

How to improve customer engagement by Email Marketing.

Parima Liimatainen



Author(S) Parima Liimatainen	
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<p>This thesis is a research-oriented thesis and qualitative research method was used for this research. The objective was to analyse the case company's email marketing strategy and to provide an improvement plan which includes a list of suggestions and recommendations that will help commissioner to develop their relationship with their clients.</p> <p>The commissioner is XX, a British educational institution, that provides MBA education in Finland. The case company was not satisfied with their open and click-through rate of their email marketing. Therefore, this thesis was commissioned to analyse and discover the issue. The focus group of this thesis was only Executive MBA students.</p> <p>The thesis is divided into five parts, with the first part giving insight on the background of MBA and the history of it. Thereafter, the theoretical framework was built as a way for the author to get a deep understanding about digital and segmented marketing, as well as the importance of customer engagement and interaction. Theoretical framework assisted the author to create the interview questions and it includes, general marketing theories which focuses on digital and segmented marketing, engagement and email marketing.</p> <p>Interview was the qualitative research method used for this research. Undertaking interviews helped the author to get a detailed feedback and understanding about case company's engagement strategy.</p> <p>The result of this study was that customers are not opening the emails that they are receiving from the school, because they have not found them interesting. As a result, to fix this problem, a list of interesting topics and recommendation was proposed to the commissioner as well as suggestions on how to improve their open rate.</p>	
Keywords Email marketing, customer engagement, digital marketing, MBA, Segmentation	

Table of contents

1	Introduction	1
2	Background.....	2
2.1	What is MBA	2
2.2	The history of MBA	2
2.3	Types of MBA Programmes	2
2.4	EMBA providers in Finland.....	3
3	Theoretical Framework.....	4
3.1	Introduction to marketing.....	4
3.2	Role of marketing in business	4
3.3	The Marketing Mix 4 P's.....	5
3.4	Digital Marketing	6
3.4.1	Advantages of Digital Marketing.....	8
3.4.2	Limits of Digital Marketing	8
3.5	Segmented marketing.....	9
3.5.1	Effective segmentation criteria	10
3.5.2	Types of market segmentation	10
3.5.3	XX segmentation.....	12
3.6	Engagement	12
3.6.1	Importance of customer engagement.....	13
3.6.2	History of Email Marketing:	14
3.6.3	Email marketing advantages and disadvantages:.....	14
3.6.4	Is email marketing dead?	16
3.6.5	Email marketing tools.....	17
3.7	Customer relationship management (CRM):	18
4	Methodology	20
4.1	Types of research method	20
4.2	Interview	21
4.3	Implementation of research.....	21
4.3.1	Planning process.....	22
4.3.2	Implementation	22
4.3.3	Data collection	23
4.3.4	Analysing the data.....	25
5	Findings	25
5.1	First part: Question 1,2,3 & 4	26
5.2	Second part: Questions 5.....	26
5.3	Third part: Questions 6,7 & 8	27

5.4	Forth part: Questions 9 & 10	27
5.5	Fifth part: Question 11.....	28
6	Recommendation	29
6.1	Recommendation based on findings from interviews.....	29
6.2	Recommendation on how to improve marketing email's open rate.....	31
7	Conclusion	32
8	References.....	35
9	Appendix: Interview questions.....	39

1 Introduction

This thesis was commissioned by XX. XX is a British Business School which was founded in 1945 and is one of the oldest business schools in the United Kingdom. XX is part of the university of reading and they are a triple-accredited business school.

They have also been ranked by Financial Times and The Economist among the world's top 50 business schools.

XX in Finland offers programmes such as: Executive MBA (EMBA)- Global, Certificate in Coaching, Boardroom Skills programme and Executive education.

The case company has other international campuses in countries such as: Denmark, Estonia, Germany, Ireland, Malaysia, Malta, South Africa and Sweden.

The team in XX Finland consist of six full time employees, tutors and outsourced professionals. Their current way of creating interaction and engagement with their potential and existing clients is through email and Social Media (mainly LinkedIn).

The aim of this thesis is to analyse their current email marketing system and to collect the feedback of their audience regarding the emails that they are receiving from XX.

The data is going to be analyse and the outcome of it, is going to be handed out as recommendations and suggestions on how they can improve their customer engagement and have more loyal customers. Helping XX to send the right content to the right audience at the right time is on the high priority of this thesis.

Although XX has various group of students depending on the interest of study, only MBA clients are the audience of this thesis.

2 Background

2.1 What is MBA

A Master of Business Administration (MBA) is a higher education degree, including theoretical and practical training, which leads to a better understanding of business management behaviours.

MBA programmes usually cover courses in accounting, management, finance, marketing, and business law.

Management training is the core of MBA programmes. This includes, leadership, planning, business strategy, organizational behaviour, and human resource. (Kagan J 2019)

2.2 The history of MBA

MBA was founded in the United States in 1900 at Dartmouth College. However, Harvard was the first university to offer the MBA for the first time in 1908 and 35 years later, University of Chicago Booth School of Business introduced the first Executive MBA. The mission of EMBA is to fulfil the educational need of company managers. The programme let the students work fulltime while they are studying.

The introduction of EMBA, helped MBA to become a more noticeable and acceptable degree in the fifties.

In Europe, INSEAD was the first Business School that offered MBA in 1957. In today's world, more than 300 MBA programmes are offered in 35 countries in Europe. Presently, MBA and EMBA are offered in variety of formats. (Study link 2019)

2.3 Types of MBA Programmes

There are various MBA programmes. The difference is normally in the length of the programmes and what are the requirements for admission.

- **Full-Time MBA**
Consists of two academic years full-time studies. It is usually offered as a daytime study by many educational institutes.
- **Part-Time MBA**
Formatted to candidates who are employed. Courses are usually held during weekends and afternoons. Depending on the students themselves, this type might take three years or more.
- **Accelerated MBA**
An intensive study for the students who are in a rush to receive their degree. The

duration for this programme can be one year or a bit over a year. One of the requirements is having a business background.

- Executive MBA

Designed for people that have multiple years of work experience in a managerial or senior specialist position. In some universities earlier university degree is also required. EMBA can help candidates to advance in their career.

- Dual MBA

In this programme, the students can combine their MBA with another degree.
(Study.com 2019)

2.4 EMBA providers in Finland

- Aalto Executive Education
- Hanken School of Economic
- Management Institute of Finland
- Turku School of Economics
- University of Jyväskylä
- University of Oulu
- University of Vaasa

3 Theoretical Framework

3.1 Introduction to marketing

Successful business is highly dependent on marketing and on the effective marketing department. "It is the role of the marketing manager and marketing department to plan, manage and execute the marketing strategy throughout the company with innovation, intuition and creativity. Marketing is organized effort, activity and expenditure designed first to acquire a customer and second to maintain and grow a customer at a profit" (Kotler, Lane Keller, Brady, Goodman& Hansen 2015, 4).

There are several numbers of accepted definitions of marketing.

Two of the most popular one is listed below:

- The first is Chartered Institute of Marketing (CIM) preferred definition:
"Marketing is the management process responsible for identifying, anticipating, and satisfying customer requirements profitably" (CIM,2001)
- The second is offered by the American Marketing Association (AMA):
" Marketing is the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large. (Approved 2017)"

Marketing is wide subject making it hard to be defined shortly. Each definition approaches the subject from slightly different angle which makes them complement each other.

3.2 Role of marketing in business

Marketing is a heart of any business in today's highly competitive environment and the company's profitability is often dependent on efforts made on marketing.

"Finance, operations, accounting, administration and other business functions will not really matter if company do not understand consumer needs and identify sufficient demand for their products and services for them to make a profit" (Kotler→ & al., 2015)

Some people who do not understand marketing are thinking marketing as "the art of selling". For some people, it becomes as a surprise when they realize that selling in not the most important part of marketing and that not all companies have large advertising budgets.

