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**DEVELOPMENT OF DIRECT SALES FORCE TRAINING**

Case Beautyko

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## ABSTRACT

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This thesis was commissioned by Beautyko Import Oy, founded in December 2017 which imports South-Korean cosmetic brands in Finland as well as in 5 European countries. In addition to importing company operates on B2B and B2C sections, in B2C sales happens both through e-commerce and direct selling. Thesis focuses on developing B2C sales regarding direct sales model that company implemented in late 2019. Objective of the study was to find out what kind of support and training do independent sales force need especially in the beginning of their operations as well as how those needs should be met and what company has to take into consideration in order to do that.

Knowledge base for the study was obtained through literature review from relevant secondary sources regarding South-Korean cosmetic markets, sales, direct sales in special focus and sales management. To obtain primary data for the research a questionnaire was conducted in the form of online survey. Survey was targeted to current independent sales force. Qualitative analysis was done to survey data using content analysis and discourse analysis.

Results from the survey indicated that needs for support and training vary depending how long has an individual been working as an independent salesperson. Furthermore, data revealed underlying issue concerning management reactions when faced with negative situation or feedback. Thus, impacting on the willingness to raise issues or give any sort of feedback that could be understood as a critique. Results also indicated varying factors that motivate individuals and how some practices inside the company regarding competition impact on the level of motivation.

Suggested development ideas were to enhance internal communication practises as well as clarifying management roles in a way that sales force would know who to contact and in which matters. Further suggestions were made regarding ways to enhance motivation of sales force by equalizing opportunity to win competitions. Suggested ideas of sales force training were to add variation to the contents to match differing needs of the sales force as well as to utilize potential in learning from peers by an allowing individual to show in which manner they sell in in-home sales event.

Further measures could be to expand the number of respondents, further research internal communication practices and study to possible impacts of implementation and development regarding sales force training.

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Keywords: direct selling, sales force training, sales management, customer relationship management, communication

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Commissioner

This thesis was commissioned by Finnish import and distribution company called Beautyko Import Oy, later referred to as Beautyko. Company was founded in December 2017 by its CEO Jenni Ahokas and it is a family owned company that is currently operating from Helsinki (Ahokas 2020a, cited 5.2.2020.) Beautyko is currently importing three brands from South-Korea and distributes them to 5 different countries in Baltic area. Company's core ideology and roots are in the passion for Korean cosmetics – their effectiveness and affordability (Ahokas, 2020b, cited 7.4.2020.)

Company's sales conducts of B2B and B2C, and as of late 2019 business started to branch out their B2C sales by launching direct sales concept. By the end of February 2020 company has acquired over 60 independent salespersons (Facebook 2020, cited 25.2.2020). Some of the more notable customers in business to business section are for example S-Group and Kärkkäinen. These collaborations have enabled imported brand to be available in every Prisma and in larger S-markets as well as in the respective online stores. In 2018 S-Group possessed 46,4% of total market share in Finnish grocery retail business (Päivittäistavarakauppa ry. Cited 4.3.2020).

Regarding this thesis independent sales force and independent salesperson refer to individuals that have a contract with commissioning company, which provides commission fee out of everything that they have sold. It grants sales force a permission to use marketing material provided by company as well as to retail brands that commissioner imports from South-Korea.

## 1.2 Objective of the thesis

Research problem was formulated in co-operation with commissioner. With their direct sales operation, started in late 2019, growing rapidly company faced situation where recruited people were with variety of background in terms of sales experience and education. Without the knowledge of how much interest independent sales concept would gain, additionally it was difficult to determine the kind of support and tools that sales force might need to get started. From this problem following research questions were formulated:

1. What kind of support do independent sales force need in their early sales activities?
2. How the needs of sales force should be met, and which things company has to take into account in order to do that?

Part of the information provided in this study comes directly from author's own personal experience as a representative of said sales force, which enhances the interest towards the topic of this thesis.

Structure of the study is as follows: first chapter of theses covers a phenomenon surrounding Korean cosmetic trend to provide reasoning as for why it has become a visible part of Finnish beauty scheme. Second chapter focuses on relevant terms and themes of selling, sales management as well as the traits desired in good sales personnel. Following this chapter, the reader will be taken through the research methodology used in this thesis reporting, ensuring that reader understands terms and ways used in research process. Two final chapters describe both the results and analysis of said results and conclude thesis process and its findings, discuss possible suggestions based on the research. Followed by these final chapters are a list of references and attachments for additional information.

### **1.3 Korean cosmetics as a phenomenon**

Korea and its cosmetics have risen as one of the major trends within the past decade. This chapter examines the phenomenon and markets behind it. The purpose of this chapter is to give background to reader about the market that commissioning company operates in and how it differentiates from other beauty market.

Korean cosmetics, or k-beauty as it is commonly known, is a term that covers large variety of cosmetic products and brands originated from South-Korea (Wood 2016, cited 6.4.2020). Country is one of the ten largest beauty markets – personal care and beauty industry and its market in this context includes: skin care, hair care and colour cosmetics – in the world and has been growing continuously for nearly a decade. The estimated market size in the area for 2018 was 16,68 billion USD (Statista Research Department 2020b, cited 6.4.2020.) when in comparison beauty market size in Europe is 107,4 billion euros, which translates into 117,098 22 billion USD (OP Ryhmä 2020, cited 15.4.2020; Sabanoglu 2019, cited 10.4.2020.) Global market growth in 2018 was

assessed to be 5,5% and leading category in cosmetic industry is skin care, which has been projected to continue holding first place in category. European consumption during the year in skincare products has been 20,4 billion euros (Sabanoglu 2019, cited 10.4.2020.). Portion of the growth can be explained by assistance that industry has gotten out of social media channels and influencers, as many of the brands have gotten large amounts of views through popular platforms (Shahbandeh 2020, cited 6.4.2020).

South-Korea is known for unconventional ingredients like salmon oil, snail slime (Statista Research Department 2020, cited 9.4.2020) and starfish extract in skin care products, 10-step skin care routine starting with double-cleansing, one of the most popular South-Korean skin care product in mass markets is sheet mask, which can be purchased almost everywhere in South-Korea (Wood 2016, cited 6.4.2020). Availability, both in terms of price and location, is essential to the philosophy that everyone deserves a chance for skin care.

## **2 SELLING AND SALES MANAGEMENT**

There is an abundance of literature trying to capture the essence of selling and theories of how it should be done, David Jobber and Geoff Lancaster (2015, 4) have simplified the nature of it being that selling exists to make a transaction happen. Its role, just as many aspects in and around it has both evolved and changed over time – still the simplistic version of it holds some truth. Selling means an array of situations and activities related to transaction of goods or services such as industrial selling, export or import specific sales actions and so on, which is why it is important to make clear distinction between appropriate terminology. In this chapter relevant definitions of selling and sales management will be drawn according to the study topic.

