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Customer Acquisition Development Plan

Improving Lead Generation

Metropolia University of Applied Sciences

Master of Business Administration

Thesis

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<p>The purpose of this study was to create a development plan in order to improve the case company's customer acquisition. The main goal was to increase the number of leads, which was perceived as a particular challenge in the company. The case company operates in the sports sector and its main target group is private customers. Marketing has been implemented for several short-term goals, while the marketing strategy and long-term plans have not been made. This has led to inefficient customer acquisition and a waste of resources.</p> <p>This study was carried out using Action research methodology. The study started by analysing the strengths and weaknesses of the current customer acquisition process and marketing practices. The current state analysis was conducted by interviewing the case company's marketing team and management, researching the company's marketing content in different channels, benchmarking competitors' marketing practices, and gathering data via a customer satisfaction survey. The theoretical framework focused on customer acquisition through inbound method, and the lead generation process and its integration with a marketing automation system, as well as the selection and use of relevant tools.</p> <p>The outcome of the thesis is a customer acquisition plan. The plan consists of describing the buyer persona, the buyer's journey, and the tools and budget needed to implement the plan. The plan also presents the production and implementation stages of the lead acquisition process with the help of practical examples. To track and distinguish different lead types, a lead scoring system was created. The purpose of the lead scoring is to help marketing and salespeople understand the life cycle of leads and enhance the conversion of leads into sales. In addition, the company was provided with recommendations for customer acquisition and marketing development measures, which were excluded from this study due to thesis scope limitations.</p> <p>The customer acquisition plan enables the case company to improve its customer acquisition process and to collect and utilise customer data both in the lead generation and in the later stages of customer relationship management. The practical long-term purpose of an inbound based plan is to get customers to recommend the company. In this case, customer acquisition will no longer require such massive marketing investments, and with the development activities, the profitability of the company's business can be improved.</p>	
Keywords	Customer acquisition, lead generation, inbound marketing

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<p>Tämän opinnäytetyötutkimuksen tarkoituksena oli luoda kehityssuunnitelma, joka tehostaa kohdeyrityksen asiakashankintaa. Pää tavoitteena oli parantaa liidien tuotantoa, mikä koettiin yrityksessä erityisenä haasteena. Kohdeyritys toimii liikunta-alalla ja sen pääasiallinen kohderyhmä ovat yksityiset asiakkaat. Asiakashankintamarkkinointia yrityksessä on toteutettu monilla tavoilla, pääasiallisesti erilaisilla lyhyillä markkinointikampanjoilla. Sen sijaan markkinointistrategiaa ja pitkän aikavälin markkinointisuunnitelmaa kohdeyrityksessä ei ole tehty. Tämän takia markkinoinnin resursseja valuu hukkaan ja asiakashankinta on suhteellisen tehotonta.</p> <p>Tutkimus toteutettiin toimintatutkimuksena. Kohdeyrityksen nykytilaa analysoitiin nykyisen asiakashankintaprosessin ja markkinointikäytäntöjen vahvuuksien ja heikkouksien selvittämiseksi. Nykytila-analyysi tehtiin haastattelemalla tapausyrityksen markkinointitiimiä ja johtoa, tutkimalla yrityksen markkinointisisältöjä eri kanavissa, vertailemalla kilpailijoiden markkinointikäytäntöjä ja keräämällä tietoja asiakastytyväisyystutkimuksesta. Teoreettisessa viitekehityksessä käytetään inbound-markkinoinnin teoriaa sekä muuta tutkimusaiheen kannalta oleellista aineistoa. Teoreettinen viitekehitys koostui useista lähteistä, jotka tarjosivat hyvän tietopohjan asiakashankintasuunnitelman rakentamiseen.</p> <p>Opinnäytetyön tuloksena syntyi asiakashankintasuunnitelma, jonka avulla kohdeyritys pystyy parantamaan asiakashankintaprosessiaan ja hyödyntämään dataa liidien konvertoinnissa sekä myöhemmin asiakkuudenhallinnassa. Asiakashankintasuunnitelma sisältää ostajapersoonan, asiakaspolun kuvauksen, sekä suunnitelman toteutuksessa tarvittavat työkalut. Suunnitelmassa esitellään modernin liidihankintaprosessin tuotanto- ja toteutusvaiheet käytännönläheisten esimerkkien avulla. Liidihankintaprosessiin luotiin liidien pisteytysjärjestelmä, jonka avulla liidien aktiivisuutta pystytään seuraamaan ja erottamaan markkinointikelpoiset ja myyntikelpoiset liidit toisistaan. Liidipisteytyksen tarkoitus on auttaa markkinointia ja myyntiä ymmärtämään liidien elinkaarta ja parantaa liidien konvertoitumista myynneiksi. Lisäksi kohdeyritykselle annettiin suosituksia asiakashankintaan ja markkinointiin liittyvistä kehitystoimenpiteistä, jotka jäivät opinnäytetyön rajausten vuoksi tutkimuksen ulkopuolelle.</p> <p>Kun asiakashankintasuunnitelma otetaan käyttöön, kohdeyritys pystyy tuottamaan strategisesti ja käytännön tasolla laadukkaampaa markkinointia. Inbound-metodiin pohjautuvan suunnitelman pitkän aikavälin tarkoitus on saada asiakkaista yrityksen suosittelijoita, jolloin asiakashankinnan markkinointipanostuksia voidaan keventää ja kehitystoimien myötä yrityksen liiketoiminnan kannattavuutta pystytään parantamaan.</p>	
Avainsanat	Asiakashankinta, liidigenerointi, inbound-markkinointi