Marketing can help managing and making sense of the relationship between the organization and the outside world e.g. consumers. Organizations do not exist for their own sake; they exist to serve the needs of consumers and users of their goods and services. If they cannot successfully serve their customers, sell their products, create new customers, and keep the old ones, they cannot exist. All the departments in the organization are working together, directly, or indirectly, to achieve the goal defined earlier by the company.

The employees in the marketing department in the organization are responsible for communicating with customers or clients and finding out why they need to purchase the goods or services offered. Marketing communicates and delivers information to customers or clients and helps them establishing the overall image of the brand. Badly communicated brand can ruin a good product or service. (Kotler → & al., 2015)

3.3 The Marketing Mix 4 P's

Marketing Mix is an important tool for guaranteeing main four marketing elements product, place, price promotion. It helps the clients to understand the benefits of their product as well as how to plan for the benefits.

- **Product** - The Product should be the thing that the customer wants. This is not only a physical thing, it also includes after-sales services, guarantees, installation etc. it is basically everything to do with making, developing, and managing the products.
- **Place** – means where the customers will search for finding the products, whether it is in retail stores or online.
- **Price** –It does not mean that it should be the cheapest product in the market. The product should always be representing a good value for money.
One of the facts in the marketing concept is that customers are sometimes willing to pay a little more for something that they know it will work well for them.
- **Promotion** –Key communication tools for organization are advertising, PR, Sales Promotion, Personal Selling and last but not least, Social Media.
These tools should correctly be put in the firm message, so that the audiences are more willing to hear and see. (Mindtools 2016)



Figure 1. 4ps Marketing mix (adapted from Mind Tools)

3.4 Digital Marketing

Digital Marketing is a type of marketing that is done by using electronic or digital media such as web pages, email, social media in alliance with digital data from a different range of databases and software applications. (Kotler & Keller 131)

Definition and terms used for describing the digital marketing has evolved over time making it to be one of the most popular and an upward trend in business.

“Digital marketing is more than only selling products and is more about engaging customer across many types of electronic channels.” (Debra Z 2016)

The definition of digital marketing is to use digital platforms to be in touch with potential clients in the place that they spend most of their times. According to Lucy Alexander from HubSpot, during the last five years, adults have been using the internet 5% more. This result confirm that online platforms is the place where businesses should be in contact with their consumers. Online can define, website, email, online brochures, digital advertising and many more. (Alexander L 2019)

Some examples of Digital Marketing are:

- **Content Marketing,**
The focus of this type is on creating and distributing content for potential clients. Content must be relevant and valuable in order to make a profitable action. Content marketing is the core of any kind of digital marketing.
- **Search Engine Optimization (SEO),**
SEO helps websites to get better ranking on the search engine results. With the help of SEO, the organic traffic of the website increase. Websites, blogs and infographics are the channels that benefit from SEO.
- **Search Engine Marketing (SEM),**
Unlike SEO that provides organic traffic to the websites, SEM gains traffic by using paid methods. By using SEM, the website will be visible to the potential customers when they are on search engines. SEM can be recognized by the “Ad” at the beginning of the URL.

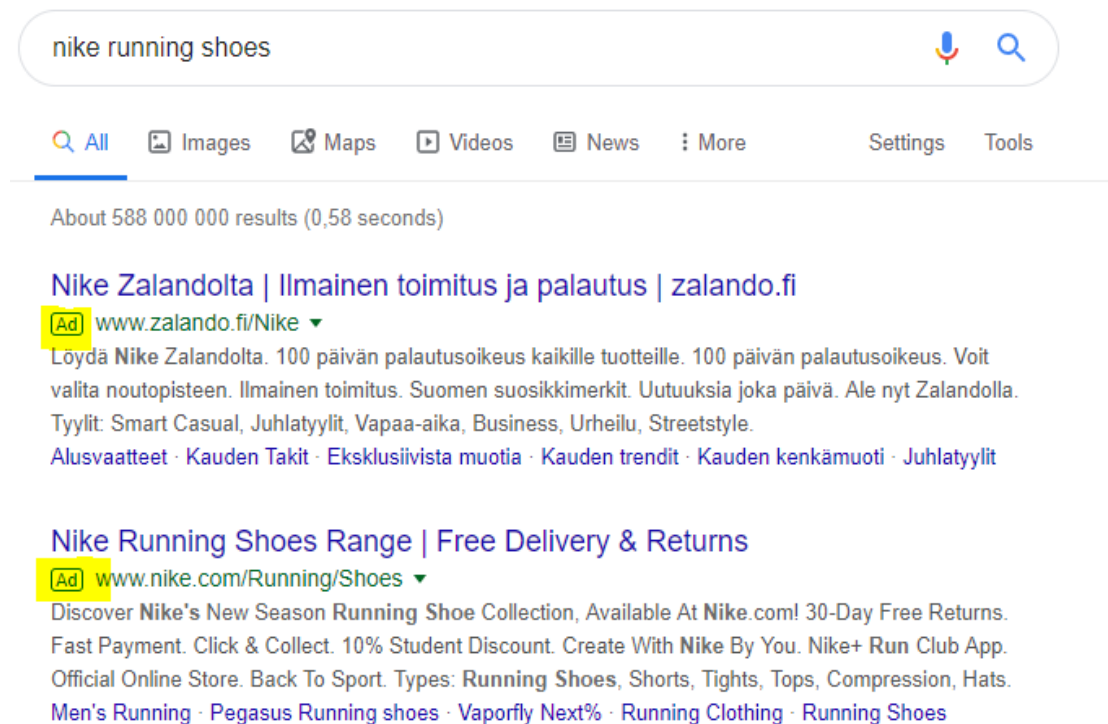


Figure 2. How to recognize Search Engine Marketing (SEM)

- **Pay Per Click (PPC)**
PPC is similar to SEM. Meaning, whenever someone clicks on the ad links, a fee will be charged from the account.
- **Social Media Marketing**

Using social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat or LinkedIn, not only for gaining visibility, but also engagement with target audience. Social media platforms are the best place for listening to consumers' needs and to engage and connect with them.

- **Email Marketing** section 3.7 (Sukhar R 2019)

3.4.1 Advantages of Digital Marketing

Digital Marketing is beneficial for all businesses. The reason is that it is easy to be personalized and use on targeted market with affordable price and efficient time. Below is list of Digital Marketing advantages.

- **Measurable**, unlike traditional marketing that was difficult to measure, digital marketing enables businesses to measure their results. For example, it is easy to see how big the audience has been, how many have seen the ad or how many have opened the email.
- **Flexible**, with digital marketing advertisement can be tailor made. Audience can be segmented and each group of them can be serve accordingly by their interests and needs.
- **Low barrier to entry**, traditional marketing could have cost a fortune. Making TV ads or billboards needed a lot of money. But digital marketing can be fixed according to the budget of the company.
- **Reach large audience**, as digital marketing is online, it is accessible to people all over the globe.
- **Easy to optimize**, after the first campaign it is easy to see what has worked and what has not. Therefore, it can be adjusted and improve for the next campaign.
- **improved conversion rates**, Digital marketing ease the way for better interaction with the prospects. While reaching target market is easier for businesses this therefore influence the conversion rate. (MacDougall A 2018)

3.4.2 Limits of Digital Marketing

A part of preparing for digital marketing campaign is to be aware of restrictions.

Some of the drawbacks are:

- Restricted by technology
- Cyber security and data protection issues"
- Competitive market due to globalization
- Price sensitive caused by higher clarity (Sina soft 2018)

Cyber security and data protection issues is one of the highest risks in digital marketing especially when businesses are aiming to reach a wide range of the audience.

Studies shows that in year 2018 the cost for the data violations for businesses has been over three million, while only in United States the average cost of it for a company could be over seven million. Therefore, it is important for Digital Marketing professionals to be aware of the risks. (Smith C 2019)

Email marketing and social media marketing are the two digital marketing channels that X is using for interaction with potential and existing clients. Email marketing subject is the focus area for this research. However, in the recommendation section the author will provide suggestions and highlights that can help the case company to improve their social media marketing as well.

