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BUILDING B2B BRAND AWARENESS WITH CONTENT MARKETING

Case: Viet Trang Export Company Limited

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ABSTRACT

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In recent years, with the technological revolution, the forms of marketing have been re-shaped and evolved. In particular, there is a vigorous development of building a content marketing strategy in the Business-to-Business context.

Therefore, the aim of this thesis is to analyze the most feasible ways for businesses to enhance its brand awareness by utilizing the content marketing tools, especially for startups and midsize companies.

The case company Viet Trang Handicraft is introduced in the first chapter. The literature part of this paper concentrated on two main areas which are brand awareness and content marketing tools. Firstly, the relation between brand equity and brand awareness, buyer's journey and lead generation process are discussed in detailed. Secondly, the inbound marketing concept, relation between content marketing and brand awareness are studied thoroughly. Finally, primary information source was implemented in the theoretical parts of this research topic.

In regard to the empirical study, it was conducted by the qualitative research method for gaining in-dept insights from relevant individuals in the case company and an specialist in the form of an email interview. Professional point of views and perception were collected in order to evaluate the validity and reliability the study. The study enables to clarify more how the industry insiders view content marketing as a strategic tool for their branding.

The result comprised the impacts of content marketing on B2B brand awareness establishment which was indicated by the answers of the research questions and the author withdraw insights. In addition, based on theoretical research, a content marketing plan outline was proposed to the case company in order to enhance its brand awareness effectively.

Keywords	Content Marketing, Brand Awareness, Business-to-Business, Inbound Marketing, B2B Branding
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1 INTRODUCTION

Along with the fast development of the marketing industry, content marketing at this current point is commonly known as one of the most practical tools to demonstrate the perceived values contained within product or service of one business to the buyer. However, less in-depth studies and researches have been paid to the business-to-business (B2B) context rather than the business-to-consumer (B2C) marketplace.

1.1 Background of the Research

In a broad sense, content marketing has been the heart of inbound marketing which indicates how companies building trust and familiarity with their audiences. As Hall (2016) stated that “boring communication won’t even work” which emphasized the necessity of content marketing integration.

Nevertheless, most of the inbound marketing tool guidelines concentrate on the consumer’s market for instance ways to create story-telling marketing strategy or viral content. There are little studies which focus on B2B market when it comes to brand awareness by inbound marketing since it desires a more informational and straightforward content marketing concepts and B2B marketers do not acknowledge its use. Furthermore, content marketing is seemingly taking more time for displaying real results on brand awareness comparing to the quick returns on traditional advertising. Despite the fact that business customers are also real humans (Decision-Making Unit) in the same way as the B2C customer, the guideline for B2C content marketing could not be applied within this B2B market due to the distinction of marketing objective and channels.

In addition, the buying cycle in B2C environment is evidently short, impulsive and driven by emotions, thus the marketing goal is fundamentally identifying a need and demonstrating how the product fills it. By those objectives, the key elements of B2C inbound marketing are brand identification, emotional impact and enhanced value. However, in B2B marketing, the purchase process takes longer time which includes several steps: recognizing needs, products or service identification in order to fill those needs, options evaluation and vendor offers comparison. With its longer buying process, the goal of B2B content marketing becomes more about connecting businesses with the offered products

and services as focusing on trusted and expert provider establishments according to the organization's perspective (Hoda, Joseph & Russell, 2019).

Therefore, the main purpose of this paper is to analyze the key role of content marketing and its impact on building brand awareness in B2B market following with a proposal content marketing plan outline for the case company – Viet Trang Handicraft by the author.

1.2 Case Company – Viet Trang Export Company Limited

Viet Trang Export Company Limited is a Vietnamese handicraft manufacturer which was founded in 2001. The company's representative office is located at Ho Chi Minh city, Vietnam and its 9000 square meters factory is in Thanh Hoa Province which is renowned for its seagrass fields - the raw materials and traditional weaving village in the Northern part of the country.

With a total annual revenue from 1 million dollars to 2.5 million dollars, Viet Trang is a medium sized company with approximately 500 weavers and 20 office employees. The main products are natural and handwoven rugs, baskets, poufs and lampshades. As the need of natural furniture is increasing rapidly, there is a mass production of interiors in which the products are machined-produced in order to meet the market's high demand. The company has featured itself from the competition with the handwoven products which is a truly appreciation for the Vietnamese culture. The company's main exporting markets are Western Europe (30%), North America (20%) and Oceania (15%) (Viet Trang's Alibaba Company Profile; Viet Trang Website).

According to the author's own experience when being an intern in the case company, with a young and modern mindset executive team, Viet Trang company, despite being a manufacturer, its marketing activities and materials have evolved better comparing to other traditional manufacturers in Vietnam. The brand image and story are carefully concentrated on by the marketing team with creative content development. Thus, it is evident that enhancing brand awareness is a possible thing for Viet Trang. Furthermore, by continuing the marketing strategy improvement, one possibility is that Viet Trang could be a top of mind natural handicraft manufacturer in Vietnamese marketplace.

1.3 Structure of Thesis

It is undoubted that branding is now also playing an increasingly crucial role in B2B markets, by branding efficiently, the companies could enhance their brand images to more prospects in today's tough competition and finally improving the sales revenues which is the ultimate objectives of every B2B company within this logics-driven market.

Therefore, it can be assumed that the impact of content marketing in the B2B environment have been widely acknowledged. However, the way this strategic marketing tool enhance one company's brand awareness is still a controversial topic and is not studied much at this current point. Within this thesis, the author aims at clarifying brand awareness firstly. Simultaneously, introducing the tools of content marketing in business – to – business context.

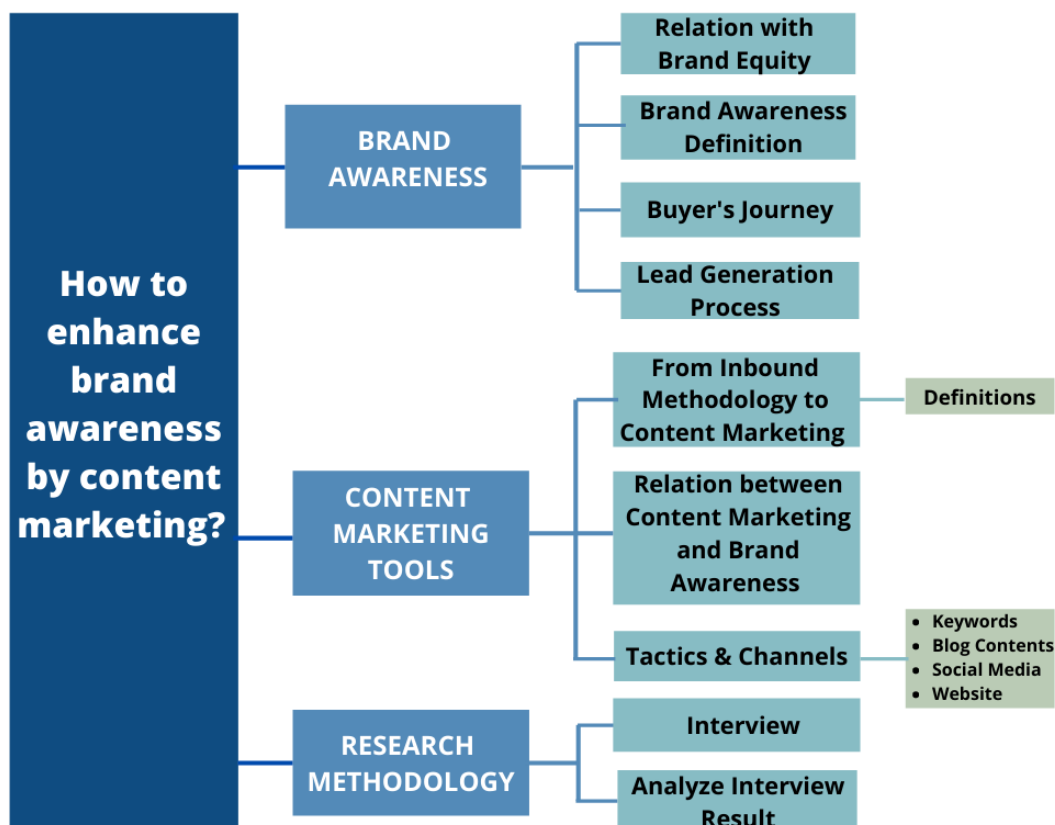


Figure 1. Thesis Framework

Figure 1 shows the research structure of this thesis. Initially, the research background, objectives and the Viet Trang company information are contained within this introduction

chapter. Following is the fundamental components contained in brand awareness such as the definition of it and its relation to brand equity, the buyer's journey and lead generation process in marketing funnel. The next chapter demonstrates in details content marketing tools by indicating its meaning under the inbound marketing concept umbrella and their role and advantages in building brand awareness. The methods of research and data collection as well as the study's validity and reliability are included in chapter four. Finally, the thesis ends with presentation of the answers of the research questions, the data analysis from the conducted email interview and the proposal content marketing strategy for the case company.