Contents

1	Introduction	1
1.1	Business challenge	1
1.2	Objective, scope and expected outcome	2
1.3	Key terms and concepts	2
1.4	Case company	2
1.5	Thesis outline	3
2	Methods and materials	5
2.1	Research approach	5
2.2	Research design	7
2.3	Data collection and analysis	9
2.4	Validity and reliability	11
3	Current state analysis	13
3.1	Overview of the current state analysis stage	13
3.2	Strategy	13
3.3	Marketing practices and tools	14
3.4	Lead generation	15
3.5	Competitors	16
3.6	Strengths and weaknesses	20
3.7	Summary of current state analysis	20
4	Conceptual framework - Inbound marketing	22
4.1	Modern markets and customers	22
4.2	Method	23
4.3	Processes	25
4.3.1	Sales Funnel vs. Flywheel	25
4.3.2	Buyer personas	27
4.3.3	Customer journey	30
4.4	Lead generation	31
4.4.1	Lead types	32
4.4.2	Lead scoring	33
4.5	Tools	34
4.5.1	Web pages	34
4.5.2	Email	36

4.5.3	CRM	37
4.5.4	HubSpot	37
4.5.5	Integrations	40
4.6	Content marketing	40
4.7	Content distribution channels	41
4.8	Analytics and reporting	42
4.9	Key findings of conceptual framework	43
5	Customer acquisition plan proposal	45
5.1	Overview of the proposal building stage	45
5.2	Objectives and success metrics	46
5.3	Buyer persona	47
5.4	Buyer's journey	49
5.5	Benefits, offerings, and elements of lead generation	50
5.6	Tools and channels	52
5.7	Budget	53
5.8	Production plan	54
5.9	Implementation plan	63
5.10	Summary of the proposed customer acquisition plan	65
6	Validation of the initial customer acquisition plan	67
6.1	Overview of the validation stage	67
6.2	Feedback on the initial proposal	67
6.3	Final customer acquisition plan for the case company	69
7	Discussion and conclusion	70
7.1	Summary	70
7.2	Practical recommendations for future	72
7.3	Evaluation of the thesis	73
7.4	Reflection and afterword	74
	References	76

Appendices

Appendix 1. Interview questions: current situation, marketing practices and customers

Appendix 2. Validation questions

1 Introduction

Generally, in any business, acquiring new customers is more challenging than retaining old ones. The sports industry is no exception and competition for customers is particularly fierce. The sports industry is also constantly and rapidly changing according to new trends and customers are easily attracted to new offers elsewhere if a customer relationship is not properly strengthened. Due to the high turnover of customers in this field of business, especially in the early stages of the customer relationship, companies need to engage many new incoming customers to make non-stop sales and guarantee business profitability.