3.5 Segmented marketing

Segmentation refers to splitting the market into different groups. In fact, because of factors like cost, time, and efficiency, it is impossible for companies to target the whole market. They need to put their market audience into groups that are sharing the same interest, location, or relevant character, and target them with reasonable effort, cost, and time.

Segmentation is the key to survive in today's chaos market with wide variety of products, media platforms, advertisements, and cost-effective problems worldwide. With segmentation, vendors can adjust their products and services accordingly with potential client's needs, budget, desires and uses. This way is more time and cost efficient for both seller and buyer. (The Economic Times 2019)

According to Business Dictionary, market segmentation is the process of determining and splitting an identical market into certain detectable sections that are sharing the same desires, needs or interests. It is important to make the marketing mix accordingly to meet those characteristics in the segmented group. (Business dictionary 2019)

Market segment speaks about placing the customers that are having same interests and needs in the same group. Marketing professionals face the challenge to identify those interests and decide which group they should target. (Kotler & Keller, 368)

Strategic segmentation is used for business planning and making market strategy. The definition of tactical segmentation is used when, marketing professionals decide to build the marketing plan for their huge target market to point out their certain good or services to certain customer. A worthy segmentation consists both strategic and tactical action. (Statistical concepts 2010)

Figure 3 suggests the following steps for market segmentation:

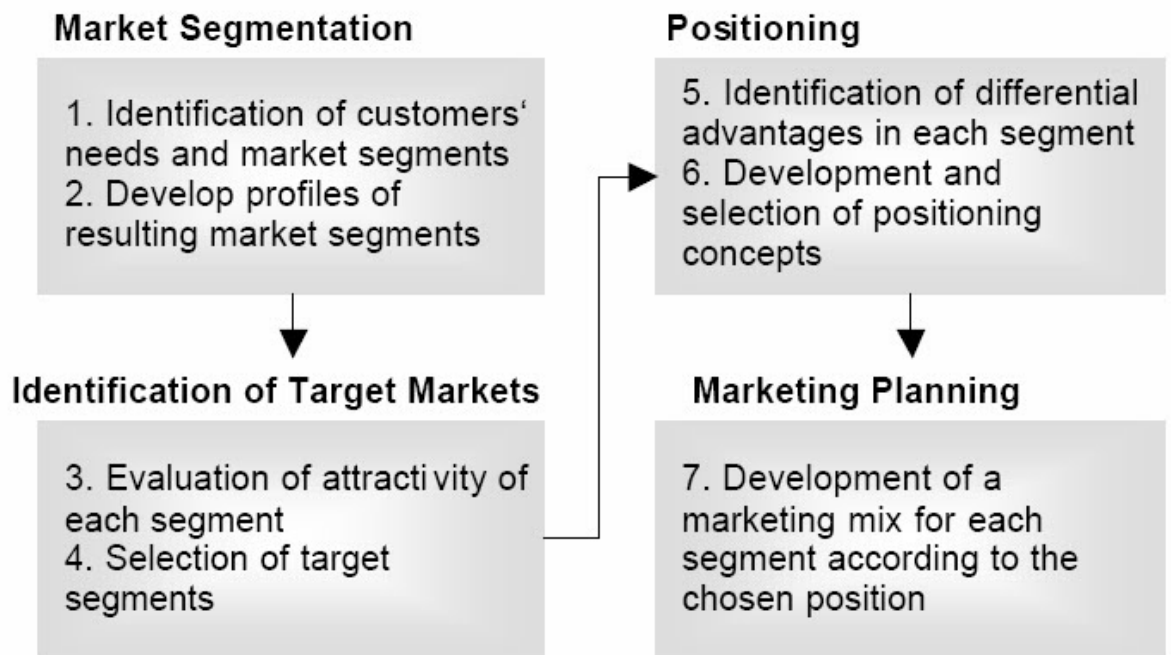


Figure 3. Segmentation strategy (adapted from Statistical concepts)

3.5.1 Effective segmentation criteria

According to the writers of Marketing Manager, in order to getting better results, market segments should be capable of assessing five key criteria:

1. **Measurable.** Segments should be measurable with buying power, amount, and uniqueness.
2. **Substantial.** Meaning, segment should be big enough and beneficial to be worthy to serve.
3. **Accessible.** The segment should be accessible and available to reach.
4. **Differentiable.** The segments must be theoretically categorizable.
5. **Actionable.** Powerful plan should be made to draw attention to segments and serve them efficiently. (Kotler & Keller, 391)

3.5.2 Types of market segmentation

There are different ways of segmenting market. Below there are four main types of market segmentations that is applicable for most of the businesses.

1. Geographic segmentation

In this type of segmentation, target audience is on the specific area. People's interests vary in different locations. Marketing professionals should take into consideration where their targeted customers live.

2. Demographic segmentation

Demographic segmentation put market to different group based on their age, sex, job, revenue, marital status, or education. Depending on the marketing subject, marketers should decide what kind of demographic elements they should use on their segmentation.

3. Psychographic segmentation

Psychographic segmentation is unlike the other two types above. This type has a deeper focus on people's lifestyle, personality, interests, values, and opinions. Meaning, people with different lifestyles are having different interests and opinions. In order to having more successful campaigns should have a deep knowledge of their target audience.

4. Behavioural segmentation

This element is similar to psychographic, but it focusses more on customer behavioural and their journey through buying process and decision making. The examples of behavioural segmentation can be, customer attitude against the product, how they are using it and their knowledge. (Statistical concepts 2010)

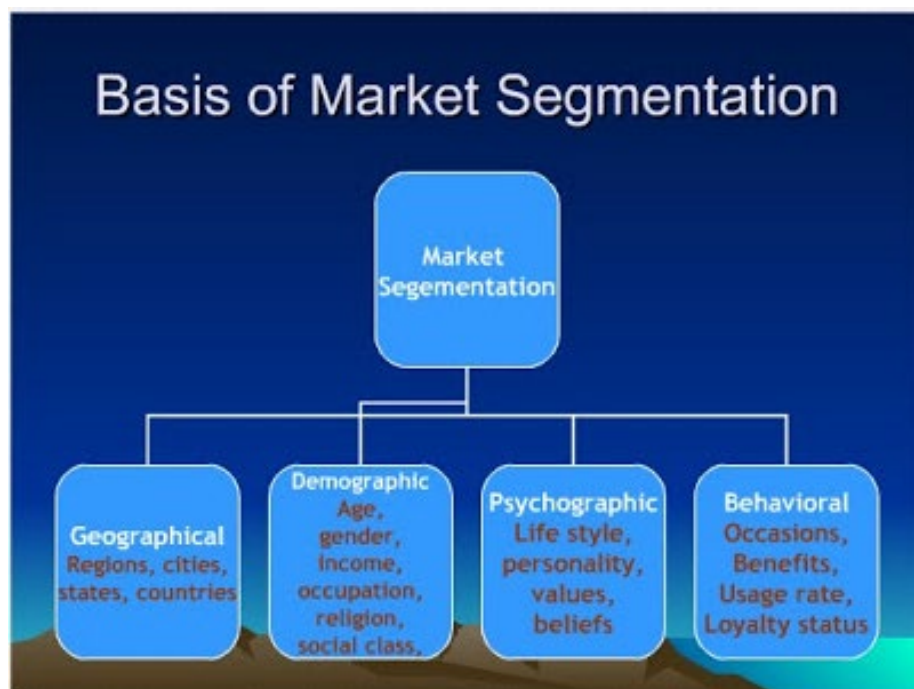


Figure 4. Basis of Market Segmentation (adapted from Statistical concepts)

3.5.3 XX segmentation

XX focus geographic area is Finland however, they have students from Russia and some other countries as well.