1.4 Research Objectives and Questions

The research objective of this thesis is delivering a thorough and effective content marketing plan outline for a B2B company – Viet Trang Handicraft to evolve its brand awareness. Hence, the main research question is how to enhance brand awareness with content marketing tools. Initially, in order to answer this question, the definition and superior effects of content marketing on building brand awareness should be understood precisely, how important brand awareness is and what elements are included in content marketing. The case company should also acknowledge its sources and tools for building brand awareness (keywords, blog contents, social media and website). With this careful detection, the case company will be able to improve its marketing strategy as extending its brand awareness via creating valuable and thoughtful content. To be more specific, there are questions that will be taken account into in the thesis.

1. How are brand equity and brand awareness related to each other?
2. What is the decision – making unit (DMU) and buyer's journey?
3. What is content marketing, its tools and benefits in building Brand Awareness generally and specially in the case of company?
4. How can the chosen channels and content types be aligned with different stages of the buyer's journey?

2 BRAND AWARENESS

Aiming at thoroughly understanding the crucial role of brand awareness in the B2B content, this chapter provides all grounded knowledge regarding to this term. The relation between brand equity and brand awareness is first defined, along with an detailed introduction of brand awareness and ways how it is evolved by establishing an accurate buyer's journey and comprehending the lead generation process.

2.1 Relation between Brand Equity and Brand Awareness

In 1991, the concept of brand equity was first introduced by David Aaker through many published research papers. Primarily, there are four key determinants of the brand equity model (Figure 2) which are the brand's awareness, loyalty, assets and associations along with the perceived quality and other proprietary.

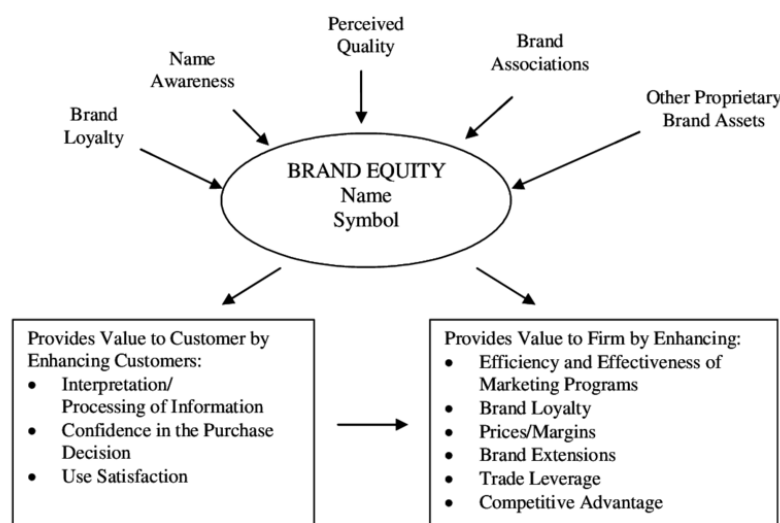


Figure 2. Brand Equity Model by Aaker D. 2013

Initially, figure 2 illustrates that generally, an undoubtful strong brand is known by the majority of people (Brand Awareness), perceived as good product (Perceived Quality) with the loyalty and associations coming with other different things. Moreover, brand equity itself also generates value to the customers when enhancing one's ability to process and interpret information, improve the level of trust in the buying decision and thus, both directly and indirectly influence on the quality of the users' experience (Aaker 2013).

In short, brand equity is crucial since its ownership will help businesses expressed somewhat differently than their competitors in the market. A superior product quality and excellent services connect with marketing campaigns and its strong brand equity will make the brand more recognizable, thereby promoting buying behaviour from the customers for a possibly better revenue sources for the business. Therefore, carrying out brand awareness - the foundation before brand equity, is an essential step for every business to have a sustainable brand equity (Aaker 2013).

2.2 What is Brand Awareness?

Prior to any purchase decisions, it is manifested that every customer needs to traverse the consideration process between brands, deciding which one to buy. According to an analysis in 2013 (McKinsey and Company), there is a 20% gap in terms of performance between strong brands and weak brands in the B2B context. Thus, in that process, these brands leap to their minds towards one particular product category without any outer searching or suggestions called brand awareness.

According to David A. Aaker (2009), brand awareness exists once a brand is recognized and recalled by potential buyer when referring to a certain product category without going into details which is also known as a nexus between a product class and one brand. It is the first stage in the procurement process and is known as a crucial criterion for one brand strength measurement. The more recognizable a brand is, the more renowned it is and the higher opportunity it has to be the final choice for customers. That awareness is created by the business communication activities such as advertising, PR, events, sponsorship and brand activation, etc. It is evident that the cost of the brand awareness creating process is significantly high and therefore, a deep understanding of its impact on the product selection process will be beneficial for businesses to get more effective branding strategy at a reasonable cost. In addition, according to figure 3 below, there are four different levels of brand awareness ranging from the uncertain feeling about the brand to the absolute trust of one brand in the product class. The awareness pyramid created by David A. Aaker includes the unawareness of brand from the bottom to the brand recognition, brand recall and the top of mind as the highest level. The bare minimum of brand awareness is the brand recognition which simply means that a brand is recognized when a customer

perceives it. In a higher level, brand recall occurs when a customer thinks about certain products and envisions the brand promptly (Figure 3) (Aaker 2009).

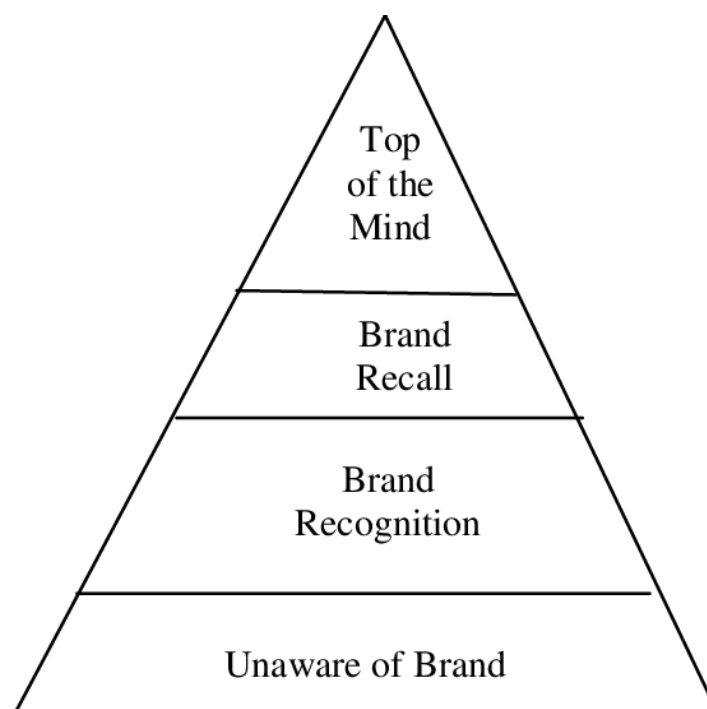


Figure 3. The Awareness Pyramid by Aaker D. 2009

As mentioned before, brand awareness precedes building brand equity, thus, it is one of the most vital elements in the branding process, in the B2B market in particular. Once building and gaining trust, customers will choose that specific product or services before hundreds of other choices on the market. Briefly, it is the result of recognition of one brand and remember its footprint in the customers' heart. This is the very first crucial step and the most fundamental objective of marketing communication for every business (Aaker 2009).

2.3 Buyer's Journey

In order to understand and approach potential customers, businesses should map out the buyer's journey and simultaneously aligning it to the awareness pyramid. The buyer journey is a map displaying the experience journey of one customer towards a brand over

time as well as a reflection of their personas. It contains all the occurred touchpoints along the interaction between customer and business.

Buyer journey is defined as a purchasing-decision process which consists of Awareness stage, Consideration stage and Decision stage (Kemp; Borders; Anaza & Johnston 2017).

