the important is the “what” and “how” of the research problem. Pragmatist research relies on using any methods that can be useful for finding an answer to the research question and developing a resolution to the managerial issue at

hand. A pragmatism thesis can rely solely on a single method instead of multiple one. (Wilson 2010, 10-11.)

These are the reasons why the researcher of the project decided to use the research philosophy of pragmatism, as this philosophy is less strict than the positivist one, it gives more freedom for the researcher to use whatever method is appropriate, as well as it strongly focuses on finding an answer for the research question and relies on taking action as well. The researcher decided not to choose interpretivism as the research epistemology, because a lot of the secondary data that she used during the research is quantitative, although, she is interpreting it. While the ontology of positivism is purely objective and the ontology of interpretivism is subjective, pragmatism is a mixture of objective and subjective ontology that is the most suitable of this project. In this case, this is beneficial as the researcher's axiology is value-free and could be biased as she was working with Youredi's marketing besides this present project as well. While positivism is only using quantitative research strategy, pragmatism could also rely on a qualitative approach.

According to Saunders et al. (2009, 120), radical change is a research paradigm that reflects on how fundamental changes should resolve organizational problems. Radical change always approaches the issue with a critical perspective and how these could be completely changed for the better. In the case of this present research and development project, a radical change in Youredi's marketing tactics was inevitable to help the company to create appropriate website traffic and leads, thus helping to improve the quality of the sales prospects.

### **3.3 Research Approach and Design**

The research approach of this thesis is deductive. Deductive approach is suitable for this research thesis as it is concerned to develop a theory that can be tested.

According to Saunders et al. (2009, 124-125), deductive research has five stages that will assist in the progress of the project. First, the deductive approach subtracts a hypothesis from theory (typically the hypothesis is testable, and it is considering two or more concepts). Second, it focuses on what impacts the concepts have on the operations before the third stage which tests the operational hypothesis. The next phase is the examination of specific outcomes of the test. This may prove that the theory is the right one for overcoming the operational problems that the research focuses on or it will determine needs to improvement and modification of the theory. The fifth stage is closely related to the fourth

one, and it is only considered if there's a need for the adjustment of the theory considering the findings of the research. (Saunders et al. 2009, 124-125.)

Shortly, the deductive approach in business research recognizes a managerial problem, the researcher develops a hypothesis, collects quantitative data, and based on the findings she/he will test the hypothesis. In case the theory and the data provide an answer for developing a comprehensive working resolution for the problem, the work of the researcher is complete. Otherwise, the researcher may need to propose changes in the theory that based on her/his findings could help other researchers to overcome similar managerial challenges. (Saunders et al. 2009, 124-126.)

The research design is concerned with constructing a plan for the research so the researcher can focus on answering the research question (Sanders et al. 2009, 136). Research design defines the explicit objectives of the project, the plan for the data collection, as well as it considers constraints and ethical issues the researcher may face during the thesis. (Sanders et al., 2009, 136-137.)

The researcher hypothesized that organic traffic is essential to acquire new high-quality leads. To generate more traffic, Youredi needed to focus on digital marketing tactics, such as content marketing and SEO as part of the inbound marketing method. The theory helps to identify tactics, such as content marketing that can be vital for testing the theory and the hypothesis.

During the project, the researcher relied on available secondary data available through Hubspot, SEMRush, Google Ad (previously Google AdWords), and Google Search Console tools to identify previous pitfalls in Youredi's marketing that were restricting the company from acquiring organic website traffic. The secondary data helped the researcher to define the best ways to progress with the project and what actions she needed to take as in what content needed to be developed. Throughout the project, the researcher measured the results on a daily basis and kept implementing changes for further improvement. Monitoring the results daily allowed the researcher to plan the next steps during the project. The researcher also used the tools offered by Hubspot, SEMRush, and Google to execute the experiment.

The primary constraint of the project could be that the researcher worked as an employee for Youredi. Therefore, she could be biased, and she could strongly rely on her own opinions. However, she knew that other B2B technology marketers would perhaps use different methods or would depend on a digital marketing agency that has sharp insight into

search engine optimization. In this case, due to budget constraints, she decided to conduct her own research, act and experiment with SEO to improve inbound marketing although bias could affect the results.

### **3.4 Research Strategy**

The research strategy of this present development project is action research as it facilitates practitioners to thesis aspects of practice. and it is emphasizing gathering knowledge through observation, listening, analyzing, questioning, and being involved in constructing one's own knowledge. Action research focuses on improving practice based on the outcomes of the project. (Koshy 2005, XIV.)

There are different explanations of what action research is. Hopkins (2002, 47) described it as the following:

“Action research combines a substantive act with a research procedure; it is action disciplined by enquiry, a personal attempt at understanding while engaged in a process of improvement and reform.”

Cohen and Manion (1994, 297), on the other hand, defined action research as a procedure that deals with a concrete problem, a step-by-step process that is observed continuously over a specific period and by varying methods. They highlight that the process needs constant adjustments and redefinitions to assure the quality of the results.

Bell (1999, 8) remarks that action research is the proper research strategy for practitioner-researchers as the method is focusing on practical problem-solving by understanding and improving practices.

The authors of the Handbook of Action Research, Reason and Bradbury (2001, 4) noted that action research produces knowledge that is practical in everyday life.

Koshy (2005, 26) quotes O'Leary's definition of action research:

“A strategy that pursues action and knowledge in an integrated fashion through a cyclical and participatory process. In action research, processes, outcome and application are inextricably linked.”

Koshy (2005, 9) believes that action research is a constructive inquiry in which the researcher constructs knowledge of an issue through planning, acting, evaluating, refining, and learning from the experiences she/he experience during the research. He reckons that action research is emergent, participatory, constructs a theory from practice, situation-based, focuses on solving real problems, aims to improve practice through analysis, reflection, and evaluation to facilitate change.

The author of this theses has chosen Kemmis and McTaggart's 'Action Research Spiral' (Koshy 2005, 3-5) shown in Figure 15 as the research model of the project, as based on the available data the author has identified the problem and defined the research question and the sub-questions. Based on that she planned the change, acted by starting to implement the change, she regularly observed the outcomes and consequences of actions during the project, then she evaluated the need for change and planned it before implementation. The researcher of this project kept repeating this method daily when needed. The Kemmis and McTaggart model was ideal for this research project as they advise researchers against using it as a rigid structure and they noted that in reality, the phases of the action research process might overlap. They also disclose that the plan may become obsolete as the researcher is learning about the project and practices throughout the process. The action research process can be fluid, open, and responsive. (Koshy 2005, 5.)

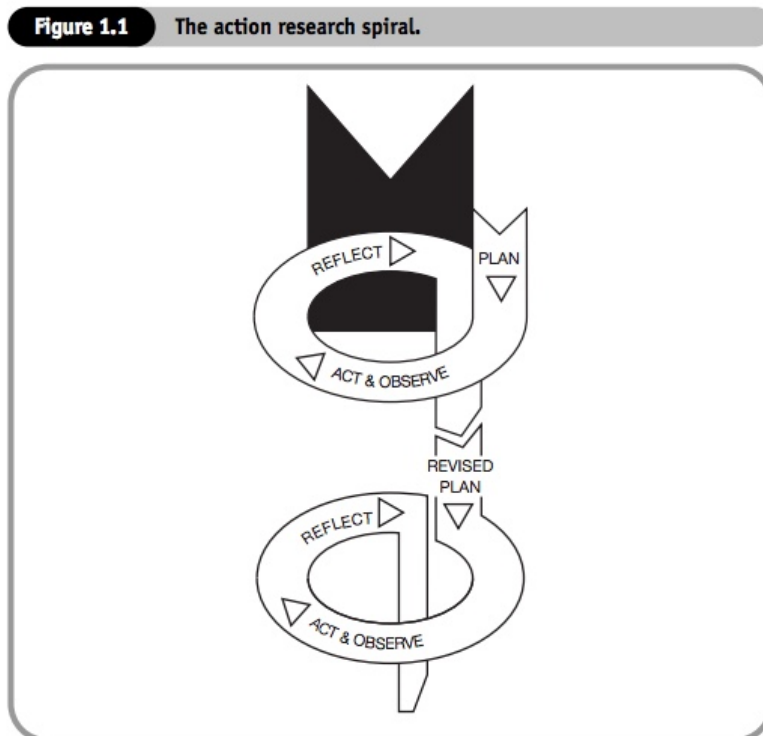


Figure 15. The action research spiral model designed by Kemmis and McTaggart. (Koshy 2005, 4)

While there are other similar models, such as O'Leary's cycles of action research model or Eliot's action research model (Koshy 2005, 6), due to its simplicity of the action research spiral, it is more suitable for this present research.

The author has initially considered constructive research for the purposes of this present research and development project. Nevertheless, the advantages of action research that Koshy (2005, 21) discusses have been relevant for the current project. He argues that in action research the researcher is set within the situation or the project. In this case, the author herself has been working on the project as an employee of Youredi, and she was aware of the problem that she needed to solve. Also, the chosen theory for the project predetermined that the process would be continuous, as SEO needs constant attention, actions and results need to be evaluated daily and modified to ensure success. In the case of this research project, the researcher followed the available theory, but typically action research would allow researchers to create a new theory based on the knowledge they have gathered during the project phase. (Koshy 2005, 21.)

### **3.5 Research Method**

The present research and development thesis was using a mono-method, and it relies on utilizing secondary data that was at Youredi's disposal. The thesis was conducted as longitudinal research which studies change and development within the organization that happened between January 2018 and December 2018. Secondary data means that it was previously collected and there was raw secondary data and compiled secondary data (Sanders et al., 2006). According to Stewart and Kamins (1984, 20), secondary data provides the researcher often with higher quality data than if the researcher was collecting her/his data through quantitative or qualitative methods (for instance quantitative surveys or interviews). They also argue that using secondary data has the advantage over primary data as the data already exists, the researcher can evaluate the quality of it before she/he would use it.

In action research, using secondary data made sense, as the researcher did not want to benchmark what others are doing, but based on the theory she developed an approach to prove her hypothesis and solve a managerial issue that can have positive impacts on Youredi's marketing.

In this case, the researcher used raw data from multiple sources, and she derived her assumptions from the available information. All the sources that the researcher used are

gathered from tools that Youredi has access to and tools that Youredi has been purchasing.

The tools that have been used for data collection are the following:

- Hubspot: Youredi has been using Hubspot as its CRM, its marketing tool with its marketing dashboard for collecting and analysing data, as well as Hubspot's sales tools and dashboards. In Hubspot, we have historical data saved since 2015. For the purposes of the research, the researcher used data from 2016, 2017 and 2018.
- SEMRush: SEMRush is a tool for search engine optimization professionals. SEMRush is a complex SaaS tool that provides information both about Youredi's SEO efforts, as well as the researcher had access to comparable data, competitive intelligence that guided the researcher to analyze the SEO strategies of the competitors and use the insights and findings for developing an SEO strategy and content strategy for Youredi for Q3 and Q4 2019. The researcher used varying reports from SEMRush. Some provides historical data that provide proof for the effectiveness of the project.
- Google Ads are used for measuring search volume data of keywords and determining competition for the different words that the project targets. The more search a keyword has the more valuable it is for driving traffic. Also, buying intent behind the words should be considered which is subjective. Nevertheless, the higher the competition is for a given keyword, the more valuable it can be in terms of generating prospects.
- Google Search Console has been connected to Youredi's website to define which keywords have been generating traffic for the organization. This helped the researcher to analyse which keywords were driving traffic to the website in 2016 and 2017 and what keywords have emerged during the project as traffic sources for Youredi during 2018. The researcher used Google Search Console daily for example to target new keywords or improve click through rates in Google for specific words, thus improving overall traffic to the website.

The data at Youredi's disposal clearly define what marketing actions Youredi conducted before this project, as well as the researcher could confirm those based on her own experience. All data was used to generate content that would include keywords that people are



searching for to improve Youredi's findability in Google. The performance of the most important keywords have been monitored daily (though for this research project the researcher only attached monthly information) and used SEO best practices and tactics to improve rankings. The researcher provided data on monthly improvements. The researcher also evaluated the results of the project that was conducted between January 2018 and December 2018 and use her assumptions to define how to use inbound marketing, content marketing, and SEO for Youredi marketing during 2019. It is important to mention that content marketing and SEO efforts may take six to twelve months (Coombe 2017, 46) on average before they start paying off.

### **3.6 Validity and Reliability**

According to Miles and Huberman (1994, 278), validity is a mean to ensure that the findings of the thesis are credible and useful for others as well. The purpose of this research and development project is to provide a method for a small international technology company to generate more website traffic and high quality leads with limited budget. For this, the author has studied relevant literature and used secondary data from different sources to define a plan. The project was initially twelve months long and it served as the foundation for the company's future marketing tactics. This case could be a useful thesis for others that need to develop an action plan for acquiring website traffic and capturing leads which strengthens the external validity of the thesis. External validity means that the thesis can be generalized to other cases. (Miles & Huberman 1994, 279.)

To ensure the reliability of this thesis, the research questions and the research design need to be clear. (Miles & Huberman 1994, 278) Although, the researcher worked for the case organization full-time, the literature used for certain parts of the research thesis gives a clear guidance about the methods that need to be used, thus limiting bias.

## **4 Research Results of Youredi's Content Marketing and SEO in 2018**

In this empirical part of the research, the researcher reported the findings of the project to help to answer the research question stated in Chapter 1. sub-chapter 1.3. To provide the reader with understanding as to why the project was significant, the researcher analyzed secondary data from 2016 and 2017 — showing the results from before the project puts this present project in more context as to why it was inevitable for the researcher to re-search this topic. The author will analyze secondary data from Hubspot, SEMRush, and Google Search Console from 2018, as well as the first quarter results of 2019 as the project had an impact on the newest results.

### **4.1 Youredi's Marketing Before the Project**

This paragraph describes Youredi's marketing tactics in 2016 and 2017 to help the reader better understand why this research project was necessary. Understanding the background information was vital for defining the target, the objective, and the problem that this action research has been focusing on. The researcher only discussed results and tactics of 2016 and 2017 as she only started to work for the case organization in 2016.

Before looking at the available secondary data to interpret what tactics Youredi was using, it's important to emphasize that one of the main problems was that the buyer persona was focusing on individuals that are working within the supply chain department of organizations. As it was discussed in paragraph 1.6. About Youredi chapter, the company helps to overcome digitalization challenges of supply chains and logistics. Nevertheless, the buyer was rarely the supply chain director or someone from the supply chain department. Developing marketing actions around the incorrect buyer persona triggered that Youredi's marketing team was creating content based on the interests of supply chain professionals. This also meant that website visitors and leads were not the people that would be interested in buying integration solutions and services. As an iPaaS company, Youredi also had very little content around the core services, products, and technology of the company. Youredi needed to identify a new buyer persona and develop the project with the new buyer persona in mind.

The inaccurate buyer persona and the content created for this persona was also used for creating campaigns on LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook, and on Google AdWords as well in 2016. Before 2018,

Youredi was also creating content without clear guidelines or plans. Most of the blogs were opinion pieces instead of informative, helpful articles and lacked focus and search engine optimization.

#### 4.1.1 Youredi Marketing Results 2016

As Figure 17 shows, Youredi's primary source of website traffic was social media in 2016. Social media generated 25 356 sessions from the total of 55 173 (Figure 16), and that was 45,94% (Figure 18) of the overall website traffic. It is important to mention that the vast majority of social media traffic in 2016 was paid traffic. Social media traffic came predominantly from LinkedIn pay-per-click (PPC) advertisement besides a small fraction of Twitter and Facebook advertisement.

