Arto Kallunki

GUIDE TO USING SOCIAL MEDIA FOR BELLEGAMES

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Thesis

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Degree Programme of International
Business

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ABSTRACT

Oulu University of Applied Sciences

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Title of Bachelor's thesis: Guide to Using Social Media for BelleGames

Supervisor(s): Juha Väisänen

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The topic of my thesis is to help BelleGames, a small local gaming company, define marketing and social media for their upcoming product the Year of Eden. The thesis was commissioned in the fall of 2010 as the need for this work became evident for the CEO of BelleGames. My aim is to discuss branding and social media with the intent to write a beginning social media guide. The material is largely from the OUAS school library in addition to two books that I have bought. The rest of the material was collected from relevant professional journals and blogs mainly via desktop research.

The main results were that BelleGames should concentrate their advertising to those social media channels that have the highest visibility with Facebook, in addition to striving for transparency, engagement and social pull. BelleGames should emphasize the differentiating features of Year of Eden (chiefly nonviolence, sci-fi, and co-operation).

Based on my research I would recommend that BelleGames would emphasize collaboration, transparency and linkability in its social media, and commission an appropriate branding campaign some months before the game's launch. The current situation would imply that the social media presence is in a proper phase with the game development.

Keywords: social media, Facebook, gaming applications, social media optimization, branding, SEO, SEM, brand

TIIVISTELMÄ

Oulun seudun ammattikorkeakoulu
Degree Programme in International Business

Tekijä: Arto Juhani Kallunki

Opinnäytetyön nimi: Guide to Using Social Media for BelleGames

Ohjaava opettaja: Juha Väisänen

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Opinnäytetyöni tarkoitus on auttaa BelleGames'ia, paikallista pelialan yritystä, lisäämään julkaistavan pelin näkyvyyttä sosiaalista mediaa käyttämällä. Työ aloitettiin syksyllä 2010 alkuperäisenä tarkoituksena luoda brändi tulevalle tuotteelle. Ohjausseminaarissa tuodun ehdotuksen perusteella tavoite muutettiin sosiaalisen median käyttöoppaaksi, pääaiheenaan sosiaalisen median optimointi.

Käytetty aineisto on peräisin suurimmaksi osaksi OAMK:n liiketalouden kirjastosta tai omista hankinnoistani. Muu materiaali kerättiin asiaa koskevista akateemisista julkaisuista ja blogeista desktop research-metodilla.

Opinnäytetyöni päätuloksena esitän, että läsnäolo sosiaalisessa mediassa on pelillistä kehitysvaihetta silmälläpitäen oikealla tasolla. Parhaat keinot näkyvyyden lisäämiseksi ovat kohdennettu mainonta oikeissa kanavissa sekä aktiivinen läsnäolo sosiaalisessa mediassa

Johtopäätöksenä suosittelisin keskittymistä yhteistyöhön, avoimuuteen ja mahdollisimman laajaan jakamiseen sosiaalisessa mediassa. BelleGames'in tulisi keskittää mainontansa niihin sosiaalisen median kanaviin, joilla on suurin näkyvyys Facebookissa. Keinoina tulisi käyttää uuden, mielenkiintoisen sisällön tuottamista ja jakamista, suostuttelevaa teknologiaa sekä kohdennettua mainontaa. Brändi-asemoinnissaan BelleGames'in tulisi korostaa piirteitä, jotka erottavat tuotteen muista kilpailijoista (väkivallattomuus, pelilliset puitteet, yhteistyön merkitys).

Asiasanat: sosiaalinen media, Facebook, pelit, sosiaalisen median optimointi, brändäys, hakukoneoptimointi, SMO, SEO

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1   INTRODUCTION

The amount of global telecommunications has experienced a sharp increase over the decade in subscribers and uploading and downloading speeds. According to ITU's yearly ICT reports, the global internet penetration tripled from 10 to 30 per 100 people, meaning that over 2 billion people use internet and/or have internet subscriptions. Mobile phones were 2.5 times more commonplace than 10 years ago and popular with over 5 billion subscriptions. (World Telecommunications/ICT Development Report 2010.)

As the speed of internet download and upload increases, so does the interactivity and complexity of websites. Streaming 720p and 1080p videos is now possible with a broadband connection, even though it is still relatively rare with only an 8 % penetration. (World Telecommunications/ICT Development Report 2010.)

Prior to the broadband expansion to mainstream, going online was a more purpose-oriented activity and involved a very deliberate connecting of the personal computer and the network. Currently, with the introduction of 24/7 internet broadband at homes and the adoption of mobile devices capable of navigating between Wi-Fi and mobile phone networks, the internet has become a daily, integral part of our lives. (Evans 2008, 182.)

The effects of fast and cheap communications can be seen and felt throughout nearly every aspect of human life. The internet enables consumers to receive much larger doses of information than previously possible and enables for a large variety of dynamic, small businesses to function. The increased data handling capabilities enable companies to have internet as a key channel for company- or brandbuilding by combining consumer participation with visually satisfying pictures and videos. (Salmenkivi & Nyman 2008, 273.)

For small companies, using internet in brand management is even more essential, since the effects of word-of-mouth and the search engine optimization are magnified by Web 2.0, both in good and bad. The best way to turn a liability into strength is by good customer service and in building trust between the company and its customers. Trust in the brand is reflected in brand loyalty, and the key to creating trust is through openness and transparency. (Salmenkivi & Nyman 2008, 273-274.)

Facebook is arguably the most successful and widespread example as a social media phenomenon. According to a Goldman-Sachs –report from January 2011, it caters to over 600 million users, and ITM's cloud-computing network research found that using its functions may be more addicting than sex, cigarettes and oxycontin. The brand value of Facebook has been estimated at around 5.5 billion US dollars. The publishing platform of Facebook is easy to use and demands relatively little resources. Consequently, Facebook has been one of the leading caterers for small and casual game publishers. (Digitaltrends, 3.2.2011; Businessinsider, 5.1.2011, accessed 4.4.2011.)

BelleGames is a small, Oulu-based gaming enterprise which has been developing a new gaming application for Facebook. The new app is intended to be a nonviolent real-time space strategy game with a co-operation encouraging structure. The product's name is set to be The Year of Eden. This thesis was commissioned with a goal of researching the most effective methods of creating a distinct brand for the upcoming product.

This thesis was originally commissioned to be a brandbuilding exercise for the commissioner's upcoming product, but was then changed to create a social media guide that could be more practically utilized by the company at the direction seminar. It attempts to answer the questions "how to form a brand over BelleGames' product?" and "what are the most efficient ways of promoting a product over social media?"

The development task and the purpose of the work are therefore to research basic information on making the product more visible to the target segment. This mainly includes visibility on search engines and the social media sites that the target segment frequents.

The audience for this game is intended to be international casual gamers of both sexes between the ages of 18 to 30 who have an interest in sci-fi. This demographic is more or less evenly distributed along sexes, and the usage of internet and social media is high among it. The characteristics of it vary by region, but it is marked by an increase of neoliberal thought on politics and economics. It is also a very broad demographic, and one of the prime groups which the marketers aim their marketing at.

The overlap between the target demographic and the demographic cohort Generation Y is significant. Some of the common traits associated with Generation Y include being used to technology, family-centricity, achievement -, and team orientation and attention-seeking behavior.

This can be seen in the fast adoption of new technological appliances, calls for more flexible working conditions, and expectations for a more interactive feedback. (about.com, accessed 5.9.2011.)

2   METHODOLOGY

In this research the data is collected on secondary sources only due to limited resources and time available for completing the thesis. This method is also most effective and practical considering the topic and the resources at hand. The main sources have been provided by Oulu University of Applied Sciences' library through access to different databases e.g. EBSCO and the library book collections, enabling the researcher an access to latest publications from the field of interest. Articles and newscast about social media and independent gaming publishing provided the latest information and trends where the development of these issues is going in the future. Books gave theoretical foundation needed to carry on the study from the field of branding and marketing communication. The knowledge base was gathered by desktop research.

The main theoretical source for social media studies was Safko & Brake's *Social Media Bible*. David A. Aaker's *Brand Leadership* was the corresponding book source for parts on brand and its different aspects. On par with desktop research methods, internet was used to provide the material for the thesis. Search hits on this study are based on Google's search engine results, which if used with other search engines could generate different results.

In addition, a variety of subject-related blogs were searched using Technokrati.com and Google. The use of blogs was seen equal to the use journals and published material due to the presence of established professionals and advertising firms, leading to a wider and more diverse sampling of opinions.

The main consideration in using content that is freely modifiable and publishable is its authenticity. I strived to use electronic material from reputable sources and, in the case of Wikipedia articles, paid attention to the listing and origin of source articles as well as the quantity of editing and the page history.

These sources provided qualitative and quantitative information. Qualitative data was the critical source to understand the environment of social media and how game developers use it or could use it in the future.

Keywords used in the database search were "social media", "casual game", "casual gaming", "marketing communication", "conversational marketing", "viral marketing", "brand" and "brand equity".

3 BRAND

To lay a good foundation to my thesis, I will introduce the brand, brand identity and brand equity concepts. In this chapter I will also discuss positioning and the benefits that a company can have from creating brand equity.

There are a variety of different definitions for the concept of brands. American Marketing Association defines brand as "a name, design, or symbol that identifies one seller's good or service as distinct from other sellers" (AdCracker, accessed 29.3.2011).