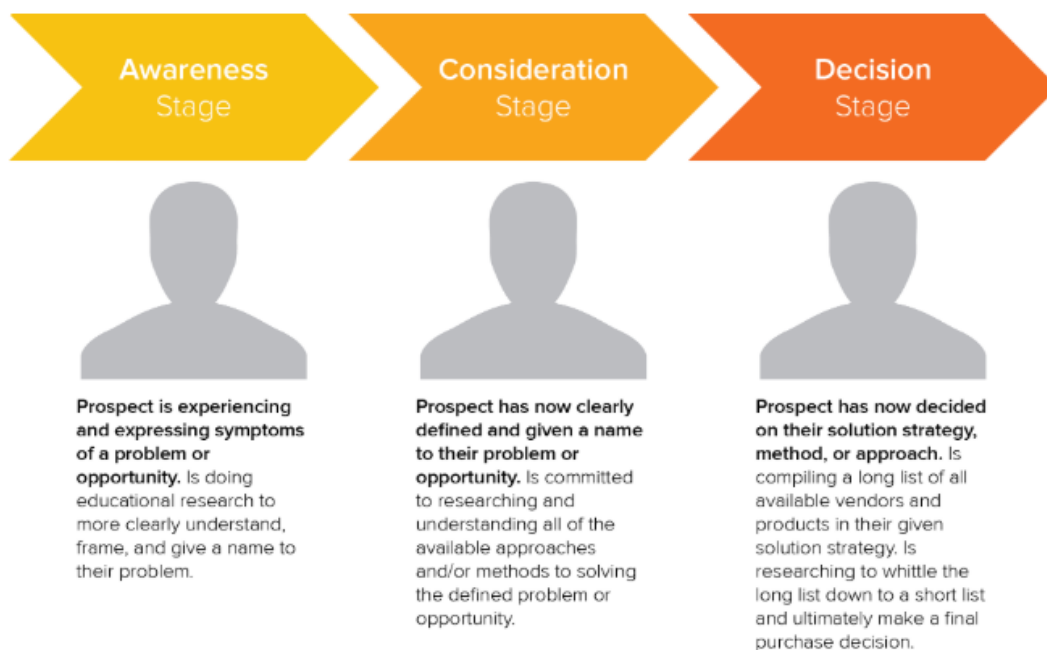


Figure 4. Buyer's Journey by Chitalia and Berg

Figure 4 shows that firstly, in the phase of awareness, this is when the problem encountered is acknowledged by the buyers. As soon as the problem is defined, possible solutions are detected by buyers in the consideration stage. Lastly, the chosen solution is invented in the decision stage. The three fundamental stages are illustrated by Figure 4 below.

Nevertheless, as the sale process in the business environment is lengthy and more complicated than in the consumer market (Dibb & Simkin 2004), the B2B buyer's journey possesses a little differences from the B2C. For example, below is the figure by Charlesworth (2009) demonstrating the general buying process of the organizational customers.



Figure 5. Buying Process in B2B by Charlesworth

According to Figure 4, it is evident that the awareness and consideration stage in the business market is more complex and longer. Moreover, according to an online B2B buyer's survey report by Demand Base in 2017, 70% of the buyer's journey in B2B context is the pre-purchase research. Business customers do several independent online researches before engaging with the suppliers and they usually conduct research via Google (Halchak 2017). Therefore, from the author's opinion, in the B2B buyer's journey, it is crucial for business to create helpful and problem-solving contents for enhancing the prospective customer's engagement during the awareness and consideration stage.

2.4 Lead Generation Process

As discussed above, this marketing tactic is seen as a pull technique which plays a key role in converting prospects to customer along the buyer's journey. This part aims at explaining in detail the lead generation process which occurred before and in the awareness stage of the buying process.

During the awareness stage, the marketers strive to gain an adequate quality traffic towards the company's website. In fact, there are several paid marketing methods on the Internet which are commonly known as Pay-Per-Click (PPC) or Pay-Per-Acquisition (PPA). However, for instance, it can be assumed that there are more efficiencies between

the paid and organic searching (Berman & Katona 2012). Therefore, this study focuses on ways to implement the organic marketing effectively which contains the search engine optimization (SEO), blogging and posts in social media platforms.

With the purpose of building a customer's organic interest in a business, the transformation from a visitor to a customer must be conducted in the most natural way by the company. Figure 6 below is created by author in order to describe the simple lead generation process.

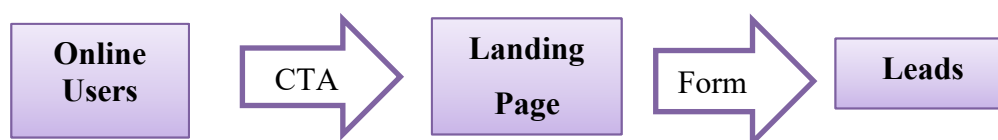


Figure 6. Lead Generation Process by author

According to figure 6, the process initiates from navigating the targeted traffic to the website, attaining the information and contacting, interacting with right visitors of the established buyer's personas. This is considered as the very first step in building relationships with the potential customers – the leads. Particularly, firstly, the visitors have the awareness of one business's identity through the marketing channels such as website, blog or social media. The online users click on the Call-to-Action (CTA) in the form of an image, a button or a message containing an encouraging message to perform an action. Lastly, the CTA leads the visitors to the landing page in which they are going to leave information in exchanging for valuable offers.

To sum up, in this chapter, the concept of brand awareness including its meaning and relationship with the company's brand equity has been discussed thoroughly. Thus, one possibility is that brand awareness and brand equity have an interdependent relation. A company is able to increase its brand value by strong and positive effective brand recognition in the marketplace. In addition, before establishing a content strategy for brand awareness enhancement, it is essential for business to comprehend the complexity of organizational purchasers and in which the brand awareness impact in a sale funnel within the business context.

3 CONTENT MARKETING TOOLS

“Cultivating the right relationship with business is paramount for any holistic programme.” – Kotler & Keller 2009.

Customer-centered marketing is known as a compass driving every modern marketing plan which aims at nurturing the relationship between business and customer for sizing up the long-term advantages. Thus, this chapter presents one of the most effective and renowned marketing methodologies at this current point which is content marketing.

3.1 From Inbound Methodology to Content Marketing

This part discusses content marketing within the inbound methodology umbrella. In particular, it clearly pinpoints how companies could increase their organic traffic by providing relevant contents to prospective customers.

3.1.1 Inbound Methodology

According to the focal point in business scenario in this study, inbound marketing is considered as the viable tool in building brand awareness from the potentials as it mainly aims at generating the customer’s organic interest towards the brand (Halligan, B. & Dharmesh, S. 2014).

Recently, it is assumed that inbound marketing has been an effective approach for marketers to grab the prospect’s attention and generating the company identity. In fact, HubSpot co-founder – CEO Brian Halligan (2014) has introduced the concept of inbound marketing which is the process of prospect attraction through content creation before they are even ready to be. One possibility is that this tactic is one of the most cost-effective method to covert strangers becoming customers and even brand’s advocacy. This marketing tactic refers to the “pull” technique rather than “push” ones which is the interruption advertising message (Zlatko B. 2015). As one of the founder of HubSpot – Dharmesh Shah. concluded in his blog that “People did not want to be interrupted by marketers or harassed by salespeople. They wanted to be helped.”. Therefore, by applying inbound marketing, it enables businesses to draw customers’ attention and earn their interest by offering personalized and insightful content.. In other words, customers are aware of their

problems and seeking for possible solutions provided through offered contents in the market. The process is naturally pulling the customers moving from the very top of the buyer journey – awareness stage to consideration stage and finally converting them into customers in the decision stage (Halligan et al 2014).



Figure 7. Inbound Methodology in Marketing by Brian Halligan

In the attraction stage presented in figure 7, businesses by creating valuable content with relevant and on-trend keywords are able to generate high-qualified visitors to the company's website. In the engagement stage, the relationship between prospective customers and the business is nurtured via chat bots, email marketing and other conversion tools. At the end of the flywheel, when the purchasing decision is already made, the marketer's responsibility remains in delighting the customers continuously by personalized email and content and asking for feedbacks or requirements.

In short, comparing to outbound marketing, the implementation of inbound technique aims at improving the lead quality in the awareness stage of the buyer's journey as well as building long-term relationship between customers and business and enhancing the

company's reputation positively. In particular, it is relevant and crucial in a business context as the personal relationship is one of the important features as businesses in this context desire a long-term partnership (Halligan et al 2014).

3.1.2 Content Marketing

Connection between customers and businesses is formed by content marketing. It is not the entire marketing, but it is critical for building a brand image, brand awareness as well as building long-term relationship with customers. According to the Demand Gen Report in 2019, 41% of buyers stated to read the three to five pieces of content before speaking to a salesperson.

Laura Busche (2017) defines the word *content* simply as a piece of “text, video, sound or image” that contains a relevant part between one individual to another. Therefore, it can be simply understood as a list of key message to the targeted audience (Laura et al 2017). As the focal point of this thesis is to study the content marketing under the inbound methodology umbrella, the inbound content is a concentrated topic. With the customer-centric mindset in the core of inbound content, the marketers need to understand profoundly who the audience is (buyer's persona) and where they are in the buying journey for compelling content generation.

Etlinger & Lied (2015) state that the value generated from content marketing is beyond the monetary value. In addition, costs and risks could be reduced with this marketing strategy when more innovation and effectiveness are enhanced. Therefore, from the author's point of view, it is evident that with content marketing implementation, businesses, especially the startup and midsize company, are enabled to evolve the engaged customers, reaching the most potential prospects and creating a sustainable impact on the brand awareness and reputation.