Their ideal customers are over Thirty years men/women with over 3 years of managerial or senior specialist work experience.

The candidates should have already a university degree or equivalent qualification.

3.6 Engagement

Engagement means interaction with both potential and existing customers. It is a fact that both are as important as one another. Bringing new customer is as important as keeping existing one loyal. However, this cannot happen unless companies have a plan for having a healthy interaction with their clients. Healthy means that engagement should be enough but not too much, so that their clients will not unsubscribe or forget about the brand. (audi-enti 2014)

Paul Greenberg in his interview with HubSpot described the engagement as below:

"Customer engagement is the ongoing interactions between company and customer, offered by the company, chosen by the customer." (Hussain A 2014)

The highlight of this definition from the authors point of view is, it is important to take customer's opinion into consideration when we choose the way of interaction with them. Customer should itself choose whether he/she wants to interact with us or not.

According to Michael Fertik:

"Customer engagement is about inspiring your customers to interact with your brand and willingly take part in the experiences you are creating for them" (Fertik M 2019)

This definition's message is the customer interaction has the direct relationship with profit growth. If businesses do it correctly the results are, growth in brand awareness, loyal customers and in the end profit.

Micah Solomon talks about secrets of customer engagement:

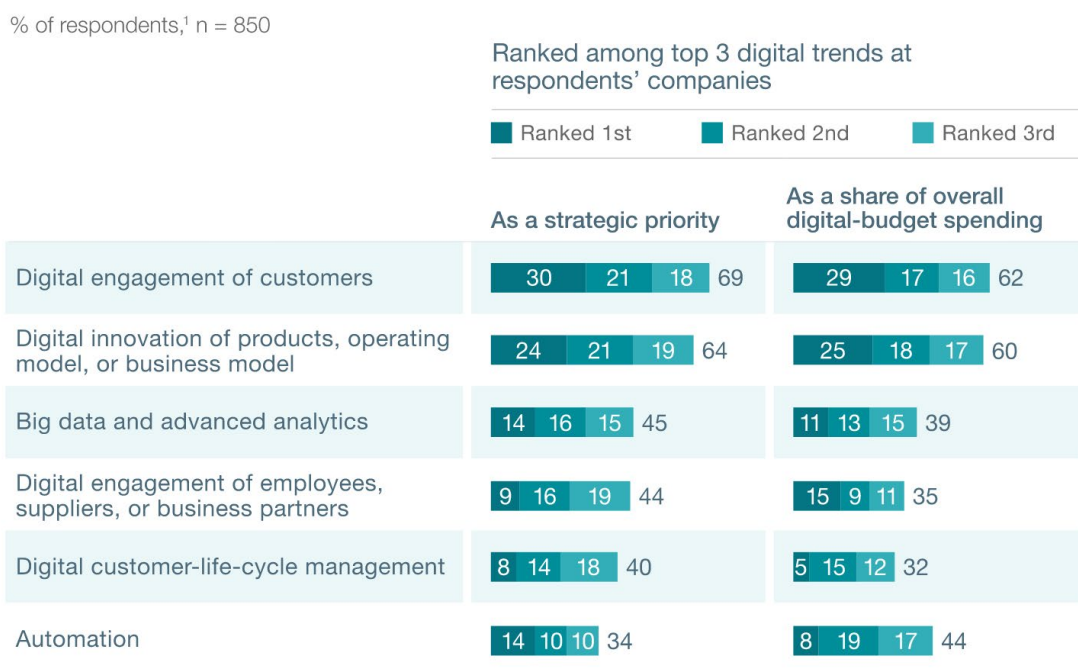
"Customer engagement is a result of superior customer service and a well-designed customer experience"

However, not always the effect of customer service and customer experience on customer engagement is equal. (Solomon M 2018)

In the authors point of view customer engagement is, every action that a company is willing to take in order to get one step closer to their existing or potential customer. Being in the close relationship with the target audience helps to get a better understanding about their need and try to provide it for them. Happy customers talk about the brand with their network and Word-of-mouth has a strong influence on people’s decision making. ‘

3.6.1 Importance of customer engagement

McKinsey and Digital in year 2014 ran a survey about digitalization. Results showed that, digital customer engagement is highly important in both strategy and digital-budget spending. CEO’s and other C- level executives in the company rated customer engagement the highest. (Gottlieb & Willmott 2014)



¹Respondents who did not rank each of the 6 trends in the top 3 are not shown.

Figure 5. Digital customer engagement. (adapted from Mckinsey)

Gallup research point out that a fully engaged customer represents 23% more revenue than average. While, actively disengaged ones represent 13% discount in the same element. (State of the American consumer report, June 2014)

Also, same report shows that, online shoppers that are fully engaged are visiting the online store 44% more that those that are actively disengaged in one year.

their marketing plans. Whether the business is small or big, email marketing is always a good option for companies because nowadays audience prefer to get information regarding promotions, discounts, and newest news by email.

3.6.2 History of Email Marketing:

The history of Email Marketing in short is as below:

- 1971 First email was sent by Ray Tomlinson
- 1978 First mass email was sent to about 400 users by Gary Thuerk and it bring over thirteen million in Sales to Digital Equipment Corporation.
- 1991The Internet was born
- 1996Outlook was born by Microsoft
- 2000s Email marketing service providers were born, SaaS (Church C 2019)

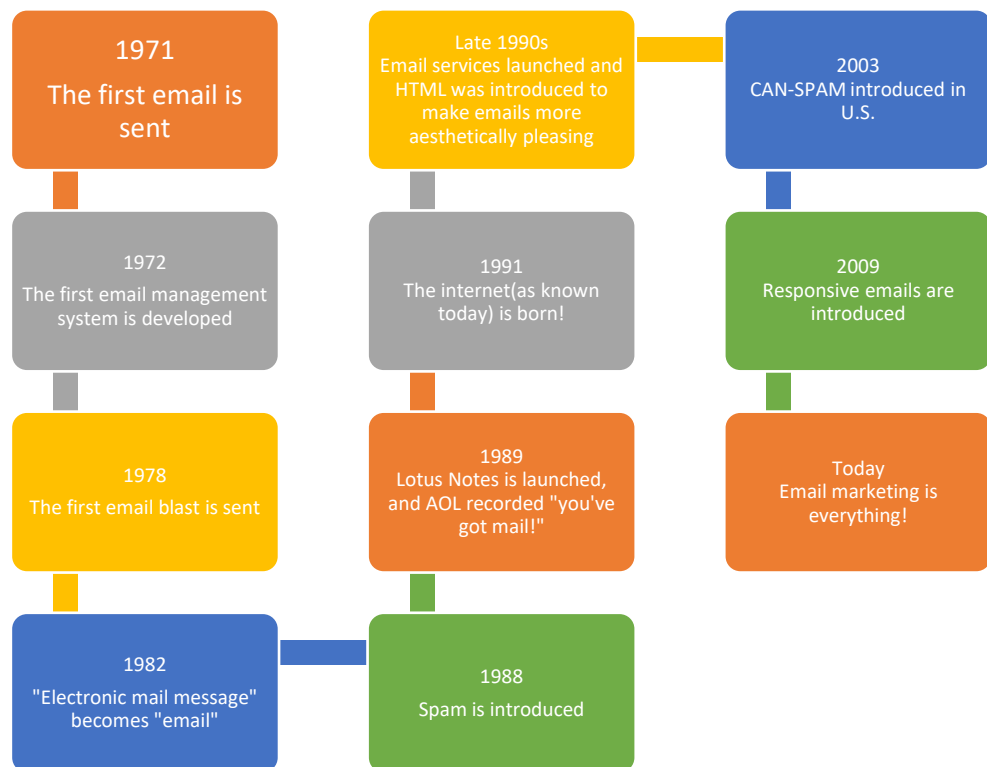


Figure 6. The history of email marketing (adapted from Braffton)

3.6.3 Email marketing advantages and disadvantages:

Pros:

- Affordable

Email marketing is an affordable way of marketing as apart from professional person, businesses need to buy the tool and normally tools are paid by amount of the emails that are going to be send.