Aaker has essentially the same definition, adding the signal dimension that would argue that the brand as an idea resides within the consumer's brain:

> "A brand is a distinguishing name and/or symbol (such as a logo, trademark, or other package design) intended to identify the goods or services of either one seller or a group of sellers, and to differentiate those goods or services from those of the competitors. A brand thus signals to the customer the source of the product, and protects both the customer and the producer from competitors who would attempt to provide products that appear to be identical." -Aaker 1991, 7

The word branding refers to marking cattle with firebrands. Branding or at least trademarks, however, are much older and can be traced back to ancient pottery and stonemason's marks, which were applied to handcrafted goods to identify their source and give juridical protection to the producer. (Keller 2003, 52.)

Brands can serve as symbolic devices, allowing consumers to project their self-image. Certain brands are associated with being used by certain types of people and thus reflect different values or traits. Using such product is a means by which consumers can communicate to others- or even to themselves- the type of person they are or would like to be. Keller cites Harvard's Susan Fournier on the socio-cultural issue of brands:

> "Relationships with mass [market] brands can soothe the "empty selves" left behind by society's abandonment of tradition and community and provide stable anchors in an otherwise changing world. The formation and maintenance of brand-

product relationships serve many culturally-supported roles within postmodern society."

Kapferer defines a brand consisting of the name and visual style, the product itself and the impression that consumers associate with the brand (2004, 12). Nokia cell phones for example have been associated with professional, engineering-type consumers.

In other words, brands and branding have become increasingly important in the self-definition of people's exterior image in today's world. Brands that successfully manage brand equity and change their outward communication of identity will always have an upper hand on an emotional level, when compared to weak or unknown brands, in their field of association.

According to Kotler, any given product can be divided into five different layers of benefits to the customer, illustrated in figure 1. (Kotler 2009.)
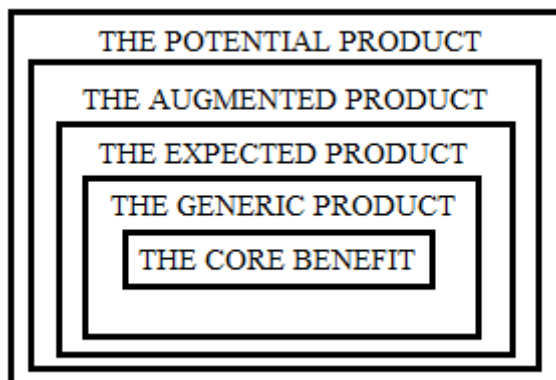
FIGURE 1. Kotler's Five Levels to Product Marketing

Kotler says that the competition between brands happens at the level of augmented products, since most companies can deliver expected products of identical attributes. The main message of a brand to consumers should therefore be one of added value that using the brand brings. (Kotler 2009.)

3.1 Brand identity

Aaker believes that creating and realizing brand identity, as well as understanding and leading it are key issues in creating strong brands and brand equity. According to him, brand image is reflecting the state of the brand through the eyes of the consumers and brand identity is the goal image that the company wishes to create to the consumers. Keller somewhat supports this by stating that brand and brand image can be defined as perceptions about a brand through associations that the consumer makes in his memory. (Aaker 1996, 25, 71, 105; Keller 2003, 66.)

Brand identity offers a goal and a reason for existence to the brand. It also guides the selection of associations and mental images, meaning that what the company wants the brand to represent in the minds of the consumers. These associations represent what the brand stands for and what the company has promised to its' customers. (Aaker 1996, 25, 68; Aaker & Joachimsthaler 2000, 71.)

Brand identity consists of the brand essence, core identity and an extended identity. The core identity represents the most central and important values and strategy of the company. A clear core identity symbolizes the reason why the brand exists and what is its role in the market. A brand will not fare well in times of change without a strong core identity. (Aaker & Joachimsthaler 2000, 43-44.)

Value proposition is a tagline of sorts, based on relevant, positive traits of the brand like its attributes, benefits, uses, competitors, quality, price, product category and so on (Scribd 2011, accessed 19.7.2011). It symbolizes brand identity and is meant to separate the company's products and services from those of its competitors. Among other things, a good brand identity helps brand recall because a strong, unifying brand is easier to remember and offers a clearer picture of the brand and its purpose and for the consumer offers a sustainable competitive advantage based on its value proposition. (Aaker & Joachimsthaler 2000, 85.)

Even though Aaker would suggest that the analysis, design and application of brand identity would be chronological phases, reality dictates that these actions take, at times, place simultaneously. Aaker's different aspects of brand identity (brand as a product, an organization, a person and a symbol) help to elaborate what the brand is and can be, making the identity less ambiguous. (Aaker & Joachimsthaler 2000, 44, 71.)

3.2   Brand equity

Aaker describes brand equity is a set of brand assets and liabilities that are linked to a brand, its name and symbol, that add to or subtract from the value provided by a product or service to a firm and/or to that firm's customers. The assets and liabilities on which brand equity is based will differ from context to context. Brand equity consists of four categories, which are brand loyalty, name awareness, perceived quality, brand associations and perceived quality. Different areas of the brand equity influence one another. The perceived quality for example is based in part in brand associations and awareness. The main parts are visualized in figure 2. In his 1991 book Aaker identifies a fifth contributing factor to brand equity (other brand assets), meaning sustainable competitive advantages that are not reflected in the other equity dimensions, such as trademarks and relationships. (Aaker 1991, 29; Aaker & Joachimsthaler 2000, 17.)
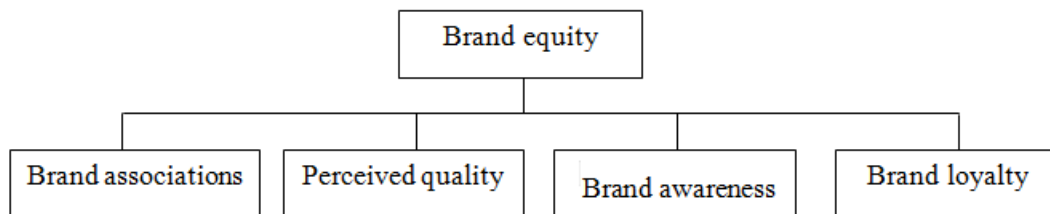

FIGURE 2. Brand equity (Aaker & Joachimsthaler 2000, 17)

Brand equity helps to consumer to interpret, process, and store large quantities of information about the products and the brand. The categories' influence on the consumers' product preference and use satisfaction either adds or subtracts to the brand equity. (Aaker 1991, 16.)

Keller's model of customer-based brand equity argues that the power of the brand depends on the opinion that the consumers have formed of it over a period of time. Customer-based brand equity is the effect that brand awareness has on the consumer's reaction to the marketing of the brand. When customers react more favorably to a product and the way it is marketed when the brand is identified than when it is not, the brand has positive customer-based brand equity. Keller's definition of CBBE does not distinguish between the source of brand associations and the manner in which they are formed; all that matters is the resulting favorability, strength, and uniqueness of brand associations. (2003, 59-60, 70, 101.)

In his definition Keller highlights the point that a brand's value and strength are dependent on the opinions that the consumer has formed based on his/her own experiences and company communications, saying that "brand equity ultimately depends on what resides in the minds of the customers". It follows that brand equity is formed from the company's communications and marketing knowhow, brand analysis and the brand's relationship to the customer. (Keller 2003, 13, 60.)

Keller further states that "no single number or measure fully captures brand equity. Brand equity should be thought as a multidimensional concept that depends on what actions a firm takes to capitalize on the potential offered by these knowledge structures." (Keller 2003, 505.)

The different facets of brand equity form a sustainable competitive advantage to a company. Brand equity enables a price premium for the products and services. As Aaker (1991, 18) writes, a" strong perceived quality position… …is a competitive advantage not easily overcome - convincing customers that another brand has achieved quality superior to [own product] (even if true) will be hard." Conversely, for a brand without sufficient name awareness, achieving parity can be extremely expensive. In addition, brand equity can lead to increase for third parties (in this case, webhosting services and online advertisers) to engage in business, since a brand with high brand equity and established brand associations in the eyes of the consumers is more profitable than one without. (Aaker 1991, 18; Keller 2003, 60.)

A brand with positive brand equity enjoys loyal customers. This means a brand can guarantee future profits for the company, and it is valued as a business partner and an investment target. Loyal, existing customers are easier to reach and require fewer resources. A brand with a positive brand image weathers crises better. (Aaker 1991, 16, 18, 47; Keller 2003, 11, 105.)

In its shortest definition brand equity means added value that's a result from the brand's previous marketing efforts and positioning. Brand equity can be a liability or strength, depending on the target market.

3.3 The brandbuilding process

The basic premise of Keller's Customer-Based Brand Equity model is that the power of a brand lies in what customers have learned, felt, seen and heard about the brand as a result of their

experiences over time. Consequently, building a strong brand requires creating a proper brand identity and appropriate brand meaning, eliciting the right brand responses and then forging appropriate brand relationships. It follows that, according to customer-based brand equity, a prerequisite for creating a strong brand is when the consumer has a high level of awareness and familiarity with the brand and holds some strong, favorable, and unique brand associations in memory. (Keller 2003, 75, 102.)

Aaker & Joachimsthaler consider brandbuilding in the light of three essential tasks that we have covered: Creating brand visibility; brand associations and differentiation; and developing deep customer relationships. (Aaker & Joachimsthaler 2000, 263.)

Brandbuilding creates a brand memory for the consumer and helps them organize their knowledge about the brand in a way that alters their decision making and creates brand value. Both perceived quality and brand associations increase the satisfaction of using the product, making consumers react more positively to the performance of a known brand over an unknown one. Thus a brand's associations provide basis for brand extensions and in doing so can create sustainable competitive advantages and protect the brand from competing marketing efforts. (Aaker 1991, 209.)