3.2 Relation between Content Marketing and Brand Awareness

In fact, it is evident that the relationship between the business identity and recognizable content is symbiotic. The existence of one business is zero in case its brand message is not delivered to the customers. On other words, even though the brand is identifiable, the

ability to being chosen by the customers is still unsure. However, having low brand awareness is still better for brands than being nothing. By offering relevant and insightful to the audience with unintentional sale purpose, strangers are aware of the encountered problem and seeking for the offered solutions in an organic way. This avoids the forced feelings which are usually from the outbound marketing methodology with interruption approach. In short, content marketing supports the interests raised from online users then nurturing them by helpful content and lastly converting the visitors into potential customers. Therefore, content marketing is paramount for businesses in order to approach and connect with the corresponding market as enriching the interaction between business and customers at each stage of buying journey (Rose, R. 2014).

Thus, as this study concentrates on the first stage of the buyer's journey, the attract tools such as blogging, social medias and content strategy will be discussed furthermore in the next part.

3.3 Tactics and Channels

In business environment, B2B buyers consume a majority of online content before engaging with the sellers (Halchak 2017). Therefore, drawing their attention to one specific brand is genuinely a fierce challenge for business when producing content which requires choosing the most appropriate tactics and channels.

3.3.1 Keywords

It is evident that an optimized content accompanies effective keywords. By determining the most popular keywords used by audience, businesses could create high-rank content on the search pages (Enge, Spencer, Fisking & Stricchiola. 2010).

According to Curran (2011), keyword has three main types including the general, broad and long tail keywords. In terms of the general keywords, it is fundamentally relevant words to the business. General keywords are usually used for product or service description. This type of keyword is a foundation for evolving the two other types: broad and long tail keywords. Broad keywords usually involve from two to three words which are something particular comparing to general type. While long tail keywords consist the

most words within, sometimes it can be assumed as a sentence or long phrase. For instance, a general keyword for the case company should be “natural basket”, broad keywords will be “Vietnamese natural basket” and the long tail could be “Vietnamese natural basket with tassels and lid”. Therefore, it is crucial for businesses to plan and decide prior the seed keywords for developing a well-organized keywords plan for effective content creation (Kelsey 2017).

One of the key performance indicators (KPI) when choosing a keyword is related to its search volume. It is explicit that the more specific of the keyword, the lower of its search volume. However, according to the Keyword Research Guide (2017), the long tail keywords in spite of having low search volume, the intent level is considerably high meaning that the users are more probable to be converted on the company’s website (Moz 2017). Therefore, maintaining balance between the low search volume long tail keywords with the high search volume keywords is crucial for business to develop a coherent plan. Google AdWords Keyword Planner is presented as a free and good tool for insightful keyword research. The tool illustrates the search volumes and the trending keywords when the user placing a word randomly. It indeed provides a clear keywords idea for businesses in terms of the trend as suggesting the most effective keywords also the related valuable ones (Kelsey 2017).

3.3.2 Blog Content

Nowadays, blogging has become a strategic tool in B2B inbound marketing plan as it supports to reach the potential customers attracting them with interesting posts and connecting with the readers.

In order to attract new visitors, it is suggested that blog posts on businesses’ websites should be published constantly. The post must contain valuable content for the audience, encouraging the readers to share the articles on other social networks such as LinkedIn. Furthermore, the post content should be relevant to the audience, in this case is the organizational customers. Business buyers in fact prefer the educational blog posts which clearly displaying the value and insights towards their interests or problems. Therefore, prior to writing a blog, it takes the business back to the customer research stage which includes the buyer profile and buyer persona development. The ranked posts usually have

an average length of 1890 words (Ziakis & Vlachopoulou 2019). However, the blog content length still depends on the industry in which the audience prefer reading long or short content. A well-written blog should have unique content and becomes a trustful information sources for the readers (Ho, Chiu, Chen & Papazafeiropoulou 2015). Blog post could have various type from how-to-do articles, the company news or product updates. In addition, it should have an informal writing style in order showing the characteristic of the people behind the company as improving the interaction between readers and business. In short, setting a proper voice tone and diving into the content value could help the business' website ranked on Google, thus increasing the brand awareness for the business.

3.3.3 Social Media

Briefly, Merriam-Webster dictionary defines social media as a digital forum in which the participants enable to share their ideas, information, messages or other forms of content to each other. According to a white paper sponsored by LinkedIn, it pointed out that “90% of B2B decision makers never respond to any form of cold outreach, while 75% of them use social media in their decision-making process” (Schaub 2014; Scott 2015). Thus, social media, indeed, plays a crucial role in B2B marketing, particularly the content marketing strategy.

One important part when producing content through social media is to decide an appropriate distribution platform. With a strong presence on social media with high interactive volume, businesses, in particular the small and midsized companies, are opened huge opportunities to reach the targeted worldwide customers with low budget (Garner R. 2013).

Generally speaking, the quality of content is exceedingly appraised than its quantity, thus, there is no need for business to have every possible social media accounts. It is clear that each platform targets to its segment audience which means that businesses should choose the right one accordingly. Furthermore, another consideration when doing content marketing on social media is related to the type of content. Since every platform features by its unique kind of content, the anticipation of how the content will approached and be shared by the audience is required during the decision stage. Therefore, companies should

evidently define its company profile and buyer profile when strategizing the content creation plan (Hakola & Hiila 2012).

Nowadays, there are various social media platforms, thus, in this section, three main social media platforms which are Facebook, LinkedIn and Pinterest will be discussed furthermore in terms of the reasons why they are suitable ones in the B2B context.

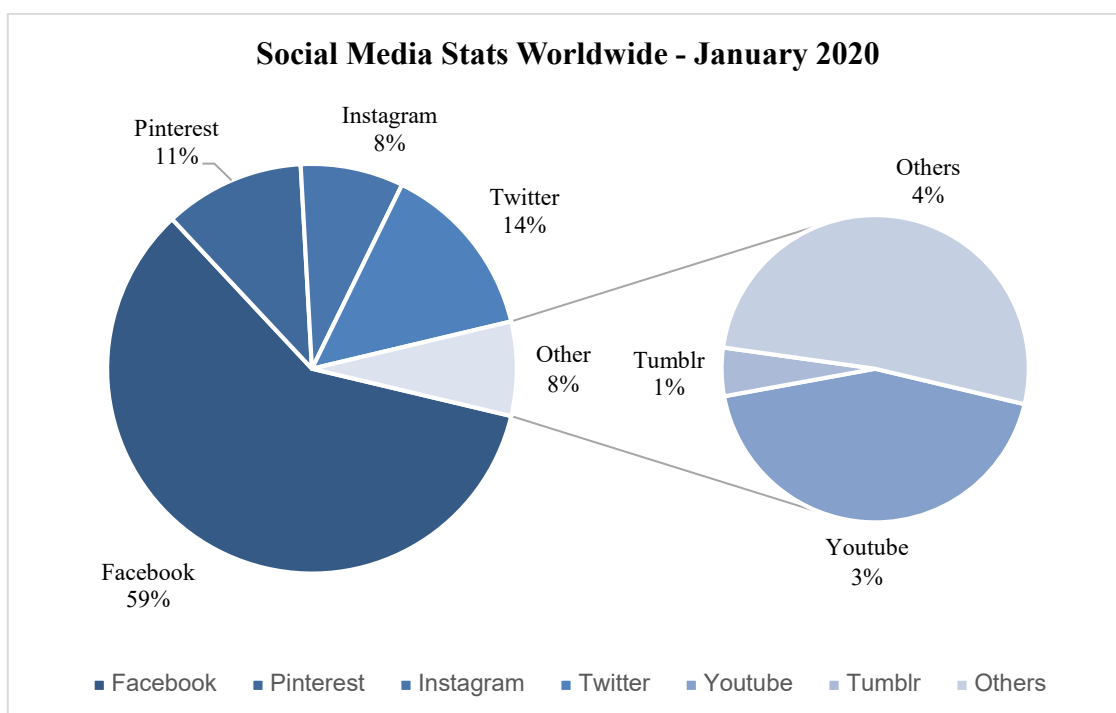


Figure 8. Social Media Market Shares – January 2020 by author

First and foremost, according to figure 8, at this current point, Facebook is known as the most popular used social media platform in the world which accounted for 59% in the social media market share. Facebook was founded in 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg with the mission is “Give people the power to build community and bring the world closer together”. Recently, there are more than 140 million businesses using Facebook to connect with customers and grow (Facebook Company Information 2020). One crucial B2B feature that Facebook provides on the company page is the ability to collect opt-ins (which is the way users register to receive the whitepapers via their email). Therefore, it supports business companies to shortlist and segment the prospects when conducting the customer’s profile and persona research. In addition, through Facebook, business can share

its leadership thoughts in order to display the expert characteristics attracting the organizational customers.

Secondly, there is LinkedIn, which is already known as the world's largest professional network. This platform was officially launched in 2013 by Reid Hoffman and Jeff Weiner. By early 2020, LinkedIn has approximately 660 million users in more than 200 countries throughout the world. Therefore, in spite of the small accounted percentage on the market share (about 4%), LinkedIn with its special target audience segmentation is considerably accordant for companies in business environment. By using this social media platform, the company is able to leverage its professional brand image intensification (LinkedIn Corporation 2020).