- **Effectiveness**
If the email marketing campaign be optimized carefully and get tested, it can be effective and achievable. Meaning, sending right message to right people at the right time.
- **Measurable**
With the email marketing tools, companies can access the data about their subscribers and details about whether they have opened their email or not. This measurement help businesses to adjust their plan better and more accurate.
- **Customization and Personalization**
It is possible to customize the emails easily even for each segmented group.
- **Segmentation**
Email marketing platforms that are offering segmentation feature, enables businesses to divide their audience in the groups according their interests, ages, locations, and other elements. By segmentation, open rates, click/through, and conversions will go up.
- **Relationship and trust building**
Email marketing helps firms to build their trust with their audience and present their Brand to potentials to be recognized in the market.
- **Timesaving**
Once everything is setup on the tool and automation has been built it is easy and fast to send the emails.

Cons,

- **Deliverability**
There is a chance of getting spam and not ending up on the right inbox of the people.
- **Clutter**
The amount of the emails that are sent every day is increasing rapidly. Based on Internet live stats, year 2017, in each second more that 2.6 million emails are sent and 67% of it end up spam. (Internetlivestats.com). But the fact is the risk of trashing paper ads, ignoring video ads and all other sorts of advertisement is nevertheless the same. It is true that people might unsubscribe from our email lists, but by sending not only promotion emails but also interesting news and feeds businesses can keep people interested in our brand. Though, those people that never buy or

open their email can unsubscribe so that companies can invest money on those that are interested in their brand.

- Time requirement

By automating email marketing campaigns, once emails are set, they will be sent automatically after that. However, it is good to remember that email automation is time saving while email marketing can be very time consuming. Setting up the email marketing tool, preparing web sites, managing leads, analysis and making content needs quite much time to prepare.

- Skills

The person who is responsible for email marketing should be professional and have a lot of relevant skills. Companies should be careful to find the right person who can exceed their expectations. (Gunelius 2018, Ch1)

3.6.4 Is email marketing dead?

Steven MacDonald in his article about “The Science Behind Email Open rates” provides a statistic about average email open rate.

According to him, email marketing has been the most popular marketing channel for B2B” business already for several years. while the sending rates has been increasing during years some people might think that open rate in the other hand, has been decreased.

He stated that according to the researches email’s open rate for had been staying steady at 24% worldwide between years 2015 to 2018. Nevertheless, it came down to 22.1% in year 2019 compared to 2018. However, this decrease is not a sing of email marketing’s death. Statistics shows that, during history whenever email marketing’s open rate has decrease has been followed by a strong period of growth. With some preparations and re-search companies can increase their open rates easily. (MacDonald S, 2019)

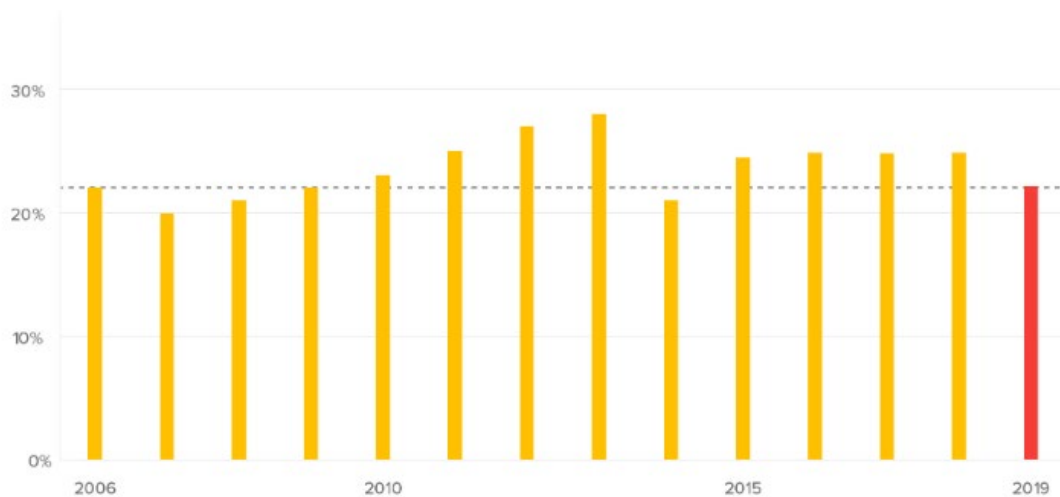


Figure 7. Open rate Benchmark by year (2006-2019). (adapted from Super Office)

Sujan Patel in his article about how to improve the open rates of your marketing emails, explains the reasons around why email marketing is not dead by stating some facts as below.

Researches show that, email marketing is the only channel of marketing that returns 44.25\$ for every 1\$ spent. Email marketing is not dead but also it is the channel that has one of the highest engagement rates and returns on investment of any other marketing models. (Patel S 2015)

3.6.5 Email marketing tools

Marketing Automation providers offer a tool that enables companies to implement and analyse their email marketing efforts. Email automation tool can integrate the email marketing with content marketing, online advertising, and other marketing efforts to support companies to track leads from acquisition to conversion. The main reason of using automation tool is to save time and money. With marketing automation tool is possible to apply advance segmentation that will have an advantage to reach more targeted audience. (Gunelius 2018, Ch1)

Depending on the size of the company each tool can be beneficial and efficient on its own.

For small businesses some of the email marketing services in 2020 are as below:

- Constant Contact
- SendinBlue
- Drip

- Convertkit
- For large businesses some of the recommended tools for 2020 are:
- Active Campaign
- Fresh marketer
- Quest back
- HubSpot (capterra 2020)

3.7 Customer relationship management (CRM):

CRM is more refer to the sales tool than marketing tool. With CRM, businesses can follow the whole journey of their customers from the moment that become a lead to the moment that they become customers. In addition, in later stages they can use the CRM data for customer engagement and support. CRM enables corporations to build a long-term relationship with their customers. Integrating CRM and email marketing tool help companies to have a more accurate and qualified email marketing. (Gunelius 2018, Ch1)

It is important to integrate customer relationship management activities with suitable channels across the organization. The four marketing activities that comprise CRM is shown in figure 8.

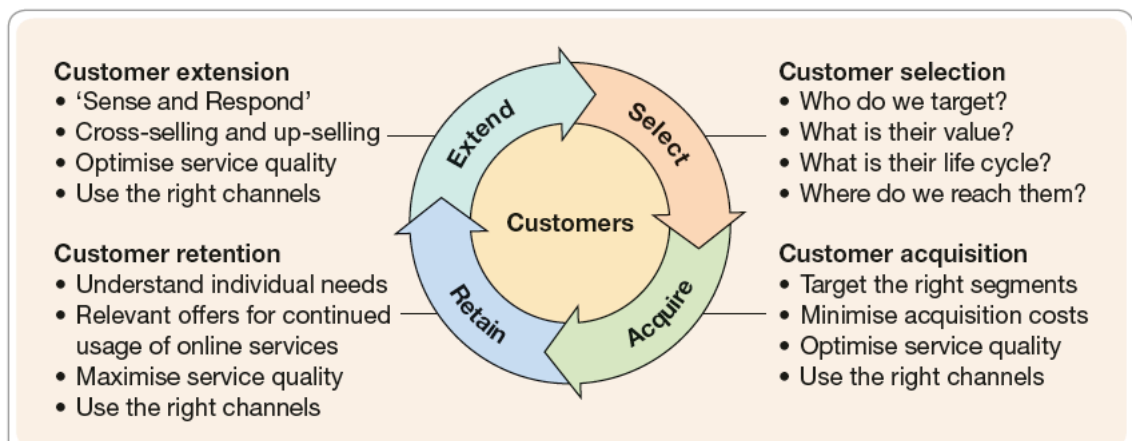


Figure 8. The four classic marketing activities of customer relationship management. (adapted from Digital Business E-Commerce Management)

Marketing applications supporting these four activities are:

Salesforce automation (SFA). Tools to help streamlining the collection, analysis, and distribution of data in sales pipeline. Recent study suggests that most of the sales repre-

representative's time is spent on something other than sales activities. With salesforce automation previously manually done work is automated in sales representatives and their managers workflow. (Rouse M 2018)

Customer service management. Tool to help company to respond to customer requests by providing customer data management i.e. database of the customer, product, and previous queries. Such tools can also consist of the following features; Case management, Self-service, Visual workflow and automation, Virtual agent, Knowledge Management and Customer Project Management.