In brandbuilding, for branding strategies to be successful and brand equity to be created, consumers must be convinced that there are meaningful differences among brands in the product or service category. The key to branding is that consumers must not think that all brands in the category are the same. The brandbuilding process begins when the consumer is informed what the product is, what need the brand fulfills and of the brand element, i.e. the brand's name, logo and design. (Keller 2003, 175.)

Brand elements can be chosen in a manner to build as much brand equity as possible. That is, according to the customer-based brand equity model, brand elements can be chosen to enhance brand awareness; facilitate the formation of strong, favorable and unique brand associations; or elicit positive brand judgments and feelings. The test of the brand-building ability of brand elements is what consumers would think or feel about the product if they only knew about its brand name, associated logo, and other characteristics. The key point in branding is to properly position your product and advertising in a way that ensures consumers that the products in the same category are not identical and the meaningful differences exist. (Keller 2003, 13, 75, 102, 175.)

In brandbuilding we can see an order from identity to meaning to responses to relationships in two parts. That is, first the category to which the brand is associated and compared and with what products it competes is defined. Then the brand is defined by its meaningful points of parity and points of difference in relation to the consumer. (Keller 2003, 136.)

3.4   Brand positioning

Brand positioning is at the heart of marketing strategy. On one of his online lectures Kotler defines brand positioning as the "act of designing the company's offer and image so that it occupies a distinct and valued place in the target customer's minds" (Scribd 2011, accessed 13.4.2011). Thus, positioning, as the name implies, involves finding the proper position in the minds of a group of consumers or market segment so that they think about a product or service in the desired way. Positioning is all about identifying the optimal location of a brand and its competitors in the minds of consumers to maximize potential benefit to the firm. A good brand positioning helps to guide marketing strategy by clarifying what a brand is all about, how it is similar to competitive brands and why consumers should purchase and use the brand. (Keller 2003, 119-120.)

According to CBBE model, deciding on a positioning requires determining a frame of reference (by identifying the target market and the nature of competition) and the ideal points of parity and points of difference brand associations. In other words, it is necessary to decide 1) what the target market is, 2) who the main competitors are, 3) how the brand is similar to these competitors, and 4) how the brand is different from these competitors. (Keller 2003, 119-120.)

Market segmentation involves dividing the market into distinct groups of homogenous consumers who have similar needs and consumer behavior and thus require similar marketing mixes. Defining a market segmentation plan involves tradeoffs between costs and benefits. The more finely segmented the market, the greater the likelihood that the firm will be able to implement marketing programs that meet the needs of consumers in any one segment. The advent of different social medias and the subsequent practical applicability of Reed's law on marketing segmentation gives an unprecedented ability for companies to tune their advertising. Behavioral segmentation bases are often most valuable in understanding branding issues because they have clearer strategic implications. (Keller 2003, 119-120.)

4 SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media can be said to be the use of web-based and mobile communication possibilities to turn communication into dialogue. Essentially social media enables the audience to participate in and create social discourse. In this chapter I intend to define and expand on the concept of social media and the relevant advertising subject such as social media optimization/marketing, search engine optimization/marketing and Facebook, the intended social media platform for the commissioner's product.

Social media is a medium for social interaction that builds on the basis of Web 2.0, allowing users to create, exchange and control the contents of web-based applications (Kaplan & Haenlein 2010). The most well-known phenomenon of social media are the different audio/visual hosting services like YouTube and blogging and social networking/sharing sites like Twitter and Facebook. The definition of social media, as well as Web 2.0 interaction (itself by definition a method of social media engagement), can be seen as an example of social media in the web encyclopedia, Wikipedia (Evans 2008, 32). Evans uses Wikipedia as an example because in this context, social media is used to tap the collective knowledge of the users and arrive at an acceptable conclusion over discussion of the structuralization, definition, content and grouping of information on the subject of social media (Evans 2008, 32).

Evans (2008, 53) argues that contemporary social networks follow Reed's Law of networking, meaning that the value of networks scale exponentially in relation to its size. The reason given is that the number of possible communities and sub-groups grows faster than the number of participants or the number of paired connections. So even though the utility of available groups is small on a peer-group basis, the networking effect of potential group ownership can dominate the overall system economics. Should Reed's Law be applicable with social networks, which encourage the formation of and communication between subgroups, the amount of connections enables would be very big. The law itself states that the number of possible, connecting networks is $2^N - N - 1$, where N is the number of participants. For example, a social network of 50 users could potentially have c. 1 126 trillion subgroups, making targeted marketing easy, provided that the personal information is available for marketing. (Wikipedia 2011, accessed 13.4.2011.)

In a social media-related seminar in Mikkeli 9.6.2011 Eero Seppänen, a social media entrepreneur, identified 8 points of interest in internet which were strengthened in significance by the advent of social media. Essentially E. Seppänen promotes thinking based on transparency, engagement, and social pull. As viral marketing is an essential part of social media, its basic concept should serve as a good primer.

Tim O'Reilly was the first person to introduce Web 2.0 into the general vocabulary. According to him, Web 2.0 is to function as a platform enabling users to interact, network and collaborate with one another. O'Reilly's Web 2.0 mindmap (or "Meme Map") is shown in the figure 3. His perception is that communality, the merging of work and play, and perpetual user modification will be the dominant memes of Web 2.0 activities. This can already be seen in user communities that exist for media phenomenon like movies, popular games and bands. The user contribution for a product can be very significant, for example the gaming firm Paradox has released several commercial DLC (DownLoadable Content) packages that have begun as user modifications. The customers who have developed and offered solutions to the product and the support community feel a sense of ownership for its wellbeing (Evans 2008, 197). (Paradoxplaza, accessed 25.7.2011.)
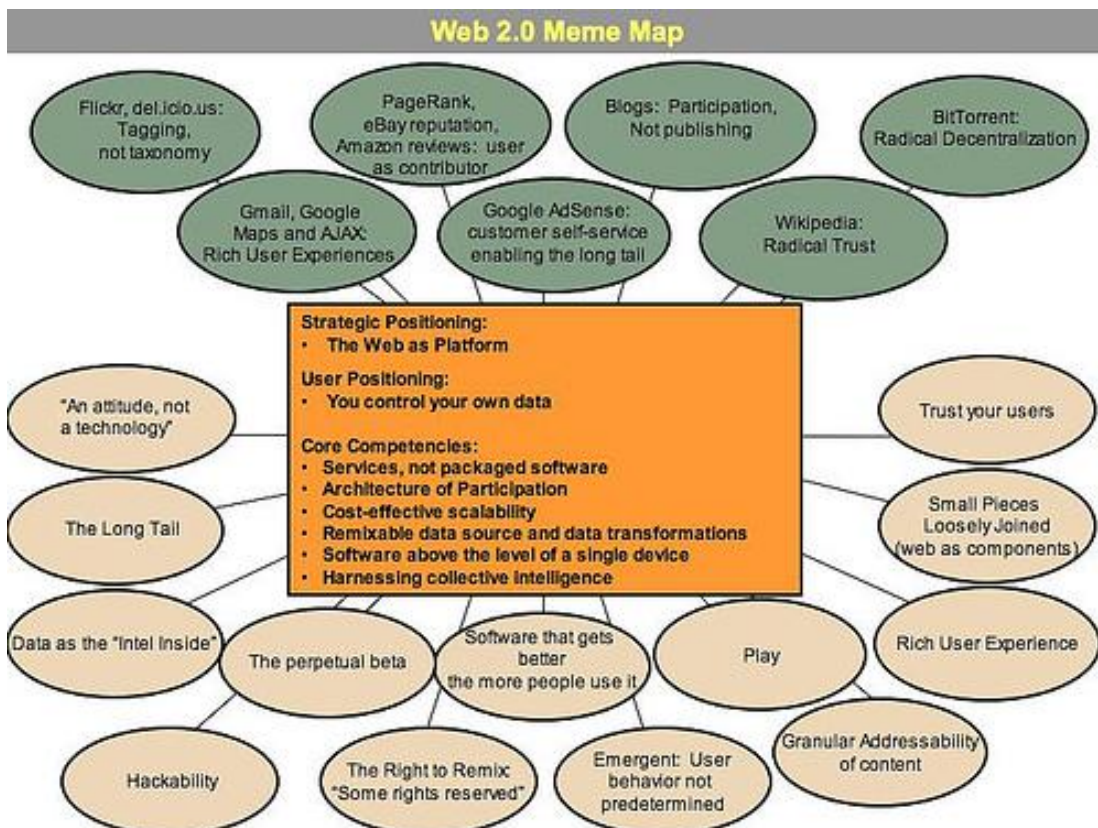

FIGURE 3, Web 2.0 Mind Map by Tim O'Reilly

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Salmenkivi & Nyman (2008) identify four main driving characteristics in what motivates people to become active participants:

1. Feeling a sense of communal belonging
2. Power received through belonging
3. The possibility to individualize from the masses
4. Creating purpose to activities

Reeves and Read confirm these assumptions, and note that a more game-like approach to workplace tasks could dramatically reinforce productivity and a workplace atmosphere. (Reeves & Read 2008). According to Safko and Brake's social media strategy, companies should consider communication, collaboration, education and entertainment as the main influencers in social media. (Safko & Brake 2010, 675.)