Lastly, Pinterest is known as a visual discovery platform which was founded in 2010 by the co-founders Ben Silbermann, Evan Sharp and Paul Sciarra. It is an ideal platform for businesses to reach their prospective customers as a large number of people go to Pinterest when searching for topics or ideas. According to the company's statistic, about 83% of the weekly users on Pinterest have made a purchase based on the Pins of the brands occurred on Pinterest. At this time, this platform has more 300 million users around the world with around 200 billion pins saved from the users. These numbers illustrate huge opportunities for businesses to enhance their lead generation process. Furthermore, one special thing that really makes Pinterest different is the inspirational aspects from brand. The brand by sharing the ideas and inspiration to customers without any interruption is able to reach the most potential customers during their awareness and consideration stage (Pinterest Company Information 2020).

3.3.4 Website

It is obvious that website is a cornerstone for this lead generation and brand awareness process since content marketing is strategic plan focusing on customer conversion on digital technology platforms. Therefore, in business context, it is essential for companies to build a good website before launching any content marketing plan or the lead generation process.

Fundamentally, a good website should consist of well-organized visualization, detailed information about the company and its products information and lastly, having helpful and available sources such as e-books or whitepapers in the case of business context. However, this part will mainly discuss the popular mistake of B2B marketers when building a company website for branding.

At the first stage of the lead generation process, the users will be navigated to the landing pages on website via the CTAs, thus, the most crucial aspect here is related to quality of traffic. One popular blunder among the marketers within this point is spending too much budgets on the PPC. However, in inbound marketing perspective, by using the relevant and right keywords accompanying with the contents on social media platforms, the business could enhance the traffic quality for increasing the conversion rate. Secondly, the website visualization is not all-important but the content and function inside it. Obviously, users could visit the website through blog post and the keywords on search engine, however when visiting the website, the lack of further engagements is the factor preventing the visitor from staying in or coming back to the it (Chakraborty, Lala & Warren 2003).

To sum up, chapter 3 of this study has indicated in detail the relation between content marketing under the inbound marketing concept as well as with brand awareness. Moreover, several content marketing tools such as keywords, blog content, social media and website have been discussed thoroughly. Firstly, it can be assumed that with content marketing implementation by inbound methodology, companies are able to increase its organic traffic navigated to the website. As mentioned before, the organic lead is considered being moderately high quality comparing to the ones navigated by paid marketing tools. That leads to the crucial and strategical role of content marketing in increasing the number of organic traffic for one business. By taking advantage of the tools and channels, companies utilize its function as a leverage in order to enhance the brand recognition and simultaneously adding value and unique points to the products or services.

4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology applied within the thesis is indicated in this chapter. It particularly includes the reasons for adopting the qualitative research method and the implementation process of this technique towards the study. Furthermore, there are also descriptions of the research design and data collection process.

4.1 Research Approach and Design

The research objective of the study is to deliver a thorough and effective content marketing strategy for a B2B case company in order for evolving its brand awareness. A pertinent research method thereby plays a key role in bridging the valid resources to the theoretical framework reinforcement. When conducting research, there are two essential approaches for data collection and analyzation which are the qualitative research and quantitative research.

Qualitative research emphasizes on ideas discovery and theory or hypothesis formulation. The indication of this method is in words and the analyzation are displayed by summaries, categorizations and interpretation (Streefkerk 2020). Its main purpose is to provide an insightful attribute of the subject matter by the interviewees' answers assembly and elucidation or the reviewed arguments of other relevant researches. Meanwhile, quantitative research is used for information testing and endorsement as dealing with graphs and numbers. In order for accomplishing this method, the researcher is required to collect respondents' data from experiments or public surveys. Thus, this method contains a significant number of participants for a conveyed objective result (Jamshed 2014).

Regarding to the research approach, it consists of inductive and deductive types. Specifically, inductive reasoning initiates from specific observations towards the wider generalizations. It is also called a "bottom up" approach. Whereas, deductive reasoning or a "top-down" approach starts from general knowledge to a precise results delivery (Burney & Saleem 2008). In addition, a qualitative research is usually assisted by inductive approach whilst deductive approach is involved in the quantitative research method (Wilson 2010). Qualitative methodology and inductive research approach are believed as the most appropriate techniques for undertaking the research project after a cautious consideration

of the study topic nature. The main reason is that the research topic is seemingly specialized in business area which is not wisely understandable like the universal knowledge. Moreover, it is undeniably difficult to gain a depth of understanding and contributed ideas from a closed question survey. As mentioned above, the main purpose of the study is to answer “why” and “how” questions and to develop a content strategy for the case company. By that objectives, the in-depth interview with the industry insiders or relevant individuals to the case company are more appropriate to collect professional point of views and perception as having a deeper look into the research topic.

4.2 Data Collection

In this section, an applicable technique collecting data for this study is defined with clarity. A detailed explanation of how the research answers are determined and the procedure of the acquired results analyzation.

4.2.1 Primary Data Collection methods

Primary data are the real time information originated by the researcher when conducting a study. In order to acquire the method, it is probable to manage a survey or an interview (Driscoll 2011). Particularly, according Dudovskiy (2019), primary data are categorized to two main types which are the qualitative data (observations, interviews and data) and quantitative data (computation, surveys and statistical analyses). As mentioned in section 4.1, the study is conducted by assessing the qualitative data obtained from the interviews with industry insiders and relevant individuals to the case company. By choosing the primary data collection method with an attention draw on qualitative data, it is believed that validation level of the proposed content marketing plan will have high quality by the collective data from the interviewees.

4.2.2 Interviewing

The research data collection is conducted by a most frequently used qualitative technique which is interview (Jamshed 2014). In general, an interview possesses open-ended questions in order to generate an in-depth discussion with the interviewees (Adhabi & Anozie

2017). There are four types of interviews including the informal, conversational interview, general interview guide approach, standardized, open-ended interview and close, fixed-response interview (Valenzuela & Shrivastava).

Firstly, in terms of the informal, conversational interview, there are no prior prepared questions in order for generating a natural conversation with interviewees. In the second interview type, the interviewees are provided a same instruction for ensuring that the collected answers are based on the general information areas. However, the essence of the second type is similar to the first one as it focuses on the opening and adaptable aspects of the interview. The third one is a standardized, open-ended interview which means that all interviewees are asked by the same open-ended questions. By applying this type, the interview implementation takes less time as well as the analyzation and comparison will be more simplified. Lastly, regarding to the closed, fixed-response interview, the same questions and a set of fixed answers are provided to the all interviewees (Valenzuela et al). Therefore, one possibility is that the standardized and open-ended interview is the most suitable method for this qualitative study research.

The author had an agreement with nine individuals for conducting an online interview for the empirical part of this study. This part will briefly introduce the participants' title, experience and their relation to this research topic. Ms. Dao Mai is currently a Business Development Manager of Viet Trang Handicraft. She has more than thirteen years in Vietnam handicraft exporting industry. The second interviewee is Ms. Uyen Le – a Strategy and Marketing Manager of Viet Trang. Ms. Uyen has a strong education background of a master's degree in international business in the UK and relevant working experience to Ms. Dao. The author also had an opportunity to interview two members of the case company's business development team including Ms. An Nguyen – Order Management Team Leader and Ms. Loan Dinh – Inquiry Management Team Leader. Both of them have been working for Viet Trang since 2016, thus, having their objective opinions on an impact of different implemented marketing campaigns towards the company's sale growth. Moreover, as this study relates heavily to Marketing topics, the author had an in-depth interview with four members from the case company's marketing team including Ms. Nha Ngo, Ms. Vy Nguyen, Ms. Ha Nguyen and Ms. Huyen Nguyen. Ms. Nha Ngo is recently a Product Management Team Leader of Viet Trang for three years and the other three

members are working as Marketing Assistants within a team. All the marketing members shared their personal view and industrial experiences according to the study topic. Lastly, the author interviewed one expert outside the case company, Mr. Daniel Yap. He has industrial experience in marketing (content and creative writing) and business consultancy. With 19 years of working experience, Daniel has worked a considerably number of projects from marketing campaigns to investor relation communications. By interviewing an industry expert besides the individuals from the case company, the interview result showed an interesting and objective point of these professionals.

4.3 Validity and Reliability

In an academic perspective, validity is a required component in every research. The extent of validity is calculated by the coherence connection between the study's objectives and the theoretical literatures within the paper. Meanwhile, reliability plays a vital role in determining the measurement method quality of one study. It could be simply understood as the degree of resemblance or consistency of the current study findings comparing to results of similar topic researches (Malhotra, Wills & Birks 2012).