Managing the sales process. In Consumer business this can be achieved with e-commerce platforms or in B2B with salesforce automation.

Campaign management. Tools for managing social media, ad, direct mail, email, and other campaigns.

Analysis. Analysis can be done through technologies such as data warehouses (structured data) and data lakes (unstructured data) with approaches such as data mining and big data analysis. (Chaffey 2015, 389)

4 Methodology

Research method definition refers to a process, strategy or technique that is used in data collection of the research when researcher is trying to create a better understanding or discovering new information of a topic. The types of the research methods are many and each of them are using various tools for data collection. It is researcher's job to identify which type and tool can help her to find answers to the research question of the research. (The University of Newcastle 2019)

4.1 Types of research method

Qualitative research, quantitative research and mixed methods research are the different types of the research method.

Qualitative research method which is also known as market research method was chosen for this thesis. It focuses on gathering data by having a conversational communication with the focus group. This type of research method is seeking more about "Why" type of the questions rather than "What". Qualitative method allows researcher to go deeper to find out why certain thing has happened. Understanding more about the actions helps the researcher to find out about ways of improvement and suggestions. (Bhat A 2019)

Data collection tools	
Techniques or tools used for gathering research data include:	
Qualitative Techniques or Tools	Quantitative Techniques or Tools
Interviews: these can be structured, semi-structured or unstructured in-depth sessions with the researcher and a participant.	Surveys or questionnaires: which ask the same questions to large numbers of participants or use Likert scales which measure opinions as numerical data.
Focus groups: with several participants discussing a particular topic or a set of questions. Researchers can be facilitators or observers.	Observation: which can either involve counting the number of times a specific phenomenon occurs, or the coding of observational data in order to translate it into numbers.
Observations: On-site, in-context or role-play options.	Document screening: sourcing numerical data from financial reports or counting word occurrences.
Document analysis: Interrogation of correspondence (letters, diaries, emails etc) or reports.	Experiments: testing hypotheses in laboratories, testing cause and effect relationships, through field experiments, or via quasi- or natural experiments.
Oral history or life stories: Remembrances or memories of experiences told to the researcher.	

Figure 9. Data collection tools. (adapted from The University of Newcastle)

For highlighting the reason to the question” why this method was chosen for this thesis”, author decided to analyse the main elements of qualitative research. Ritchie & Lewis have explained the key aspects of qualitative research as table below. (Ritchie & Lewis 2003)

Table 1. Key features of qualitative research (Ritchie & Lewis 2003)

Perspective	Implementing the viewpoint of the participants in the research
Goal	the subject needs to be deeply understood or well-defined which will lead to better awareness of the nature of the issue. Analysing the experience of the candidates can provide this knowledge
Selection/ Candidates	Small group of individuals by specific characteristic that are relevant to the topic
Data collection	Collaborative and conversational contact between researcher and candidates
Analysis	Combination of creativity and systematic searching which can lead to an explanation or detailed description of the issue.

4.2 Interview

The qualitative research method chosen for this thesis is interview. Interview is one of the key methods of data gathering based in qualitative research.

Interview is a conversational method that gives the researcher the chance of getting in depth information from the interviewee. Interview provide the opportunity for interviewer to get the detailed understanding of respondents believe and thoughts. Interviews can be accomplished face to face or over the phone or Skype. However, face to face interviews give the opportunity to read the body language and compare it with the answers. (Bhat A 2019)

Researcher chose interview because, it helps her to gets deeper details from the respondents and provides the opportunity for a better understanding of the current situation. During the interviews, researcher tried to provide the atmosphere that respondents feel comfortable and be able to give the honest answers.

4.3 Implementation of research

The details of data collection are described in this chapter. Details on how the focus group was chosen, how the interviews were planed and phases of data collection.

4.3.1 Planning process

In order to better understand the current situation of XX's email marketing, the researcher decided to choose candidates from current students from different intakes. It is necessary to mention that all the interviewees are originally from Finland. The focus group of this research were only Executive MBA students.

Table below shows the number of the students and in what stage of their studies they are:

Table 2. Number of interviewees

Criteria	Amount
Stage 1	3 students
Stage 2	2 students
Stage 3	2 students

The point was to collect data about student's satisfaction towards emails that they have received before becoming clients and have been receiving after becoming students. Considering that current students are still potential customers for XX as they are offering different kind of programs, it was important to know how they feel about the engagement plan that XX has towards them.

When choosing interviewees researcher asked admins of XX to provide a list of students that have been with XX for different length of time. The purpose was to understand has anything changed along duration of time and collect insights from different peoples that are not studying at the same time.

4.3.2 Implementation

To respect the interviewee's privacy, Interviews were done anonymously. The respondents are coded below. Same coding has been used also for analysing the data for guiding. Table below includes codes, which stage of the study the student is and date of the interview.

Table 3. Interview coding

Code	Stage	Date
A1	Stage 1	26.7.2019
A2	Stage 1	31.7.2019
A3	Stage 1	2.8.2019
A4	Stage 2	5.8.2019
A5	Stage 2	9.10.2019
A6	Stage 2	19.7.2019
A7	Stage 3	1.8.2019

4.3.3 Data collection

The seven interviewees are current student of XX. Some of the interviews were done face to face and some through Skype. All the interviews were recorded and transcribed. The questions were created by the researcher and they are based on the literature review that is written in this thesis. However, interviewer was flexible during interviews and added or skipped some questions depending on the responses that she received. The aim was to find out about the feelings the interviewees have towards the emails that they have been receiving from case company before and after they become client. Table below shows the main platform of questions that were questioned in all interviews.

Table 4. Interview questions

1	Do you remember how you heard about XX for the first time?
2	How long ago was that?
3	Can you please tell me about your experience before becoming a client? Have you attended the info meeting? Did you download our brochure?
4	Do you remember how often did you receive emails from XX before becoming client? How often are you receiving now?
5	How satisfied have you been with the emails that you have been receiving? Do you think that the content that you are seeing in your emails are relevant?
6	If you were less than totally satisfied, what could we have done to serve you better?
7	If we would have options in our subscription that you could choose from the information that you would like to receive from XX, what would you choose
8	What do you want to see in emails? Content? What interest you more?
9	How often do you prefer to get emails?
10	What is your preferred language for receiving emails? Fin/ENG
11	Can you please tell me an example of bad or good customer experience that you have with XX?

After the interviews, in order to get more understanding and insight of the subject, writer used some parts from the theoretical part.

In all the interviews, researcher asked interviewees for the permission to record the whole session. Recording the session helped interviewer to concentrate on the conversation and amend the questions properly.

All the interviews were fully transcribed in order to help the writer to gain a deeper analysis. Transcribed documents are stored in other location to respect anonymity of the interviewees.

4.3.4 Analysing the data

Qualitative data analysis is not as easy as quantitative one. The difference is that comparing to quantitative data, there are less well known and accepted ways of analysing for qualitative data. However, recently some techniques of analysis have been established by known researchers. Miles and Huberman (1994) were the people that introduced 3 steps is qualitative data analysis.