Fitness centres generally market their services a lot. There are variety of operating models and channels, from fairs to street promotion and from newspaper advertising to numerous digital advertising options. Digital advertising can be effectively targeted and measurable, but in many cases these aspects are overlooked, and the results obtained are not processed effectively further. Updating social media or writing blog posts alone is not enough to generate a steady, guaranteed flow of customers, but steering right kind of traffic to company website or webstore site, is a right direction. Furthermore, there is a need for a method by which the right kind of traffic is captured, and how it can be converted efficiently and predictably into leads and eventually buying customers.

This thesis is carried out at the request of the client company. The client company operates in sports industry. The purpose of this thesis is to create a customer acquisition plan for the case company to increase the amount and quality of sales leads.

1.1 Business challenge

The business challenge of this thesis is related to customer acquisition of the client company. The case company does not currently have a clear marketing nor sales strategy. Customer acquisition has been accomplished in number of short-term ways, and, due to a lack of planning, customer acquisition process is inefficient and leads to a loss of sales and profits. The case company does not have a clear view how they should direct and follow-up their marketing to increase the number of incoming new customers. The purpose of this study is to solve the problem in question.

1.2 Objective, scope and expected outcome

The objective of this thesis is to create a development plan that will enhance case company's customer acquisition by improving lead generation. The plan will include a lead generation model and operating instructions for more effective customer acquisition that utilises inbound method. Accordingly, the expected outcome of this thesis is a customer acquisition plan.

When looking at customer acquisition on a large scale, it involves many different steps from marketing to sales procedures and customer relationship aftercare. To get the most out of the topic and meet the needs and expectations of the client company, the thesis is limited to cover lead generation phase. This means, the work does not focus on search engine optimisation or search engine marketing although these issues are discussed in terms. Content production is also excluded since it is all alone a very broad topic. Despite these limitations, all stages of inbound marketing are covered in the theoretical part of the work to make it easier to understand the comprehensiveness of the method.

HubSpot was chosen as the marketing automation tool for this work since it provides the service solutions that a case company's marketing and sales need now and because it offers virtually limitless opportunities to further develop marketing and sales measures. The work therefore does not present or compare other possible marketing automation tools.

1.3 Key terms and concepts

CRM	Customer relationship management
CTR	Click through rate
MQL	Marketing qualified lead
SEO	Search engine optimisation
SEM	Search engine marketing
SQL	Sales qualified lead

1.4 Case company

The case company is a medium sized privately owned fitness centre that operates in Tampere city centre. The basic services the company provides are gym, group exercise

classes, and personal training. Supplementary services available are, wellness services such as physiotherapy and mindfulness courses. The majority of the company's revenue consists of the sale of permanent fitness memberships and ten-time user cards. The company employs about 20 persons and its annual revenue is one million euros.

1.5 Thesis outline

The thesis is organised as follows. In the first chapter the topic was represented, and followed by short explanation of the business challenge, objective, and expected outcome of the work. Then the case company was introduced, and lastly the thesis outline is described.

The second chapter introduces and explains the ways how the thesis is carried out. This helps the reader to understand the structure of this study more easily. First, the research approach and research design are explained. After that, data collection and analysis as well as validity and reliability of the research are described.

The third chapter is about current state analysis. This section reviews the case company's current marketing and customer acquisition procedures and compares the ways with competitors' operations.

The fourth chapter will give theoretical background for the thesis. To gain deeper understanding of how consumers are acquired as buying customers and ways to intensify the process by means of lead generation, several sources of different publications is utilised. The key issues of literature review are summarized in the final part of this chapter.

The customer acquisition proposal will be introduced in the fifth chapter. The first section represents the objectives and indicators of the development plan. The following sections are about the ideal buyer persona and buyer's journey. After that, the tools and budget needed, production plan, and implementation plan are reviewed. The final section summarises all parts of the proposal.

In chapter six, the first part is about feedback received from the original development plan and the second part presents the final customer acquisition plan based on the feedback received.