On the hand, in terms of validity, it can be assumed that this thesis contains reliable information source and an appropriate research method. In the empirical part, the author conducted an online interview with industry insiders and relevant individuals to the case company for gaining the most possibly high-quality sources for the primary information. The theoretical part is enhanced by the orthodox and academic knowledge from printed books and published scientific articles from reputable authors in the industry. Besides, in order to bridging two information sources types, a qualitative research method is implemented with a list of interview questionnaires created carefully by the author in order for reflecting the experts' point of view in an objective way to the grounded theories. On the other hand, regarding to the study's reliability, it is evident that the research question is solved by the interviewee's answers and the high quality of the primary information source. In addition, there is a similarity extent between the interviewees' answers which means it is possible to expect the same study results from future research on this specific phenomena. In short, one possibility is that the validity and reliability of this study could be guaranteed.

5 EMPIRICAL STUDY

The empirical study is conducted by email-interviews with nine respondents. In particular, this chapter contains the results analysis from the interview, the answers of the research questions, an outline content plan for the case company, and the study's limitations and future suggestion.

5.1 Interview Result Analysis

The division of data analysis is according to the ten interview questions. The author categorized the questions into three topics which are an overview of a strategic content marketing plan in general, the current execution of the company and the future scenario of this marketing tool. The following part contains the list of questions, opinion from the interviewees and the analysis of the author.

Overview of a strategic content marketing plan

This part includes two questions in terms of the decision between proactive search and passive discovery of the interviewees. Moreover, the interviewees have shared their own opinion towards the role of story-telling techniques implemented in marketing strategy. Each question and its answers analysis from the interview results will be indicated in succession below by the author.

1. *There are two ways in which content is consumed by the users including: proactive search and passive discovery. Which one do you think is a strategic content marketing for B2B company? Being proactive or passively discovered by buyers?*

According to the first question, all the interviewees shared similar opinions according to the way users consuming content and the role of story-telling in the company's marketing strategy. The same point of view of the interviewees as they thought it is better for business to be proactively discovered by the buyers. Since in business context, the purchasers will first define clearly their goals, types of products requirements and direction of their development before engaging with the sellers and passive discovery accounts for a small rate in this environment.

2. As a B2B company, what do you think about the role of story-telling in the company's marketing strategy? Is it necessary and has any certain impacts?

The same opinion has been shared on important role of story-telling in a marketing strategy. The interviewees assumed that story-telling could contribute to the unique point of the company as differentiating them from the competitors while adding more values to the products and gaining trust from the buyers. In addition, according to one interviewee's idea, a good story-telling should present the engaging information not just simply presenting the information.

The current execution of the company

The second part emphasizes the recent situation of the company's marketing execution. The questions involved in this part are the discussion of the pros and cons of content marketing implementation, whether the interviewees consider participating in social media platforms and create themselves a content platform and lastly, the key performance indicator they used for their marketing campaign.

3. What are the benefits and challenges of content marketing execution in the company platform or particularly, in the industry?

Thirdly, in terms of the benefits of content marketing execution, all the interviewees stated that it could bring a clear direction and long-term effect for the company's future marketing strategy, enhancing the company's image as the leadership or industry thought in the marketplace and lastly directly influencing on the company sales funnel. According to the challenges, the answers are mostly related to time and efforts spent for gaining insights from the customers and ways to generate good marketing materials. However, other interviewee shared his/her own thoughts of the challenge of content marketing execution are channel selection and engagement, the leader's awareness and organization's studying ability. Thus, from the author's reflection, besides having several benefits, it is clear that content marketing takes a lot of time and efforts in order for evaluating and selecting the most suitable content theme for business and sustaining the firm's awareness towards this execution.

4. Have Viet Trang or your company considered to join and enhance its presence on any social media platforms?

Regarding to the choice of social media platforms, Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn are the platforms preferred by the interviewees for widening up the buyer's reach points . In addition, one individual stated that it is necessary for Viet Trang to define an appropriate approach for B2B presence on social media.

5. How do your company measure the efficiency after a marketing campaign (in content aspects)? Is it related to company's brand awareness or equity?

The key performance indicator (KPI) of a marketing campaign efficiency stressed mostly from the interviewees are related to the conversion rate, referral reach and traffic on website, number of inquiries or orders and also the response to emails or signups for whitepapers and guides. In general, all the interviewees also stated that the KPI is flexible and adjusted due to the purpose of the marketing campaign. They also assumed that brand awareness and brand equity will be enhanced by an effective content marketing plan. In particular, marketing campaigns with high-quality content will contribute to the company's brand awareness and the value information got from these campaigns are considered as a company equity.

6. How do you determine whether a company should build a content platform?

There are three different viewpoints of how a company determines building its content platform. Firstly, three interviewees stated that it should depend on the development phase of the company. The startup company, the growing ones which desires to expand its market or the one having lagging revenue are the cases that need to build content platform. The participants explained that by implementing effective content marketing, it could enhance the company's brand awareness which is essentials for startups and the growing businesses simultaneously improve the sales situation of the company. Secondly, the other three participants shared their own thoughts on the vision and value proposition of the company. In specific, the decision of building a content platform is based on whether that company prefers adding more values to its products, being different to the others or having a sustainable long-term marketing strategy. One of them also stated that

to his/her content marketing is not the only one for businesses in this nature to succeed as the company should consider carefully whether content marketing building is essential for its business growth. Lastly, two individuals said that they think every company should build a content platform as it is necessary for the growth of a B2B company. However, another opinion was implemented later that building content platform can be a lower priority marketing activities since there are many arms-length or outsource options for businesses to utilize such as the aforementioned social medial platforms.

Future scenarios of content marketing

The last part of the interview concentrates on the interviewee's viewpoint in the future scenarios of content marketing. The first involved question relates to their reflections on a successful and failed content marketing plan. Secondly, their opinions on the sustained growth of content marketing and which any other marketing trends in 2020 are essentially adopted for businesses to improve their competitive edge. Lastly, the author interviewed the experts and industry insiders about their recommendations for small and mediums enterprises (SMEs) to starting the content marketing plan.

7. Why do some companies succeed in conducting content marketing while the others do not? Do you consider Viet Trang or your company being successful or not with marketing plan?

Some interviewees stated that the failure of the content marketing plan originates from not thorough market research and customer's insight comprehension. Thus, it will lead to the jejune and inconsistent content with the business orientation. The others shared their personal thoughts that since every business has different direction, the degree of one marketing plan failure probably depends on the orientation or objectives, mindset and expectation of that company. One stressed that one of the ultimate reason for not succeeding in conducting content marketing is the business's impatience getting the immediate results. It can be simply understood that these companies invest a large amount of money for building content campaigns and hope for an immediate results then getting disappointed since content marketing should be considered as a long-term strategy. The execution in terms of human resources and the distribution channels are also discussed as the reasons for failed content marketing plan. Most of Viet Trang stakeholders stated that they think

the company is on the right track of building a successful content plan. It is said that the company has prepared very well and only get started in conducting this marketing type. Moreover, one supposed that it is quite difficult to say whether they succeed in building content plan or not however, one possibility is that Viet Trang will continue doing with content marketing with appropriate expectation, keep tracking the results, amending and learning from that. From the shared story from the industry insiders, he thought that according to the positive numbers of lead on the marketing funnels, his previous content project was considered moderately successful.

8. In the future, do you think content marketing will still being a strategic tool for company in marketing the products and services?

All interviewees agreed that content marketing or inbound marketing in general will remain as a critical part of their future marketing plan. Specifically, content marketing is considered as a core and the most effective and strategic tool for Viet Trang company in near future. One of the participants stated that by implementing content strategy, the company could save costs and increase loyalty from customers.

9. Have you ever considered to adopt any other marketing trends in 2020 for the company?

One of the experts said that he/she also thinks that although content is still a critical part of marketing, the KPIs or content formats will change in the future with less reliance on in-house blogs, fewer blogs, more of a shift towards networks, publication and platforms and a rise in video content engagement levels. In terms of which marketing trends to adopt in 2020, most of the interviewees shared their decision on SEO for the company website. Digital marketing or SEO will be strongly promoted and become their main marketing method in 2020 as the believe that with this global condition, every B2B purchaser will explore the benefit of Internet and Google to gain more information they need whilst saving time and effort. Two interviewees considered to adopt personalized marketing and inbound marketing for the company at this current point. The reasons behind that is that they prefer improving the quality of content via personalization enhancement from customer segmentation, email segmentation campaigns, trade platform and content personalization. Another participant said that chatbots or marketing automation tools will be

adopted in 2020 as he/she think that effective data analytics play a key role in conversion rate and marketing effectiveness.

10. Any suggestions for other SMEs when initially starting content marketing plan?

The suggestions for SMEs to initially starting a content marketing plan is spending more time on clarifying their business core value and vision, studying all the previous cases, researching carefully their customers and digital marketing world. Nonetheless, another suggestion that SMEs should priorities lead generation from content marketing since the SMEs' cashflow and reserves tend not to be robust comparing to larger companies. Therefore, branding by content marketing should be deferred until a solid client pipeline is established and grown.