Contemporary selling has made the necessary skillset of a sales force more diverse than ever. Even more so in the cases such as commissioning company's where sales force work for the enterprise, although in an entrepreneurial way. This means that an individual is mostly managing their own business operation with the advice and contact of the company employees. Principals in selling are rather simple; salesperson must listen and focus on the customer, find out what they want and need – and not to press customer to buy something they do not want. In addition, salesperson should ask questions that may assist customer towards successful purchase decision. By pressing on some other agenda than what customer wants and needs, can result into losing potential future customer. (Jobber & Lancaster, 2015, 5-7, 14)

### **2.1 Direct selling**

According to Direct Selling Association, (DSA), (2020, cited 24.4.2020) direct selling is a business model used by businesses of all sizes to advertise products and services to end-user. Kotler and Keller (2016, 552.) describe direct selling as a practise, where a salesperson visits customers home where host has invited interested party. Salesperson can show products as well as let individuals try them out before customers make a purchase decision. Independent salesperson selling in this manner acts as a distributor. For each item they distribute, they earn a portion of a selling price. Usually this is as a percentage of the price. Additionally, as direct selling is closely related to direct marketing practices which can have different forms such as potential customer wishing to see a catalogue or inviting independent salesperson to their home. Direct marketing is an effort to



maintain and expand relationships between a salesperson and a customer. (Jobber & Lancaster 2015, 317)

In a direct selling, sales force works independently and have more freedom regarding business operations. There is a loose company guideline, which does not restrict too much operational decision making. Flexibility on working hours as well as low entry costs makes direct selling lucrative to variety of people. Traditional direct sales company that has operated since 1967: Oriflame opts to offer new recruits support network through utilizing more experienced independent salesforce overseeing and advising in the beginning of their career (Oriflame Cosmetics 2020, cited 22.4.2020). This kind of skill multiplication method is a common practise with multi-level marketing companies that aim for individual to have recruits under themselves, as a downline. (Direct Selling Association 2020, cited 24.4.2020)

When discussing sales activities in the context of this thesis, as well as sales activities often related to direct sales can be defined in many ways. Depending on an individual, sales activities include, getting familiarized with brands, products, obtaining customers, creating suitable social media accounts ready to be used. Salesperson introduces themselves with social media if they are not familiar with it as it is, in the purpose of creating content. Arranging direct sales party or event, selling in trade fares and, if it is part of company agenda, recruitment. Another part of these sales activities are ordering and delivery of products, assisting with online orders, demonstrations and referrals of products, and payment collection, billing, possible taxation etc. depending on regulations of a specific country as well as the company that independent salesperson is working for.

### **Success factors in selling**

Understanding what makes a person successful in selling is one of the key aspects of sales management according to Jobber and Lancaster (2015, 7). One of the skills of successful salesperson have been identified to be *emotional intelligence*; a term referring to one's ability to recognize emotions as well as understand them, both in relation to oneself and others. Crucial part of emotional intelligence is to be able to use empathy, social skills, and motivation on behalf of themselves as well as those around them. Essentially, high skills in emotional intelligence makes humans able to read and utilize signals in social situations, and to react accordingly (Akers & Porter 2018, cited 14.4.2020).

Common misunderstanding is that all successful salespersons share similar bubbly and extrovert personalities. Those successful in selling are comfortable being themselves and know how to employ traits that they possess to maximum benefit. Essentially being good at something is about knowing oneself well in different scenarios. There are factors that can impact on chosen selling approach of individual. This kind of factors are for example whether individual is prone to act or to reflect, to focus on details or to a big picture. Factors that impact on selling approach that salesperson chooses have their own strengths as well as weaknesses, so rather than to draw conclusions on which aspect is more desirable one should focus on knowing what aspects impact in their actions and how. Similarly, our beliefs impact on our behaviour, by focusing on what we believe that we are not able to do, may result into us being not able to do that. Being aware of these thought and action patterns allows individuals to change them, and therefore improve them. (Cassel & Bird 2014, chapter 1, 4)

Ohai (2005, 1-2), describes sales coaching as being focused on uncovering salesperson's own skills and strengths through three primary points: observation, motivation, and developmental feedback. Observation gives person more profound view on salesperson's performance in sales activities. Observation can be done by tailing salesperson for a full day or by targeting to certain activities. Motivation in terms of sales coaching means that coach knows internal and external motivation factors of a salesperson. Cassell and Bird (2014, chapter 5) argue that coaching does not necessarily require individual to have a coach but can take place via the use self-development tools to improvement. This development can take place in the form of a self-assessment after sales activity (e.g. contacting customer, direct sales event). In addition to assessing themselves, salesperson can gain valuable insight from getting their peers to assess them. Peer assessment can be done in many ways, one of which is showing video to a peer where sales activities happen, or to co-operate and have multiple salespersons in same trade fair.

### **Customer oriented selling approach**

From the buyer's perspective preferred qualities in sales personnel listed by Jobber and Lancaster (2015, 240-241) would be to have knowhow of products and services, good communication skills, problem solving skills, capability to both understand and meet customer needs, fast and reliable service. When it comes to situation involving sales, variables may differ largely, it has been found that some basic steps stay the same in regards of what sales force does. This is known as personal selling process, further referred to as PSP. (Hair et al. 2010, 92; Roman et al. 2002, 1344)



*FIGURE 1. The Six Steps in effective selling (Kotler & Keller 2016, 673)*

Steps included in PSP are displayed in Figure 1. There are different opinions between sources about the number of steps as well as how the model should be presented. In regards of the topic of this study, the decision of using six step model was deemed to be enough.

1. Prospecting and qualifying: this step starts the PSP; it aims to maintain sales capacity. Prospecting means that salesperson finds potential customers through existing customer base by acquiring names and phone numbers. To qualify this potential customer must pass following qualifications: need or want to purchase must exist, potential customer has to have the authority to make purchase decision (e.g. must be of age if individual), closely related is that potential customer needs to have money. After being qualified customer is one of the trusted ones that salesperson can approach when sales are otherwise slowed down.
2. Preapproach: in this step focus is in obtaining knowledge about the prospect, and their needs. This can happen for example by sending catalogue or news article about products beforehand to customer, thus planting seeds for beginning relationship. Another important step in this stage is to decide in which manner the contact will be taken, phone call, email, face-to-face. After these measures have been taken is time to decide the strategy of the actual sales.
3. Presentation and demonstration. This step is crucial especially in in-home sales event. Salesperson describes the qualities of the product to buyer using FABV-approach; acronym comes from words features, advantages, benefits, and value. Salesperson point out everything that product would bring to customer if obtained, pitch is supposed to be captivating and relevant. In terms of direct selling demonstration is opportunity for consumer to test products and see how to use them in appropriate way.
4. Overcoming objections: fourth step is essentially about salesperson overcoming objections, that consumer presents, while resisting purchase. There are many kinds of objections that sales force may face; about money, products, company ethics, news that

relate to company or market etc. Importance of maintaining affirmative approach is the key to handle objections in professional manner, as well as to ask questions that shed light on what the concern is. This shows that salesperson cares about customer and their concerns regarding product. When personnel are trained to face objections, positive outcome is more likely, as personnel does not get overwhelmed by questions or initial rejection, and thus give up early on.

5. Closing means signs that customer gives, after which there are no actions or comments forwarding situation. At the closing salesperson asks for order, repeats crucial points of agreement. Customer is perhaps offered choices considering payment or delivery method.
6. Follow-up and maintenance final step of the six is extremely important considering customer satisfaction. In this phase salesperson takes care of details such as delivery time, and makes follow/up call or message to check that customer is happy with the condition where items arrived, or if necessary offers further help with how to use the product in a correct manner. This action further cements the relationship between salesperson and consumer as well as raises the likelihood of customer coming back. (Kotler & Keller 2016, 673-674.)

### **Sales channels**

Like many other fields, selling has undergone tremendous changes within the past decades due to digitalization. Social media is an example of that change, which has become a useful tool in attempt of reaching new and existing audience, as well as to analyse reached audience's interests (Jobber & Lancaster 2015, 317.). Recent statistics show that within 10 most used platforms globally there are Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, Weixin and Instagram. Usage of these services go beyond economical statuses and geographic borders. Top 10 used apps show diverse in the purpose of usage as well (Clement 2020, cited 14.4.2020.). These statistics show clear indication that multiple channels are available to be used with for different types of content (e.g. video, photographs, text). These channels can aid salesperson in a direct sales process.