1. Data reduction: is the action of choosing the right data and coding them and finally putting them to different categories.
2. Data display: Meaning the style that data is going to be presented. Researcher can have a better understanding of the data by sorting them in the concept of a graph, table, matrix, or any other illustration ways. Data display also helps in concluding the reduced set of data.
3. Drawing of conclusions: This is the point that researcher should prove that did results that was found after data analysis answer the research question or not?
(Sekaran & Bougie, 352)

For this thesis, a deductive approach was used. Researcher created the research question and objectives based on theoretical framework. With the help of theoretical framework this thesis was organized and directed to the data analysis.

The aim for the questions was that the writer wanted to discover about the customer journey and moreover, about their feeling towards X's customer interaction which leads to customer experience. Therefore, the deductive was the best approach to choose for this research.

For analysing this research, researcher has grouped the interviewees based on what stage of their studies they are which shows that for how long they have been X's customer.

The purpose of this division was to get the understanding on whether the quality of customer interaction has been different during the time or not.

5 Findings

The findings from the interviews are going to be analyse in this chapter. The interviewees have been coded in Table 3 and questions have been listed in Table 4.

For getting the better understanding, the analysis was done by putting the questions into five different groups. The straight quotes from interviewees has been listed in

some part of this analysis to emphasize the importance of the subject. The list of the questions is attached to this thesis in appendix 1. The order of the questions was changed in some cases during interviews based on the answers that the interviewer received during the interview.

The questions of this research were formed to measure the quality of the XX's current email marketing system. But after the interviews, it was clear that majority of the students have not been opening their marketing emails that they have been receiving from XX. Based on this result, author decided to add another research question to this thesis and find out about how XX can raise their open rate. From researcher point of view Internet research to answer this question was adequate. The results of this research are listed in Finding section.

5.1 First part: Question 1,2,3 & 4

The idea of this part of the interviews was to know about customer journey and customer experience of XX's customer. The goal was to understand, what was their feeling about XX staff's way of engagement and interaction.

The key points that writer found out from all the answers to the first question was that the word-of-mouth was the key elements for them in making decision. A7 who is in third year of his studies said that:

Finding the school for studying my EMBA was one of the biggest decisions that I needed to make in my life and for making this kind of decision of course I needed to talk to someone that had experience with the schools. (A7 2019)

A1 who is a stage 1 student, explain her feeling against staff's approach as below:

After I download brusher from website I was contacted by X, it was nice that process was fast but not too fast that I had time to read through the materials and I was contacted few days later to ask if I need more information, I didn't feel that they are pushing me or over selling me (A1 2019)

All the interviewees had the same feeling about how they were approach and they were happy with their customer journey.

5.2 Second part: Questions 5

This question was asked to measure their satisfaction against email's content and understand whether they think that the content in the emails are relevant or not.

Answering to this question was difficult for candidates as most of them could not remember the content due to not opening and reading the emails.

A4's reason for not opening his emails and not being satisfied with them was:

I am not happy; the email's subjects are not interesting and have not gave me the reason to open and read them. I am receiving many emails daily and what I do is just delete and delete and delete, I am busy with my professional and personal life and do not have time to read not interesting things (A4 2019)

A1 had similar idea. She was thinking that the content is irrelevant, and she explains as below:

The content is not relevant, I was interested in EMBA, but they were sending me emails about other programs. If I want to apply for EMBA I do not want to see emails related to other programs. It seems that there is no filter and they send the same email to everyone (A1 2019)

However, in the other hand A3 had a different idea as the others, she mentioned that:

I do not receive their emails so often that is why it does not bother me. I am satisfied and I will not mind if I get more information (A3 2019)

5.3 Third part: Questions 6,7 & 8

The aim of these three questions is to figure out the students' field of interest. Knowing this matter, facilitates the process of making the content which interests them the most.

Recommendations will be listed in chapter 5 of this research. However, below are some of their comments.

A3 is also stage one student and she answered.

As I am in the beginning of my journey it is very interesting for me to know about the life of those who have been graduating from this program. Knowing about what they did after graduation and if their work life has changed after graduation can be inspiring for me (A3m 2019)

A4 touches the interesting point regarding the subjects of the email.

Subject of the email can make me interested. Can touch me and make me curious (A4 2019)

5.4 Forth part: Questions 9 & 10

The purpose of these two questions was to plan emails schedules and understanding whether the content language has any impact on opening rate or not.

About preferred language A7 said,

English language is fine but If they are in Finnish, I might open them better (A7 2019)

A6 has about the same idea as A7. He mentioned,

Of course, Finnish is always better but English also is ok (A6 2019)

A1's answer was,

I am fluent in both, so I do not mind. But if I can choose, I choose Finnish. However, if the original version is English then I prefer original language because I feel that in Finnish version, I might not get everything since normally translated versions are not so good (A1 2019)

Apart from these three that were thinking English is okay but if they have an option, they will choose Finnish, all the others chose English as a preferred language.

The result that researcher received to the question about how often they would like to receive emails from XX is as follow:

They all agreed that if it has more than once a month is too much. Monthly email is a good idea if the content is rich and high quality other than that once a quarter is preferred.

5.5 Fifth part: Question 11

The purpose of this question was to understand the candidates overall feeling about X and its staff. The question gave them the freedom to talk about the first thing that comes to their mind about XX's customer service whether it is a good memory or bad

A4 expressed his feeling as below:

My personal tutor is super lady, she is always there for me and we always have good conversation together. XX Finland has taken a good care of me as a student and as a human (A4 2019)

A2 had a good experience with response time of the X's staff:

XX local personnel and especially program managers' response time and the way that they manage students is in the high level. Whether is phone or email or face to face they are always responsive and fast, and I am so pleased with the service that I am receiving (A2 2019)

A3 explained that she has always received the support that she needed:

Always when I ask for help, I receive it immediately. They care about their clients so much. We never felt that we have left alone after we joined the school (A3 2019)

A5 and A7 had the similar feeling about workshops and trips that are organized by XX Finland.

A5 said:

Our study trips and workshops are well organized and on professional level (A5 2019)

And A7 mentioned:

How the workshops have been organized, they are professional and high quality (A7 2019)

And finally, A6 explained shortly that:

I have always received what I wanted. I am satisfied. I never had any problems. Customer service has been good (A6 2019)

6 Recommendation

This section is focusing on giving recommendation to the case company on how they can improve their email marketing and its open rate.

This section of this report is divided into two different parts.

- The First part is based on material from the interviews and the suggestion ideas that was mentioned by interviewees.
- Second part includes tips and suggestions about increasing email marketing open rate based on online research.

6.1 Recommendation based on findings from interviews

- Segmented email marketing list

The Executive MBA includes 3 different stages. The recommended segmentation for XX is to divide the list into 2 different groups:

- Stage 1 & 2 students
- Stage 3 students and Alumni

As stage 1 & 2 students are still in the beginning of their studies, they would be more interested to see news about study tips, how to balance study, work and personal life and these types of the news. However, those who are near graduation or already graduated would be interested to know about tips on how to write their final work, other available programmes or read testimonials about life after graduation.

- Monthly newsletter.

Having all the information that they want to communicate to customers under one umbrella rather than several shorter emails. This includes alumni related news, introducing new programmes, news about XX in different countries. The newsletter can be divided to different sections like:

- What is new?
- What is coming next?