Social media gives a potent tool for companies to rank customers and employees, if they have open accounts on Facebook, Twitter, or LinkedIn. There are several services such as Klout, PeerIndex, and TwitterGrader currently available to companies for ranking the social media standing of individuals or companies. The possibility of positive feedback in social media has resulted in people receiving preferential treatment according to their social media scores. (Businessesgrow 22.11.2010, accessed 22.7.2011) This would indicate that content control and an active, participant-encouraging account management are essential in increasing visibility in the social media. (Taloussanomat 16.7.2011, accessed 22.7.2011.)

Some have gone so far as to suggest that social media leads to increased power equality and the democratization of knowledge, using the Arab social upheavals as examples (Wired 2011, accessed 12.4.2011), while others believe that social media, at best, can act as a catalyst (Miller & McCune 2011, accessed 12.4.2011).

It is important to note that despite its "force multiplier" applicability, social media as an industry is not employer-heavy. Twitter for example currently employs only around 300 people. (suomenkuvalehti.fi, accessed 7.6.2011.)

4.1 Facebook

Mark Zuckerberg founded Facebook on February 2004, and since then it has grown to a community of over 600 million participants. It has the most active userbase along social media sites and despite heavy market saturation, doesn't show signs of slowing down of its user expansion. Facebook has been acting as one of the main innovators in the Web 2.0 field. Its foremost contribution has been the "Like"-button, which enables user-based social indexing for marketers, a technology which was reviewed as one of MIT's top 10 emerging technologies of 2011. (technologyreview 6.2011, accessed 7.7.2011.)

Application creation to Facebook is encouraged through low initial costs and a developer community. Facebook apps can be integrated with many different Facebook technologies such as Social Plugins, the Graph API and Platform Dialogs, and can be built using any web-compatible programming language like PHP, Python, Java or C#. (developers.facebook.com, accessed 31.5.2011.) Consequently Facebook houses 57 514 published apps and has over 200 000 developers publishing or evaluating the platform for publishing. (adomomics, accessed 31.5.2011.)

According to StatCounter's global statistics, the global usage share of different web browsers is divided between Internet Explorer (44.52%), Mozilla Firefox (29.67%) and Google Chrome (18.29%). It is therefore important to check that the application works without problems in all three main browsers. Currently the mobile web browser accounts for 5.21% of internet activity, so the approximate ROI on converting and marketing the commissioner's application to mobile users would not be enough to justify it. (StatCounter.com, accessed 15.5.2011) Facebook does, however, cater to 250 million mobile users with varying degrees of application usage (the browsers of mobile platforms don't allow for the same complexity as PC browsers), so the possibility of sizeable markets on mobile platforms is there. (techcrunch.com, accessed 7.6.2011.)

4.2   Social Media Games

Social media gaming is online gaming activity performed through social media sites with followers/friends and online gaming activity that promotes social media interaction. Examples of the former include FarmVille, FrontierVille, and Mafia Wars. In these games a player's social network is exploited to recruit additional players and allies. An example of the latter is Empire Avenue, a virtual stock exchange where players buy and sell shares of each other's social network worth. In Empire Avenue a player's worth is linked to their social media influence and activity as well as that of the other players they have invested virtual currency in. This game design promotes social media interaction as a means to attaining higher value in Empire Avenue market rankings. Nielsen Media Research estimates that, as of June 2010, social networks and online games account for about 1/3 of all online activity by Americans. (Wikipedia, accessed 14.7.2011.)

L. Reeves and B. Read (2009) have identified several key characteristics about gaming and why people play. Based on their research, playing games is not a generational phenomenon rather than a situational one; any person with suitable access to technology and a motivation to participate will do so without much regard to stereotypical demographics. According to ESA annual industry report, the average age of a frequent game purchaser is 41, and the gender ratio between male and female players is 29:21. In 2011, 29% of all players were over 50, compared to 18% that were under 18. (Reeves & Read 2009, 27; ESA 2011, 2-3.)

According to Reeves & Read, the first divide in categorizing individual motivations for playing is personal (achievement, immersion, exploration) versus social (competition, socializing). With extended play, gamers will develop sensibilities based on their personal and social experiences. These expectations can be divided into four groups.

1. Social interaction, as all aspects of more advanced multiplayer events requires discussion, group action and conflict.

2. Competition. Virtual competition is relatively harmless, and frequent successes and failures make the players used to it.

3. Experimentation. Game speeds usually encourage effort-feedback cycle and thus foster important aspects of innovation.

4. Meritocracy. Well-performing players advance and are rewarded according to their present abilities.

(Reeves & Read 2009, 27-31.)

It would therefore be important to optimize all possibilities for players to experience all four of these gaming elements. The most successful games manage to offer all four of these expectations.

Most similar applications (browser-based Flash/JavaScript online games) use a combination of viral marketing and appropriate web channels for promotion. Currently there are 59 different freemium (explained in the following paragraph) browser games of various success and size available and marketing. Of these 14 are in the same area (post-apocalyptic/scifi) and five could be considered to be direct competitors. These are X-Wars, Fallen Empire: Legions, Pardus, Planetarion, and Pirate Galaxy. X-wars, Fallen Empire: Legions and Pirate Galaxy are combat-oriented space or First-Person Shooter (FPS) simulators, while Pardus and Planetarion are mainly text-based and geared for colonial development, sharing more similarities with Year of Eden. Both of these games have a long, established history, though recent development in freemium games, most notably the Age of Conan which was announced to become freemium sometime during the summer, has presumably been eating away their userbase (funcom 25.5.2011, accessed 26.5.2011). (Wikipedia, en.x-wars, pardus.at, pirategalaxy.com, legionsoverdrive.com, planetarion.com, accessed 26.5.2011.)

The entrance of freemium games to market which has been traditionally dominated by large-scale games requiring great amounts of work hours has posed an interesting revenue model dilemma to the established Massively Multiplayer Online (MMO) games. The example of Age of Conan (AoC) shows that games of similar scale have been designed with the social marketing axiom (of pulling consumers in) in mind. During launch, AoC was distributed for free to people who downloaded it before a set date. Other people wanting to play the game had to buy it either from an online shop or physically. The game was then progressively made more available (by

uploading more free content and lowering the game price), culminating in the May 25th announcement that the base game would be free while still retaining the pay-for-premium option. This hybrid business model still endorses micropayments for premium options like enhanced experience receiving, unique gameplay options and extra play areas. This makes it easier for new player to begin playing. (funcom 25.5.2011, accessed 26.5.2011.)

Most of the aforementioned games and a good amount of other, commercially distributed games advertise, among other things, by using banners and public videos. YouTube in particular offers a wide variety of advertising options, including a separate branding channel. At the present, YouTube only offers direct branding help to United States and Canada, leaving the other regions to Google AdWords –service, which is heavily integrated with YouTube. (Google Support, accessed 15.8.2011.)

The increase in casual social games has made online status a more and more important resource for the developers. Since a lot of the freemium games rely on Paretto's 20/80 principle (a theorem which argues that of any given project, 20% of activity accounts for 80% of results), the status that defines the player's position (both directly and relatively) in the game world tells the developers how much value individual users can provide. Consequently, using player status as a carrot is the main motivation to get more people involved both for the users and the developers. (mediashifters.com. 2008.)

Since multiplayer games are by definition social, status is one of the key methods of social communication inside a game (mediashifters.com. 2008). The use of status as a marketing tool can be seen in banner ads and in embedded marketing as status updates on different social media sites, such as YouTube and Facebook.

4.3 Social Media Optimization

The concept behind SMO is simple: implement changes to optimize a site so that it is more easily linked to, more highly visible in social media searches on custom search engines (such as Technokrati), and more frequently included in relevant posts on blogs, podcasts and vlogs. In other words it means a methodization of the company's social media activity. It concerns activities in both product e-promotion such as blogging, participation on relevant discussion groups, and

status updates on social networks; and site features such as RSS feeds, sharing and social news buttons, and rating tools. (Wikipedia. Accessed 4.4.2011.)

Social Media Optimization is related to search engine optimization as an idea, but differs primarily by the focus on driving traffic from sources other than search engines (such as blogs, shared links, user communities and so forth), though improved search ranking is also a benefit of successful SMO. It is in many ways similar to viral marketing, where the word of mouth –effect is created through the use of networking in social bookmarking, video and photosharing websites. In SMO engagement with blogs achieves high visibility by sharing content through the use of RSS in the blogosphere and special blog search engines. (Wikipedia. Accessed 4.4.2011.)

SMO has been proposed as a future replacement to SEO by Ben Elbowitz, a CEO of Digital Quarters. Elbowitz proposes that since Web2.0 has made the linking of good content easier, actual content management has become increasingly more important than SEO. (digitalquarters. Accessed 14.7.2011.)

According to professor A. Rehn from the Åbo Akademi, the most important factor in social media communications is to engage and have people participate in the dialogue (Verkkouutiset 7.5.2011, accessed 26.5.2011). It is therefore important to realize this and have the social media communication encourage group-forming and self-regulation within reason in the user base. The most relevant examples are in Facebook, where businesses or groups of people can create their own profiles either as fan (now known as official) pages or community/group pages. Store forums are another example, whereas fan sites can be outside of a company's influence but still serve as an important channel for both the consumers and the companies.