The word influencer typically refers to a person that has power to alter audience's behaviour (Cambridge University Press 2020, cited 13.4.2020). Within a past decade social media has impacted on what platforms are used by social media influencers; from popular bloggers and Youtubers to trending stars on Instagram, Twitter and so on, depending on their audience and interests. Social media has enabled chance to basically anyone to become an influencer, yet to reach officially recognizable level, influencer must have certain number of followers to be called an

influencer. In Finland, this level is at its lowest 1000 followers (nano influencer) followed by 1000-5000 (micro influencer), and larger number than that (macro influencer). Limits differ largely between different countries based on the amount of potential audience sizes (Halonen 2019, 13-14, 20.)

The fact that practically anyone with content idea and willingness, and necessary skills to become content producer, and moreover to become influencer, opens the possibility of regular people to utilize tools such as Facebook or Instagram to advertise or promote services and products to whom they know, as well as to grow audience further than that. Important skill for any successful social media influencer is to ability to produce interesting content that resonates with their audience. From marketing perspective, the most valuable quality in influencer is, whether they can inspire target audience and therefore impact choices that audience makes. Influencer marketing is a collaboration between company and influencer that aims to increase both visibility and sales for product or service. Influencer marketing is paid visibility that utilizes both influencer and their audience, as influencer may either get payment or free product. Usually collaboration includes written contract, which obliges influencer to produce content that involves company's product or service (Halonen 2019,15, 39.) Selling at a workplace and to friends and family is a common practice for direct sales, when salesperson does sales as a hobby or as a secondary income source, this kind of selling happens often through face-to-face interaction (Direct Selling Association 2020, cited 24.4.2020). Other options for face-to-face selling are different events and trade fares. Prices for participation vary greatly between different cities, but essentially if there are multiple independent salespersons in same area sharing costs and revenues could be one option.

## **2.2 Sales management**

Jobber and Lancaster (2015, 14-16) describe the role of sales management as follows: to manage sales force by organising, arranging, and controlling sales functions. Managing sales personnel in 21<sup>st</sup> century requires more than being a distant manager; personality traits such as listening, and coaching are important as well. On top of managing salespeople, manager observers' direct sales functions and profitability. Some of the key responsibilities that sales manager has are motivating sales force, recruitment, and training, establishing targets and objectives of sales force as well as their evaluation.

Internal communication is defined as oral and written organisational communication that occurs both in physical and in virtual environment that is used for working. Internal communication includes communication flows both ways between personnel and management, as well as communication between individuals in personnel. In conclusion internal communication contains all the communication inside the company. Purpose for internal communication is to ensure that all parties have necessary information required to complete work tasks. Communication plays major role in building trust within company as well as in motivating personnel to reach at their best performance. Company has a reputation that shows to the outside but reflects on the inside as well in the form of increasing motivation and wellbeing. This in turn increases good reputation of the company communication flow in both ways strengthens both employer and employee. (Kortetjärvi-Nurmi & Murtola 2015, 60-62)

In company communication role of management is crucial as it is responsible of company communication and culture surrounding it. The purpose of management communication is that individuals have knowledge and understanding of company goals as well as the manners how those goals are being reached. Actions on management level determine the kind of communication style company executes within. At its best communication resembles an open conversation in which all parties are in unison. (Kortetjärvi-Nurmi & Murtola 2015, 63)

Customer relationship management, further referred to as CRM, aims to maintain relationship to a customer on a long term. Depending on a business field and size it may require focus of a single individual or a team of people to take care of a customer and their needs. CRM and relationship selling accompany each other closely. CRM as a concept has existed a long time and has therefore been affected by the technological advancements. (Jobber & Lancaster 2015, 6; Harrigan et al. 2015, 27) From the sales management point of view, especially larger companies, need to decide how customer oriented they are. For locally operating company it is easier to be customer centric as company can offer products and services according to customer's wishes. When company grows larger, they need to decide if their products and services will be offered to everyone without any area specifications. (Hair et al. 2010, 62) Somewhat similar targeting can be used with Beautyko as direct selling model works currently only in Finland, product range is similar throughout the country. If, however, they expand direct selling model to Europe this is something worth considering.

Key aspect of CRM is company's aim to maintain business relationship with customer repetitively over a lengthy period. In these long customer relationships both parties gain value as company manages to satisfy customer, thus superseding competitors. Additionally, repeatedly selling to same consumer or partner is cheaper than attempts to gain new one. Tendency usually leads companies to prefer long term relationships with customer or partner. This way of focusing on relational selling where company puts consumer to the centre, however, has its disadvantages like company becoming dependent on a certain partnership. Therefore, it is especially harmful on B2B selling. In regards of selling and CRM, salesperson collects and utilizes information about customer to better meet his or her needs as well as oversees the relationship between company and customer. (Hair et al. 2010, 67-71; Harrigan et al. 2015, 29).

Technological advancements make CRM applications available, integrated into social media tools commonly used, such as Facebook, with reporting and analysis available. Using these tools independent sales force has a possibility to follow customer engagement, but without knowledge of how to interpret the data and properly use the tools, a lot of significant data can go unnoticed. (Facebook 2020, cited 26.4.2020).

### **Sales training – importance and benefits**

Continuous sales training aims to enhance business operations both on short and long term. Such benefits are described by Hair, Anderson, Mehta and Babin (2010, 250) to be: enhanced working morale, more clarified roles within the organisation, more satisfied employees and fast-paced development on a short term, whereas on a long term; better control over sales people, enhanced customer relationships, less frequent change of sales people, increase in sales as well as higher overall profit. The requirements to establish training can be measured in time and monetary inputs, both of which increase in terms of profitability if training is successful.

Zoltners, Sinha & Zoltners (2001, 196-197) note how there is a clear difference between those in salesforce that have received training to those that have not – despite their original skill level. They also point out ways that successful training benefits customer, sales force and company. Key benefits for customer are that they trust salesperson, are willing to work with them, and salesperson brings additional value to customer while addressing their needs in a way that those needs are understood. This added value can be for example knowledge about products or assistance in purchase decision, quick reactions and suggested solution to a problem (e.g., wanted product is not available, but salesperson comes up with replacement or arranges item to be sent without

additional cost when it arrives). Impacts of successful training to sales force are feeling of confidence and preparedness while entering sales situation, awareness of trends that relate to industry. Confidence and preparedness in sales situation can come from Confidence and preparedness in sales situation can come from the fact that salesperson knows what they are selling, have gotten training into how to meet customer in the sales situation, what kind of language to use, how to argument and so on, Key impacts that company gains out of successful sales training is that company culture is understood and supported by the sales personnel, and change in personnel is minimized.

Factors that impact to salespersons need for sales training have been identified by Zoltners et al (2001, 200) as increased knowledge of customers as well as more demanding customers, new products, more varied product lines, e-commerce and technological advancements. Nowadays, information availability is crucial factor in selling. As knowledge about product ingredients is easily obtained by everyone, it may bring up situation where salesforce has less information than customer. Or that questions asked by customer are formed in a way, that additional confirmation or information is needed before answering. Similar situation can arise from technological advancements that for example create a phenomenon or bring new type of ingredient into public awareness that requires special knowledge to be used in a correct way. In these situations, salesforce may become unsure of their own capabilities or overwhelmed by questions. One example of this kind of major environmental change in selling, is previously mentioned COVID-19 pandemic, where many companies had to find out new ways to adapt to a situation where customers could no longer visit physically location where selling used to happen.