- Highlights of the month.
- Promoting their social media channel.
XX is using Facebook and LinkedIn as their social media platform. However, many do not know about the existence of their Facebook page. They should always tag their different social media platforms in each other.
- Sending HTML email.
Using more images and videos in the content.
- Not changing sender's name
Changing the sender's name can cause spamming.
- Testimonials/ Storytelling.
Based on the results of the interviews and asking customer's about how they heard about XX for the first time, it is clear that "WORD OF MOUTH" has the strongest influence on people's mind when it comes to choosing the school for their future studies. Creating short videos or writing blog posts about their alumni can have an enormous effect on decisions making. Testimonials can include their experiences. Moreover, about their life after graduation.
- Keep the language of the emails English. For some cases if the source of the news, testimonials or interviews are Finnish is better to share them in original language as it feels more natural and it will send the message more correctly.
- Interesting content
Figure 10 shows some of the interesting contents that was mentioned during interviews

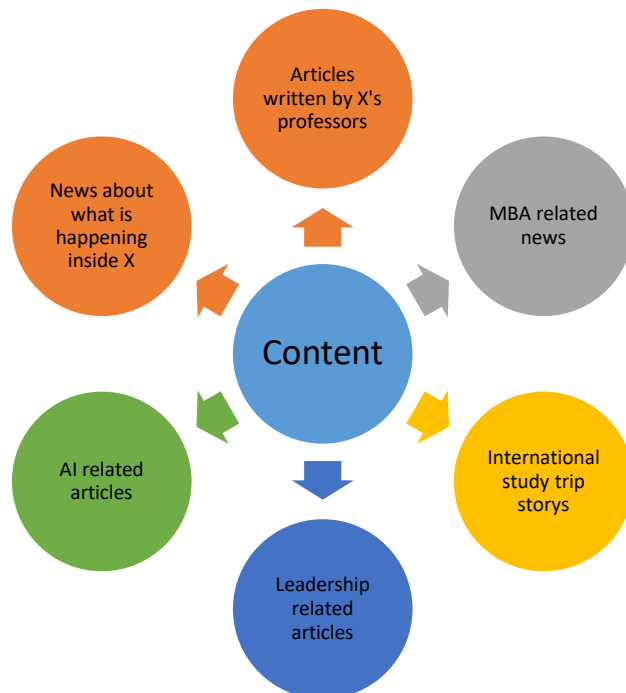


Figure 10. Interesting content mentioned by interviewees

6.2 Recommendation on how to improve marketing email's open rate

Many people might think that the time for email marketing is over and email marketing is not efficient anymore. Like it was mentioned by some of the interviewees in this research.

A2 had a strong opinion against email marketing, he shared his opinion as below:

Somehow, I feel that email marketing is not efficient anymore and it is dead. Maybe It is a good channel for retailers when they have a specific offer to customers or potentials. People spent most of their time in Social media rather than emails. (A2 2019)

At the end of interview A1 added that:

I am a bit old fashion. I would like to meet people f2f rather than email or skype. I appreciate if people spend time and meet me in person as well. In my opinion it is better if companies do not focus on having good email service rather focus on meeting people on person. It is important that they do not forget about people themselves. (A1 2019)

Section 2.7.2 of this research argued that there are more advantages in email marketing than disadvantages and section 2.7.3 discussed about why Email Marketing is not dead. Email marketing is still efficient if organizations using it in the right way.

Below is the list of suggestions that can help XX to improve its open rate and benefit from this marketing channel:

- Interesting and engaging subject line

As also one of the interviewees mentioned, subject line has a massive impact on the email open rate. Moreover, 47% of marketing professionals test various email topics to improve their emails' performance. A good subject line should raise the curiosity in the receiver and should be interesting enough to make the recipient open his email. Below is some recommendation to write a catchy email subject line:

- Keep it as short as possible, long subject lines are not mobile friendly and as 77% of email open device are mobiles is crucial to keep subject line characters less than 50.
- Create a persuasive question, asking question is a great way to spice up an email subject. This is one of the ways that businesses can raise the curiosity in their audience.
- Make it personalized, using people's name or location in the subject adds feeling of respect and care to the email. Researches show that emails that has first name in their subject are having higher click-through rates than the others.

- Create a sense of importance, using phrases such “Act now!” can help persuade readers to act.
- Use numbers, using data and numbers to make an email noticeable. (Allen O 2019)
- Personalizing the email by pointing receiver’s name directly
Researches has shown that emails that are including the receiver’s name had higher click-through rates than the one without.
- Targeted email
Having a segmented list is having a significant impact on open rate. Sending the same email to your entire list can be relevant for some of them while it is not for the others.
- Format the email for mobile devices.
Researches shows that more than 75% of people read their emails via their smartphones. In addition, over 60% of them delete the email immediately if it is not mobile friendly. Using shorter sender name and subject, adjust the email preview text with mobile and optimized the format, are some of the technics of having mobile friendly emails.
- Besides the above-mentioned points, Send emails from a person, not a company, Consider the best time for sending the emails and Keep the data up to date are the other elements that is good to be consider to increasing the open rate. (Allen O 2019)

7 Conclusion

As was mentioned earlier, marketing plays an essential role in the organization’s survival. Without marketing, companies cannot send their message out to the world. Marketing help businesses to build their brand awareness as well as tell people how their product or services can make life easier. It also helps sales to sell and drive revenue to the company. After understanding the importance of marketing, next step is to find the right channel to use for reaching the target audience. Nowadays there are various ways and channels for marketing. Marketing professionals need to discover in which platform their target markets are and use that for reaching out to them.

The goal of this research was to investigate whether the channel that the case company is using was suitable for them or not. Moreover, the aim was giving suggestions and recommendations on how they can improve their relationship with their clients. The research started with creating the research questions and establishing the theory foundation. After

having a several meeting with the commissioner, author and case company together decided on the main research question that the researcher was going to focus on. The theoretical framework of this thesis concentrated on building a good foundation for the research and interviews.

The author gained a deep understanding on digital and segmented marketing as well as customer engagement through building the theoretical framework which further helped her with creating interview questions. Candidates all voluntarily decided to participate in the interviews and all of them agreed to give their honest opinion in answering the questions. With the promise, that they will stay anonyms. Even though, author could not find many participants for her research, the outcome was successful and helped researcher learn about the tactics of digital marketing.

The main finding regarding case company's email marketing strategy was that, most of the emails that they are sending out remains unopen and unread. Due to this some were thinking that email marketing might not be the best tool for them to engage with their clients, while others had natural opinion. One of the challenges for XX was that, they do not have targeted email marketing. Same email is sent to all the customers without considering their stage and field of studies. The first ingredient that case company needs is a segmented marketing list. Dividing the list into new student and near graduate students as their interests and focus area is completely different, will benefit them enormously. Other recommendations were about considering having monthly newsletter rather than sending emails on ad hoc bases. Furthermore, XX needs to utilize other practices to increase their email open rate and the researcher carried out an online research, in order to discover other approaches that can help them with this matter.

Entire period of this research process was a learning journey for the author. Working on this thesis improved author's knowledge on digital and modern marketing. She was able to strength her conversational skill in order to perform interviews as well as her analytical skills to collect and analyse the information that she gained for this research.

Beside these theoretical skills, improving her time management skill enabled her to accomplish this thesis. She learned how to prioritize the tasks, think ahead, and stay motivated even though it was not always easy. The knowledge that she gained during this research not only helped her to perform this thesis but also helped in her professional and business life.

For further research in this subject, the authors suggestions would be to conduct competitive analysis for XX's email marketing strategy. Analysing competitor website provides a clear understanding of the gaps in their email marketing campaigns.

To conclude, this learning experience supported author to trust her personal and professional capabilities and self-confidence that she could not have gained without completing this study.

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9 Appendix: Interview questions

1	Do you remember how you heard about X for the first time?
2	How long ago was that?
3	Can you please tell me about your experience before becoming a client? Have you attended the info meeting? Did you download our brochure?
4	Do you remember how often did you receive emails from X before becoming client? How often are you receiving now?
5	How satisfied have you been with the emails that you have been receiving? Do you think that the content that you are seeing in your emails are relevant?
6	If you were less than totally satisfied, what could we have done to serve you better?
7	If we would have options in our subscription that you could choose from the information that you would like to receive from X, what would you choose
8	What do you want to see in emails? Content? What interest you more?
9	How often do you prefer to get emails?
10	What is your preferred language for receiving emails? FIN/ENG
11	Can you please tell me an example of bad or good customer experience that you have with X?