The second most important source of traffic was paid search in 2016 which meant that Youredi was using Google Ads for pay-per-click digital marketing. Paid search in 2016 was accounting for 11 781 sessions on the website (Figure 17), and it was 21,34% of all website traffic (Figure 18). This means that all together Youredi paid for 67,28% of its website traffic (Figure 19). Social media was converting at a 1,86% conversion rate that meant 471 leads, and paid search was converting at a 1,41% rate that was resulting in 166 leads (Figure 1). While that was a significant amount of leads, because of the incorrect buying persona the quality was low, and only two leads converted into customers (Figure 16 & Figure 17).

In 2016, Youredi's marketing budget was varying monthly between 5000 – 8000 US dollars. This was a low amount for digital marketing, especially when there was immense competition in the market like there was for the iPaaS buyers. The daily 50-100 euros bidding amount on a platform like LinkedIn or Google AdWords can run out extremely quickly.



Figure 16. Youredi's marketing performance from January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2016 to December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2016. (Youredi 2016)

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	SOURCE	SESSIONS 	CONTACT CONVERSION RATE 	NEW CONTACTS 
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Social media	25,345	1.86%	471
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Paid search	11,781	1.41%	166
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Direct traffic	9,363	0.99%	93
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Organic search	6,637	1.67%	111
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Email marketing	1,117	0.27%	3
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Referrals	922	1.08%	10
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Other campaigns	8	-	-
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Offline sources	-	-	935
Total		55,173	3.24%	1,789

Figure 17. Youredi's website traffic breakdown from January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2016 to December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2016. (Youredi 2016)

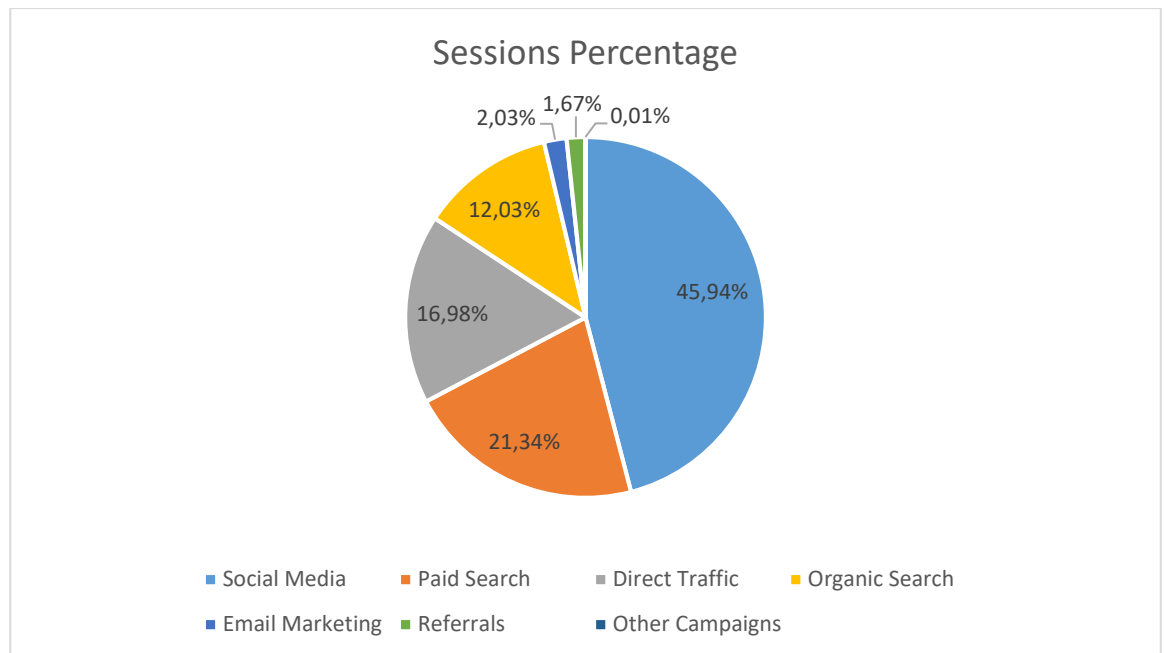


Figure 18. Youredi's website visit sessions by sources in percentage. (Youredi 2016)

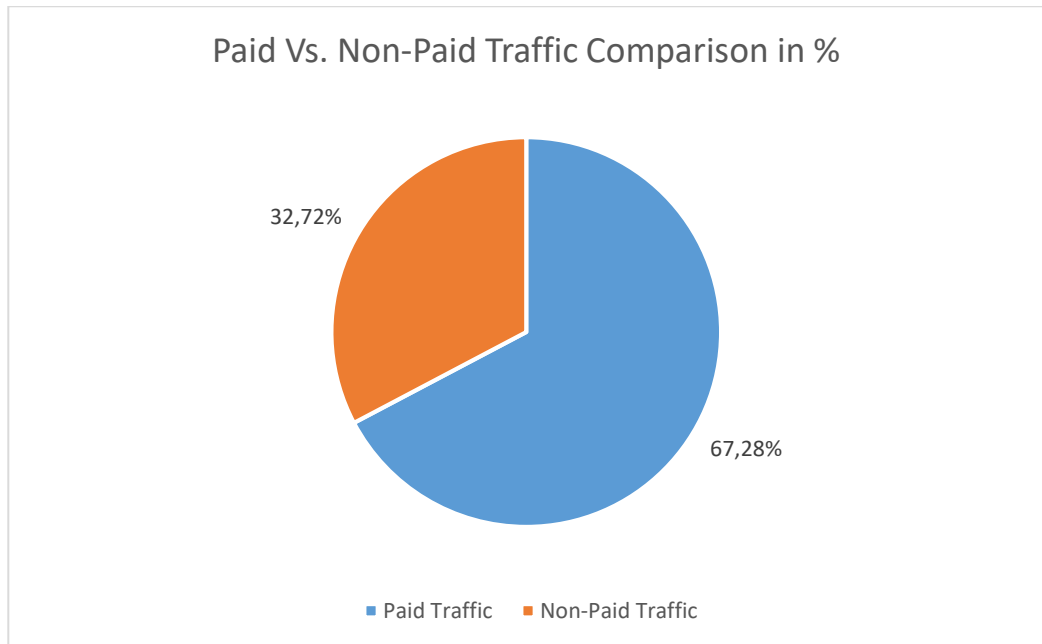


Figure 19. Paid vs. Non-paid website traffic in 2016. (Youredi 2016)

#### 4.1.2 Youredi Marketing Results 2017

In April 2017, Youredi decided to stop paying for LinkedIn and social media advertising as well as Google Adwords campaigns from April 2016. This resulted in a significant drop in traffic and a slight decrease in leads as it is shown in Figure 20. The total amount of sessions on the Youredi website was accounting only for 23 343. Compared to the 55 198 sessions in 2016 that are a 57,7% drop in traffic during 2017 (Figure 20). That happened because of the lack of paid traffic from social media and paid search. While in 2016 social media was bringing 25 356 website visits, it dropped to only 7625 visits in 2017 without advertising. In 2016, Youredi had 11 781 visits from Google Ads and in 2017 that was only 110 visits. (Figure 17 & Figure 21)



Figure 20. Youredi's marketing performance from January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2017 to December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2017. (Youredi 2017)

Nevertheless, in 2017 the primary source of website visits was still from social media, and it was accounting for 32,78% of the overall traffic as shown in Figure 21 & Figure 22. In 2017, the second most important source was organic traffic with an 11,47% increase from the previous year (Figure 21). Direct traffic slightly dropped in 2017, and that could happen because of the overall drop in website sessions that also resulted that we had less returning visitors that was reflected in the decrease in direct sessions (Figure 21).

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	SOURCE	SESSIONS	CONTACT CONVERSION RATE	NEW CONTACTS
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Social media	7,648	3.45%	264
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Organic search	7,399	1.64%	121
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Direct traffic	6,268	1.32%	83
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Email marketing	1,096	0.36%	4
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Referrals	751	1.46%	11
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Paid search	110	0.91%	1
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Other campaigns	62	1.61%	1
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Offline sources	-	-	823
Total		23,334	5.61%	1,308

Figure 21. Youredi's website traffic breakdown from January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2017 to December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2017. (Youredi 2017)

The significant decrease in website visits meant that Youredi had to find a way to increase it and convert more leads that could result in new sales. Acquiring traffic organically was not only necessary because of budget constraints, but also because of Youredi needed to improve the quality of the visitors and leads. The company needed to ensure that the individuals visiting the company's website would have the right background and interests and they could even be potential buyers.

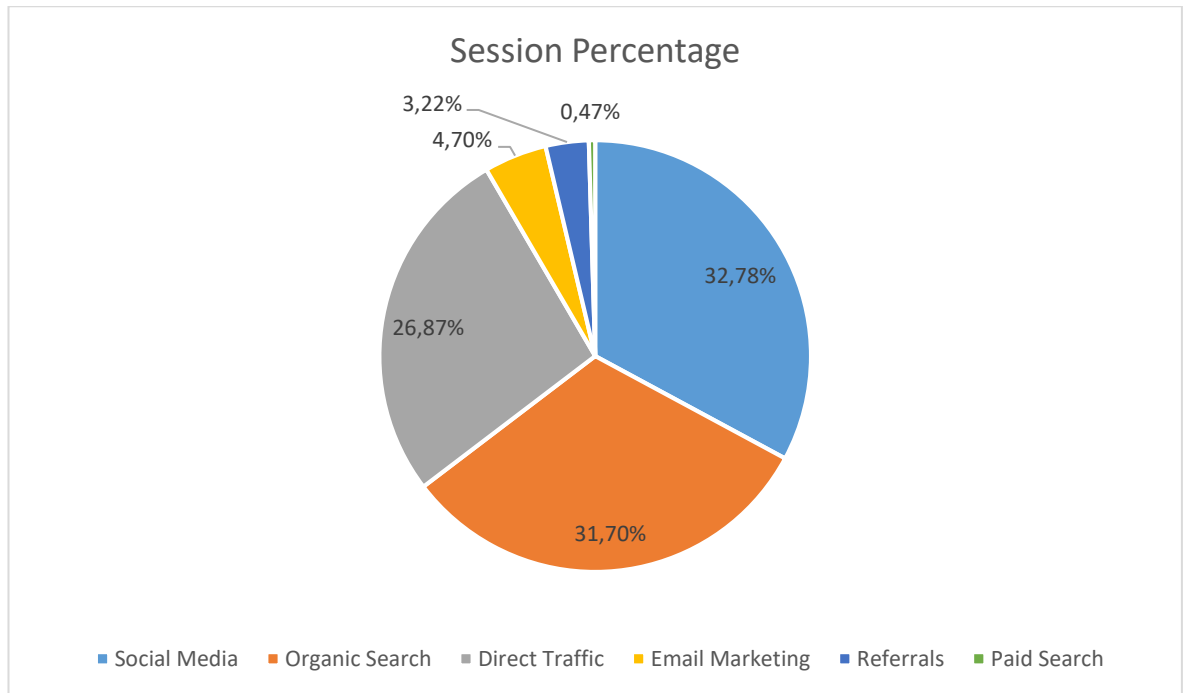


Figure 22. Youredi's website visit sessions by sources in percentage. (Youredi 2017)

To prove that the buying persona was wrong, we have data from 2017 from Google Search Console exhibited in Figure 23. Google Search Console was connected to Youredi's website, and it measures what keywords resulted in organic traffic for the company. The earliest data we have from the Google Search Console was from September 2017. The researcher used the data from September 2017 to December 2018 to show some of the keywords Youredi received the most traffic from.

Search type: Web

Date: Sep 4, 2017-Dec 31, 2017

+ NEW

QUERIES	PAGES	COUNTRIES	DEVICES	SEARCH APPEARANCE
Query				<div><div></div><div></div></div> <div>Clicks</div> <div>Impressions</div>
youredi				600944
youredi ase				79429
logistics trends 2018				45240
yoredi.com				29154
youredi.com				1762
jaakko elovaara				1493
amazon dragon boat project				1427
3pl china				13179
postal industry trends				13137
global logistics trends				1198

Figure 23. Data on the keywords Youredi received organic traffic from between September 2017 to December 2017. Google Search Console. (Youredi 2018d)

Some of these keywords are branded, such as the company's name. The assumption was that previous investment in advertising in 2016 created awareness for Youredi and organic branded searches were reflecting on that. Some of the terms that people were searching for are 'youredi' or 'youredi.com'. The rest of the organic traffic were supply chain and logistics related, such as 'logistics trends 2018', 'postal industry trends' '3PL China'. These were topics that we were blogging about during 2016. These keywords could not help Youredi to address the right target audience, integration buyers, as these do not address the right department of the business and these words carry no integration buying intent.

These preliminary findings based on the available secondary data and the researcher's own work experience led her to understand the problem with Youredi's marketing, define the objective of the research, determine the hypothesis that organic traffic could be beneficial for acquiring high-quality leads and based on these identify the research question and start planning and implementing the project.

#### 4.1.3 Project Plan

The objective of the project was to find a cost-efficient way to generate high-quality website traffic that could be converted into leads and prospects in order to sustain Youredi's



growth. The researcher had the hypothesis that inbound marketing, content marketing, and search engine optimization (SEO) could help to achieve this objective. The research question was the following:

- Can content marketing and search engine optimization increase the case company's website traffic and generate more qualified leads and prospects cost-efficiently?

This research question helped the researcher to define a project plan and actions that needed to be taken to experiment with SEO and content marketing as part of Youredi's inbound marketing to evaluate whether it was a feasible option for Youredi's marketing to generate adequate traffic and leads to consequently help to boost Youredi's revenue and growth.

As the thesis was longitudinal research, the defined project time frame was from January 2018 to December 2018. Nevertheless, this thesis also looks at the results from January 2019 to April 2019 to give the reader better insights on what impact the initial project phase had on Youredi's website traffic and lead generation.

As SEO may change as Google frequently updates its algorithm, the project had to be closely monitored daily and make modifications in the content when needed. Reporting of the results to Youredi happened monthly as part of the sales and marketing meeting.

To ensure the success of the project, the researcher had to rely on a redefined buyer persona. Once the buyer persona was clear, she needed to generate new content with the buyer persona in mind and to do it in a systematic way she needed to develop a content calendar as well as plan the to-do list for each month for the project. The content calendar, as well as actions related to the project, are shown in Appendix 1.

To ensure search engine visibility, the researcher needed to optimize all pieces of content for SEO. Once a new article or blog post was published, the researcher had to keep monitoring how the material performs in Google and based on the results she made adjustments when needed. This was a continuous cycle. Besides, the researcher measured the results month by month. Initially, the goal of the project was to create one piece of new content a week. The researcher mostly wrote the articles with some exceptions. Especially in the beginning, the schedule was a lot tighter than later in the year, as the case company needed to create blogs and articles that are relevant for Youredi's business to replace all the content that had to be removed as they were focusing on the wrong buyer persona.

It is important to mention that the initial phase of the project took 12 months it could take anywhere between three to five months according to a recent thesis by Moz (Baker 2018), an SEO software provider, for SEO efforts to pay off. The list of blogs and articles Youredi created in 2018 and the first quarter of 2019 can be found in Appendix 1.

During the project, the researcher used Hubspot's topic cluster model (previously called Content Strategy, now it can be found within the software as SEO Strategy). The topic cluster framework was developed to help SEO professionals to define a core topic, create a pervasive and descriptive page about that specific topic and build supporting pages around the topic based on relevant search queries. To define relevant search queries the researcher used both Google Ad Keyword Research Tool, as well as SEMRush Keyword Overview, Keyword Magic Tool, and Keyword Difficulty tools. (An 2017.)