The components which make training successful are listed by Hair et al. (2010, 251) as follows: *comprehensive, customized, relevant, tied to measurable performance outcomes, motivational, reasonably paced, easy to test and measure, interactive, cost effective, embraced by management.* Roman et al. (2002, 1348-1349) remark that main contents of sales force training have stayed much the same over time: knowledge of products, markets and sales techniques have been emphasized alongside of understanding the customer needs and asking the right questions. Balance between these themes is crucial, and it provides sales force with both customer-oriented approach and increased sales performance. Depending which of these results company wants to focus on leads to potentially different inputs required.



Nowadays sales training can be arranged in many ways. One of which is digitally available sales training, which can save significant amount of resources as well as make participation possible for those as well that could not otherwise take part due to distance, or other similar reason. Using digital tools to save seminar in a video form for example therefore makes participation more equal between salesforce. During the time this thesis was written company has kept one sales training in January 2020 that was in Helsinki. Further trainings were planned to take place in May 2020 via Zoom, due to COVID-19 that had forced companies to change their practices considering ways of working and training personnel.

### 3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this chapter research methods will be covered with justification over why certain methods of data gathering and analysis have been chosen. Followed by portion of the chapter that covers reliability and validity of the study. Chapter is completed with description of analysis methods used in the study.

All methods are not suitable for every case, so the methods must be chosen so that the nature of the research and its problem meets the method. Research methods are a set of tools and guidelines, to help researcher in solving a problem. These guidelines serve the study in variety of ways, such as to explain the logic behind research and to clarify means of reporting in a way that a study can be continued or repeated afterwards (Ghauri & Grønhaug 2005, 41).

In research process data collection is determined by which type of data is needed: usually required type is decided based on the research problem and questions. Data types are generally primary and secondary data or combination of both (Ghauri & Grønhaug 2005, 108). In this study primary data is needed as commissioning company is doing a pioneer work by bringing Korean cosmetics available to customers through direct selling in Nordic countries, however secondary data about direct selling, as well as companies utilizing such strategy, and sales management, is available and comparable, and is thus used in this study.

Primary data can be collected in many ways, three main collection methods named by Wilson (2010, 136) are interviews, questionnaires, and observation. All of which can be executed in various ways. And there are both advantages and disadvantages in using primary data in a research, Ghauri and Grønhaug (2005, 102-103) describe data collected being specific to the study done, and thus it reflects better the objectives set for the research. Furthermore, primary data helps to answer questions regarding attitude and opinions. Main disadvantage of using primary data is the time consumption in the process of obtaining the data, as well as the importance of using tools that will not endanger the reliability of the study.

Secondary data means data that already exists during that moment in time. Such data can be in many forms: internet websites, documents, journals, reports, and textbooks to name a few. Using secondary data can be a risk in terms of reliability of the study, however with correct evaluation this

data can be beneficial. Evaluation can be done by considering the authority of the source, its purpose in relation to the research, what kind of audience it has been directed to and the form of the information (Wilson 2010, 169-170). The advantages of using secondary data on the other hand described by Ghauri and Grønhaug (2005, 95-97) is that they can save significant amount of researcher's time, as data can be corroborated easily, and it is accessible. It can help to broaden and shape the research problem. Secondary data is a valid starting point for almost every research done.

Usually researches are divided into two types: quantitative and qualitative method. Main differences between the two are different questions that they pose; quantitative method aims to confirm hypotheses, produces numerical data, often uses surveys and other structured methods. Qualitative method seeks to explore phenomena through describing e.g. individual experience and explaining relationships. Data produced via qualitative method is usually in text format and study design is more flexible compared to quantitative study (Mack & Woodsong 2005, cited 10.3.2020). Ghauri and Grønhaug name in their book about business research methods, published 2005, research design types as following: exploratory, descriptive, and causal with respective characteristics. Exploratory design is advised when problem is not well structured, as is in this study. There was secondary data available on the subject, which has been used in this study alongside empirical data, that was to be obtained in a focus group interview. Interview method had to be changed due to the current COVID-19 pandemic, and official recommendations regarding how to avoid it (THL 2020. Cited 29.3.2020).

There are variety of ways to do sampling including probability and non-probability methods. (Blaxter, Hughes & Tight 2010, 169-170; Ghauri & Grønhaug 2005, 145-147) In this study population, out of which the sample is taken, refers to an independent sales force of a commissioning company.

Reliability of the research measure how successfully the study has been carried out according to its research plan as well as if its interpretations could be drawn in somewhat similar matter by another researcher following the patterns of previous research. Whereas validity is considered as a measure of how well methods and techniques of research relate to objectives of the study (Blaxter et al. 2010, 245).

## Questionnaire

Questionnaires are one of the most used research techniques and can be used both in written and oral form, and be targeted to either an individual person with special expertise, or to many people in order to find out general opinions out of a population. Self-completed survey methods can be done on paper or in electronic form. Nowadays electronic surveys have mostly superseded traditional paper surveys, as electronic devices are more available in everyday use with the average of 7 electronic devices; such as mobile phones or computers, in a Finnish household in 2018 (Statista Research Department 2020, cited 5.4.2020), and as a link to a survey can be sent easily via e-mail or a message to one another. Questionnaire was chosen as a technique for this research due to it being less time consuming compared to other methods. However, downside of this method compared to an interview is that respondent cannot ask clarifications. In an interview, respondent and interviewer are both present where respondent can clarify questions from the interviewer if necessary. One aspect for surveys where special attention is needed therefore is wording of questions that must be thought very carefully. Questionnaire that is self-administrated, can result respondent to get frustrated and leave questionnaire before it is finished. Surveys are also widely used in research which may affect to people's willingness to participate in it at all. (Blaxter et al 2010, 201; Brace 2008, 29-31).

For this research, the questionnaire is constructed based on secondary data provided by respective articles and literary sources. Questionnaire has been created by using Webropol. This tool was chosen due to its easiness and integrated reporting qualities (Webropol 2020, cited 15.4.2020). Target group for the survey consists of Beautyko sales force, as the research aims to gain insight over the needs to train this salesforce. Due to this quite specific target group, questionnaire was published in Facebook group which is used as one of the main channels to inform sales force. At the time of posting the survey link to Facebook group of independent sales force, it had the total of 76 members, out of which 74 were part of independent sales force (Facebook 2020, cited 5.5.2020). Questionnaire was answered by 13 respondents and it was open to answers between 5<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> of May 2020. Period was rather short due to changes in methodology, from a group interview to a questionnaire, during the thesis process.

While constructing questionnaire Ghauri and Grønhaug (2005, 129-131) suggest using simple and concise language to respondent to understand the questions, as well as not to put unrealistic demands on respondent's knowledge. Questions should also be formulated so that they do not offer alternative that does not provide any valuable information, such as 'I don't know'. Questions

should never be suggestive, or direct respondent's answer in any way. Order of the questions is also important, if difficult questions are placed first, respondent may not answer the questionnaire at all. This can also be the result if the layout of the questionnaire is too frightening from the perspective of the respondent (e.g. too lengthy questionnaire). Language for the questionnaire was chosen to be same as native language of sales force. For this research report and analysis of the results, translation for questions were added to make it easier for the reader. Questionnaire consisted of both open and closed questions, multiple choice questions, as well as options where respondent could add options.

Analysis is needed to get meaningful information out of raw data, this can be done in numerous ways out of which the first steps like editing and coding are commonly used in many researches. Some steps are more common to qualitative research and vice versa, but the two are not exclusive. (Ghuri & Grønhaug 2005,157-159). In this research sample size itself is not such an important factor. For questions that are either closed or multiple-choice type content analysis is used to find patterns in the data obtained. (Wilson 2010, 265-267) Analysis is utilized by focusing on recurring words and their significance. Grouping is utilized by using the time spent working for the company as a significant marker.