The final chapter of the study is for discussion and conclusions. The first part of this chapter will summarise the entire project. The second part provides practical recommendations for increasing customer acquisition in the future. The last part will explain how initial objectives of the study were met versus the outcome.

2 Methods and materials

First, this chapter discusses the applied research approaches, and why they are selected in this research. Next, the structure of the research process is illustrated in research design model and described step by step in the text. After explaining the approach, methodology and process, the data collection points and methods used in different points are explained more broadly to make data collection process more understandable for the reader. In the final part of this chapter validity and reliability of the research is discussed.

2.1 Research approach

The purpose of this research is to develop a customer acquisition plan. To build such plan, it is necessary to analyse the case company's current marketing and customer acquisition processes first and then to examine what means can be used to improve the process. After that, the customer acquisition plan, and instructions, how to implement it in practice, can be revealed.

This thesis is a practice-based study and therefore an action research theory and method are applied to it. Action research is used in real situations, rather than in contrived, experimental studies since its primary focus is on solving real problems. Kemmis's simple model of action research, see Figure 1, illustrates the cyclical nature of the process. Each cycle has four stages: planning, taking action, observing, and reflecting. (O'Brien 1998, p. 4, 6.)

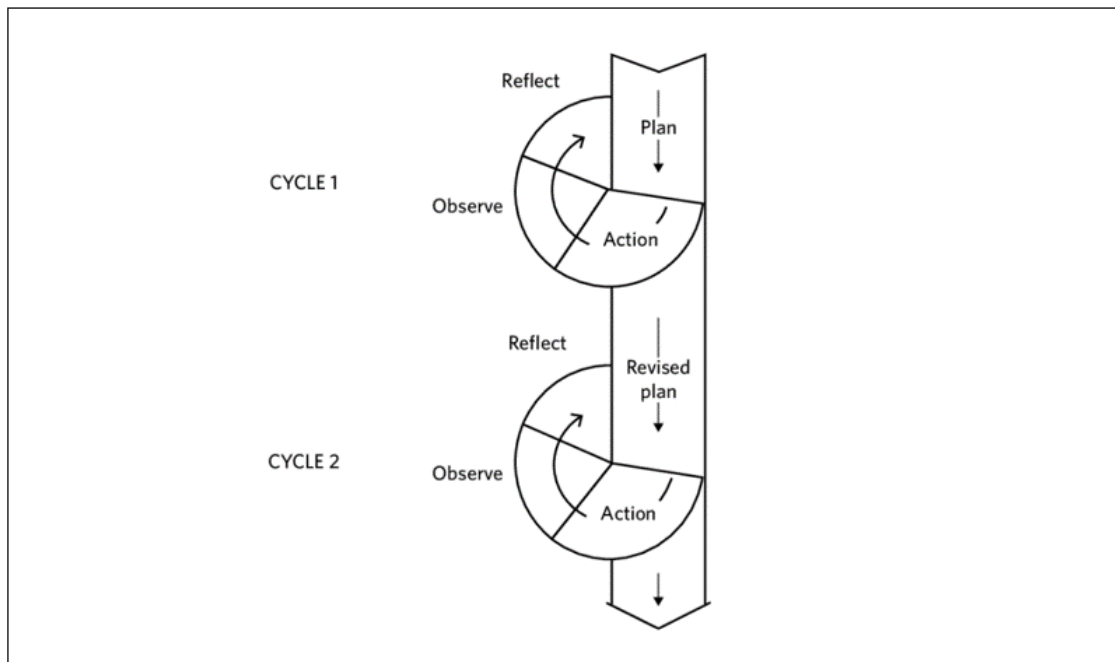


Figure 1. Simple action research model (O'Brien 1998, p. 4).

Action research was chosen as the research method because it best supports this applied research in finding a solution to the customer acquisition problem in the target organisation. Ongoing action-observing-reflecting process helps the researcher to understand the needs and challenges the case company faces more comprehensively. This will also improve the overall quality of the research as the cycle rounds progress.

The conceptual framework of this thesis covers inbound marketing method and processes. Particularly the attention focuses on lead generation. All this existing literature supports this applied research approach in gaining knowledge related to the research topic of developing customer acquisition.