The researcher defined two core topics to focus on as part of this research:

- **iPaaS:** This was an important topic for Youredi as the company's core product is an integration platform as a service (iPaaS) that the Professional Services team uses for creating integration solutions for the client. (Figure 24)
- **EDI:** Although, Youredi is not a traditional EDI provider, creating challenging B2B integrations for clients is an integral part of the business. There are many EDI providers on the market, so the content we created also needed to focus on emphasizing that the way Youredi approaches EDI integrations is a modern approach executed in the cloud. Figure 25 below is the screenshot of Hubspot's SEO tool about the EDI/B2B integration topic cluster.



Figure 24. Screenshot of Hubspot's SEO tool about the iPaaS topic cluster. Hubspot. (Youredi 2018b)



Figure 25. Screenshot of Hubspot's SEO tool about the EDI/B2B integration topic cluster. Hubspot. (Youredi 2018b)

Although the project was action research, as the researcher had no previous experience with SEO or creating a content marketing plan, thus she had to commit to learning daily as the project was proceeding. The researcher used books on SEO, content marketing, communication, buyer personas, marketing plans, as well as SEO blogs, SEO and content marketing online courses, Youtube videos from SEO experts, as well as she attended an SEO course in Helsinki, Finland in January 2018 and INBOUND 2018 in Boston, USA where she learned more about inbound marketing and how SEO and content marketing are the pillars of inbound marketing.

While it is not closely related to the topic, it is essential to mention in this paragraph that Youredi undertook the project of renewing its website between August 2018 and November 2018. This was a necessary step to improve Youredi's findability on Google. By rebuilding the website, Youredi was able to improve the company's website's technical SEO and also focus on Google's mobile-first preference by optimizing the webpages even for smartphones. These are important ranking factors for Google (Randolph 2018). The website update had a positive impact on the organic search results of Youredi in November and December 2018. Nevertheless, this research will not discuss the website renewal project in further details.

To evaluate the results of the project, the researcher used secondary data available in Youredi's Hubspot, SEMRush, and Google Search Console tools.

#### **4.2 Analysing of Youredi's content marketing and SEO project in 2018**

In 2018, Youredi's marketing plan focused on acquiring leads with inbound marketing. Therefore, the marketing plan needed to embrace digital marketing and the tactics that Youredi had to use were content marketing and search engine optimization. The project aimed to evaluate whether acquiring website traffic and leads organically without using the marketing budget could help Youredi to get more sales qualified prospects.

To ensure a successful project, the researcher needed to create new content together with the Youredi team. During 2018, Youredi published 63 new blog posts and articles. The full list of blog posts and all relevant information can be found in Appendix 1. The majority of the content was focusing on the topics around iPaaS, EDI, and data integration.

The content plan was built on Hubspot's topic cluster model (An 2017) as also shown in Figure 24 & Figure 25. This meant that the researcher created two pieces of core content in which she described the topics in details to help searchers learn more about the topic. The blogs were the following:

- iPaaS: What is iPaaS?
- EDI: What is electronic data interchange?
- 

While these pieces of content could have enormous value for some individuals, these people tend to be at the very beginning of the buyer's journey. Due to the limited resources to releasing new articles, the researcher decided to apply a niche SEO method. This meant that the supporting content under the core topic would focus on keywords that carry buying intent meaning that the searchers are far further in the buyer's journey and they may be looking for a specific product. These keywords might not have as much search volume than for example the core topics mentioned above, but these topics could convert individuals better into leads and possibly into prospects. While having more traffic was crucial, the quality of the leads was more important.

Overall, the project in 2018 was extremely successful. During 2018, Youredi saw a 38,41% increase in website traffic from the previous year, this means that traffic grew from 23 334 sessions to 32 309 in 2018. During 2018, there was a 37,23% decrease in leads, meaning that Youredi only acquired 821 new leads compared to 1308 in 2017. However, the quality of the leads was better as compared to 7 new customers, the sales team could close 15 new deals, out of which one was through organic search and three deals were via direct traffic. (Figure 25 & Figure 26)



Figure 26. Youredi's marketing performance in 2018. Hubspot. (Youredi 2018b)

Perhaps the most important metric for this project was the organic traffic sessions. In 2017, Youredi had a total of 7399 organic sessions (Figure 21), while in 2018, this number was doubled, as Youredi had 14 634 organic search sessions on the website. (Figure 27) The previous year, organic search accounted only for 7399 sessions (Figure 21). This meant that in 2018, organic search visits increased by 197,78%. This data was also backed up by the data from Google Search Console as shown in Figure 28. Another successful metrics was that Youredi was also able to increase the direct traffic sessions. In 2017, the total direct traffic sessions were accounting for 6268 visits (Figure 21), while in 2018 it was 12 604 (Figure 27).

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	SOURCE	SESSIONS	SESSION TO CONTACT RATE	NEW CONTACTS	CONTACT TO CUSTOMER RATE	CUSTOMERS
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Organic search	14,634	0.87%	127	0.79%	1
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Direct traffic	12,604	1.07%	135	2.22%	3
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Email marketing	2,358	0.34%	8	0%	0
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Social media	1,471	1.02%	15	0%	0
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Referrals	895	1.34%	12	0%	0
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Paid search	334	0.3%	1	0%	0
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Other campaigns	13	0%	0	0%	0
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Offline sources	0	0%	520	2.12%	11
	Total	32,309	2.53%	818	1.83%	15

Figure 27. Youredi's website traffic breakdown by source in 2018. Hubspot. (Youredi 2018b)

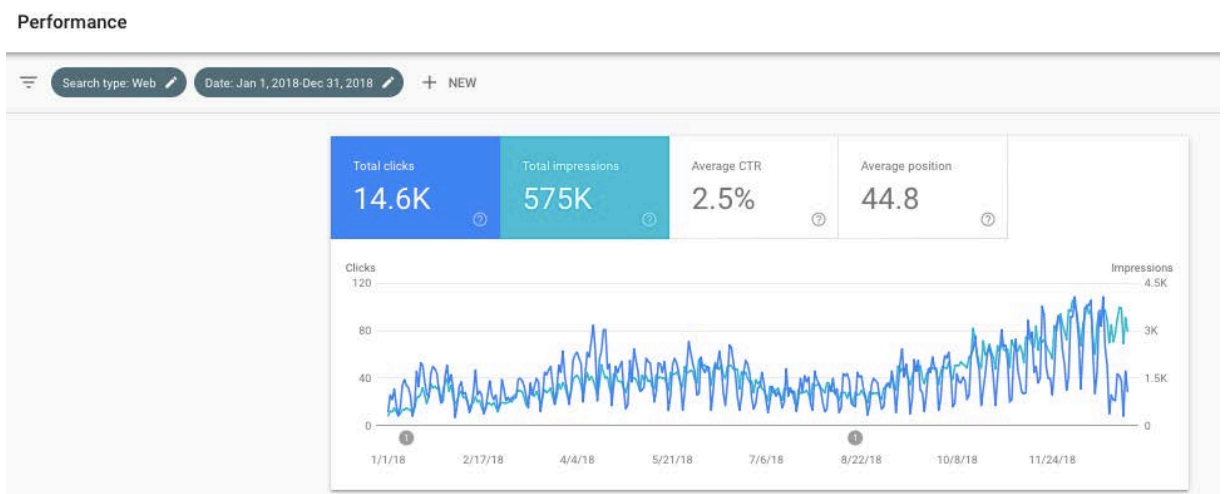


Figure 28. Youredi's Organic Search Traffic in 2018. Google Search Console Data. (Youredi 2018d)

Besides Hubspot, the most important tool for this project was SEMRush, an online visibility management platform. Figure 29 and Figure 30 display the impact on the project on Youredi's search engine visibility. As Figure 29 shows, in January 2018 Youredi's search engine visibility was almost non-existent. According to the secondary data that the researcher had at her disposal, the search engine visibility grew by 700% by the end of December 2018. The data was captured on 28th December 2018. This exponential growth was positive feedback for the project and meant that Youredi should continue creating content and improve its SEO.

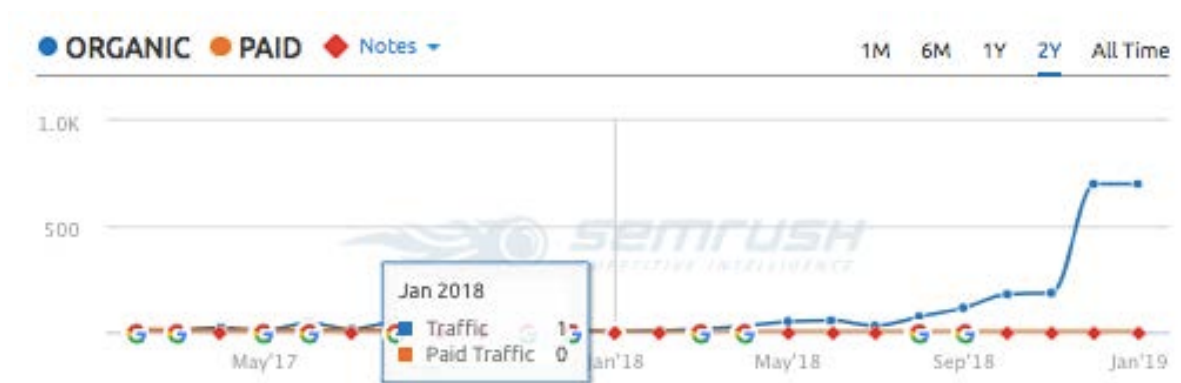


Figure 29. Organic Traffic in January 2018. SEMRush. (Youredi 2018c)

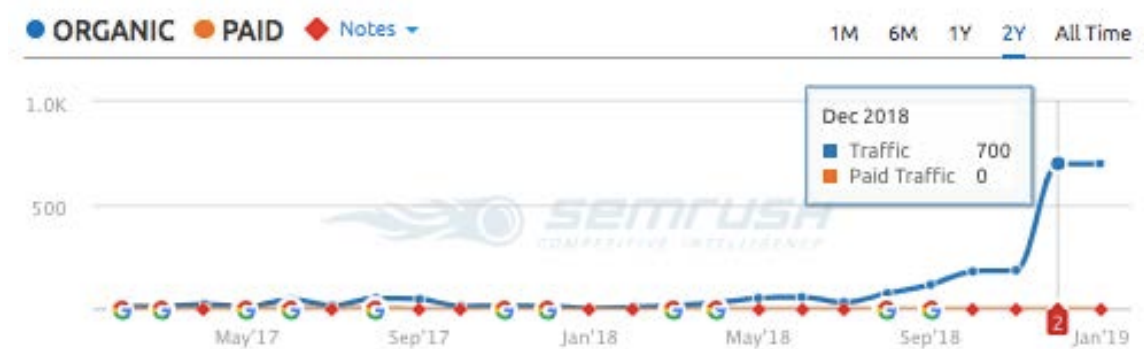


Figure 30. 700% traffic in organic growth in 2018. SEMRush. (Youredi 2018c)

One important success factor for this project besides writing articles and blogs was to increase the number of keywords Youredi was ranking for. As it is shown in Figure 31, Youredi steadily increased the number of keywords the company was ranking for in Google. For this, it was not enough to focus on a single keyword in each article, but the company needed to ensure that each article included all relevant topics and the article

was enriched with the right keyword without “keyword stuffing” that is considered a black hat SEO practice (O’Connor 2018.). In January 2018, Youredi was only ranking for 170 keywords in google, and zero of the 170 was in the Top 3 (Figure 31), in December 2018, the number of keywords was 1107, and 16 keywords were ranking within the Top 3 in Google (Figure 32).

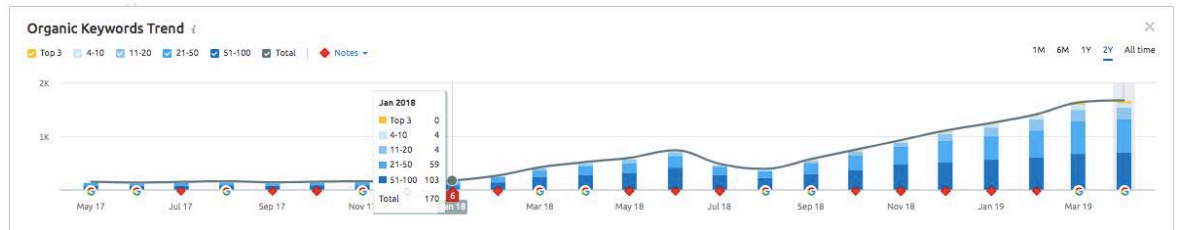


Figure 31. To achieve growth in organic traffic the project needed to focus on adding new keywords to the website that are relevant to Youredi’s focus. (Youredi 2018c)

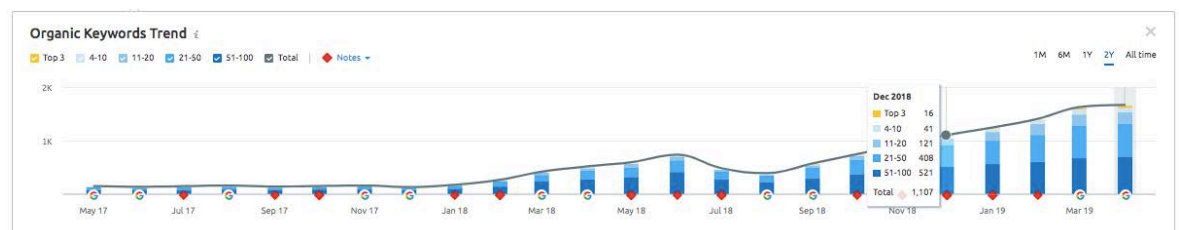


Figure 32. Youredi’s Organic Keyword Trends. (Youredi 2018c)

Perhaps the most interesting metric that the project was following during 2018 in SEMRush was the traffic cost. While Youredi did not have historical data available in SEMRush for this specific metric (because of the subscription type), but the researcher started to report this performance indicator at the end of the year in 2018. Initially, the organic traffic was accounting for one (Figure 29), and by 29th December 2018, it was 754 (Figure 33). The traffic cost was zero in January 2018, and at the end of December 2018, it was US \$15 100 (Figure 33). Traffic cost means that if the case company would have paid in Google Ads for same keywords it received traffic from organic search results, Youredi would have paid US \$15 100. That is a significant number considering that Youredi had a monthly budget of €4500.



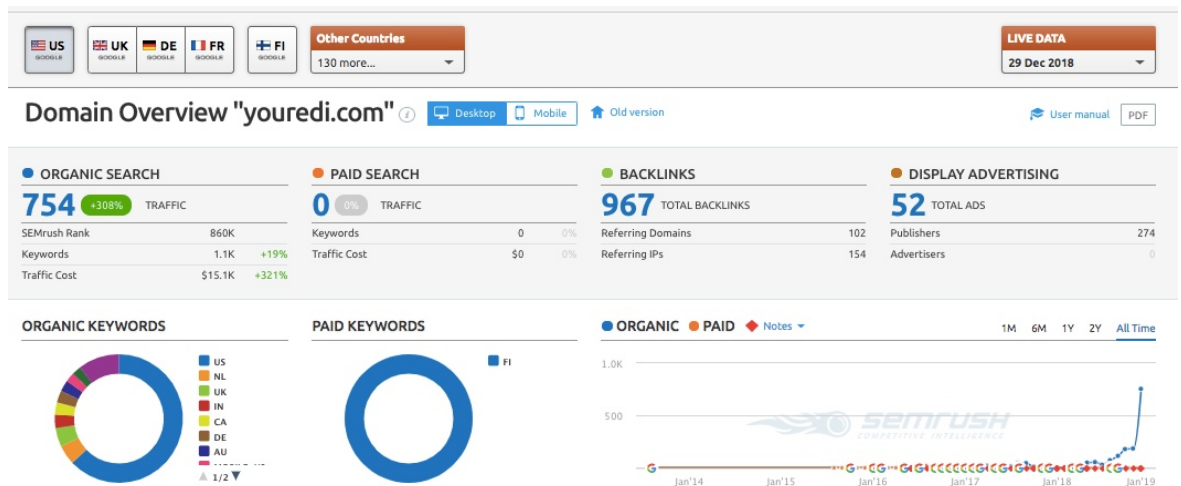


Figure 33. Domain overview of Youredi in SEMRush with metrics about organic search, keywords, and traffic cost. (Youredi 2018c)

Another metric that the researcher was monitoring daily through SEMRush was the search engine visibility trend on desktop. Figure 34 and Figure 35 below show how the visibility trend of Youredi developed between 3rd January 2018 and 26th December 2018. In January, it was accounting for 0.1667% as shown in Figure 34 while at the end of December it was 10.06% (Figure 35). It is important to mention that this Visibility tool only considers the keywords that Youredi has been tracking. Also, for the purpose of this research, this thesis does not show the comparison to the competitors, but that's something that the researcher also monitored daily.