Danny Sullivan, the founder of Search Engine Watch, credited the term "social media optimization" for Rohit Bhargava, an influential marketing blogger (Sullivan 2006). Bhargava proposed a set of five rules that he saw as fundamental in social media optimization, and later updated them, based on audience feedback. These rules are:

1. Create shareable content
2. Make sharing easy
3. Reward engagement
4. Proactively share content

5. Encourage the mashup

Essentially the rule set is calling for content that would encourage the use of "Share"-buttons and publisher participation in the discussion that the content spawns, as well as uploading much of the public documentation and endorsing public documentation yourself. The amount of potential readers that the "Share"-button offers is seen in figure 4. Aside from the traditional email and printed version, it offers over 300 other social media channels (some of which require registration). The concept of mashup is when users take and remix content that the publisher has released and share it on. Over the years this phenomenon has been growing as more sophisticated computer tools for this have been developed. As the most relevant example, the feedback for his post that Bhargava encouraged resulted in the updated rules. (Bhargava, 2010.)
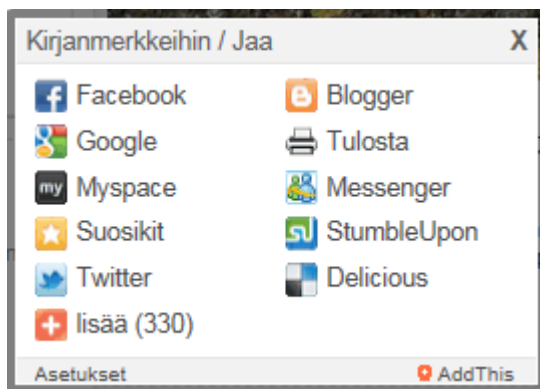
FIGURE 4. Possible sharing platforms of one random Talouselämä –article

4.4   Social Media Marketing

Social Media Marketing is a concept where marketers create content that is attractive in some way to the consumers and has been made easy to share in an effort to encourage sharing through the consumers' social networks. The most widely-known social media marketing campaign has been the 2008 United States presidential election, where the democratic candidate Barack Obama's campaign was made very visible on social networking sites like Twitter and Facebook. (Wikipedia, accessed 10.7.2011.)

The most often spoken concept in social media marketing is viral marketing. Viral marketing is commonly seen as a word-of-mouth phenomenon spreading through the internet, usually via social networking sites. MarketingTerms.com defines it as "a marketing phenomenon that

facilitates and encourages people to pass along a marketing message" (marketingterms.com, accessed 9.4.2011).

Evans on the other hand believes that viral marketing encourages the phenomenon (the ad) itself rather than the message, as evidenced by the Dutch beer company Bavaria's orange dress campaign in the 2010 World Cup where Bavaria distributed orange dresses, a color associated with the Netherlands and also with Bavaria, to people participating in an event with only one officially accepted beer sponsor. The following dispute served to create "buzz" based on people's feelings on beer, football and nationalism. (Telegraph 16.6.2010, accessed 9.5.2011; Evans 2008, 158.)

The concept of viral marketing centers around a phenomenon called the viral loop, illustrated in figure 5. The idea of a viral loop is to raise the visibility of a product and bring in new users by encouraging existing users to share different media relating to the product. (Momentusmedia, 5.1.2011, accessed 25.7.2011) Viral marketing is the most common source of "buzz" due to its user-based spreading; it seems to be users sharing an interesting link without monetary/commercial incentives in the background when it is actually promotional material. (Evans 2008) An apt viral marketing video would be 20th Century Fox's viral promo of "Rise of The Apes", where only the details give away its intended purpose. (YouTube, accessed 3.8.2011)
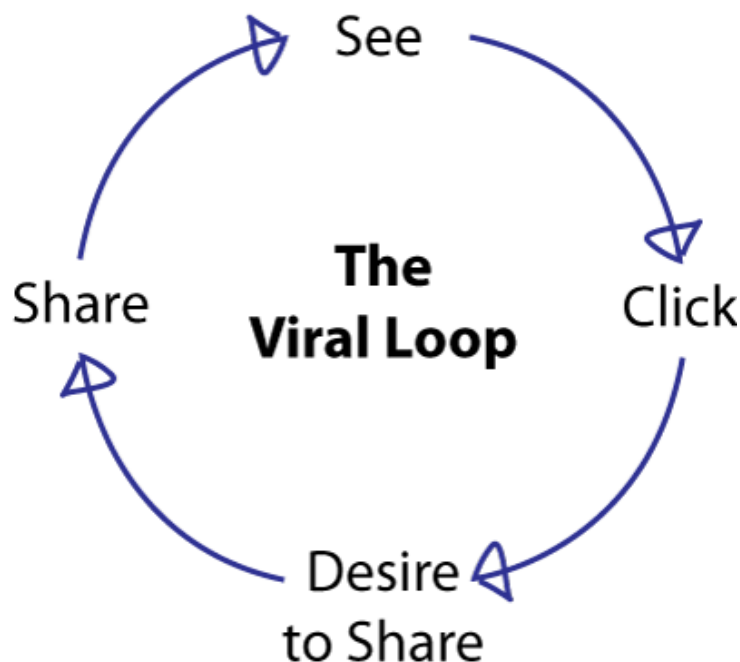

FIGURE 5. The Anatomy of Viral Loop. Momentus Media

Leskovec et al (2007) say that viral marketing exploit social networks by encouraging customers to share product information with their friends. It is essentially word-of-mouth marketing and creating a "buzz". The first game to use viral marketing almost exclusively was Majestic, published by Electronic Arts in 2001. The game, branded as an alternate-reality game and based on a popular conspiracy theory, was played mainly by telephones, IM, email, fax and by visiting special websites. The game was played in real time and randomly selected other players as allies. Unfortunately, a combination of launch difficulties and the September 11th terrorist attack made the EA decide to discontinue the game. (Wikipedia, accessed 7.7.2011.)

Salmenkivi & Nyman (2008) have identified 29 different facets to internet marketing, all ranked along four different things: visibility within own channels, visibility within other channels, communication and advertising. Other sources seem to collaborate with this divide, although their division of facets is different. Evans initially divides social media into just two elements by using Robert Scholbe's social media starfish model, seen in figure 6 - activities and channels. This would suggest that the effective use of social media would be a question of marketing integration. (Evans 2008, 44-45.)
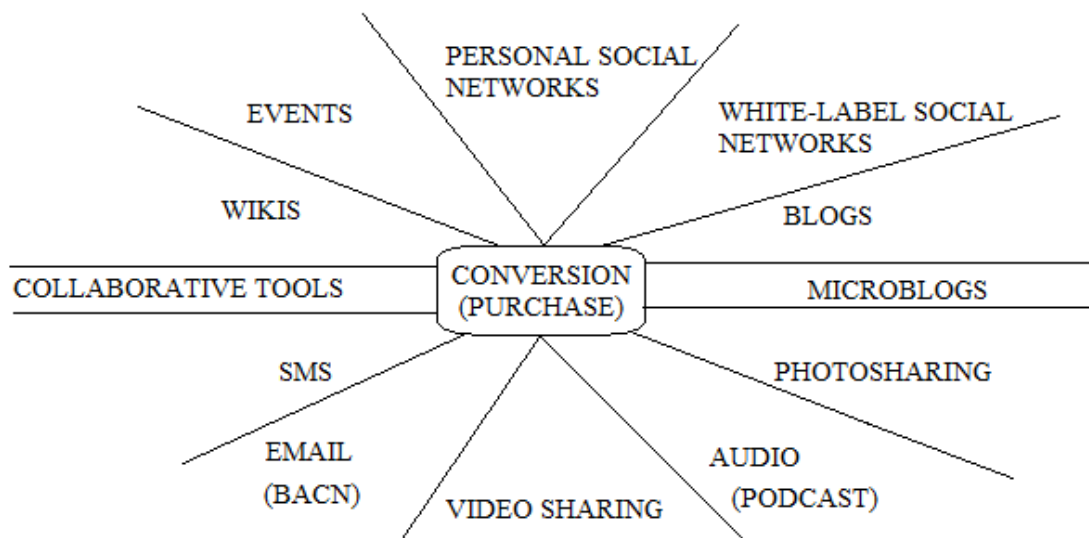

FIGURE 6. Robert Scholbe's Social Media Starfish

The problem posed by the advent of social media is essentially an integration problem. It should therefore be managed according to the context of business objectives, the audience and channel mix. (Evans 2008, 44-45.)

4.5   Search Engine Optimization

According to Safko and Brake, search engine optimization (SEO) and search engine marketing (SEM) are techniques by which the company optimizes their web pages, photos and other media to maximize search engine rankings (Safko & Brake 2009, 355). Search engine optimization can be either organic or non-organic, meaning unpaid listing based solely on keywords or paid advertisement.

The first search engine of its kind, called SMART for System for the Mechanical Analysis and Retrieval of Text, was developed by a group led by Gerard Salton at the Cornell University in 1965. Based on his research, he authored a title called A Theory of Indexing explaining his search theories, and later developed the Vector Space Model indexing system together with Andrew Wong and Chung-Shu Yang, which is now widely in use as a base by different search engines. (Safko & Brake 2009, 356; Salton et al 1975, 613-614.)

Both SEO and SEM have a wide array of changing techniques to ensure high rankings on organic page listing. It is noteworthy that all search engine providers change their search code and provide new algorithms, changing the rankings. This is done to ensure the most relevant result to the query and to combat possible list stagnation. When, for example, using Google, the only constant seems to be the popularity of a related Wikipedia article. The Google search engine has two important features that help it produce high precision results. First it makes use of the link structure of the Web to calculate a quality ranking for each web page, called the PageRank and secondly, it utilizes the pages that the resulting page possibly links to. (Brin & Page 1998, 4-5, Safko & Brake 2009, 256; Levy 2010.)

All search engines share three different components between them: the database, the indexing programs that index it, and the search algorithm. The relevancy of the search results depend on the sophistication of these components. (Safko & Brake 2009, 357-361.)