All data for this research was gathered from the interviews, company materials and competitors. Collecting data diversely from different sources supported the objective of this thesis enabling to understand the case company's internal strengths and weaknesses and to gain deeper understanding of the business environment where it is operating.

The research is conducted by using qualitative research methods. This means obtaining data through open-ended questions and conversational communication and critically

analysing all available data that are used for the research (Anderson 2018). Because the study utilises more than just one qualitative method, the approach is called multi-method qualitative research. Multi-method term means using several different data collection and analysing methods that are the same generic type, either qualitative or quantitative (Saunders et al. 2009, p.152). Qualitative methods were chosen in order to understand variety of things that affect customer acquisition and enhance improvement of processes using modern marketing methods. Since the case company does not have certain data collection nor documentation procedure, qualitative data collection methods support the goal of collecting the data needed enabling to build a customer acquisition plan for the case company.

2.2 Research design

A research design refers to the conceptual structure of how research is conducted. It forms a plan for the collection, measurement, and analysis of data. (Kothari 2004, p. 31.) The research design of this thesis is represented in the Figure 2 next page.

STEP	CONTENT	OUTCOME	DATA
Research Objective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Business challenge: Need to increase the quantity and quality of sales leads 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Objective: To build a customer acquisition plan for generating sales leads 	
↓			
Current State Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identification of the case company marketing strategies, processes, and activities Identification of the case company's business environment: market, competitors, and customers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analyses of current situation of customer acquisition and marketing procedures. Strengths and weaknesses of customer acquisition related issues Competitor analysis 	<p>DATA 1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Start-up meeting/semi-structured interview with case company management Case company marketing materials+ customer survey results Field research: Competitor analysis Telephone meeting with CEO: clarifying current situation
↓			
Conceptual Framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Literature research and finding out best practises and tools for generating and managing leads to enhance customer acquisition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Framework for Customer Acquisition Plan 	
↓			
Initial Customer Acquisition Plan Proposal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creating an initial customer acquisition plan based on the analysis, collected data 1 & 2, existing knowledge gained from conceptual framework 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Setting objectives and success metrics Review and suggestions of suitable methods and tools for generating and converting contacts into sales leads Initial Customer Acquisition Plan 	<p>DATA 2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Progress meeting with case company's marketing representative: collecting additional information, clarifying details, and determining success metrics and objectives
↓			
Validation of the Proposal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Feedback for the initial proposal from the case company Validation of the proposal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Final Customer Acquisition Plan 	<p>DATA 3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluation discussion and written feedback regarding the initial proposal Improvement needs for the initial proposal
↓			
Final Customer Acquisition Plan			

Figure 2. Research design model illustrating the thesis process progression.

The design is divided into six different parts: research objective, current state analysis, conceptual framework, initial proposal, validation of the proposal and final proposal. In the first stage the business challenge, objective and outcome are defined. In the second stage the research process with current state analysis which include interviewing company management of the strategies, procedures, and activities related to research topic as well as investigating company marketing channels and content in them, and benchmarking competitors. The third stage is about conceptual framework. At this stage topic related existing knowledge is examined from various sources including books, online materials, and webinars. This versatile investigation is carried out to gain deep understanding of the topic and to be able to utilise best practices available to accomplish the target of this research. Based on all knowledge gathered and processed, initial proposal of customer acquisition development plan can be built after setting objectives and gathering additional data from the case company at stage four. The fifth stage of research design is initial proposal's validation. The case company representatives are requested to give feedback of the proposal and objectives vs. results are evaluated. Based on evaluation discussions and feedback got from the case company the final stage is to refine the customer acquisition plan in its final form, so that it corresponds in the best possible way to the desired result and accordingly it meets the objectives set in the beginning of the research process.

2.3 Data collection and analysis

Data for this study was collected in through three data rounds which are represented more closely in data collection Table 1.