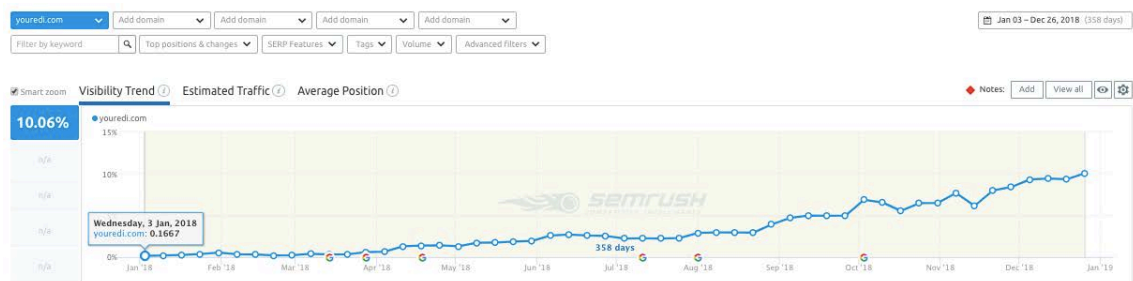


Figure 34. Search Engine Visibility in January 2018 for Youredi. (Youredi 2018c)

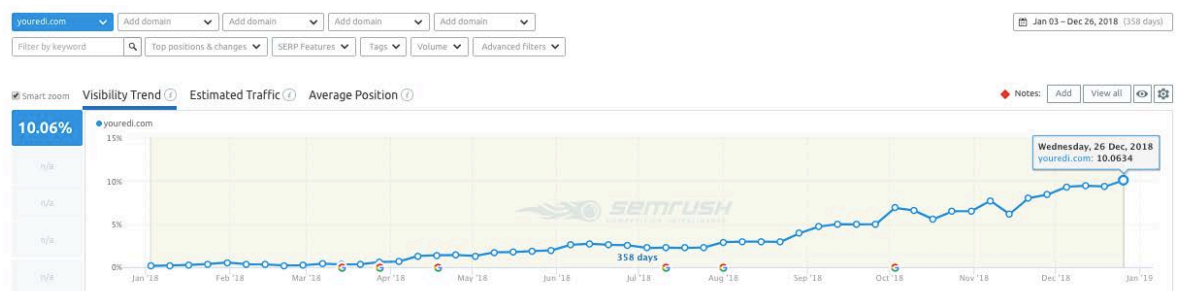


Figure 35. Search Engine Visibility in December 2018 for Youredi. (Youredi 2018c)

In the following subchapters, the author shortly explains how the project developed month by month and how she used secondary data from Hubspot and SEMRush.

#### 4.2.1 Results in January 2018

As the project kicked off in January, the January 2018 metrics were not too ground-breaking. Nevertheless, looking at January was still important because it gives the reader a good snapshot and understanding of how little traffic Youredi was receiving during this month. The total amount of sessions was 1933 (Figure 36), and while it was an increase from the previous month, this was rather low.

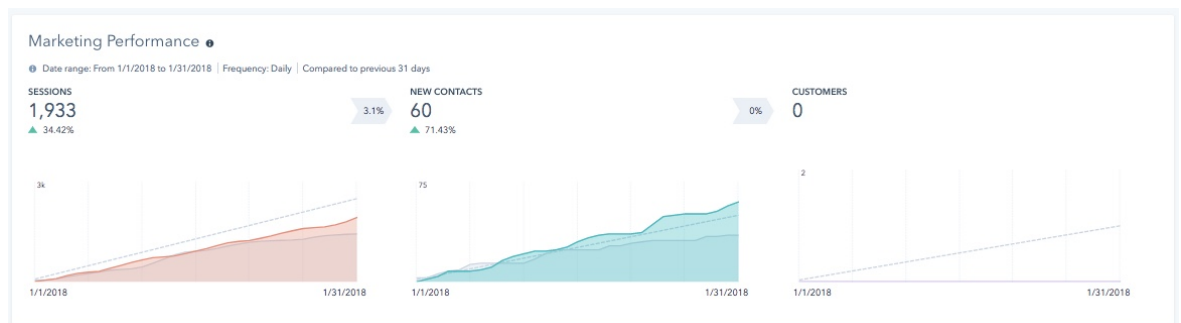


Figure 36. Youredi's marketing performance in January 2018. Hubspot. (Youredi 2018b)

Out of the 1993 sessions, only 944 (Figure 37) was from organic search. This was something that the researcher had to increase throughout the project. Another metric that the researcher needed to focus on is shown in Figure 38, as Youredi was only ranking for 170 keywords.

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	SOURCE	SESSIONS	CONTACT CONVERSION RATE	NEW CONTACTS
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Organic search	944	1.17%	11
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Direct traffic	589	0.85%	5
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Social media	309	1.29%	4
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Referrals	58	5.17%	3
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Email marketing	28	-	-
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Other campaigns	5	-	-
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Offline sources	-	-	37
Total		1,933	3.1%	60

Figure 37. Youredi's website traffic breakdown by source in January 2018. Hubspot. (Youredi 2018b)



Figure 38. Number of keywords on Youredi's website in January 2018. (Youredi 2018c)

At this point, the researcher was focusing on removing old, irrelevant content, developing and understanding the buyer persona, researching the keywords from Google Ads and from the competitors through SEMRush, and planning what keywords the company needed to use to reach the most people that could be interested in integration services. In January, Youredi published six new blog posts (Appendix 1), and these blog posts were all related to data integration services and kept the correct buyer persona in mind. January was also mostly about learning more about content marketing and search engine optimization. As the researcher did not work with these methods earlier, it was difficult to pre-

dict what the results could be in December 2018, thus she did not set any concrete, measurable goals. The key to the project success was seeing constant growth in traffic, organic search traffic, as well as receiving better quality leads.

#### 4.2.2 Results in February 2018

In February, there was a 15,56% drop in traffic (Figure 39), and also the amount of organic search traffic dropped from 944 to only 693 (Figure 40) that was a 36,21% decrease from January. Nevertheless, the researcher thought that this sudden drop could happen, because a lot of the previous articles were removed, so Youredi did not receive traffic anymore from those irrelevant articles.

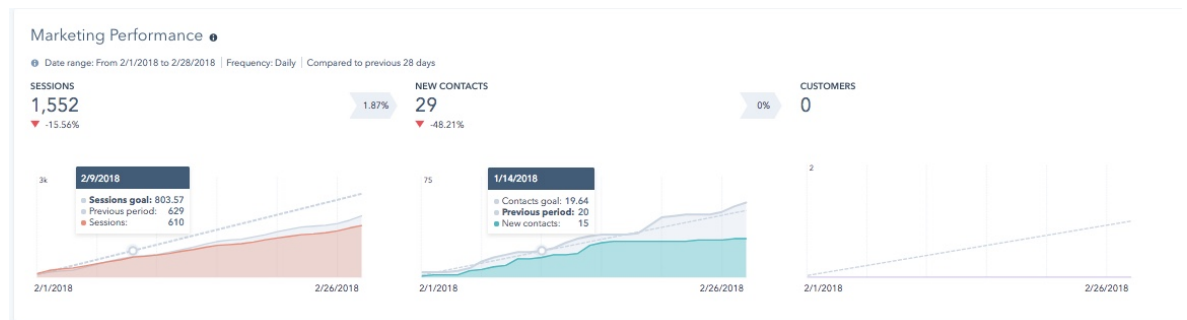


Figure 39. Youredi's marketing performance in February 2018. (Youredi 2018b)

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	SOURCE	SESSIONS	CONTACT CONVERSION RATE	NEW CONTACTS
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Organic search	693	1.15%	8
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Direct traffic	621	0.97%	6
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Social media	114	-	-
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Email marketing	59	-	-
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Referrals	58	-	-
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Other campaigns	4	-	-
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Paid search	3	-	-
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Offline sources	-	-	15
Total		1,552	1.87%	29

Figure 40. Youredi's website traffic breakdown by source in February 2018. Hubspot. (Youredi 2018b)

The number of keywords grew from 170 to 266 (Figure 41) which was the positive result of the six articles Youredi published in January and the four more released during February.

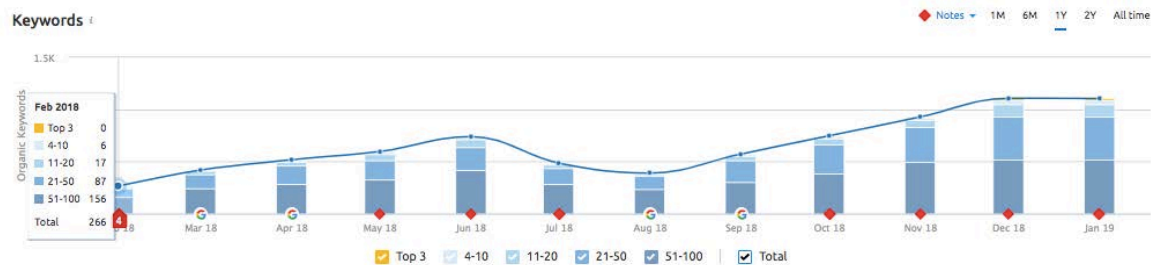


Figure 41. Number of keywords on Youredi's website in February 2018. (Youredi 2018c)

#### 4.2.3 Results in March 2018

In March 2018, Youredi saw a slight increase in website traffic as it grew by 8,02% and there was also a 13,16% growth in the amount of leads generated (Figure 42). Organic search slightly increased from February and it was back on the same level as it was in January (Figure 43).

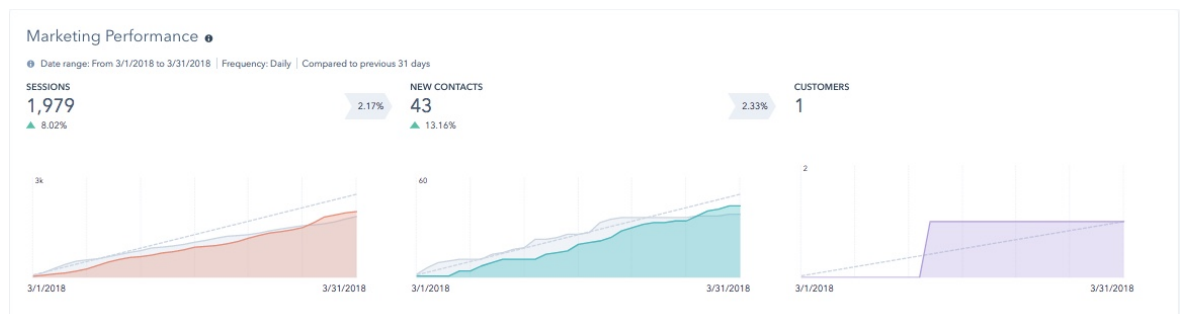


Figure 42. Youredi's marketing performance in March 2018. Hubspot. (Youredi 2018b)

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	SOURCE	SESSIONS	CONTACT CONVERSION RATE	NEW CONTACTS
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Organic search	940	1.91%	18
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Direct traffic	725	1.38%	10
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Social media	147	-	-
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Email marketing	100	2%	2
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Referrals	57	-	-
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Paid search	10	-	-
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Offline sources	-	-	13
Total		1,979	2.17%	43

Figure 43. Youredi's website traffic breakdown by source in March 2018. Hubspot. (Youredi 2018b)

In March, Youredi again released six new articles that could contribute to the growth in keywords as it is shown in Figure 44. The exponential growth regarding the number of keywords looked promising as it meant that the content that Youredi was creating was high quality and therefore it was indexed in Google.

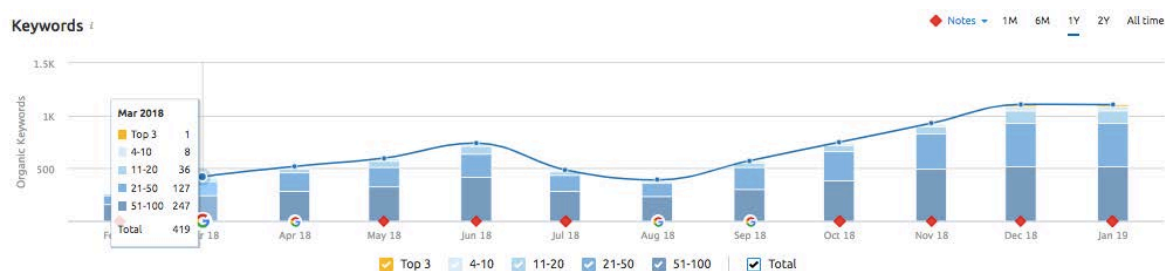


Figure 44. Number of keywords on Youredi's website in February 2018. (Youredi 2018c)

#### 4.2.4 Results in April 2018

As it was discussed above, it can take three to five months to see the first results from content marketing and search engine optimization (Baker 2018). April was the first month when Youredi saw a significant increase in website sessions. In April, website sessions grew by 51,78% and leads increased by 33,33% (Figure 45).

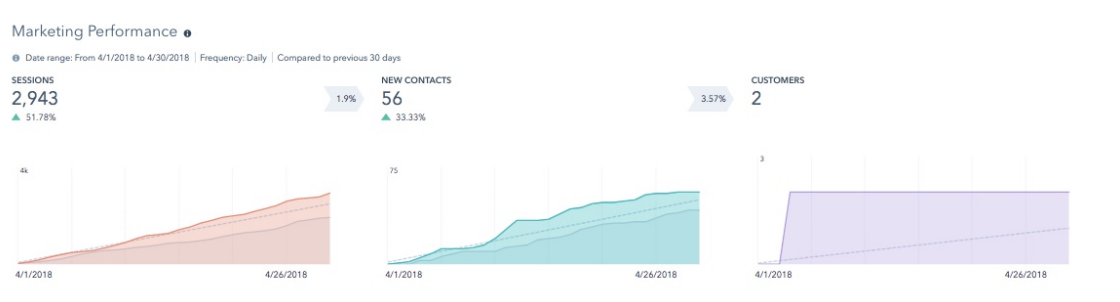


Figure 45. Youredi's marketing performance in April 2018. Hubspot. (Youredi 2018b)

Publishing content frequently had a positive impact on the organic traffic results. Organic search sessions in April increased by 47,55% (1387 sessions) (Figure 46) and converted leads at a 1,73% conversion rate meaning that 24 out of the total 56 leads were coming through Google search.

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	SOURCE	SESSIONS	CONTACT CONVERSION RATE	NEW CONTACTS
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Organic search	1,387	1.73%	24
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Direct traffic	961	1.04%	10
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Paid search	249	-	-
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Social media	127	1.57%	2
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Referrals	115	1.74%	2
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Email marketing	104	-	-
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Offline sources	-	-	18
	<b>Total</b>	<b>2,943</b>	<b>1.9%</b>	<b>56</b>

Figure 46. Youredi's website traffic breakdown by source in April 2018. Hubspot. (Youredi 2018b)

Not only the number of keywords kept growing, but Youredi was also ranking in the Top 3 for three keywords (Figure 47). Ranking in the Top 3 and on the first page of Google is important, because the Top 3 results get the majority of the traffic from the searchers and a research revealed that the number one result gets 30% of all the clicks (Chaffey 2018.) Youredi released a total of seven blog posts during in April to further impact the company's search engine visibility.