## 4 RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

This chapter covers survey questions that have been translated for this report, results and analysis of the data gathered through internet questionnaire. Questionnaire had total of 9 questions, some of them multiple choice questions, some open ended with possibility to answer with one's own words. Questions of the survey are visible in the appendixes 1 and 2 at the end of this report.

During time that answers were collected survey was opened 73 times through the link in Facebook group. By the time collection of answers ended the post had been seen by 59 people in a group (Facebook 2020, cited 11.5.2020.) Total amount of responses was 13. None of the respondents that started answering closed questionnaire before finishing survey. At the beginning of the survey some background information was obtained by asking respondents if they worked as an independent salesperson part- or full-time as well as for how long had they worked for Beautyko at the time of answering. Both questions had options to choose from.

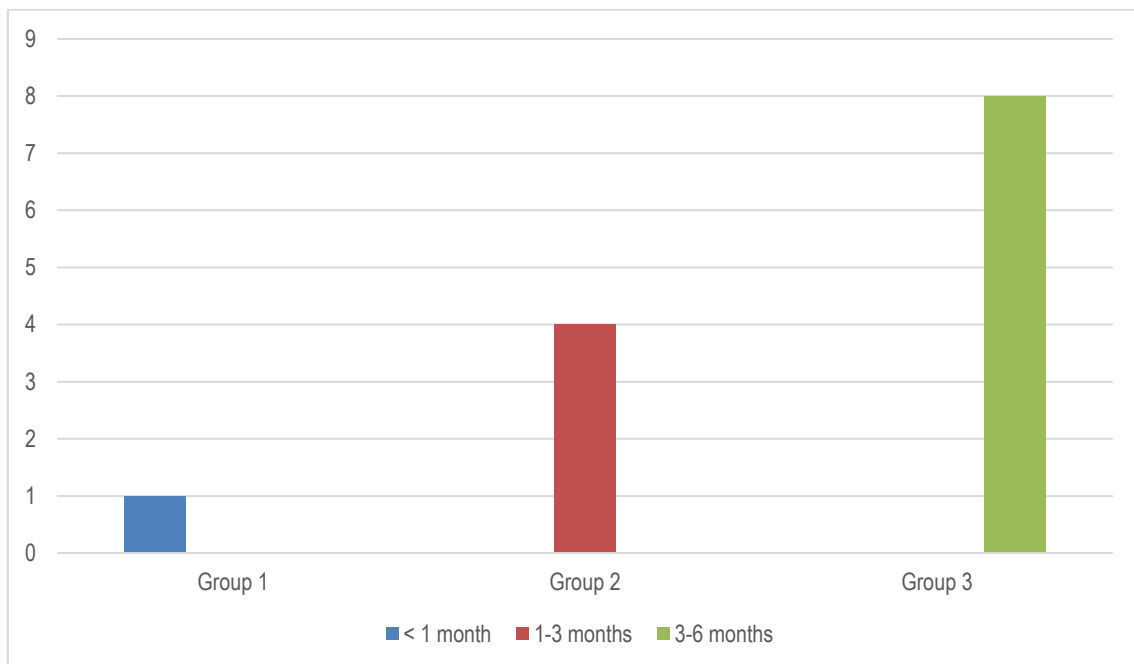


FIGURE 2. How long have you been working as an independent salesperson for Beautyko?

First question was about working as an independent salesperson for Beautyko. Respondents could choose from two options: full-time and part-time. All 13 respondents answered questions regarding background information. 100% of the respondents chose an option of working part-time in the first

question. Second question about respondents' background in regards their work at Beautyko shed light on the length that they had been working for the company. Figure 2 shows that respondents had three options to choose from. Options were as follows: less than a month chosen by one respondent, 1-3 months, and 3-6 months. 4 of the respondents had been at Beautyko 1-3 months. Majority had been part of independent sales force for 3-6 months, gaining the option 7 responses. Questions 3-9 were analysed in groups 1-3 based on the answers given to second question. There is variation between the length that respondents had been working for the company. This gives more insight to the commissioner on how respondents views have changed between those that had recently begun as a salesperson, to those who had been part of the sales for longer period.

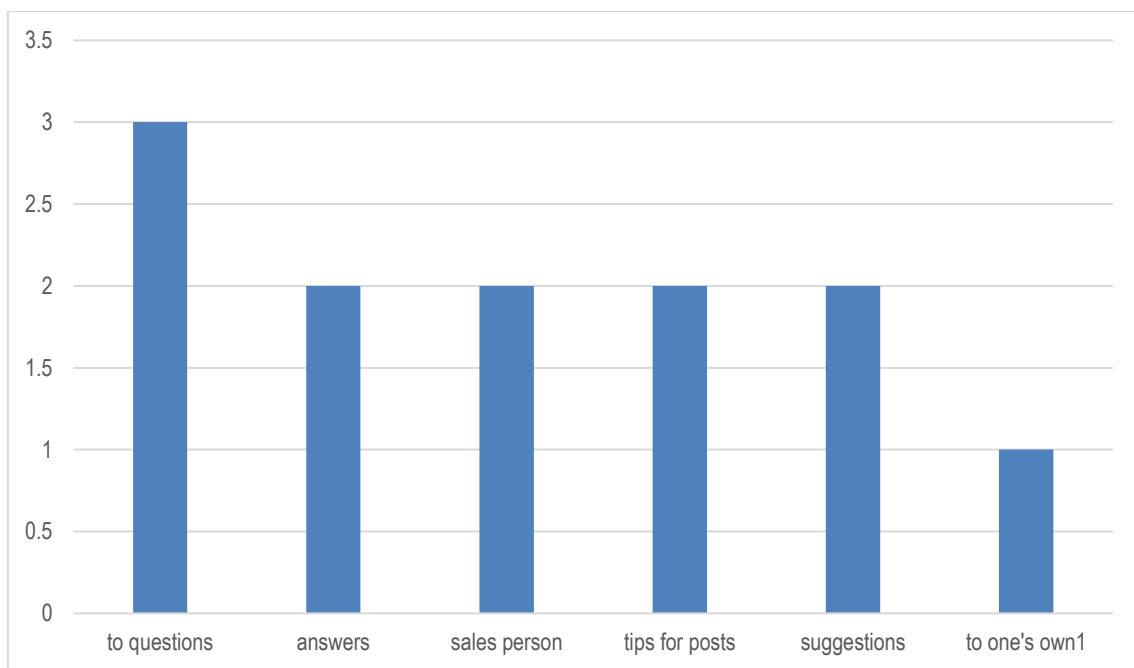


FIGURE 3. Most mentioned words in answers to third question.

Questions 3.-5. of the survey were open-ended questions regarding the support and problems encountered by an independent salesforce. Open ended questions were analysed based on answers given to the second question. Aim is to find out if time spent as an independent salesperson made difference between given answers. Third question asked respondents to describe the support they had gotten from the company. This question collected the total of 10 responses. Words most frequently used in responses are displayed in figure 4, those words in order from the most used are as follows: *to questions* (3), *answers* (2), *sales person* (2), *tips for posts* (2), *suggestions* (2), *to one's own* (1). Every respondent category based on answer to second question raised tips gotten from either salesforce or the company. Another common theme raised

by respondents was a written guide. Similar reactions from each category related to quick answers, which was one of the most frequently mentioned words among responses. Unlike those that had spent least time with company respondents in other categories noted post examples made by sales personnel manager as a form of support by company.