Table 1. Data collection process

Data Round	Data Type	Data Source	Date & Approach	Recording	Purpose / Focus
Data 1					
Current state interviews	Interview	Sales officer & Marketing officer	May 28, 2019	1h 34min	Identifying the case company strategies & processes and current business environment
Gathering company materials	Internal Documents	Customer satisfaction survey 2019	June 2019	-	Collecting information of customer base for deep understanding of client status
Current state update interview	Telephone interview	CEO	June 30, 2020	32min, written notes	Current state update
Data 2					
Building the initial customer acquisition proposal	Email conversation	Sales & Marketing officer	October 8, 2020	Email	Clarification of the data gathered and collecting additional data
	Brainstorming meeting	Sales & Marketing officer	October 15, 2020	Written notes	Ensuring practical implementation plan direction and suitability to practice
Data 3					
Feedback and validation of the initial customer acquisition plan	Evaluation discussion	Marketing officer	December 14, 2020	Written notes	Receive feedback and possible improvement suggestions to be able to refine the initial proposal into its final form
	Email	Marketing officer	December 14, 2020	Email	

The data for this research was collected by interviewing and through email discussions with the case company's sales and marketing representatives and management. Also, one brainstorming meeting was arranged. Data was also gathered analysing the latest customer satisfaction survey and online marketing materials and comparing materials and practices with competitors' marketing. In order to make sense of all gathered data afterwards, interviews and other discussions were saved either by recording them or writing notes.

Ethical and respectful aspects were also considered in the research. This means, for example, that the companies involved in the competitor comparison cannot be identified based on the survey results alone. Detailed information about competitors or their processes has not been disclosed to the case company or other parties.

The purpose of the Data round 1 was to gain understanding of the case company and its the business environment. The target was to gather knowledge of company's strategies, processes, and activities and identify strengths and weaknesses in them.

Information was gathered by interviewing case company's sales and marketing personnel via semi-structured interview. The purpose of the interviewee was to guide the conversation and let the personnel openly discuss of different topics. Current state interview related guiding questions are available in Appendix 1, in the end of this thesis. Data round 1 also included analysing of company's online marketing materials and results of previous customer satisfaction survey that was conducted in the spring 2019. Covid-19 pandemic significantly affected the case company's operations and slowed the progress of the research. Therefore, it was important to update information of the company's current situation, which was carried out through a telephone interview with the client company's CEO. After analysing all data gathered during Data round 1, current state and strengths and weaknesses of the research was formed.

The Data round 2 was about clarifying the data and collecting once again updated information that has impact on strategic operation and marketing in the company. The data was gathered from email conversation with sales & marketing representative. Researcher and marketing representative arranged a one-to-one brainstorming meeting which enabled active changing of ideas and thoughts and gathering information of tools, channels, and possible training needs for deploying the future customer acquisition plan. Through the collection of this data, it was possible to build the initial customer acquisition plan.

The Data round 3 consist of validation process of the research. Evaluation and feedback of the initial customer acquisition plan was requested from the case company in order to be able to make changes or refine the plan if needed. Validation data round was carried out sending validating questions by email to company CEO and marketing representative. Based on feedback and answers received, some refining was made before handing out the final customer acquisition plan for the case company. The questions of Data round 3 are available in the end of this thesis, in Appendix 2.

2.4 Validity and reliability

Thesis validation is the process of verifying whether the chosen research method can achieve the results that were intended to be achieved. Conceptual framework of this thesis is related to existing knowledge of inbound methods, processes, tools, and other themes related to customer acquisition. Customer acquisition plan, the outcome of this

study, has been validated by the case company by reviewing the relevance and suitability of the plan in their business. Considering all actions of the research work and the collected data, the result corresponds to the planned outcome.

Reliability refers to how consistently a method can measure the results of a study. If the same result can be obtained using the same methods under the same conditions, the measurement is considered reliable. This study content is specifically designed to meet the objectives of the case company. As a result, the research cannot be fully used as such in another organisation. However, research theory and operating model can be applied at a general level in another organisation and it should not be forgotten that inbound marketing fundamentals apply to customer acquisition in any organisation.

3 Current state analysis

This chapter contains an analysis of the case company's current customer acquisition situation.

3.1 Overview of the current state analysis stage

The current state analysis reviews the case company's current marketing and customer acquisition procedures and compares the ways with competitors' operations in order to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the current processes.