Figure 47. Number of keywords on Youredi's website in April 2018. SEMRush. (Youredi 2018c)

#### 4.2.5 Results in May 2018

May did not differ much from April in terms of growth, however, it was positive that the results remained at the same level as in the previous month as you can see from Figure 48 and Figure 49.

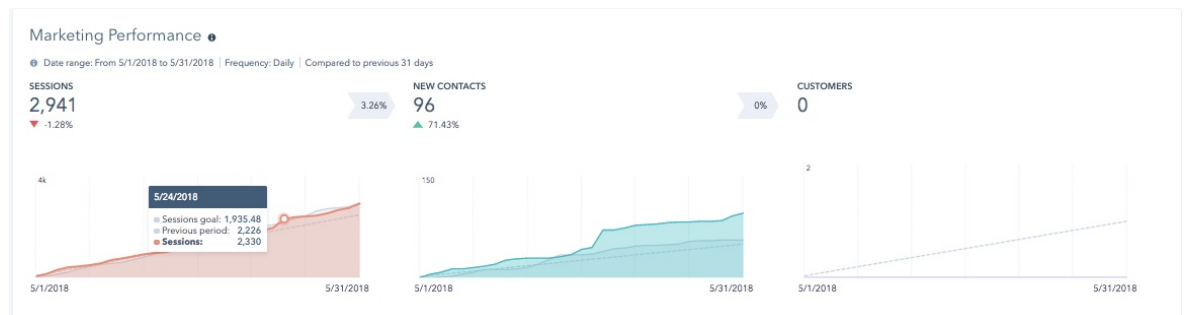


Figure 48. Youredi's marketing performance in May 2018. Hubspot. (Youredi 2018b)

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	SOURCE	SESSIONS	CONTACT CONVERSION RATE	NEW CONTACTS
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Organic search	1,290	0.85%	11
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Direct traffic	1,117	0.54%	6
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Email marketing	359	1.11%	4
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Social media	108	0.93%	1
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Referrals	63	3.17%	2
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Paid search	4	-	-
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Offline sources	-	-	72
Total		2,941	3.26%	96

Figure 49. Youredi's website traffic breakdown by source in May 2018. (Youredi 2018b)

The researcher decided to accelerate the speed of creating and publishing new content, thus Youredi added nine new articles to the website during May. One article that was focusing on the keyword 'iPaaS vendors' was a test and the researcher wanted to see if Youredi would be able to rank number one in Google and thus capture people that are looking for an integration platform. However, she was aware that seeing results would take time. May was also positive as there was a slight increase in the amount of keywords



Youredi was ranking for and at that time, the company was ranking for five keywords in the top results (Figure 50).



Figure 50. Number of keywords on Youredi's website in May 2018. SEMRush. (Youredi 2018c)

#### 4.2.6 Results in June 2018

While in June there was a 20,05% decrease in sessions (Figure 51), but the amount of organic sessions only dropped slightly, thus we could say that it was stagnating (Figure 52). While this was not ideal, the researcher assumed that summer holidays could influence the results, as Youredi saw a decrease in traffic during the summer also in the previous years.

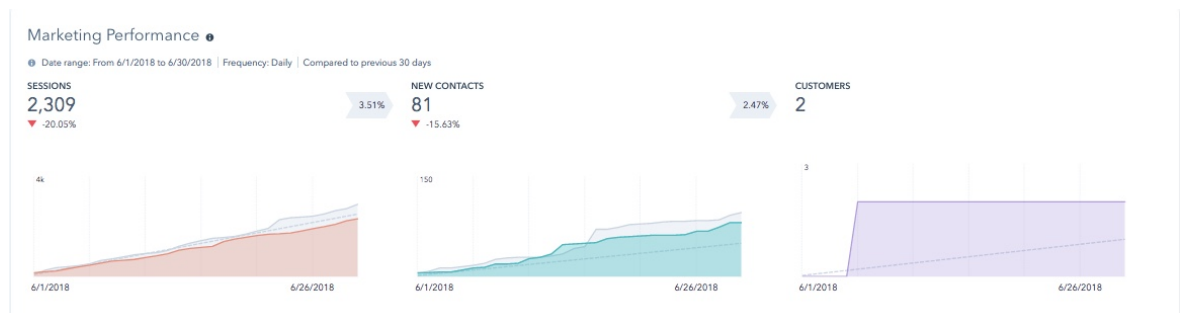


Figure 51. Youredi's marketing performance in June 2018. (Youredi 2018b)

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	SOURCE	SESSIONS	CONTACT CONVERSION RATE	NEW CONTACTS
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Organic search	1,213	0.66%	8
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Direct traffic	844	1.42%	12
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Referrals	89	2.25%	2
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Email marketing	87	-	-
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Social media	74	1.35%	1
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Paid search	2	-	-
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Offline sources	-	-	58
Total		2,309	3.51%	81

Figure 52. Youredi's website traffic breakdown by source in June 2018. (Youredi 2018b)

During the summer the researcher did not put the project on hold. Thus, Youredi published another five articles to contribute to the content marketing strategy. Also, the company did not get that many views during the summer months, but all content that Youredi was publishing had the goal to remain visible and useful for readers also in the future. The amount of keywords the company ranked for kept increasing to 740, but the top results remained at the same level as in the previous month (Figure 53).

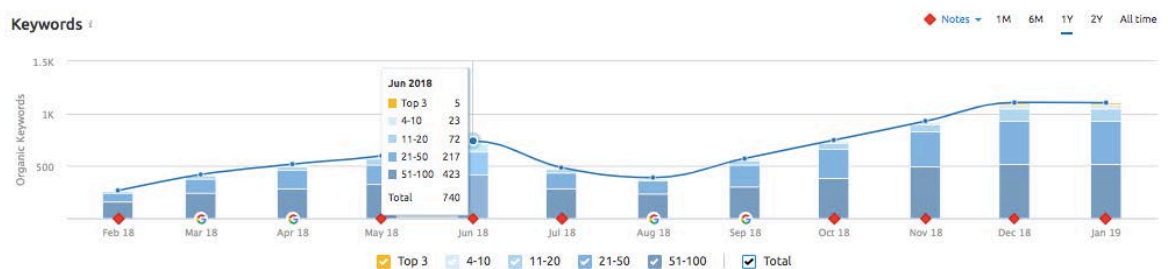


Figure 53. Number of keywords on Youredi's website in June 2018. (Youredi 2018c)

#### 4.2.7 Results in July 2018

In July, the results were as poor as in January and in February, as Youredi only had 1776 website sessions and only 23 leads (Figure 54). Also, the organic search results decreased to January and February levels and the organization only received 868 organic sessions (Figure 55).

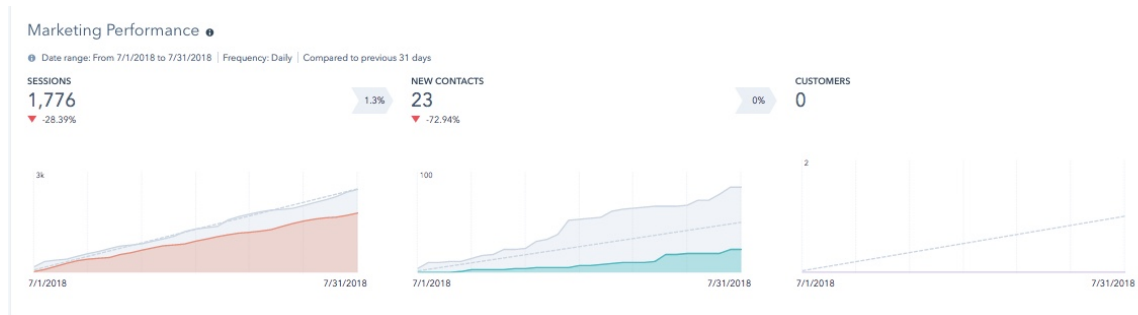


Figure 54. Youredi's marketing performance in July 2018. (Youredi 2018b)

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	SOURCE	SESSIONS	CONTACT CONVERSION RATE	NEW CONTACTS
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Organic search	868	0.23%	2
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Direct traffic	753	0.66%	5
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Referrals	67	-	-
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Social media	62	-	-
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Email marketing	23	-	-
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Paid search	2	-	-
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Other campaigns	1	-	-
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Offline sources	-	-	16
Total		1,776	1.3%	23

Figure 55. Youredi's website traffic breakdown by source in July 2018. Hubspot. (Youredi 2018b)

This drop could have been interpreted as normal, but as also the number of keywords started to decrease (Figure 56), the researcher assumed that there was something wrong with the on-page SEO optimization. To ensure that the results would be more positive in the next month, the researcher spent the whole July making adjustments and corrections to all the articles that were published during 2018 to ensure that all pages are optimized according to the SEO on-page optimization best practices. (Moz 2018.)

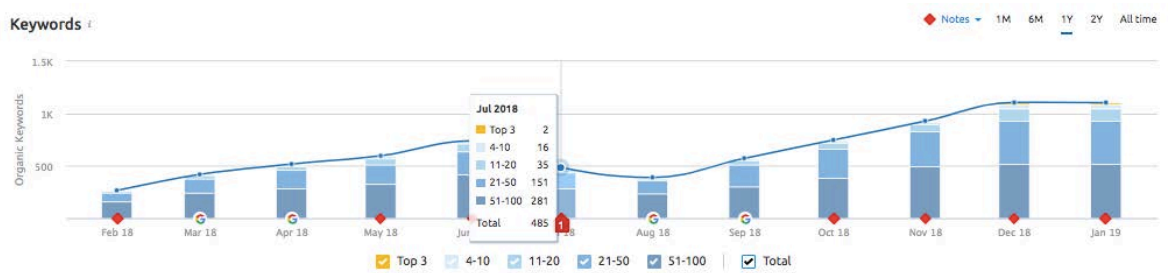


Figure 56. Number of keywords on Youredi's website in July 2018. (Youredi 2018c)

#### 4.2.8 Results in August 2018

In August, the results did not look more positive than in July. The traffic dropped even further from the previous month and also the company only converted 15 leads from inbound marketing (Figure 57 & Figure 58) and that was concerning. Therefore, the researcher continued to make further improvements in SEO. She also decided to keep removing old blog posts that were generating organic traffic, but were not relevant for the company's purposes and goals. The reason she decided to remove articles that were bringing in traffic was that it could have confused the Google crawlers resulting in less traffic for the keywords that are important for us. (Boitnott 2019.)

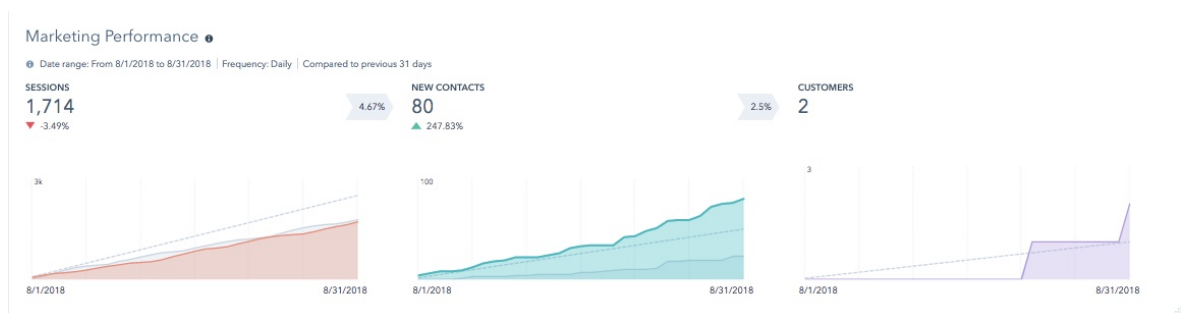


Figure 57. Youredi's marketing performance in August 2018. Hubspot. (Youredi 2018b)

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	SOURCE	SESSIONS	CONTACT CONVERSION RATE	NEW CONTACTS
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Organic search	925	0.43%	4
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Direct traffic	498	2.21%	11
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Social media	99	-	-
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Referrals	84	-	-
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Email marketing	56	-	-
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Paid search	52	1.92%	1
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Offline sources	-	-	64
	Total	1,714	4.67%	80

Figure 58. Youredi's website traffic breakdown by source in September 2018. Hubspot. (Youredi 2018b)

Because of this action, the number of keywords kept decreasing (Figure 59). While this was not an ideal situation, it could have also meant that in the future the company would be able to increase its rankings in Google for the keywords that matter and keep growing the number of keywords Youredi was ranking for.

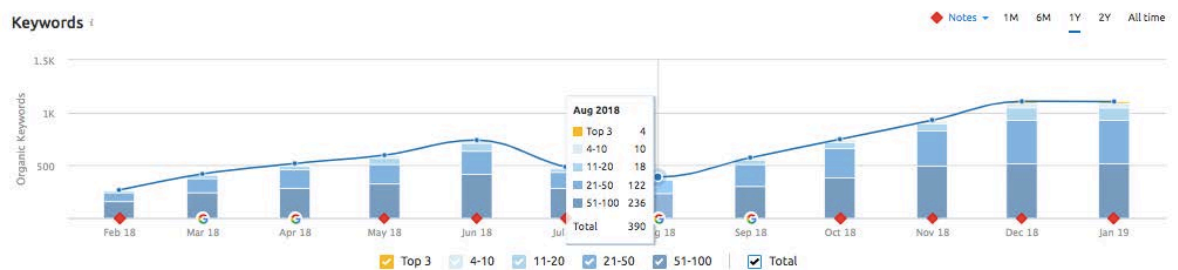


Figure 59. Number of keywords on Youredi's website in August 2018. (Youredi 2018c)

#### 4.2.9 Results in September 2018

In September 2018, Youredi saw an increase in website traffic and this could be interpreted as the actions taken during July and August started to pay off. The increase was significant as traffic was 2844 in September that was a 72,78% increase from the previous month (Figure 60). The traffic to lead conversion has not recovered yet, as it was stagnating at the same level as the month before. Nevertheless, the researcher knew that it could take more new content and further optimization to improve that. The website redesign that

started in August was focusing on creating a design that would help Youredi to increase its conversion rates and by fixing technical issues it could also impact the visibility of the website in the search engines.

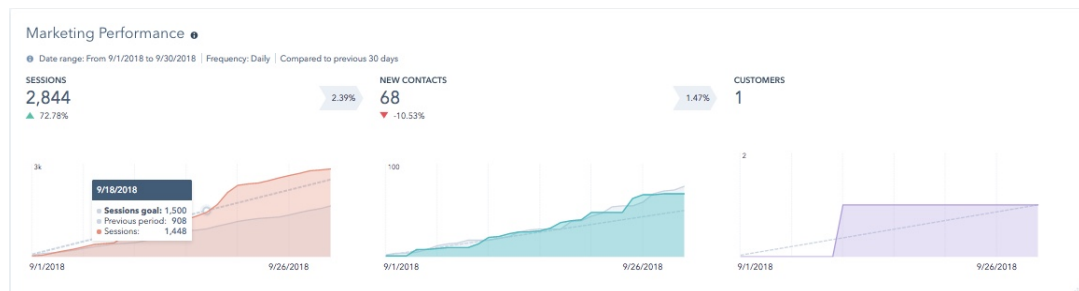


Figure 60. Youredi's marketing performance in September 2018. Hubspot. (Youredi 2018b)

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	SOURCE	SESSIONS	CONTACT CONVERSION RATE	NEW CONTACTS
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Direct traffic	1,537	0.78%	12
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Organic search	1,123	0.27%	3
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Social media	77	-	-
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Referrals	54	1.85%	1
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Email marketing	48	-	-
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Paid search	5	-	-
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Offline sources	-	-	52
Total		2,844	2.39%	68

Figure 61. Youredi's website traffic breakdown by source in September 2018. Hubspot. (Youredi 2018b)

In July and August, the company published 10 blogs, articles, and interviews, while in September only two. Still, the number of keywords kept increasing and already six keywords were ranking in the Top 3 Google results (Figure 61). The reason for releasing less content was that the researcher wanted to focus on improving SEO optimization, such as internal link building. Also, she decided to remove the remaining articles that were irrelevant after she saw the positive impact of removing some already during the summer. She

also gathered new knowledge regarding content marketing and SEO at Hubspot's IN-BOUND 2018 event that she wanted to experiment with during September.