5.2 Research Findings

This study objectives are to clarify the important role of brand awareness in the business context, its relation to content marketing and the ways it is enhanced by utilizations of marketing tools. In other words, the following content is a summary of the theoretical parts within this thesis which is presented in the form of the answers to four aforementioned research questions in the introduction chapter.

The first research question is “How is brand equity and brand awareness related to each other?”. At this current point, the concept of brand awareness and brand equity are moderately vague due to the grey area between them. Therefore, with this study question, the author aims at explicating the definitions of both terms and the relationship between brand equity and brand awareness. By deeply understanding these concept, businesses and readers could have the grasp of the important role of brand awareness with respect to a B2B company.

Initially, before discussing the relationship between these two concepts, brand equity and brand awareness will be defined thoroughly. Brand equity can be simply understood as brand value which originates from the customer's perception towards a brand and its concept was first introduced by David Aaker. It generates value to the customer, enhancing

one's ability to process and interpret information, improving the level of trust in the buying and influencing on the quality of the user's experience both directly and indirectly. Meanwhile, brand awareness occurs once it is recognized and recalled by potential buyers when they are choosing a certain product. A customer could remember that brand as a representative for the product class or category. For example, customers could see Pepsi or Coca Cola as a soft drink not just a brand that sells soft drink. Therefore, it is explicit that the definitions of brand equity and brand awareness do overlap each other. However, it can be understood that brand awareness is a subset of brand equity. By having a strong brand awareness could contribute to the enhancement of brand value.

The second research question is "What is the decision-making unit (DMU) and buyer's journey?". In respect to business marketers, it is crucial to comprehend the organizational buyers in terms of their needs and motivations. Moreover, simultaneously with an understanding of the buyer's journey, the marketers are able to prepare a strategical content marketing plan with high quality and relevant information.

Answering the second question, in the B2B market, the buying decision depends on the buying center team, also called DMU – decision making unit and follow intricate procedures. This is a group of individuals who are involved in the purchasing process. The major players within this process are initiators, gatekeepers, decision makers, users and influencers. However, it only determines a general view of DMU's participants in the B2B context as the relationship *de facto* might vary for every organization and within purchase situation as each role is equally important. Buyer journey is knowns the experience journey of one customer regarding to a brand and his/her reflection of their personas. Buyer journey include all touchpoints within interaction between customer and business. The third research question is "What is content marketing, its tools and benefits in building brand awareness generally and specially in the case of the company?". Relating to the topic of the thesis, this question aims at clarifying the meaning of content marketing, its tools and its positive impacts on brand awareness enhancement.

Therefore, content marketing is known as a strategic approach concentrated on creating and delivering relevant and valuable information to a targeted audience consistently. Its main purpose is to boots the conversion rate from prospects to the actual buyers in the

marketing funnel and feed into sale funnel. Marketers could utilize content marketing as an effective tool for lead generation, client engagement, thought leadership, brand building and industry leadership. There are several content marketing tool regarding to the tactics and channels. Like aforementioned within this study, content marketing tools such as keywords, blogging and channels are social media platforms and company's website.

A effective implementation of a content marketing strategy could improve the company's brand awareness also brand equity. By utilizing these tools, companies are able to optimize their brand presence on the Internet as gaining traffics and high-quality leads to company's website. Generally, in terms of the benefits brought by content marketing, it could help companies supporting the interests raised from online users then nurturing them by helpful content and lastly converting the visitors into potential customers. In specific, regarding to the case company, as a midsize company, Viet Trang cashflow and reserves tend not to be as robust as larger companies and brand-building will need to be deferred until a solid client pipeline has been established and has grown. Therefore, from the student's perspective, small and midsize company should rely on a lot on content marketing in order to create more potential customers sources not only from the trade shows.

The last research question is "How can you align the chosen channels and content types with different stages of the buyer's journey?". As understanding brand awareness importance, the influences of content marketing in increasing brand recognition and value and the buyer's marketing funnel, it is acknowledged the vital role of the content tools implementation and utilization. Therefore, this final question will shine a light on the main research question which is "How can you enhance brand awareness with content marketing tools" presented in the introduction chapter.

After considering all aspects from this topic study, from the student's point of view and other answers from the interviewees, there are several ways in order to align the chosen channels and content types to the right stage of customer's journey. Firstly, companies should take use of data-driven approach, for example, to know how the audiences interact within the company's site, by that companies are able to understand better as identifying more accurately their target audience. Secondly, before creating a strategical and effective

content campaign, firms should invest time and effort for pre-outreach activities. Managing sustainable relationships with each individual in DMU enables the company to figure out their content consumption and preferred information. Thirdly, if it is possible, the company should outsource experts for supervising and controlling the quality of content, ensuring that the conveyed information is high-quality, relevant and valuable to the audience. Next step is to understand the buyer's journey in-depth. Furthermore, companies should consider carefully when choosing an appropriate distribution channel. By choosing the right one, the content is able to share with the right audience. Lastly, although being in the business context, organizational buyers are just a group of people, therefore, companies must be active on social media platform in order for interacting with each individual within that buying decision group. Therefore, the company should comprehend their audience persona, targeting the offer and able to customize the content to each buyer.

5.3 Study Results

This part contains an outline of the content marketing plan by the author for the case company. The outline plan includes five parts which are the content SWOT analysis, content SWOT action plan, SMART goal setting, content marketing matrix and a content plan timeline for the following month April.

Initially, SWOT analysis is an essential part which allows the company to create a plan of action based on the given situation in the marketplace (Appendix 3). This analysis provides a general and objective viewpoint of the company internal strategic strengths and weaknesses as well as identifying both opportunities and threats.

After developing a SWOT analysis of the case company current content marketing efforts, the following step is an actionable plan. This SWOT action plan is based upon the strengths and weaknesses which are identified from the previous figure. Moreover, potential opportunities and threats are also taken advantages to the company's current strategy.

Content SWOT Action Plan



Figure 9. SWOT Action Plan

Figure 9 illustrates in detailed the content action plan for the case company. The author has briefly listed six actionable steps according to the SWOT content analysis.

Firstly, the case company is suggested to test the paid social media distribution in order to enhance the contents that have well performance while establishing the new one. Secondly, it is recommendable that a resource centre should be developed which offers free and valuable content. Along with paid social media distribution, the company could also create and increase its organic leads. Thirdly, adding the experts' commentary within the white paper will help the company improve the value and validity of its offered contents simultaneously maintaining its leadership thoughts in the marketplace. Fourthly, according to the content marketing tendency under the circumstance, the author has suggested the company to conduct a video explaining the products and services for the audiences, thus, it helps improving the performance of the lead nurture programs. Moreover, in terms of improving the conversion rate, it is essential that the company needs to enhance its personalization via technology in order for turning more prospects into the actual customers. Lastly, for tracking the effects of these marketing efforts, the company is suggested to establish a content a Return on Investment (ROI) report for better comprehension.

As having a detailed action plan, the following step is to setting clear goals to accomplish within this specific content plan. By acknowledging objectives and the applied measurement methodology, Viet Trang – case company is able to conduct the action in the right direction and tracking them effectively. Therefore, the following figure is the

SMART Goal setting proposed by the author for the case company.

SMART GOAL SETTING

Customer Lifecycle Stage And Aims	SMART Objectives	Strategies To Achieve Goals	Key Performance Indicators
Reach: Increase brand awareness and visits to company websites, apps, and social networks.	Increase new monthly visits to the website by +25% in 12 months	Create a source center filled with free long form content on topics relevant to the audience	New organic visit to site
Act: Increase audience interactions with content on company-owned media platforms to generate leads	Reduce the average cost per lead by 5% in the next 9 months by increasing the amount of traffic from organic and reducing traffic from paid. Generate 10% more leads from each whitepaper created	Make whitepapers more valuable for social promotion by developing an influencer program and adding expert commentary to maintain our company's thought leadership. Paid social media distribution for whitepapers.	Number of leads per whitepaper created
Convert: Increase conversion rates from leads to sales volumes achieved online or offline.	Increase the lead to customer conversion rate to 4% (currently is 2,3%) in next 9 months.	Create explainer videos to improve the performance of our lead nurture programs. Leverage technology to improve personalization for returning leads.	Lead to customer conversion rate
Engage: Increase long-term customer engagement and loyalty leading to repeat sales and advocacy.		Leverage technology to improve personalization for returning leads.	

Figure 10. SMART Goal Setting

SMART goal setting, which is indicated via figure 10, is not usually seen as a strategic approach to content marketing by many businesses. Therefore, these companies lack clarity around both the goals and KPIs (key performance indicators) that the plan is endeavouring to accomplish. The student proposed this goal setting plan helping the case company to plan specific objectives and KPIs around the buyer's journey. Moreover, by this plan, the objectives are supposedly actionable as all the strategies are defined clearly.