Current state analysis data was collected by interviewing the case company's management and sales and marketing representatives and by studying company's websites, social media channels and the data of the customer satisfaction survey that was conducted in the spring 2019. The current state also analyses the case company's situation in relation to competitors in the market.

Competitors' inbound and marketing processes and marketing contents were studied applying benchmark method. Benchmark data was collected from online field research. Companies that are large in volume and have multidimensional and highly visible marketing activities were selected for comparison. Newer small companies, whose marketing content aroused interest at the first sight, were also included in the comparison, to gain a better understanding of their processes and to discover fresh ways to market. The outcome of the benchmark study revealed identified differences between competitors' inbound and marketing processes and revealed well-functioning ways which might be applied also in the case company's processes later.

The current state analysis ends with representing the strengths and weaknesses of the case company's processes which were identified based on all data gathered during the current state analysis phase.

3.2 Strategy

Based on the results of the current state analysis, it was identified that the case company currently lacks a marketing strategy. Yearly marketing budget has been set but an annual

marketing clock, action plan, or alike system for planning and timing campaigns and activities is missing. As Informant 1 stated:

“Our marketing has been built as the year and situations progress, together with the marketing team within the budget provided. We typically plan marketing practices only few months ahead, decide what will be the focus, and then just launch a campaign.” (Informant 1)

Marketing has so far been implemented quite generically and reaching the right kind of customers and target groups is perceived very challenging. As Informant 1 stated:

“We’ve used social media, for example Facebook in our marketing, but we don’t know for what kind of customers we really should target our marketing to. We need help on how to target marketing in the right way and how to get more leads.” (Informant 1)

Thus, presently, marketing activities are planned by a small team including CEO and staff members whose duties include marketing and customer acquisition. However, the CEO makes the final decisions on paid purchases.

3.3 Marketing practices and tools

Based on the current state analysis, the case company has tested a variety of marketing actions over the years, both in digital channels and in traditional channels such as newspaper advertising. Marketing channels that are now in use are company web pages with a blog writing once a month, Facebook, Instagram, Google Ads, and regional newspaper’s free of charge text advertising column. The case company also has two blogger partners who have been writing about case company’s services in their blogs few times. As Informant 2 stated:

“We feel that through blog posts we have comfortably gained visibility and also some new customers. However, we have not followed the development of customer numbers in more detail.” (Informant 2)

Street promoting has not been implemented recently although the company has a high will to be more active in street promotion in the future. At summertime promoting have

been accomplished in outdoor park workouts in which anyone can join free of charge. Lead acquisition is also accomplished in park workouts by collecting participant information and contacting participants with sales calls later. Newsletter is sent to current customers by email once a month. In addition, the services have been marketed to some extent at trade fairs and street promotion. The company has strong confidence in the power of the jungle drum. Marketing and sales staff, believe that the best way to get new long-time customers is through the recommendations of current customers, although such customers or leads are rare.

Company's public Facebook and Instagram accounts are mainly used as an informative channel for current member clients and social media followers. Content in the public Facebook site does not quite support customer acquisition and publications are made rather little. Instead, attractive content and events are shared on the company's VIP Facebook group that is targeted only at existing customers.

However, recently the company has made updates on current offers as well as some video greetings. Practically all marketing content is self-produced.

Marketing and sales activities have not been systematically documented, as Informant 1 explained:

"In general, we do not have data available from our previous marketing activities. Some campaigns have been good, and some have been total failures. The data has not been collected much and almost all information of customer acquisition marketing we have is based on our own memory."
(Informant 1)

Therefore, data indicating the effectiveness of previous campaigns is not available. Because existing data is based on memory, it is also impossible to assess the impact on sales and business development from a marketing perspective.