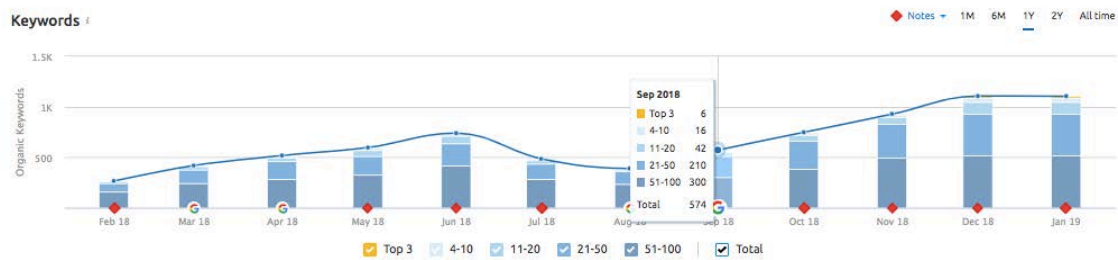


Figure 61. Number of keywords on Youredi's website in September 2018. SEMRush. (Youredi 2018c)

#### 4.2.10 Results in October 2018

In October, the website traffic grew by 42,16% (Figure 62) and there was also a small increase in organic traffic and a significant increase in direct traffic. Generating leads through inbound marketing, however, still lacked behind as it can be seen in Figure 63.

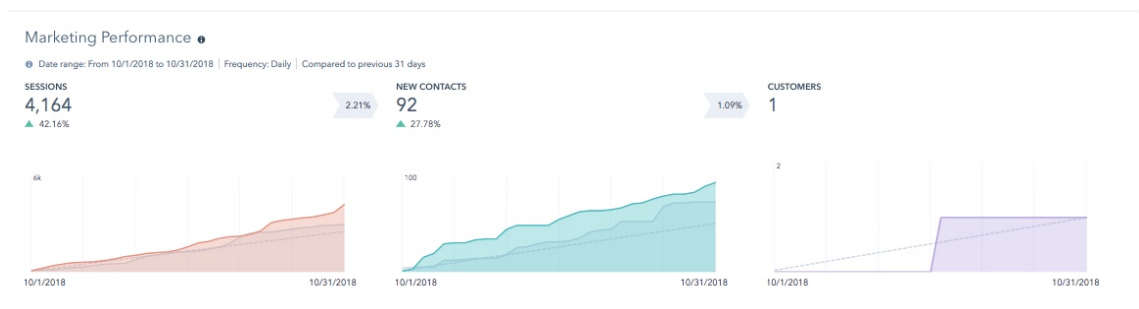


Figure 62 Youredi's marketing performance in October 2018. (Youredi 2018b)

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	SOURCE	SESSIONS	CONTACT CONVERSION RATE	NEW CONTACTS
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Direct traffic	2,081	0.62%	13
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Organic search	1,487	0.74%	11
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Email marketing	369	-	-
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Social media	147	3.4%	5
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Referrals	76	-	-
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Other campaigns	2	-	-
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Paid search	2	-	-
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Offline sources	-	-	63
Total		4,164	2.21%	92

Figure 63. Youredi's website traffic breakdown by source in October 2018. Hubspot. (Youredi 2018b)

The number of keywords Youredi was ranking for grew to 748 (Figure 64) and already eight were ranking in the Top 3 on Google's first page. Also, in October, the company only published two new articles as the focus was on the relaunch of the new website.



Figure 64. Number of keywords on Youredi's website in February 2018. (Youredi 2018c)

#### 4.2.11 Results in November 2018

In November, the traffic kept increasing only slightly, but it was still an 8.94% increase since October (Figure 65). Organic traffic grew from 1487 to 1729 in November (Figure 66) and that was a 16,27% increase. It was a positive mark as it meant that the efforts of the project are paying off as the company could see that the traffic was increasing continuously.



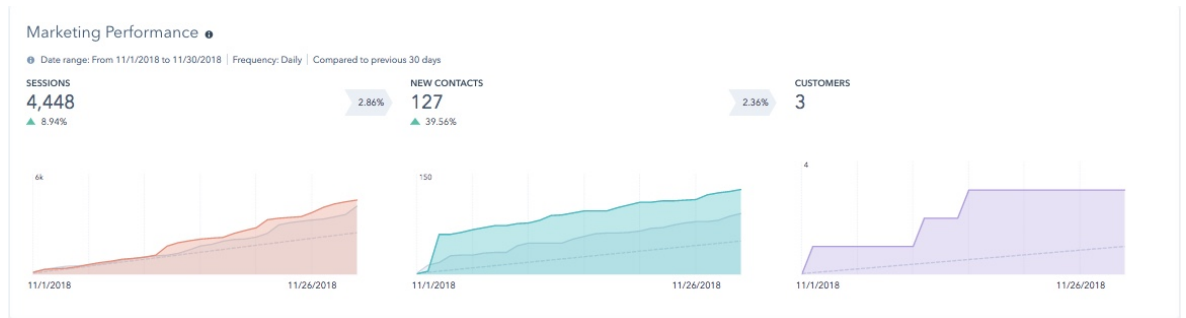


Figure 65. Youredi's marketing performance in November 2018. (Youredi 2018b)

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	SOURCE	SESSIONS	CONTACT CONVERSION RATE	NEW CONTACTS
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Direct traffic	1,865	1.18%	22
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Organic search	1,729	0.69%	12
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Email marketing	603	0.17%	1
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Social media	144	1.39%	2
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Referrals	105	0.95%	1
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Paid search	2	-	-
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Offline sources	-	-	89
Total		4,448	2.86%	127

Figure 66. Youredi's website traffic breakdown by source in November 2018. (Youredi 2018b)

Also, the number of keywords grew to be 929 and that was a 24,19% increase (Figure 67). As the new website was launched on 15<sup>th</sup> November 2018, much of the researcher's attention was on that project, as well as she was away for two weeks, thus the company only released two new articles. However, at this point, the team was hoping to see the results increasing even further and were curious to see how the technical SEO would affect the rankings and the website traffic the next month.

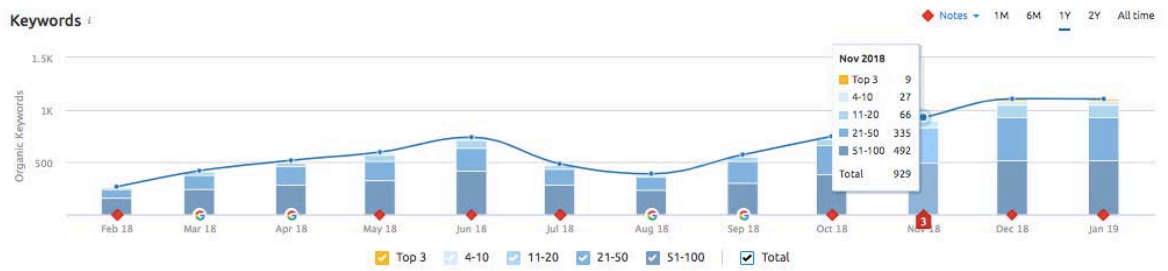


Figure 67. Number of keywords on Youredi's website in November 2018. (Youredi 2018c)

#### 4.2.12 Results in December 2018

The fact that in December Youredi had a 25,27% decrease in traffic (Figure 68) did not mean that the results of the project were not positive. In December, the company saw a stagnation in traffic after 21<sup>st</sup> December because of the holidays, but until that point it was experiencing a record amount of organic traffic that was the most important metric of this project. Organic search traffic was 2035 (Figure 69) and that was a 17,69% increase from the previous month. The team could assume that it was the result of the constant content publishing as well as the fixes with the website as on Figure 35 of search engine visibility Youredi saw a sudden increase after 15<sup>th</sup> November.

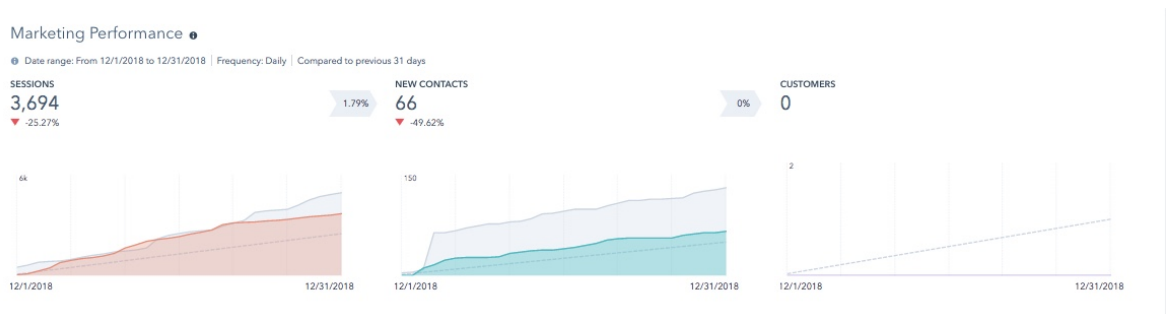


Figure 68. Youredi's marketing performance in December 2018. Hubspot. (Youredi 2018b)

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	SOURCE	SESSIONS	CONTACT CONVERSION RATE	NEW CONTACTS
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Organic search	2,035	0.74%	15
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Direct traffic	1,000	2.3%	23
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Email marketing	523	0.19%	1
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Referrals	69	1.45%	1
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Social media	63	-	-
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Paid search	3	-	-
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Other campaigns	1	-	-
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Offline sources	-	-	26
	Total	3,694	1.79%	66

Figure 69. Youredi's website traffic breakdown by source in December 2018. Hubspot. (Youredi 2018b)

In December, Youredi continued with the steady pace of releasing new content by releasing 5 new blogs and interviews. All the efforts of the previous 11 months started to accumulate, as Youredi had 1107 keywords (Figure 70) in December and suddenly 16 keywords were ranking in the Top 3. This has been an enormous increase compared to where the company was in January 2018 as it was described in the previous chapter.

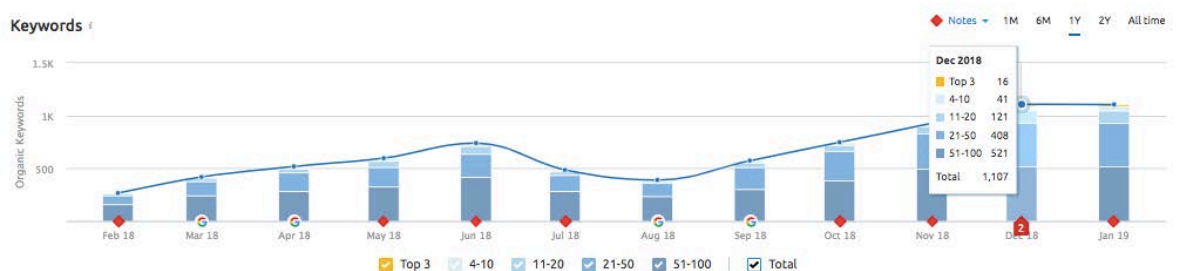


Figure 70. Number of keywords on Youredi's website in December 2018. (Youredi 2018c)

### 4.3 Results in Analysis of the 2019 Results

While the original project timeline was lasting from January and December 2018, but as Youredi has secondary data available from the first quarter (Q1) of 2019, it was interesting

to look at these to better understand the impact of the project. Publishing content frequently, optimizing all blogs and articles, as well as all other website pages for search engines, and relaunching the website reflect on the results of Q1 in 2019.

#### 4.3.1 Results in January 2019

In January 2019, Youredi saw a 41,07% growth from the next month in traffic (Figure 71). While the significant growth happened partly because of the lack of traffic in the previous month after 21<sup>st</sup> December, but still the results were promising as organic search grew from 2035 in December (Figure 69) to 3037 in January 2019 (Figure 72) which was a 49,23% growth from the previous month.

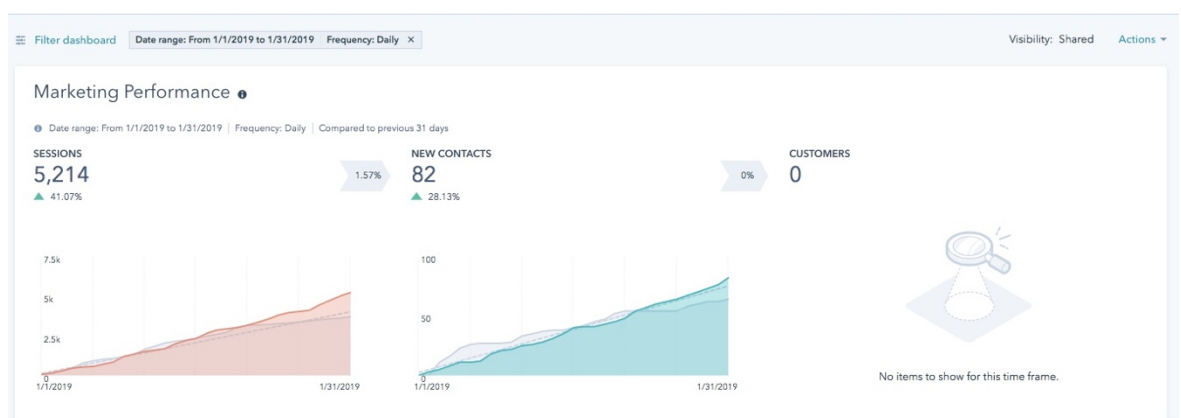


Figure 71. Youredi's marketing performance in January 2019. (Youredi 2019b)

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	SOURCE	SESSIONS	SESSION TO CONTACT RATE	NEW CONTACTS
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Organic search	3,037	0.86%	26
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Direct traffic	1,109	3.25%	36
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Email marketing	825	0%	0
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Referrals	101	0.99%	1
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Paid search	83	0%	0
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Social media	57	3.51%	2
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Other campaigns	2	0%	0
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Offline sources	0	0%	17
	<b>Total</b>	<b>5,214</b>	<b>1.57%</b>	<b>82</b>

Figure 72. Youredi's website traffic breakdown by source in January 2019. (Youredi 2019b)

Besides the organic traffic growth, also the search engine visibility increased according to the data that the researcher captured in January in SEMRush. As it is shown in Figure NUMBER X, since the end of December (Figure 33), traffic grew from 754 to 926 (Figure 73) as well as the traffic cost increased from US \$15 100 to US \$16 900.