Fourth question asked respondents to describe support that they wished to gain but did not receive. Question gathered total of nine responses. All three categories had common themes such as more practical advice considering taxation and billing. Unlike from other groups from third one risen issues considering an equal opportunity to participate in training as well as issues in communication to management level when it comes to reactions when faced with form of critique. Some respondents reported discomfort when needed to give feedback, thus not wanting to do so, as well as feeling the lack of appreciation from the management level. Several reported difficulties of being able to reach management when facing issues with orders, or not knowing which channel to use to reach those on higher level. In the responses to this question third group raised concern of sales manager participating to sales competitions with sales force. This was a problem since person is part of the management, and more skilled compared to others in sales force, thus it is seen as unrealistic to try to win sales competition. As has been noted previously in this study the role of management in internal communication and communication culture of the company is crucial and impacts in motivation and identity of employees. (Kortetjärvi-Nurmi & Murtola 2015, 63)

Fifth and final open-ended question was answered 5 times and it asked respondents to describe problems that they had faced while working for Beautyko. Common issue raised by all groups was customer acquisition, especially in the begging of operations. Those in groups 1 felt unsure if customers remember to use the code, given to each in salesforce. Groups 2 and 3 reported suspicion towards products coming from potential customers. Multiple with lengthier background with company described the lack of knowledge regarding how much products are in store to be one of the main issues for their sales activity. COVID-19 was also reported as an issue, due to its impact on cancellations. Management reactions towards feedback was mentioned in responses to this question as well.

From the results in questions 4 and 5 it can be concluded that communication between salesforce and management could be improved, which in turn would improve the overall atmosphere of the company. Positive feedback towards sales personnel and working communication inside the



company have clear relation to sales force efficiency and therefore sales (Kortetjärvi-Nurmi & Murtola 2015, 60-62).

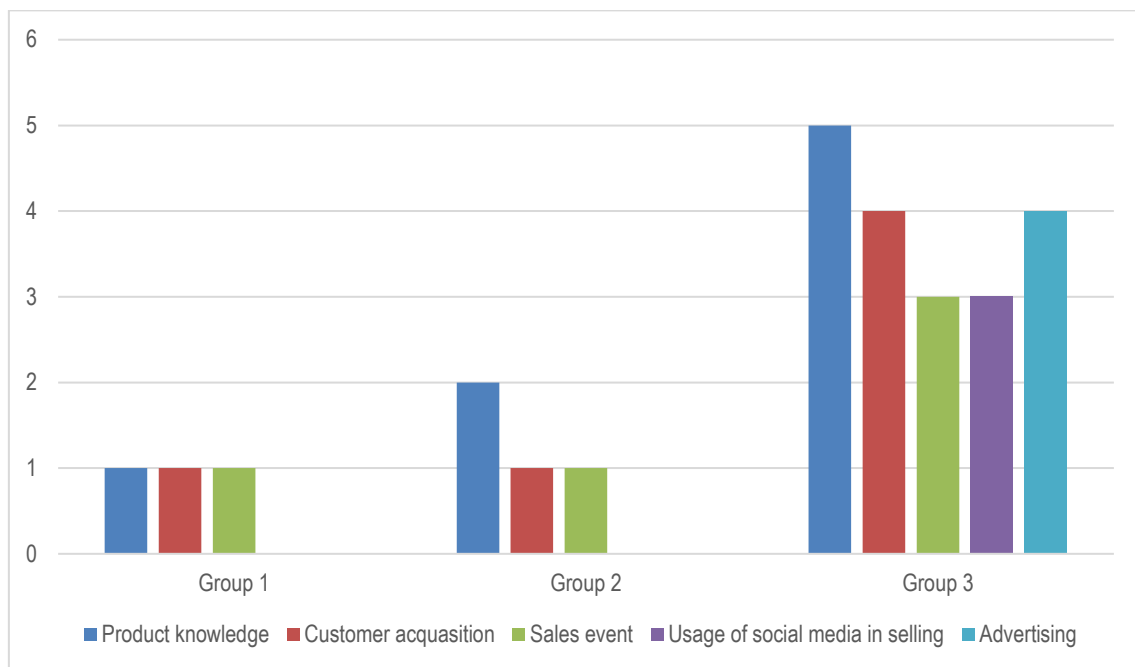


FIGURE 4. Answers given to question 6 shown by groups 1-3.

Questions 6.-7. were multiple choice questions, that included an option that allowed respondents to add something in their own words. In sixth question respondents were asked to choose options that best described the help and / or support that they wished to gain. Response options to survey question 6 (see appendix 3) were as follows: *customer acquisition, sales event, product knowledge, usage of social media in selling, advertising and something else, what?* Option mentioned last was not chosen by any respondent. Question was answered by 12 respondents, and total of chosen options was 26. When answers to second question were considered and answers divided to three groups based on time spent as a salesperson, those who had been working as an independent salesperson either less than one month or 1-3 months shared the type of answers given (see figure 4.). Only difference between groups 1 and 2 in terms of responses come from the number of people who chose options. In group 1 the only respondent chose three options; similar things were chosen by group 2 respondents as well. In third group, which included those that had worked for company for 3-6 months, had significantly more answers chosen than in other two groups. In addition to those options previously mentioned the usage of social media in selling and sales event was both chosen by 3 respondents. Four respondents chose advertisement as something they wished more support for. From these results conclusion can be drawn that when respondents had spent at least

3 months as part of an independent salesforce, variety in subjects that they wished more support for grew. Theoretical framework gathered from secondary sources support this finding from the perspective of continuous sales force training. By training salesforce of all levels: beginners as well as advanced individuals impacts positively in efficiency and results. (Zoltners et al. 2001, 196-197; Hair et al. 2010, 250).

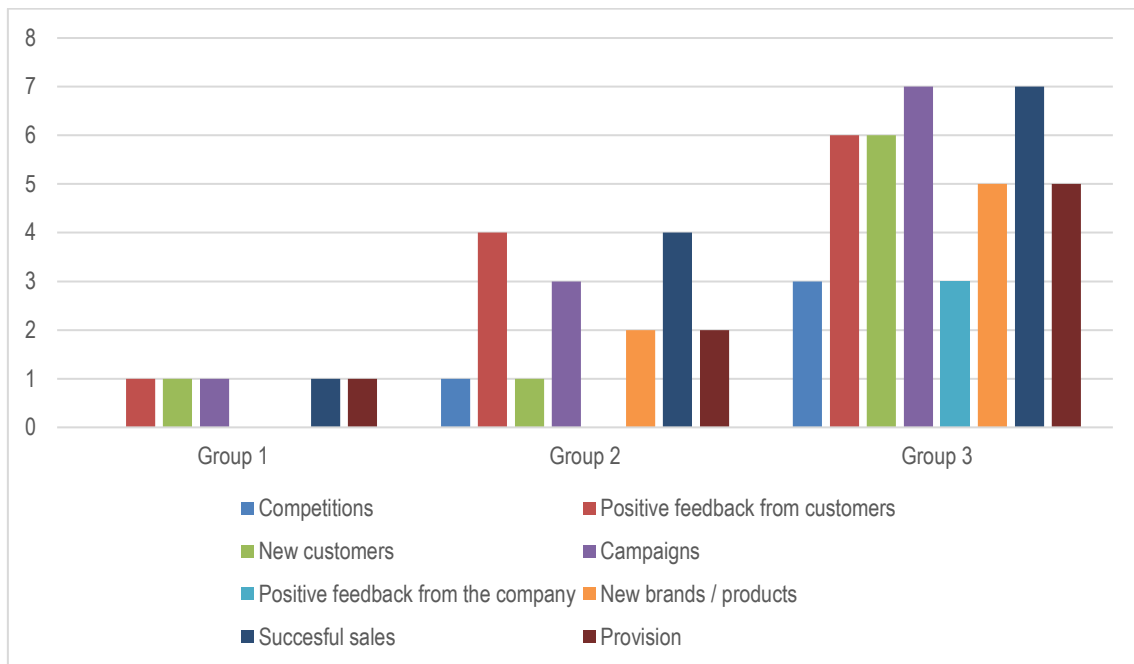


FIGURE 5. Motivating factors in selling.