Organic search results are the end results of search engine decisions that it makes with its search algorithms. Users tend to favor these over paid result listings, since the results are more trustworthy (not biased) and permanent (not paid for). Nearly 80% of traffic tends to skip the sponsored results and go to the organic listings. (Cunningham & Brown 2010, 132-134; ask.enquiro, accessed 18.7.2011.)

According to Cunningham & Brown users have only one particular need for a search engine result, relevance. This concept is formed from a variety of attributes that the users use when deciding on what to do:

- Title wording and description
- Product offers and information
- Consumer reviews
- Known and trusted brands
- Promises of added value
- Online booking possibilities
- Trustworthy-sounding URL

These attributes within the company's page will generally attract more users with better click-through rates. Google Business Center allows free submission of web pages. The most important information (that the search algorithms use) is the description field, through which the keywords are detected. The form, seen in figure 7, is easy and straightforward to use. (Cunningham & Brown 2010, 139-144.)

4.6   SEO Keywords

Keyword selection and implementation are the two most important aspects of SEO. Keyword selection has two main parts: creating a list of possible keywords and then selecting the best keywords. There are three main methods that can help in researching the best keywords: keyword tools, checking the competitors' keywords through internet source code (demonstrated in figure 8), and analyzing site traffic of own, existing internet pages. (Cunningham & Brown 2010, 150-151.)

```
http://www.playnileonline.com/ - Original Source
File  Edit  Format
 1  <!DOCTYPE html PUBLIC "-//W3C//DTD XHTML 1.0 Transitional//EN" "http://www.w3.org/TR/xhtml1/DTD/xhtml1-
 2  <html xmlns="http://www.w3.org/1999/xhtml" xml:lang="en-US" lang="en-US">
 3  <head>
 4  <meta http-equiv="Content-Type" content="text/html; charset=iso-8859-1" />
 5  <meta name="description" content="Immortal Cities: Nile Online" />
 6  <meta name="keywords" content="egypt, ancient egypt, browser game, empire building, conquest, sporatic
 7  <title>Immortal Cities: Nile Online &raquo; Ancient Egyptian browser-based Empire Builder</title>
 8  <link rel="stylesheet" type="text/css" href="/includes/core.css" media="screen" />
 9  <script type="text/javascript" src="/includes/js/misc.js"></script>
10  <link rel="shortcut icon" href="/favicon.ico" />
11  </head>
12  <body>
13  <div id="top"></div>
14  <div id="wrapper">
15  <br />
```

FIGURE 8. Keywords in source code for MMO Immortal Cities: Nile Online

Keyword selection should be a combination of findings from the abovementioned techniques. The most common rules of thumb are to avoid too broad or vague keywords, and to think industry-specific keyword modifiers. (Cunningham & Brown 2010, 152-153.)

Site structure affects how the search engine indexes the site. It is therefore important to integrate site structure in as helpful way as possible. Naming the page files of your site with the keywords you use (e.g. how-to-play.html) increases the likelihood of a high page rank. Creating appropriate hyperlinks to your footer using your keywords also helps the search engines determine your relevant match. Including site maps, while somewhat unimportant for most users, eases the navigation of your site and increases the chances that parts of your site are ranked higher. (Cunningham & Brown 2010, 153-155.)

Web tags are divided into four different categories and each has potential to positively affect your site's SEO. Each page should have its own title and meta tags, which briefly tell the user what the

content of the site is; as well as a meta description as a short summary which shows up on the SERP. These tags are seen in figure 8. Inserting alternate tags for pictures makes it possible for search engines to associate the pictures with the site's other keywords, and helps people who specifically search for images. (Cunningham & Brown 2010, 154-155.)

4.7 Search Engine Marketing

Search Engine Marketing (SEM) can be most simply described as non-organic or paid listing on different search engines. It is a logical continuum to SEO, as paid keyword advertising. In a featured interview in the Social Media Bible, Patrizio Spagnoletto (2009, 385) sees sponsored search as the most effective marketing medium available in internet. According to him, search engine marketing (or sponsored search) allows the marketers to reach people who are already interested in the product. An example of a sponsored search is shown in figure 9 where paid listings are displayed both as the two topmost results and in the right as ads. (Safko & Brake 2009, 384-385.)

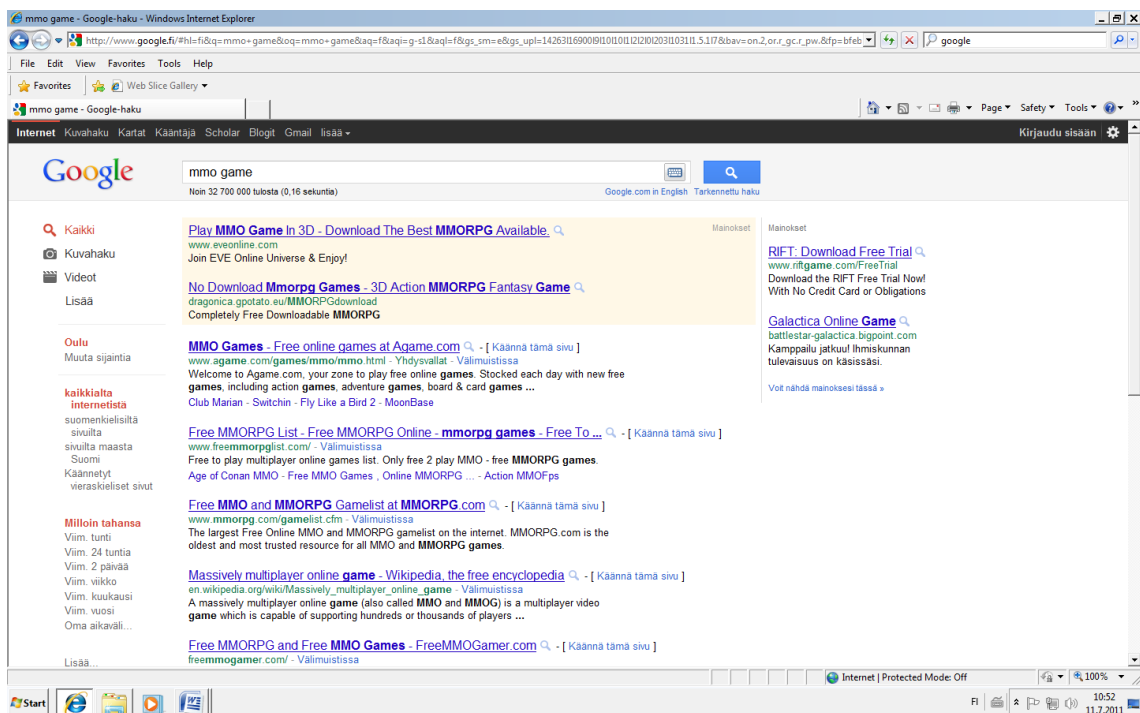

FIGURE 9. Google results page when googling "mmo game".

The most effective SEM tool is seen to be Google's AdWords, the company's main source of revenue and its main revenue model. Google's investor relations page reveals that AdWords and

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its logical extension, AdSense, earned the company USD $29 billion in 2010. AdWords main products are PPC and Cost-Per-Thousand (CPM) advertising as well as site-targeted advertising in the form of text, banners, and rich-media ads such as sound-enabled video or gif loops. Through AdWords, users can target their ads to very specific demographics. (investor.google. Accessed 7.6.2011.)

The charging system of the default SEM tool, AdWords, is based on PPC (Pay-Per-Click) method, meaning that only displayed ads that result in a visit are charged. This necessitates placing bids on marketing space for visibility with the keywords chosen. In figures 10 and 11 we can see average web search interest and preliminary traffic estimation for SEM centered on phrase "space game", on all languages and without geographical limits.
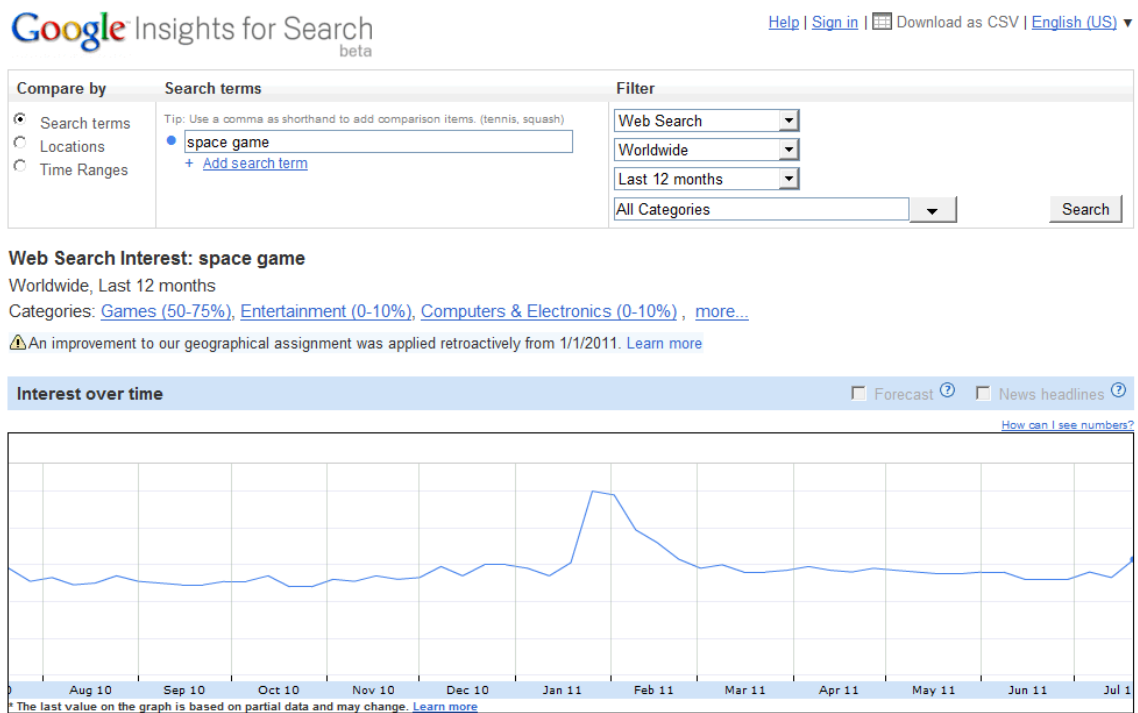