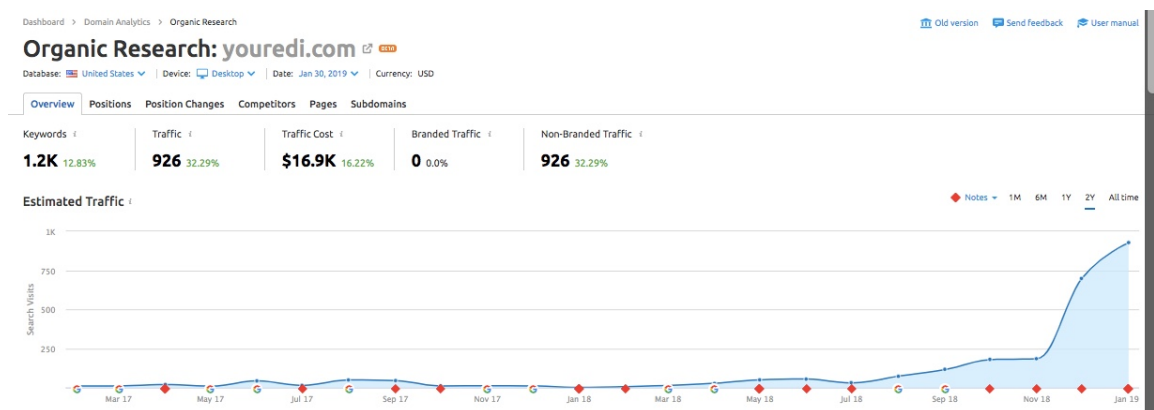


Figure 73. Organic search results in SEMRush. Traffic, traffic cpst, and keywords. (Youredi 2019c)

### 4.3.2 Results in February 2019

In February, Youredi only saw a slight growth in traffic (7,16%) and the number of acquired leads were stagnating (Figure 74). Nevertheless, the results of the month are still extremely positive, as the traffic received from organic sources kept increasing from 3037 in January (Figure 72) to 3587 in February (Figure 75), meaning there was a 18,10% growth.



Figure 74. Youredi's marketing performance in February 2019. (Youredi 2019b)

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	SOURCE	SESSIONS	SESSION TO CONTACT RATE	NEW CONTACTS
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Organic search	3,587	0.5%	18
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Direct traffic	1,157	2.77%	32
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Email marketing	278	0%	0
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Social media	128	0%	0
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Referrals	115	2.61%	3
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Offline sources	0	0%	24
	Total	5,265	1.46%	77

Figure 75. Youredi's website traffic breakdown by source in February 2019. (Youredi 2019b)

The most positive result of February was that the number of keywords kept increasing even further, as well as the traffic grew from 956 to 1176 in February. Also, the traffic cost

increased significantly from US \$16 900 to US \$26 100. (Figure 76)

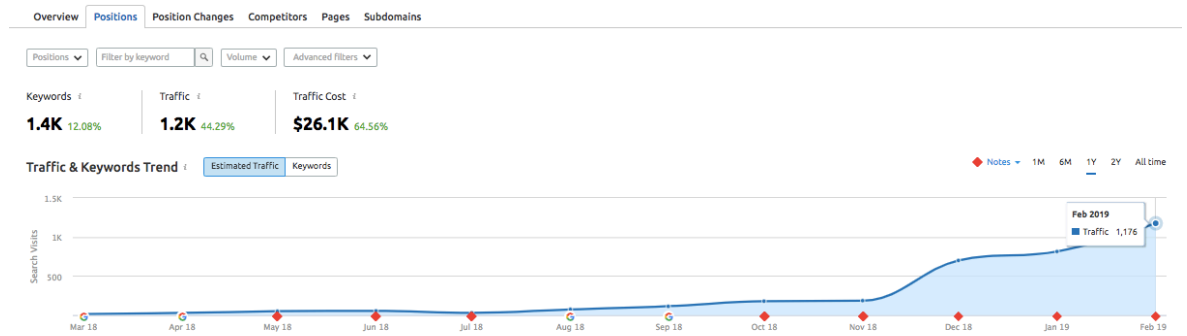


Figure 76. Organic search results in SEMRush. Traffic, traffic cost, and keywords in February 2019. (Youredi 2019c)

### 4.3.3 Results in March 2019

In March, Youredi saw a significant growth in terms of overall website traffic and organic traffic. The website traffic grew by 43,29%, while the number of leads increased by 218,18% (although, the company attended an event and that contributed to the new leads as Figure 78 shows the number of leads generated from offline sources) as shown in Figure 77.



Figure 77. Youredi's marketing performance in March 2019. (Youredi 2019b)

The case company saw a significant increase in organic traffic and that accounted for 5202 visits in March 2019 (Figure 78). Thus traffic that Youredi acquired from organic sources grew by 45,02%. In terms of organic traffic, March 2019 was the best month for Youredi and it proves that the content marketing and search engine organization efforts are paying off. In the meantime, during the entire Q1 in 2019, Youredi continued to deliver new content weekly whether in the form of blog posts or articles or in the form of PDF documents, such as ebooks, whitepapers, products sheets, and more.

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	SOURCE	SESSIONS	SESSION TO CONTACT RATE	NEW CONTACTS
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Organic search	5,202	0.56%	29
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Direct traffic	1,836	1.63%	30
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Email marketing	288	0%	0
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Referrals	125	1.6%	2
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Social media	89	0%	0
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Paid search	3	0%	0
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Other campaigns	1	0%	0
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Offline sources	0	0%	184
	<b>Total</b>	<b>7,544</b>	<b>3.25%</b>	<b>245</b>

Figure 78. Youredi's website traffic breakdown by source in March 2019. (Youredi 2019b)

According to SEMRush (Figure 79), traffic grew to 1700 and the traffic cost reached US \$35 500 which was a great amount especially if we consider that in March Youredi was ranking for 1635 keywords (Figure 80) and out of those only 39 attained Top 3 status in Google.



Figure 79. Organic search results in SEMRush. Traffic, traffic cost, and keywords in March 2019. (Youredi 2019c)

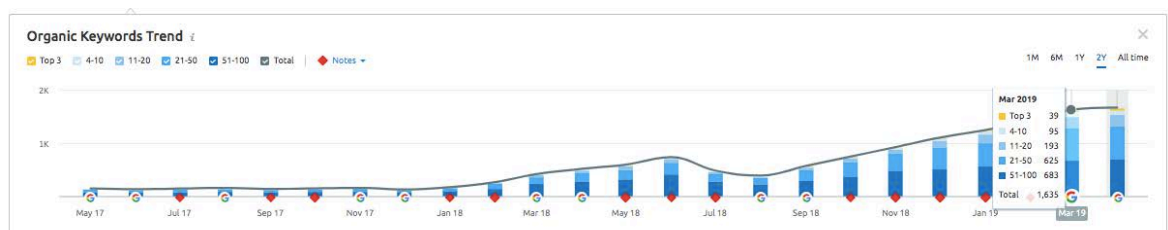




Figure 80. Organic Keywords Trend in March 2019. (Youredi 2019c)

Until the 15<sup>th</sup> April, Youredi saw a record growth in website traffic as there was a 229,64% growth compared to the same time at the previous year (Figure 81). Also, the number of leads grew by 178,18%. Comparing Figure 27 and Figure 82, last year Youredi had 14 634 the whole year and on 15<sup>th</sup> April 2019 it was already 14 530.



Figure 81. Youredi 2019 website traffic until 15<sup>th</sup> April. (Youredi 2019b)

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	SOURCE	SESSIONS	SESSION TO CONTACT RATE	NEW CONTACTS
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Organic search	14,530	0.56%	81
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Direct traffic	5,378	2.36%	127
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Email marketing	1,475	0%	0
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Referrals	432	1.85%	8
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Social media	345	0.58%	2
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Paid search	88	0%	0
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Other campaigns	3	0%	0
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Offline sources	0	0%	241
	<b>Total</b>	<b>22,251</b>	<b>2.06%</b>	<b>459</b>

Figure 82. Youredi 2019 website traffic breakdown until 15<sup>th</sup> April. (Youredi 2019b)

#### **4.4 Analysis of the main challenges**

While the project was extremely interesting for the researcher and useful for Youredi's marketing, it was also challenging. Perhaps, the most challenging obstacle, in this case, was that the author of this thesis had to keep learning about inbound marketing, content marketing, and search engine optimization throughout the entire duration of the project as she had no previous experience from these marketing tactics. In addition to this, as content marketing and SEO are constantly changing, she will have to keep learning about the topics to ensure the success of Youredi's content marketing efforts.

The fact that the researcher had no previous experience in executing a similar project meant that the objectives and goals of this research and development project were not strictly set. In the future, goals should be more concrete, yet achievable, and these should be aligned with the company's marketing and business strategies.

The project was also challenging as due to limited resources, Youredi could only publish on average one blog post per week on average at best. The project could have progressed a lot faster with more resources, and the results could have been higher. The research was also extremely time-consuming, as all the content the company released had to be monitored and adjusted according to SEO best practices. Also, the researcher had to realize that not all content necessarily work and for that there could be various reasons. One reason for that could be that Youredi has relatively low site authority due to the limited number of backlinks. In 2019, Youredi's domain authority was 40, and the company has only 1200 backlinks (Youredi 2019). In the initial phases, the researcher also published multiple blogs on the same topic. These mistakes in the future should be avoided, and all posts should be revisited. Also, from August until the middle of November, the clear majority of the researcher's time was spent with the website relaunch project.

#### **4.5 Actions required to improve Youredi's Inbound Marketing**

The researcher suggested that Youredi would keep focusing on inbound marketing by creating content and optimizing them for SEO. However, in the future, Youredi should focus even more on writing about topics that may indicate that individuals would have buying intent. It can be useful as the case company has limited resources for generating new articles and blog posts, thus the time and efforts should be used carefully. Another reason for focusing on key commercial keywords is that while the company may generate less organic traffic, but it will be able to reach people that have genuine interest in the case company's services. This focus could also improve the visits to lead conversions that would be

an important metric for the future. Continuing to invest in inbound marketing, the Youredi team should identify clear goals, objectives, and milestones that they want to achieve by releasing blog posts and other content formats frequently. It would make easier to measure the success of the company's content marketing efforts.

To identify the keywords that Youredi should focus on during 2019, the researcher used different methods. First, she identified that the main content groups should be 'data integration', 'iPaaS', 'EDI', 'B2B integration', 'EAI', and 'Hybrid Integration' (with a focus on legacy integration). Other topic groups to focus on could be 'API management', 'SaaS integration', 'IoT integration', and 'system integration' later on.

The first method the researcher used to identify keywords to write about was a competitive research. The Organic Research tool of SEMRush allows people to analyze the competition's SEO and rankings. The researcher used data from competitors, such as Dell Boomi, Jitterbit, OpenText, Mulesoft, SPS Commerce, and Informatica. She downloaded all their keyword rankings, she segmented the data based on topics, and identified keywords that other integration vendors have been placing high bids on in Google Ads. The fact that a keyword has high bidding price means that it's worth to pay for the given word as it may attract qualified buyers and decision makers. The researcher then identified the list of the keywords that could be relevant for Youredi and listed them as these words should be prioritized during the first half of 2019 (Appendix 2). Some of the keywords that are shown in Appendix 2. have already been used for articles while the others are yet to be written about.

The second method also used the Organic Research tool from SEMRush together with Google Keyword Research Tool, but in this case, the researcher only looked at keywords related to EDI and only results from one competitor, OpenText. The blogs related to EDI have been extremely popular and OpenText ranks for most of the EDI related keywords very well. Understanding what keywords they rank for could be a useful indicator of what Youredi should also write about. The keywords that were collected are shown in Appendix 3. The higher the bidding price of a keyword and the higher the search volume is the more important these words are for a business.

The third method only looked at data from Google Keyword Research Tool and Google Ads. One challenge that the researcher should tackle during 2019 is to reach enterprise decision makers. While Youredi's product is an iPaaS, the term is not as popular as for example enterprise application integration (EAI) which is basically a way to integrate appli-

cations and systems of enterprises and for which iPaaS is an ideal tool too. As the researcher had the hypothesis that developing content around this topic could reach enterprise decision makers, the researcher gathered a list of relevant keywords and search volumes and recommends that the case company would create a campaign around EAI. Appendix 4 shows what keywords the researcher suggested regarding blogs of EAI.

While it's important to keep publishing articles frequently, Youredi will also need to focus on creating content for the other stages of the buyer's journey than just the attract phase. In 2019, creating high quality resources such as white papers and ebooks will have a major role in Youredi's marketing to ensure that the company improves its visitor to lead conversion rates.

## 5 Discussion

The discussion part of this thesis will elaborate on how the research helped to answer the research questions and achieve the objective of the project and what was the value of the implementation for the business. The researcher will also establish recommendations regarding what actions the company should take in the future and how the results could be used, as well as she will propose further research areas. In the end, the researcher will shortly focus on her own learning outcomes throughout the thesis process.

### 5.1 Objective & Research Question

The objective of the thesis was to prove that digital marketing tactics can help the case company to generate more website traffic through organic search. Having more traffic that found the company through their search queries could mean that Youredi could also acquire better quality leads. Another important objective of the project was that the tactics used should also be cost-efficient.

The researcher formulated the following research question:

- Can content marketing and search engine optimization increase the case company's website traffic and generate more qualified leads and prospects cost-efficiently?

Based on the results, the research project can be considered as successful. The project proved that inbound marketing, content marketing, and search engine optimization could help the case company to generate more website traffic that can be turned into leads and buyers. Thus, these marketing tactics should have more emphasize in the marketing plan to help the company to execute its marketing strategy.

The website traffic and the number of leads the case company acquired steadily grew during the project. Furthermore, in 2019 the results started to be even more concrete. As it was discussed in the previous chapter, in 2018, the overall website traffic of the case company grew by 38,41% and was accounting for 32 309 visits (Figure 27). As the objective of the thesis was to focus on growing organic visits, the most important metrics is the growth that Youredi saw during 2018. In 2017, organic search traffic was 7399 (Figure 21), while in 2018 it was 14 634 (Figure 27) which means that the number of organically acquired website visitors grew by 197,78%. By 15<sup>th</sup> April 2019, organic search was accounting for 14 530 sessions (Figure 82) which means that in three and a half months, the company achieved the same amount of organic visits as in the previous year within 12

months. This allowed the company to forecast approximately 49 500 organic sessions for 2019 which would mean a 338% increase from the previous year.

While in 2018, the amount of leads was decreasing -37,41%, the feedback from the company was that the overall quality of the leads was better. Until the middle of April 2019, the case organization increased the number of acquired leads by 178% (Figure 81). It's important to mention that cost-efficiency was essential for this project. The case company did not spend any marketing budget during 2018 and 2019 to acquire leads.

The most significant achievement of the project was to get new deals from companies that found Youredi through organic search. This was excellent proof that the concept to demonstrate that the inbound marketing methodology can work for small business-to-business technology companies.

The case company's feedback for the project was extremely positive and they referred to the project as transformational to the company's marketing approach. The project also proved the company that digital marketing can provide value for the business even without heavy investment and without expensive pay-per-click advertisement. During this project, the researcher also led the website relaunch which did not only improve the experience of the website visitors, but also had an exponential growth effect on the website traffic. The project also was appreciated by the board of directors.

## **5.2 Recommendations**

Nevertheless, in this part of this present paper, the author also wanted to reflect on the project from a critical point of view. This is vital for giving useful recommendations for the case company. While the results of the project were outstanding, it is vital to identify what could have been done better so that in the future the researcher and the case company could make improvements.

First, in the future, Youredi could more clearly align inbound marketing with the marketing strategy and integrate content marketing and SEO more into the marketing plan. As Taylor (2018, 60) suggests aligning the business strategy and the marketing strategy to help the organization achieve its financial goals, aligning the inbound marketing of Youredi more with the marketing and business strategies could help Youredi's marketing considering how the inbound marketing activities could be monetized more to have an impact on the organization's revenue.