After completing a SWOT analysis, an action plan of top priority tasks and mapped this across the buyer's journey, this next step concentrates on identifying the possible gaps in the case company current content marketing efforts by a content marketing matrix (Appendix 4). In particular, this content marketing matrix will help Viet Trang mapping relevant content in order for identifying the suitability of content. Firstly, it supports the purchase process and improve the conversion rate of the sales funnels. The contents are mapped from awareness to purchase for the manager to identify which content the company has available to the user to attract to the company's site and help the use move across

the funnel. Secondly, although the company works with organizational buyers, the purchasers are still a group of different individuals who also have need a psychological engagement from emotional to rational. This matrix provides a content mapped from emotional to rational which support the company to enhance and achieve its audience engagement. By implementing this content marketing matrix, the case company is enabled to identify the potential gaps of its current plan, which is not accounting for the lacked content which will convince an audience of Viet Trang's brand and to begin brainstorming the content ideas for filling those gaps.

Content Plan Timeline

		Month: April																													
		CONTENT CAMPAIGNS																													
Type		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
White Papers																															
Blog posts																															
Slide share																															
Infographic																															
Expert Interview																															
Product Video																															

		CONTENT DISTRIBUTION																													
Type		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
Social Media Sign Up Account																															
Social Media Distribution																															
Adwords																															
SEO																															
Email Offers																															
Lead Nurturing																															

Figure 11. Content Marketing Plan Timeline

The last part of an outline content marketing is a realistic timeline plan for the company. Figure 11 displays an detailed one-month timeline for Viet Trang's content plans. It is divided into two parts which are the content campaigns and the content distribution. On one hand, the content campaigns content what should be launched throughout that month. Particularly, it is suggested that the case company should publish several whitepapers for

the web users. Thus, in order to promote the whitepaper which will generate the leads for the company, blog posts, SlideShares, infographics and expert interviews should be published as well. Overall, all of these content pieces are designed to help the company enhance its brand awareness in terms of attracting traffics and promoting the published whitepapers. On the second hand, to better promote the published contents, the company should utilize all the available distribution channels (the social media platforms) and tools (SEO, AdWords, Email offers). The SEO plan will be conducted more carefully in order to bring better outcome and positive number of traffic to the company's site. AdWords campaigns are invested more for promoting the company's whitepapers also improving the organic visibility of the company's resources centre. Lastly, product videos will be used for improving the lead nurture campaigns.

5.4 Conclusion

The thesis aims at indicating a method to leverage the tools of content marketing for brand awareness enhancement in business-to-business context generally and for the case company – Viet Trang Handicraft in specific. The study also resulted with an outline content marketing plan proposed by the student for the case company.

In brief, through the theoretical parts discussion, it is evident that there is a relation between brand awareness and brand equity. Although both terms are originated from the buyer's perception, one possibility is that a business is still able to manipulate the customer's awareness in a positive way towards their brand images. Therefore, the student evaluated the benefits and how content marketing which is under the inbound marketing concept umbrella influences on one company's brand awareness relating to the conversion rate in generation lead process.

Furthermore, all the interviewees also acknowledged the importance of content marketing or story-telling marketing approach and their impacts on the company's brand awareness improvement. The case company's employees stated that with an effective content marketing implementation, the company could increase number of prospects, build a positive impression and add more values to the company's products. It can be assumed that there is a sustainable evolvement of content marketing in building brand awareness for B2B in

near future. Since most of the interviewees prefer that it is still their priority when establishing their strategical marketing plan in 2020.

Lastly, under the circumstance, the marketing industry is transforming unceasingly accompanied by an increasing complexity of organizational buyers' process. The opinions collected from the interviewees tends to only accurate for certain aspects or industries. Nonetheless, the research findings are reinforced by and mostly relevant to both primary data collection and the specialist's viewpoints.

5.5 Author's Reflection

This part contains the validity and reliability of the entire thesis as well as the student's reflection towards the research topic. Initially, the research was conducted by a high quality theoretical part and an empirical study part. The literature part originated from the scientific resources including books and online articles in the marketing field. In particular, a wide range of primary information sources were used in order for clarifying the research topic. Therefore, in the study findings part, all the research questions are resolved in detailed and thoroughly. In terms of the empirical study, a qualitative methodology was implemented in the form of an online interview with several professionals by the researcher. The interview questions are practical under the circumstances and enable the author to gain the industry insider's insights and opinion towards the study topic. Specifically, from the author's viewpoint, the interview's result reflected moderately the theoretical part and research questions. Thus, there is a possibility to expect the similar results from the future study of content marketing in B2B context.

On the reflection of the writer, this study topic was first generated from the idea of enhancing the brand recognition for the case company in which the student had her internship before. Particularly, according to the student's existing knowledge and experiences gained from her 6-month-intership for the case company, the author acknowledged the challenges faced by a midsize B2B company in building its brand image and finding appropriate ways to add more values and unique points to its products. Since the company is in the B2B context, the student, who is accustomed to content marketing tools in consumer market, questioned whether these tools have some certain impacts on the business marketplace. Furthermore, according to the student's research, there is a small amount of

conducted studies regarding to this topic “building content and brand awareness in B2B environment”. With these reasons, the study goal is to clarify the benefits of content marketing tools in building a brand awareness for the case company as well as other B2B firms. On the very first stage of the research, the student was overwhelmed with vast amount of knowledge and information to the business context. There were a lot of struggles in organizing all the thoughts with valid supports and examples from scientific references which are difficult to find. Thus, the supervisor advised her opinions regarding this problem to help narrow down the redundancy. The paper at the end contained every relevant piece of knowledge coherently with proper format and citation. Meanwhile, it is clear that this study still has several deficiencies. The student’s knowledge and experiences in the marketplace is explicitly inadequate, thus, the results are not accurate totally. However, the student perceives this thesis project was a precious journey in her early academic life and would like to improve this topic in her higher study.

5.6 Limitation and Recommendation

The author acknowledges that the research topic is considerably broad, thus, it is evident that a major of content marketing area are not discussed sufficiently within this thesis. In specific, the perspective of the experts from bigger companies and other crucial parts regarding to this topics are left outside. The study mainly focused on the personal opinion of the relevant people to the case company and more concentrated on the small-scale companies included the start-ups and midsize ones. Thus, it can be assumed that this paper brought a general point of view of the chosen topic, presenting a certain part of the opinions regarding to content marketing in business context but not a whole picture.

Moreover, it is clear that the answers gained from seven interviewees cannot represent the whole professional opinion since most of them are from small and medium companies and also, there are numerous different industries in the marketplace. It is suggested that in order for fulfilling other details for the big picture, people who are interested in studying in similar field could focus more on the behaviours of large-scale regarding the topic content marketing implementation for their branding strategies.

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Lastly, I would send this instalment to my grandmother who would love to see me graduate but could not since I am studying abroad. I am thankful for your generous love, forever. In this key turning point of my life, I hope that I have made you proud.

Thank you so much, always, I will move forward by looking back on myself.

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THESIS INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Dear Sir/Madame,

My name is Mai Nguyen, an IB student from Vaasa University of Applied Sciences.

Recently, I am working on a thesis topic "Building B2B Brand Awareness by Content Marketing". I had your contact information as I was an intern with position Digital Marketing Assistant in Viet Trang company. As a part of my qualitative research, I need to collect the information about the company at this current point as well as your professional opinions from this research area. I highly appreciated all of your valuable contribution to my study.

I have attached to this email a link to my questionnaires for this interview. There are ten questions overall, I acknowledge that it is quite long, however, due to my supervisor's advice, this is the required length of the interview questionnaires of a Bachelor's study. Hopefully, you could answer them in detail as much as possible. I assure the confidentiality of all provided information when conducting the result assessment. In case the study requires more information, I would contact you for further interview. I hope to receive your acceptance.

I am looking forward to your response soon.

Thank you so much.

Kind regards,



Mai Nguyen
IB Undergraduate, VAMK
maiikim920@gmail.com



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INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. There are two ways that content is consumed by the users including: proactive search and passive discovery. Which one do you think is a strategic content marketing for B2B company? Being proactive or passively discovered by buyers?
2. As a B2B company, what do you think about the role of story-telling in the company's marketing strategy? Is it necessary and has any certain impacts?
3. What are the benefits and challenges of content marketing execution in company platform or particularly, in the industry?
4. Have your company considered to join and enhance its presence on any social media platforms?
5. How the company measure the efficiency after a marketing campaign (in content aspects)? Is it related to company's brand awareness or equity?
6. How do you determine whether a company should build a content platform?
7. Why some companies succeeded in conducting content marketing while the others do not? Do you consider your company being successful or not with marketing plan?
8. In the future, do you think content marketing still being a strategic tool for company in marketing the products and services?
9. Have you ever considered any to adopt any other marketing trends in 2020 for the company?
10. Any suggestion for other SMEs when initially starting content marketing plan?

Content SWOT Analysis