Question 7. was multiple choice question with option of choosing to add option where respondent could add something in their own words. Purpose of this question was to find out what motivates salesforce to sell and how time spent as part of the salesforce impacts to answers. Options in figure 5 are the following: *competitions, positive feedback from customers, new customers, campaigns, positive feedback from the company, new brands / products, successful sales, provision*. The only group that did not choose competitions as a source of motivation was group 1. This can be either explained by high amounts required in sales to win the competition or by large amount of information that an independent salesperson must consume in the beginning of their career. Same reason may explain why groups 2 and 3 both report new brands and products motivating, when group 1 does not. In general, the most popular choices in what motivates sales personnel was campaigns, successful sales, and positive feedback from customers. These findings are clearly backed up by theoretical background gathered. Results indicate that only group 3 feels motivated

by positive feedback from the company. This may be explained by the importance of positive feedback and continuous sales force training in motivation.

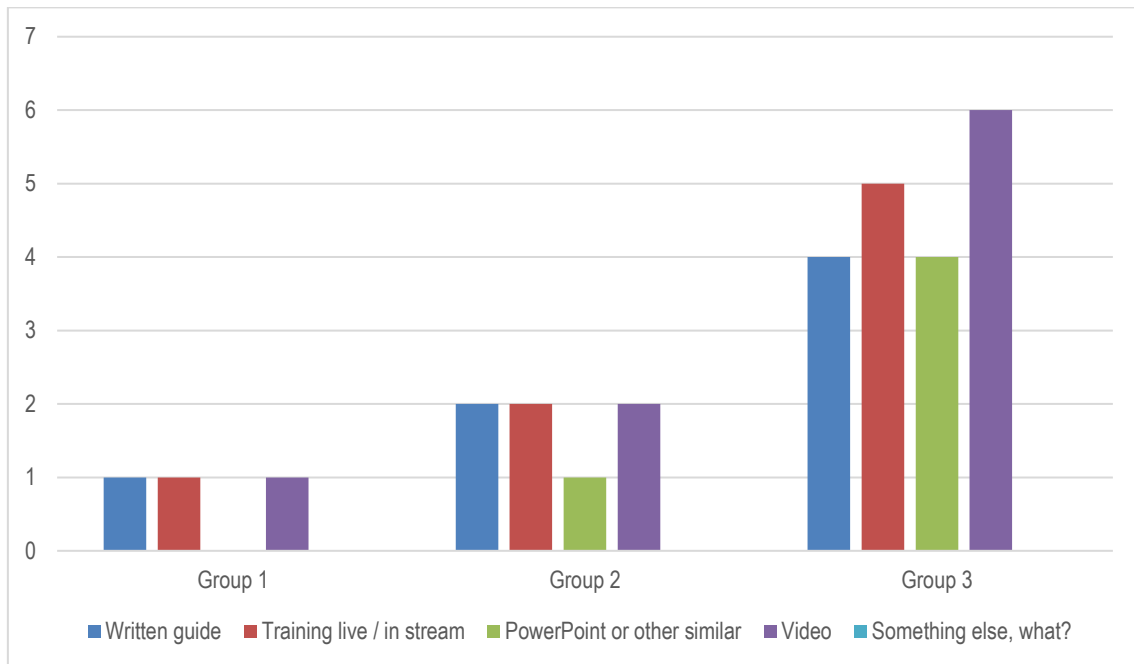


FIGURE 6. In which form respondents would wish to gain support and education?

Questions 8. and 9. in the survey regarded the form and place where they would wish to gain support and education. Similarly, to other multiple-choice questions these questions had the option of choosing option to write in their own words. These questions were analysed using answers in question 2. Questions were answered by 13 respondents. Options are as follows: *written guide, training live / in stream, PowerPoint or other similar, video, something else, what?* Groups 1-3 had very little variance in answers to question 8. Most popular options for in which form sales personnel would like to receive training. As can be seen in figure 6. those in group 1 had equal division between written guide, video, and live / stream training. Groups 2 and 3 added PowerPoint as an option as well. Groups 2 and 3 gave quite similar answers, differences came from number of respondents in each answer which can be seen in figure 6. None of the respondents suggested anything outside the given options.

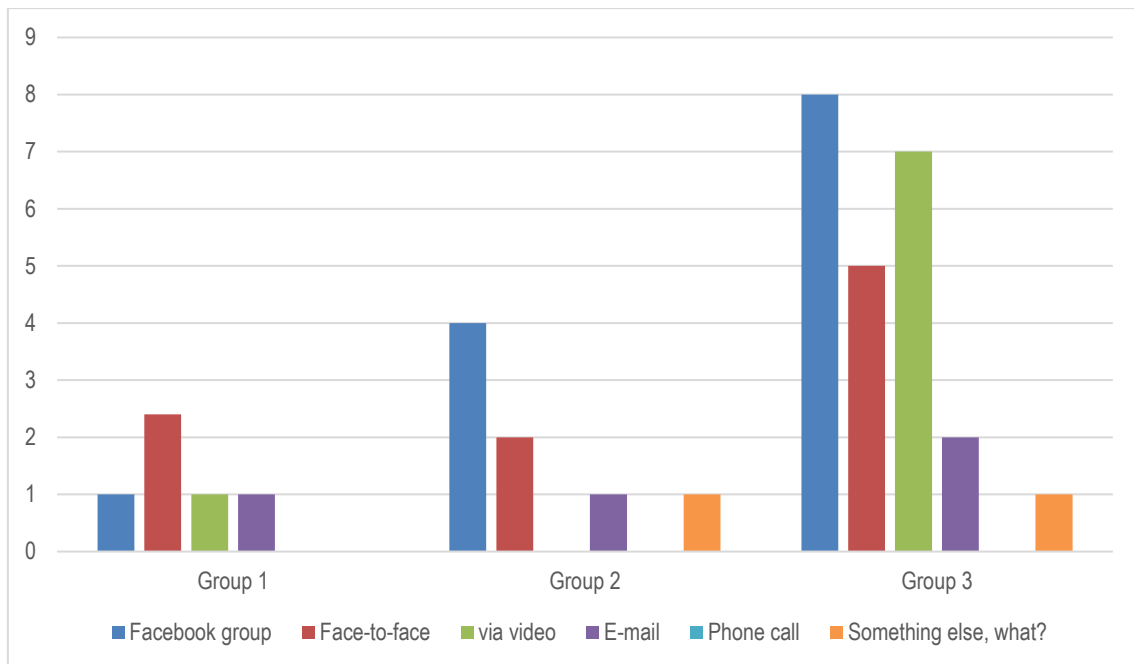


FIGURE 7. Preferred platforms to receive support from.

Lastly respondents were asked to choose which ways or platforms were the ones that respondent would like to receive support and training. Question included following options in figure 7.: *Facebook group, face-to-face, via video, e-mail, phone call, something else, what?* Question was answered 13 times in total. Most of the respondents chose Facebook group and video as a preferred form of support in all answer groups (see figure7.). In group 1 additionally wished to receive support in form of an e-mail, which was chosen respondents in group 2 and 3 as well by a single person in group 2 and 2 individuals in group 3. Unlike in responses from group 1, second and third group respondents preferred face-to-face support. In addition to differing responses between those in group 1 and other groups, respondents in groups 2 and 3 chose to add options in their own words. Added options were “WhatsApp and Messenger”, latter could mean Facebook Messenger. Another added option was defined as “Zoom, Teams etc.”.