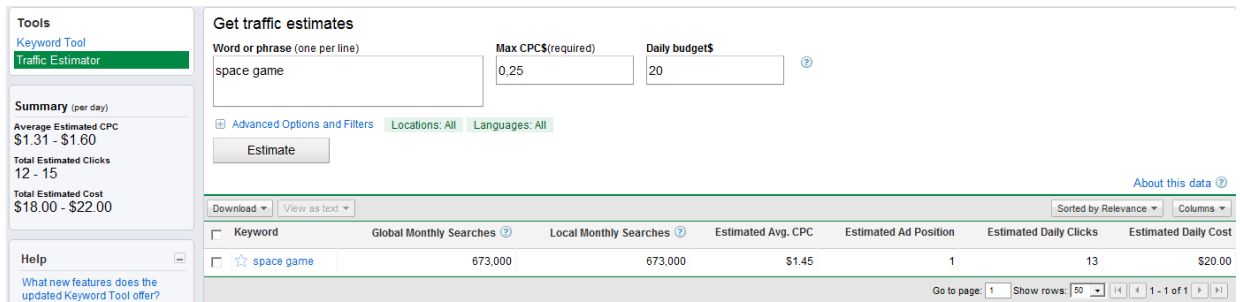FIGURE 10. Google Web Search Interest tool

FIGURE 11. Traffic Estimation tool

To give an example of Google's traffic estimation tool, a bid of 0.25$ is placed to the search term "space game" with a daily budget allowance of 20$. In figure 11 we can see that the daily estimated click amount for the ad bid is 13 with an estimated bidden cost per click of 1,41$ and daily costs of 20$, meaning that the whole budget of 20$ is estimated to be used. For reference, a hypothetical ad bid of 1, 60$ and a daily budget of 1000$ would net 148 clicks and cost 238, 71$ per day. Using more specific keyword phrases results in substantially smaller click-through rates and budgetary costs.

Aside from SERP marketing, companies have been using banner advertising, a form of display advertising, to raise visibility and gain traffic in a cost-efficient manner. Almost every website that incurs steady traffic uses banner advertisements. Examples of this range from pornographic websites to social media sites to economic journals.

Marko Pyhäjärvi, a marketing entrepreneur, published a study regarding the banner advertising prices of several Finnish service providers and concluded that the most cost-effective way of marketing products via banner advertising is by using Facebook banners (Pyhäjärvi 2011, accessed 30.8.2011). According to him, by actively testing and evolving different banner ad campaigns a company can achieve far greater cost savings, click-troughs and visibility than by outsourcing web marketing. (Pyhäjärvi 2011, 5.)

5   RECOMMENDATIONS

In this part I present my summary of branding, social media, and search engine optimization/marketing, along with my recommendations for the future development of the Year of Eden. My recommendations and suggestions for each part are included in each of the relevant chapters.

5.1   Branding

As stated in chapter 3, the competition between different brands happens on the level of augmented products; product attributes that surpass the basic expectations of its users. For casual games field this means fitting graphics, good betatesting, and good execution of the core idea, simple gameplay and an acceptable short learning curve.

One of the central things in the integrated marketing communications process is to outline a rudimentary brand marketing plan, since brand marketing is usually a culmination of IMC (Scribd, accessed 4.8.2011).The brand marketing objective for Year of Eden's launch campaign should be to generate interest, first in the target groups and then in the general Facebook user base. The overall campaign goal is to encourage as many initial users in Facebook as possible to try the game. The branding of the Year of Eden should strive to promote it as the best, most interesting new development in Facebook's casual games.

The brand category Year of Eden belongs to is one of saturation. Facebook casual games are dominated by different "Wars" and simulated poker. The closest competitors in terms of similar structure are outside of Facebook (Travian, Immortal Cities) with the exception of Empires & Allies and Civ World, both of which are playable in Facebook.

However, so far no game developer has launched a game that shares close similarities with BelleGames' product. It would therefore be advisable to highlight the parts that are unique and set it apart from the 50 000 other applications on Facebook: nonviolence, space worldbuilding, social setting, exploring, diplomacy, trade, research, sci-fi, adventure. These should be used to form brand's key messages. In the same vein, the company should strive to create an identity that would reflect the brand in, for example, press statements, social media channels and so on.

The most visible part of the game's future brand will be its logo and its tagline; a memorable, concise and meaningful statement about its essence. The current logo and mascot, seen in appendix 1 and 2, fit the general theme, although the logo seems too complex, and would, on my opinion, be better if concentrated around a single object or text.

5.1.1 Brand equity

Aaker & Joachimsthaler classify brand equity as the added value that the previous advertising actions of the company have generated. Keller's customer-based brand value is the reaction that the awareness of brand has on a consumer. Positive brand equity increases brand loyalty, helps the brand expansion, softens the impact of price changes and increases the consumer's willingness to search for the brand through other means of distribution. (Aaker & Joachimsthaler 2000, 17; Keller 2003, 119-120) The main parts of Aaker's & Joachimsthaler's brand equity concept are seen in figure 2. Brand equity is formed from brand awareness, brand loyalty, perceived quality, and associations. Other meaningful brand assets do not exist in this case, so they have been left out. In order for BelleGames to increase its brand equity, it must strive to fulfill each of these segments to the best of their ability.

Brand awareness for Year of Eden is small, since the game is still under development. However, the product has started to incur visibility through articles in local and Finnish gaming journals, and has released a small puzzle game in its Facebook pages. To continue increasing the awareness, the company could add a development diary and expand their gallery that people could share and link, either on their own web page or on their Facebook profile. Social indexing that current search engines use would suggest that users' preferences would, over time, begin to influence the search results and advertising that their friends would be subjected to. (BelleGames.net; dome, accessed 3.8.2011) After the game enters its alpha- and beta –testing, closed (or open) forums for bug reporting, after action reports and general help should be opened so that people could interact between one another.

Building brand loyalty for the game would be a question of pulling people in to invest their time in the game, preferably through a tutorial of several mini-tasks that would net the user in-game rewards like time-limited production upgrades. Keeping people interested and motivated for the game would require meeting the expectations of users: social interaction, competition,

experimentation and meritocracy. Social interaction could be emphasized by giving the possibility of creating forums based on allied groups, in-game location, trading and sharing accomplishments. Users contributing heavily to the game could be rewarded with in-game benefits. A high degree of modularity could be introduced to goods that the players can produce, leading to competition between different groups to research the best items.

The perceived quality of Year of Eden will be in primarily in relation to other casual games and secondarily to games of its own genre (space strategy). Casual games in Facebook have until recently been somewhat isometric and static in appearance, with a reduced role of graphics. Smooth animation, appropriate color scheme, logical user interface and throughout beta testing will in combination put Year of Eden on top of Facebook casual games, perceived quality –wise. The game mechanisms and the grand campaign, as well as any in-game "fluff" (random events, material production, names of stars/planets, in-game physics, the story, etc.) must also be appropriate to the game's themes.

Associations that BelleGames would like to have existing and potential users link to the game are internationality, nonviolence, humor, and sci-fi. These are on the more abstract level of associations. Achieving associations with these items requires a universal approach to game concepts, an emphasis on co-operation and low-level humor.

5.1.2 Brand positioning

Keller's CBBE model states that in order to properly position the brand the company must decide on1) what the target market is, 2) who the main competitors are, 3) how the brand is similar to these competitors, and 4) how the brand is different from these competitors. (Keller 2003, 119-120) Positioning is a result of the brand identity: what is the brand and its image about; on what way is the brand is different, better?

Of the Facebook demographic the company should try to reach the users interested in sci-fi. Since the product is intended to be suited for people of both sexes between 18 and 30, these users' interests are dominant in determining his potential interest. (ESA 2011, 2-3.)

The main competitors for Year of Eden are briefly discussed in chapter 4.2. It outlines two of the most direct competitors outside of Facebook, Pardus and Planetarion (free browser-based that

are similar to Year of Eden exist, but they compete exclusively on historical/fantasy –genre).
Recently Facebook has seen an increase of grand strategy games similar in spirit to Year of
Eden, as both Zynga and Firaxis published their respective, "civilization-building" games Empires
& Allies and Civ World. Zynga's Empires & Allies is a comparatively new game brand for the
company, as most of Zynga's previous products are on different categories. Firaxis's game
launch is on the opposite end of spectrum, marking the debut of 20-year-old Civilization-series
into social media –powered casual gaming. (Joystiq. 31.5.2011, accessed 3.8.2011.)

Since the main target market is users within Facebook and the user interface will be a Flash-
based Facebook application, the company can disregard the competition outside Facebook. On
my opinion, Empires & Allies and Civ World are the only direct competitors of the same profile for
the product.