Inbound marketing should be precisely documented in the future, and the documentation should consider the recommendations of this present paper, both from this chapter and from Chapter 4.5. Wood (2017, 4) recommends that the marketing plan should clearly define what tactics should be used and how those would be evaluated. (Wood 2017, 4.) While Youredi currently does short-plan marketing planning, a more extended plan including concrete actions needed regarding inbound marketing could be beneficial.

Wood (2017, 5-6) also explains that a marketing plan is essential for ensuring that a company's marketing can achieve the goals. Systematic planning and clear guidelines to measurement are necessary for the success of a marketing plan. To also ensure the success of inbound marketing, the company should define clear objectives and goals that they want to achieve by using this methodology. Concrete goals and objectives were not set for this research project, and while analyzing the results, the researcher recognized that clear goals would have been helpful. Moreover, setting goals and objectives will help to identify how inbound and content marketing affect the business results. For this, determining what the best key performance indicators to follow are is essential. Enhanced measuring of the results will also create more trusts toward investing in inbound marketing. The marketing plan needs to develop guidelines for measurement. The results of the last year and the first quarter of 2019 will help the case company to identify what metrics should be monitored and reported.

Having a lot of secondary data available and analyzing them even more depth will be useful to continue doing inbound marketing. The researcher will need to evaluate all the blogs from the past 15 months to see which ones work and which do not, as well as remove content that repeatedly use the same keyword as some other article. Content that does not help Youredi to increase its visibility and findability could be republished in a different format, such as an ebook or a white paper. Analyzing and identifying clearly which blogs worked well could be good examples for future blogs.

One of the flaws of the research was that the researcher only focused on how to generate more traffic. While website traffic is invaluable for businesses, it should be aligned with other goals to ensure that the results of having more traffic are more concrete (Moz 2019). For example, the researcher could have focused simultaneously also on improving visit to conversion rates to maximize the number of leads that the company received. She could have identified content for all stages of the buyer's journey as well as best practices, such as improvements in user experience and design, to ensure that people find the information and that they would fill in the forms to learn more about the solutions and products

that the case company has. This would have been a useful element of the research project, as this could have helped the sales team to get more prospects to work with and to turn them into actual sales. At the same time, the researcher could have also focused on developing materials that would help to nurture the individuals that turned into leads to help them move further along in the buyer's journey. Youredi will need to focus more on providing content for each stage of the buyer's journey to ensure that the customers can make informed decisions (Taylor 2018, 12-13). Currently, Youredi also does not have a clear plan for nurturing customers to ensure that they would repurchase services from Youredi. Working on content marketing campaigns that would target customers could be helpful to maximize their customer lifetime value.

Another flaw of the project was that it did not create enough content for enterprise buyers; thus most of the leads were coming from SMEs. While Youredi sells its services also to SMEs, the business strategy strongly focuses on selling to enterprises. Future content marketing campaigns need to consider this and develop content for enterprise decision makers, as turning them into customers could have significant value, and this was something that the researcher discussed in Chapter 4.5. in the recommendations.

Regarding SEO, the researcher learnt how to write content that can rank on the top of the search engines. Nevertheless, the material could be more exciting and unique in the future so that people would want to share it and Youredi would receive more inbound links that could help to improve the company's website's domain authority, and it would make it easier to rank well in search engines. This was something that Google also recommends among its best practices (Google 2019).

Table 1. Project plan for implementing the recommendations in a structured manner.

<b>Timeline</b>	<b>Action</b>
	<b>Marketing Strategy Review</b>
6-10-5-2019	Review the marketing strategy together with the company's CEO & COO. Make any necessary adjustment to better align it with the business strategy.
	<b>Marketing Plan Review</b>
13-17.5.2019	Analyzes of the situation, use the findings of this thesis. Implement SWOT and PESTLE analysis. Use secondary data at the company's disposal for any further analysis.
20-21.5.2019.	Define the buyer's journey and how it will help the implementation of the marketing plan.



22-23.5.2019	Establish value proposition.
23.5.2019	Define clear goals and objectives for Fiscal Year 2020.
	<b>Marketing Mix</b> <b>Digital Marketing</b>
24-28.5.2019	Inbound marketing, content marketing, SEO plans. Use the recommendations defined in Chapter 4.5.
29.5.-3.6.2019	Account-based marketing plan
4-7.6.2019	Paid advertising plan
	<b>Marketing Mix</b> <b>Other Tactics</b>
8-9.6.2019	PR, events, brand awareness, marketing automation
10.6.2019	Present the marketing plan to the CEO & COO. Make changes based on their feedback. Meet them for further reviews if necessary.
17.6.2019	Present the marketing plan to the board of directors.
25.6.2019	Make all changes that were requested and send it for acceptance. Start preparing for next fiscal year starting at 1.7.2019 which is also the start of the implementation.
1.7.2019	Implementation Starts
1.7-30.9.2019	Implement the first campaign during the first quarter, Measure the results continuously and optimize the campaigns in the future.
1.10-31.12.2019	Implement the second campaign during the second quarter, Measure the results continuously and optimize the campaigns in the future.
1.1-31.3.2020	Implement the third campaign during the third quarter, Measure the results continuously and optimize the campaigns in the future.
1.4-30.6.2020	Implement the fourth campaign during the fourth quarter, Measure the results continuously and optimize the campaigns in the future.

### 5.3 Suggestion for Further Research

Originally, the researcher's intention was also to focus on conversion rate optimization (CRO) during this project, nevertheless, the scope of the undertaking would have been

too big. Instead, the researcher decided to purely focus on proving the value of the inbound marketing methodology and that it can help to generate more traffic and interest in the case company's services and solutions.

However, the researcher reckons that conducting further research on how more visitors could be converted into leads and prospects would be necessary. This could help the case company to exploit more on the results of this present project.

Another area that could be researched in the future would be that how the inbound marketing methodology and content marketing could be utilized also as part of paid digital advertisement. For example, the company could utilize high quality content tailored the inbound way for Google Ads or LinkedIn advertisements by researching account-based marketing.

#### **5.4 Reflection on Own Learning**

Overall, the researcher learnt a tremendous amount of new knowledge during the execution of this project. Her main focus was learning more about SEO that can be very challenging due to the unclear guidelines as well as the frequently changing algorithm. However, having a good understanding of how SEO works and how to be strategic about content and inbound marketing will be helpful in the future to execute the marketing plan with even more focus. Youredi's SEO campaign of 2018 was entered into SEMRush Nordic Awards Competition and the campaign won in the 'Young Marketing Professional' award category.

Writing this thesis helped the researcher to understand that she should be more strategic about aligning marketing and business strategies. To be more strategic and prompt will require more precise planning and documentation. Creating a more detailed plan for this thesis could have been useful, nevertheless, the researcher was satisfied with the results as they gave a positive signal about the possibilities that inbound marketing could mean for the case company's business.

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Youredi. 2019b. Hubspot Data. Confidential Information.

## Appendices

### Appendix 1. Content Calendar and Project To-Do List

Month	Blogs	Keywords	To do
<b>January 2018</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 10 Data Integration Trends</li> <li>- How to tackle EDI supply chain management challenges?</li> <li>- The cost of data integrations</li> <li>- 5 Tips for a Future Ready Data Integration Strategy</li> <li>- Who Will Lead the Digitalization of the Ocean Shipping Industry?</li> <li>- Why Should You Outsource API Lifecycle Management?</li> </ul>	Data integration trends, EDI supply chain management challenges, data integration pricing, API Management	Start learning about content marketing and SEO. Identify how Hubspot could be utilized for the project. Start initial experimenting with blogging. Identify the topics to focus on and align with the buyer persona.
<b>February 2018</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What to Look for in an iPaaS?</li> <li>- Should You Include a Hybrid Integration Platform in Your Integration Strategy?</li> <li>- Why Should iPaaS Be Part of Your Integration Strategy?</li> <li>- The Most Common B2B Integration Challenges</li> <li>- Digitalization of ocean shipping improves collaboration and data sharing</li> </ul>	iPaaS, Hybrid Integration Platform, iPaaS for Integration Strategy, B2B integration challenges	Continue with blogging and monitor what worked and what not. Start planning the blogs of next month. Learn more about content marketing and SEO.
<b>March 2018</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The Most Common EDI challenges</li> <li>- EDI in Supply Chain</li> <li>- Big Data And Big Roadblocks in Logistics Industry</li> <li>- Are You Looking to Buy Data Integration Solutions?</li> <li>- How to Select the Right Data Integration Tool?</li> </ul>	EDI Challenges, EDI in Supply Chain, Big Data in Logistics, Data Integration Tool,	While learning about SEO and content marketing, start developing the EDI topic cluster in Hubspot. Write more about EDI and identify the right topics and keywords.
<b>April 2018</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What is EDIFACT?</li> <li>- What Data Formats Does iPaaS Support?</li> <li>- 5 Ways iPaaS Supports Your Data Integration Strategy</li> <li>- iPaaS for Fast Development and Deployment</li> <li>- 5 Elements to Include When Crafting a Data Integration Strategy</li> <li>- How Our Customers Benefit from iPaaS?</li> <li>- 5 Things That Distinguish Our Integration Platforms from Others</li> <li>- 19 Questions to Ask to Find the Best Integration Platform</li> <li>- Why You Need B2B Integrations?</li> </ul>	EDIFACT, Data Formats, iPaaS Data Integration Strategy, iPaaS Development & Deployment, Crafting Data Integration Strategy, iPaaS Benefits, Best Integration Platform, B2B Integrations,	Do keyword research and utilize this in the planning of the blogs of April, May, and June.
<b>May 2018</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- iPaaS for B2B Integrations</li> <li>- iPaaS Architecture for complex B2B Integrations</li> <li>- B2B Supply Chain Integration</li> <li>- EDI Transactions</li> <li>- 22 Awesome iPaaS Vendors</li> <li>- Hybrid Integration Warfare</li> </ul>	iPaaS for B2B integrations, B2B Supply Chain Integra-	Focus on writing more blogs around iPaaS and B2B Integrations. Test a blog writing about iPaaS



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- B2B Integration Technology: A Glossary</li> <li>- Benefits of B2B Integrations with iPaaS</li> <li>- Why Would You Buy B2B Integration as a Service?</li> </ul>	tion, iPaaS Architecture, EDI Transactions, iPaaS Vendors, Hybrid Integration, B2B Integration Technology, B2B Integrations Benefits, B2B integration as a Service	Vendors including competition.
<b>June 2018</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- EDI in Manufacturing, Automotive, and Warehousing</li> <li>- How to choose the best iPaaS Vendor?</li> <li>- iPaaS: A Comprehensive Guide</li> <li>- 25 Great EDI Service Providers</li> <li>- iPaaS Pricing Made Easy</li> </ul>	EDI in Manufacturing, Automotive, and Warehousing, iPaaS, EDI Service Providers, iPaaS Pricing	After realizing the success of the iPaaS Vendors blog, write a similar piece about EDI vendors. Research how keywords with buying intent work. Identify more keywords with buying intent.
<b>July 2018</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Youredi vs. Dell Boomi iPaaS</li> <li>- What is System Integration?</li> <li>- 7 iPaaS solutions You Need to Use Too</li> <li>- What is Electronic Data Interchange?</li> </ul>	Youredi vs. Dell Boomi, System Integration, iPaaS Solutions, Electronic Data Interchange,	Evaluate the results of the first 6 months of the project. Delete blog posts that could hurt the positive results of the project.
<b>August 2018</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- iPaaS Comparison: Leaders Vs. Challengers</li> <li>- What is Data Integration?</li> <li>- Benefits of Data Integration</li> <li>- 10 Reasons Why Integration Projects Fail</li> <li>- What is Data Integrity?</li> </ul>	iPaaS Comparison, Data Integration, Benefits of Data Integration, Integration Projects, Data Integrity	Start blogging more about data integration and data and create a new topic cluster in Hubspot for the subject. Delete blog posts that were underperforming.
<b>September 2018</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Data Quality: "No Garbage In, No Garbage Out"</li> <li>- System Integrators</li> </ul>	Data Quality, System Integrators,	Attend Hubspot's IN-BOUND conference to learn more about inbound marketing, content marketing, and SEO. Start implementing the results.
<b>October 2018</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The Lesser of Two Evils: Comparing Data Integration Projects and ERP Projects</li> <li>- 8 Ocean Shipping Logistics Technology Vendors to Watch</li> </ul>	Data Integration Projects vs ERP Projects, Ocean Shipping Logistics Technology Vendors,	In October, main focus is on the relaunch of the website and rewriting all website content for that. Less focus on blogging. All website product and industry pages needed to be rewritten and optimized.

<b>November 2018</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Global Logistics Trends 2019</li> <li>- The World's Most Popular Data Integration Tools</li> <li>- Data Integration Trends 2019</li> </ul>	Logistics Trends, Data Integration Tools, Data Integration Trends 2019,	Continue writing about data integration. Ensure that the website relaunch does not interfere with the project. Delete more content and pages that are not used.
<b>December 2018</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Connecting with Airlines for Air Cargo Tracking Using Air Waybill</li> <li>- 15 Awesome Data Integration Vendors</li> <li>- Field of Dreams: The Trouble With API Integration</li> </ul>	Air Waybill Tracking, Data Integration Vendors, API Integration	Evaluate the second part of the project and identify what was done well and what was not. Evaluate how the project should continue in the future.
<b>January 2019</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Big Data Integration</li> <li>- 13 Best Data Integration Tools</li> </ul>	Big Data Integration, Data Integration Tools	Identify popular topics and keywords with buying intent to write about.
<b>February 2019</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- EDI Integration: A Competitive or a Cooperative Advantage</li> <li>- Supply Chain Technology in 2019: Do or Die</li> <li>- EDI Pricing</li> </ul>	EDI Integration, Supply Chain Technology, EDI Pricing,	Update previous content and focus on writing more articles.
<b>March 2019</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 10 Awesome EDI Managed Services Providers</li> <li>- Bridging the Connectivity Gap: EDI &amp; API</li> </ul>	EDI Managed Services, EDI & API	Evaluate the results of the project. Identify next steps. How the project can be improved to impact also the quality of the leads and the business the company receives from them?

## Appendix 2. Keyword Plan Based on Competition Research

Big data integration	Data integration best practices for enterprise architects	API management platform
Data integration software	EDI integration tools	ERP integration
EDI integration	B2B transactions	Cloud integration technologies
EDI vs. API	API management tools	Cloud integration
EDI validation & transformation	Business process integration	Data integration tools
EDI pricing	Business process management/automation	Low code platform
EDI managed services	Legacy modernization	IT system integration
Hybrid integration platform	Legacy system integration	EDI mappings

### Appendix 3. Keyword Plan Based on Competition Research and Google Keyword Tool

Legacy ERP	Vendor invoice management	EDI mapping software
EDI solutions for small businesses	EDI system for small businesses	EDI invoice
Cloud managed services	B2B EDI	Benefits of EDI
EDI transaction services	EDI for small companies	EDI cloud solutions
EDI system cost	EDI vs XML	Cloud-based EDI
EDI B2B integration	EDI in e-commerce	EDI translation software
Enterprise information management system	EDI AS2	EDI connection
B2B integration	What is Web-EDI	EDI communication
EDI communication	EDI process	EDI software companies
EDI providers list	EDI ordering system	EDI software vendors
EDI integration tools	EDI order processing	EDI program
EDI translation services	EDI format capability	

#### Appendix 4. Keyword Plan Based on Google Keyword Planner for EAI

EAI	EAI technologies	EAI tools
Application integration tools	Enterprise integration technologies	Enterprise application integration services
Enterprise application integration platform	Enterprise application integration middleware	Enterprise application integration system
EAI vs ERP	Application integration middleware	Enterprise application integration software
Application integration platform	Enterprise integration software	Application integration strategy
Integration middleware	EAI software	Enterprise application integration solutions
Application integration services	EAI benefits	Enterprise information integration
Application integration solutions	Application integration	