From the responses to last question it can be concluded that different individuals prefer various ways to receive support and training. In the beginning of their sales force career receiving support via e-mail and Facebook group, but as time passes sales force seems to wish to receive support in other forms as well. In order to enhance the equal opportunity to receive training company could make video recordings or add option to save streams, as well as consider offering advanced training for those in groups 2 and 3. Offering training to all levels of sales force has been proven to be beneficial for both company and salesperson. (Zoltners, Sinha & Zoltners 2001, 196-197)

Out of the data gotten it can be concluded that majority of an independent sales force work for Beautyko in part-time, which means that sales personnel has access to potential customers in their primary workplace. This also means that commissioning company has to take it into account when organizing live training and other similar events. In addition there is clear variety in how long individuals have worked for the company. This lead to differing results in questions regarding the support they wished to get as well as what kind of problems had risen since they begun working as an independent sales force. This indicates that there may be need for take it into account when planning further training, and ways to support sales force. Even though there were least respondents in the group that included those with less than three months of experience as an independent salesperson in Beautyko, it does not mean, that there would not exist a need for training and support in that group. Though aim of the research or questions in survey were not directed towards internal communication of the commissioning company such theme arose when respondents had an option to freely express their thoughts regarding any issues that they had faced as a salesperson. This may impact further to company culture and image in a harmful manner, if not addressed. Harmful impacts are more pressing inside the company, but it may also affect on customer relationships as in direct selling, long lasting customer relationships between salesperson and customer are vital. Overall all respondents agreed that platforms used for offering support to the sales force are suitable

## 5 CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

In this concluding chapter of this thesis findings of the study will be discussed and suggestions based on the findings will be given to commissioning company. Over the course of this thesis process, many things have changed with the commissioning company, in ways that training has been arranged, as well as the amount of independent sales force working for the company. This has been affecting factor in the writing process as operations and decisions regarding independent sales force training have been in constant development. Some suggestions based on the findings from this research have partially already been implemented.

This study was conducted to fill two main aims: to find out what kind of support independent sales force needs to help them in their sales activities, and what kind of resources company has and needs to meet those needs. During the time of this research plan to first interview a small group of sales personnel and construct survey questions based on those findings. However, due to the lack of initial interest to be interviewed by the sales force as well as time plan was changed to construct a survey. Basis used to construct the survey came from literary sources such as books and articles from academic sources to keep the reliability of the study intact. Theoretical framework consists of selling, with focus on direct selling, sales management practices with emphasis on sales force training and how to make a salesperson successful in selling and how to motivate sales force. With this theoretical background meant that respondents were asked about motivating factors in their selling process, as well as problems that they had encountered during the time spent working for Beautyko.

Management practices and tools that management has are important role in every company. Due to timely issues regarding impacts that COVID-19 had to both businesses and time management regarding this study, author was unable to obtain data about which tools company has in their disposal at the time of writing this thesis. Thus, theoretical basis regarding sales management tools is constructed based on secondary sources available. Even though management communication was relatively small part of said knowledge base, as well as not directly asked about from the respondents in the survey, there was clear indication of possible issues regarding company communication. Issues in company culture and communication can lead to larger problem if not taken seriously.

Though time management and some aspects regarding this research design could be enhanced I believe that commissioning company gains from discovered indications and data obtained as it can be developed further. Findings described in this study can be utilized to make further research covering various topics described in suggestions, and by reaching more people to answer questions asked in a survey of this study more valuable insight could be gained.

## **5.1 Suggestions for the commissioner**

Based on the results of this research following suggestions are presented to the commissioning company. Due to increased number of independent sales force communication inside the commissioning company and in its management is even more significant. Based on theory regarding sales force management and internal communication author suggests that company should look at current internal communication practices to clarify roles inside the company. This would enable independent sales force to know who the person inside the company is that they can contact, and in which matters.

Furthermore, despite the changes already taking place considering sales force training some themes were raised from data that could be considered to further benefit commissioning company. Current training does not differ between those that have just started as an independent salesperson and those, that have been part of sales force from the beginning of direct sales operation. Results of the survey give indication that there could be an advanced sales force training program with slightly differing focus: e.g. usage of social media tools, customer-oriented approach in selling etc. In addition, way to add variation to sales force training is to utilize individuals in the sales force; by allowing individuals with different background and unique skill-set to show how they sell in an in-home sales event both new salesforce individuals and older ones would gain experience and an individual showing how they act in sales event would get a valuable opportunity to get feedback from peers.

To enhance the motivation of an independent sales force competitions could have skill levels, or groups based on how long an individual has been part of the sales personnel competing against each other. This way competition would be more equal between sales force and competitions would still be motivating as winner would vary more.

For further research topics it would be both beneficial for the company and interesting for the researcher, to find out how implementation or enhancements of sales force training have impacted. Direct sales concept has only been in use now for little over a half a year, which means that it is constantly developing in a fast pace as of now. Furthermore, research could be done by benchmarking sales force training programs in other companies.



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**Beautykon myyjien koulutus- ja tukitarpeiden kartoitus**

1. Toimitko myyjänä pää- vai sivutoimisesti?

- Päätoimisesti  
 Sivutoimisesti

2. Kauanko olet toiminut Beautykossa myyjänä?

- Alle kuukausi  
 1-3 kuukautta  
 3-6 kuukautta

3. Minkälaista tukea olet saanut yritykseltä?

4. Minkälaista tukea olisit toivonut saavasi, mutta et saanut?

5. Mitä ongelmia olet kohdannut myyjänä?

6. Mihin alla olevista vaihtoehdoista olisit kaivannut lisää apua ja/tai tukea?

- Asiakashankinta  
 Sosiaalisen median käyttö myynnissä  
 Myyntitapahtuma  
 Mainostaminen  
 Tuotetietous  
 Muu, mikä?

7. Mitkä asiat motivoivat sinua myymään?

- Kilpailut  
 Kampanjat  
 Onnistunut myynti  
 Hyvä palaute asiakkailta  
 Hyvä palaute yritykseltä  
 Palkkio myynnistä  
 Uudet asiakkaat  
 Uudet brändit/tuotteet

8. Missä muodossa toivoisit tuen ja koulutuksen olevan tarjolla?

- Kirjallinen opas
- PowerPoint tai muu vastaava
- Video
- Koulutus livenä / Strimattuna
- Muu, mikä?

9. Mitä kautta toivoisit tuen ja koulutuksen olevan tarjolla?

- Facebook ryhmä
- Kasvotusten
- Videon välityksellä
- Sähköposti
- Puhelu
- Muu, mikä?

Lähetä

1. Do you work as an independent salesperson full time or part time?

Options: *full time, part time*

2. How long have you been working as an independent salesperson for Beautyko?

Options: *For under a month, 1-3 months, 3-6 months*

3. What kind of support have you gotten from the company? (open ended)

4. What kind of support would you have wished for, but did not receive? (open ended)

5. What problems have you encountered as an independent salesperson? (open ended)

6. Which of the options below would you have wished to gain more help and/or support for?  
(Multiple choice)

Options: *Customer acquisition, social media utilisation in selling, sales event, advertising, knowledge about products, something else, what?*

7. Which of the options motivates you to sell? (Multiple choice)

Options: *Competitions, campaigns, successful sales, positive feedback from customers, positive feedback from company, provision, new customers, new brands / products*

8. In which form would you wish for support and training to be available? (Multiple choice)

Options: *Written document, PowerPoint or other similar, video, sales training live / streamed, something else, what?*

9. In which way would you want support and training to be available? (Multiple choice)

Options: *Via Facebook-group, in face-to-face, through video, via e-mail, via telephone, something else, what?*