Year of Eden, Empires & Allies and Civ World share a number of similarities and differences, as
illustrated in figure 12:

The product	Genre	View	Co-operation	Time simulation	Violence	Emphasis
Year of Eden	Sci-fi, MMOG	Scalable isometric graphics	Yes	Real-time	No	Co-operation, worldbuilding
Empires & Allies	Strategy, MMOG	Isometric graphics	Yes	Turn-based	Yes	Strategic/tactical warfare
Civ World	Strategy, MMOG	Isometric graphics	Yes	Turn-based	Yes	worldbuilding

FIGURE 12. Comparison of Year of Eden, Empires & Allies and Civ World

The game is similar to Empire & Allies and Civ World in that they are all Massive Multiplayer
Online Games (MMOG), freely accessed (free or freemium), have an option for co-operation and
use isometric graphics. Therefore, the most distinct ways for Year of Eden to differentiate itself
from its two closest competitors is to concentrate on its themes: sci-fi, co-operation, real-time and
nonviolence. Since violence in one form or another is the most prevalent form of competition in
video games but not an option, other forms of social competitiveness must take its place

(rulerofthinterwebs, accessed 3.8.2011). Some of these were discussed in the previous subchapter: expanding puzzle games with scorecards and development of an in-depth trading system. In other casual games the function of environment improvement is used instead of violence. This can be seen in titles like Zynga's FarmVille, bringing challenging management tasks such as planning for farm layout, crop rotation and raising livestock can be highly addicting forms of competition.

5.2   Social Media

Safkos and Brakes social media strategy revolves around

- Communication
- Collaboration
- Education
- Entertainment

As social media is centered on enabling conversation among the audience, functions that stimulate social interaction are the most important. For this BelleGames should, sometime before the launch of Year of Eden, create a forum for the future communication. Logins could either be done using the same username and password as with the application itself or by using a different account. The forums should have different areas for game rules, updates, announcements, FAQ's, user support, discussion, bug reporting, feedback and off-topic discussion. (Safko & Brake 2009, 675.)

Later on the development process (e.g. searching for alpha- and betatesters) BelleGames should use an email marketing service and social media platforms to distribute content asking for participation. For example, posting tester recruitment videos on YouTube and tweeting any new development on Twitter. BelleGames could also benefit from participating on relevant discussion on blogs and forums, both researchable either through Technokrati or search engines. Viewing and participating on discussion with an official profile will give insight on how the blogs and forums are positioned with regards to the subject. (Safko & Brake 2009, 675-676, 678-679.)

For encouraging collaboration, a game-specific wiki should be created. A contribution will tie a user to the project on an emotional level, provided that he or she sees the game on a positive or

neutral light. Collaboration can also be understood in a wider context, meaning that BelleGames' official social media outlets could be used to share different, relevant articles or blog posts to their subscribers.

5.2.1 Social Media Marketing And Optimization

Viral marketing done in social linking and sharing sites play a major role in social media marketing, according to Bhargava's five SMO rules. The different tools available for spreading social content ensure a large potential number of viewers. These tools include the social platforms like social networks themselves, mobile apps and wikis, social content like photo-, video- and audiohosting services, blogs and microblogs and social interaction like livecasting, RSS feeds, statues updates, email and physical conversations. When created media is of the type that can easily be shared through these channels, it is more likely that the message will be spread around. Social media marketing should be thought as looking at a need for social media in BelleGames' integrated marketing program. (Evans 2008, 164-165, 222.)

Social media marketing, beyond the use of paid advertisements, is the use of embedded marketing and use of social content. Embedded marketing can easily be seen in different Facebook notifications, like Year of Eden puzzle game's automatically updating scorecard or Farmville notifications. Social content in this context means that different media files that would spark social interest would be uploaded into the game's site. Examples could include how-to-manuals for computer software regarding some of the interesting features/graphics, "authentic" audio logs detailing with the catastrophe that befell Earth, and so on. The main idea would be to make the media easy to share and in a form that would encourage people to talk about it and/or adjacent phenomena.

5.2.2 Search Engine Optimization And Marketing

The Search Engine Optimization (SEO) of relevant site(s) should be conducted, as it is a low-cost mean of guaranteeing high visibility in SERP. To ensure that the product pages are relevant and optimally reached, the commissioner should practice search engine optimization with regards to both its Facebook site and its own product-related sites. Safko and Brake (2009, 370-371) identify

six major focus points to consider when practicing search engine optimization. The most central theme is the use of individualized keywords for different pages of the website. This will allow the search algorithms to construct a more complete index of the site, resulting in higher page rankings over a larger area of search terms. Likewise, using titles that include the most important keywords for the page will raise the page's SERP rating.

The meta keywords in use should contain at least the words "browser game", "Year of Eden", "free", "space game", "space", "game". What is notable is that none of the main Facebook competitors seem to use keywords in their Facebook or official sites. Free games outside of Facebook, however, use meta keywords. This could be looked at as a question of whether Year of Eden wants to be profiled as a casual game in Facebook or outside of it. Nevertheless, I would recommend using keywords for the pages outside of Facebook for higher SERP ratings. (Safko & Brake 2009; 370-371.)

Safko and Brake consider reputable external links important as well. Linking related websites and blogs about the topics that the game touches (gaming, sci-fi message boards, etc.) will result in higher page rankings. Using "invisible text" will eventually be found out and search engine providers have provisions in their contracts to terminate the contract. (Google Terms of Service 13.3A, accessed 5.8.2011) Thinking on realistic values and expenses is the last major point on SEO that Safko and Brake wish to bring up. They furthermore cover the search engine marketing with two additional focus points, the use of good content on the ads and using Pay-Per-Click search engine marketing for the possible paid ads. (Safko & Brake 2009; 370-371.)

The visibility attained with a relatively low budget would warrant a tryout on banner advertising on Facebook. On the example illustrated in figure 11, the estimated ad position with a daily budget of 20$ and a bid per click of 0.25$ is the first one. I would recommend a limited venture into SEM for a period of 14 days, followed by a cost-benefit analysis. Year of Eden's current puzzle game on Facebook would function as a landing site for the paid advertisement links, and possibly as a good first tutorial mission.

6   CONCLUSION

Even though the emphasis of this thesis was changed from branding to discussing best social media utilization practices, I intend to summarize and apply the existing branding knowledge into practice. Branding and brand building are most effective when started as early as possible, since this enables larger potential brand equity and more efficient advertising (Aaker 1991, 30-32). Branding and brand identity inform people about the brand's contents, thoughts and how it differentiates from other brands in its field. Brands tend to have a personality, and send individual, different and recognizable mental images and concepts. A brand that's not consistent or true with its communication will soon incur negative brand equity.

The game itself should stay true to its original idea of a humorous, nonviolent sci-fi adventure game. Casual games also tend to favor skill-based competition/gameplay, so keeping the Year of Eden-puzzle game or even expanding it could be future options (insidesocialgames. Accessed 3.8.2011).

In my opinion, advertisement of the game should consist of social media endorsement and optimizing social media use. Practising and researching SEO and SEM are also important in order to attain high visibility. Using SEM in Facebook banners would, on my opinion, attain the best results due to the game's type and cost-effectiveness.

For the purposes of utilizing social media for the product, encouraging users to form their own forums in the style of Travian or MMORPG's guild forums would be similar, provided that it is feasible within the upcoming Year of Eden –site.

To test the content of the game and to keep potential users interested, the game should have a YouTube channel that would be used for publishing entertaining and relevant videos about the game. For example, publishing technology trailers, "fluff", positions for testing, how-to –guides for the game's mechanisms or instructional videos for game-related Flash-coding. (Safko & Brake 2009, 680.)

Considering the product in question, BelleGames should not put too much effort into search engine marketing (SEM) outside of Facebook. A general SEM is a great tool for local companies with more traditional revenue models, but in this case it would not net an efficient result. The

optimization of search engine results has been a cornerstone for integrated marketing communications for a long time, and relevant site(s) should be designed with SEO in mind and updated when relevant.

BelleGames seems to be in the proper social media phase for the marketing of their product, which has a very real promise of becoming a popular Facebook casual game. The rest of the findings of the research were somewhat unexpected; SEM does not guarantee much visibility, and the maximum visibility for the game would be best attained by the increase of shareability and embedded marketing. The brandbuilding process for the casual games would seem to be shorter than with traditional products.

7 DISCUSSION

The thesis was commissioned on the September of 2010 after a failed attempt to complete another thesis on the subject of serious gaming to Coventry University. The working title was "Creating a product brand for a local ITC enterprise". I initially encountered difficulties in the individual preparatory tasks and the definition of the thesis subject. I kept my opening seminar at 4.2.2011 and my direction seminar at 14.4.2011, where it was decided that I would refrain from branding research and instead research the best ways to utilize social media in promoting and marketing the upcoming game. I welcomed this development, since I believed that social media and its related functions in marketing would be relatively unresearched by my school and that it would be easier to form a guide based on successful online behavior.

The completion of the thesis took longer than expected and ran into trouble during its start, primarily due to personal reasons and the uncertainty of the primary thesis subject. One of the main reasons for uncertainty was the lack of communication, primarily due to me.

The thesis covers a topic that has largely not been touched in the International Business degree programme, i.e. the proper utilization of social media in advertising campaigns and building online presence. Even though some of the subjects covered are more technically oriented, concepts such as SEO, SEM and social media optimization and marketing should be introduced in the school curriculum. I believe that my thesis will, in some small part, be of use to both the commissioner and the school's thesis library. I would like to thank the commissioner and the school personnel for their patience, as well as my parents for their support.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX 1

APPENDIX 2