3.4 Lead generation

Most new leads are collected from website visitors who have filled in a contact form at company's web page. This channel has not been explored more closely, from where these lead customers end up into client company's web page or how they get interested

in the case company in general. Another important customer acquisition channel is through current customers who bring their friends in. As Informant 1 stated:

“Current members have an opportunity to provide a three-day pass to invite a friend to visit the fitness centre as a potential new customer and from these visits, we are currently getting the best new customers, as a friend’s recommendation seems to work in marketing.” (Informant 1)

Park workouts that are held on summertime are also considered an efficient way to collect new leads. By giving contact information after the workout session, 1-2 months of training will be drawn as a prize among the participants. All participants also get a three-day pass to try fitness centre services. As Informant 2 stated, relatively large amount of lead is collected this way:

“We collect many leads in park workouts. People want to leave their contact information because then they can also win free of charge training months. Although we offer a good experimental advantage to all these leads, they rarely end up as paying customers.” (Informant 2)

Thus, presently, based on the current state analysis, more leads would be needed and there is a desire to increase the efficiency of their conversion into paying customers.

3.5 Competitors

Based on the analysis of the competitors' marketing and customer acquisition processes it was revealed that, from a customer acquisition perspective, competitors had many similar activities that have also been exploited by the case company. The benchmark study also identified issues where the quality of service can be further improved and where competitors' customer acquisition is ahead of the case company. The results of the comparison can be read in tabular form in Table 2.

Table 2. Comparison of competitors' marketing activities in digital platforms.

Company	Competitor1	Competitor2	Competitor3	Competitor4	Competitor5
Webpages have contact form	x	x	x	x	x
Ability to buy membership/training pass from web	x	x	x	x	x
Ability to get a guest pass/free visit from web			x		
Ability to free visitor training at certain day/time				x	x
Facebook page	x	x	x	x	x
Facebook info + activity	5	3	3	4	4
Instagram page	x	x	x	x	x
Instagram info + activity	5	5	5	5	5
YouTube page	x	x	x	x	x
Google Ads	x	x			
Facebook remarketing	x	x		x	x
Instagram remarketing		x		x	x
Google remarketing					
Active blog writing	x		x	x	x
Response time to contact request	2 days	5 hours	2 hours	1min	1min
Automatic contact request response	x			x	x
Personal contact request response		x	x	Next day	
Explanation	Grade				
Excellent	5				
Good	4				
Moderate	3				
Satisfactory	2				
Poor	1				

The subjects of competitor benchmarking were the content and functions of competitors' websites and social media channels from a customer acquisition perspective. Customer acquisition processes were tested by filling in contact forms and tracking companies' response methods and response time to contact requests. A comparison was also made of sponsored advertising on social media, also paying attention to contents and how the customer acquisition process progresses. To make the comparison more informative, all activities were graded on the scale 1-5. The competitor benchmarking revealed the following.

First, when comparing web pages, it was found that corporate websites are mostly visually appealing, but not necessarily user-friendly. Web sites have a lot of menus and it is time consuming to find things under complex menus. However, the web pages of a few companies differed from the line, they were easy to use, and they were interesting both visually and in terms of content. For example, an active and clear blog site is a powerful additional service to increase interest in the company. Competitor 5's chat-styled information box and its manoeuvrability throughout the website was unique and well-functioning entity. Through chat information on the site, the visitor easily finds the

answer to all common questions and the site directs the visitor towards positive buying decision with content that serves the customer and meets the customer's needs. In terms of content, competitors' websites and other channels used differ greatly depending on who are companies' target customers. However, based on the comparative data, it would be good for the case company to pay attention to the structure of the website and the easiness for the customers of finding information.

Second, social media channels are used in all comparable companies. All companies utilise at least Facebook and Instagram in their marketing. Other social media channels, such as LinkedIn and YouTube, are also utilised, but they are not considered in this comparison any deeper. Social media channels are used relatively much and in many ways. For example, Competitors 1, 3, and 4 have put effort on the information tabs on their Facebook page, where are direct prompts to contact, get acquainted, or join as a member, either via a link or the CTA (call to action) button. Contents are mostly informative, but it can be deduced from the images and texts that some competitors are testing more creative and original contents in their marketing. All competitors always appear to have some campaign offer running, regardless of whether they pay for the campaign marketing or not. Most companies also use retargeting tracking in their campaigns. However, at the time of the benchmark study, not everyone had active sponsored advertising in use. It should be noted that ad activity can only be assessed for the current time, as only the currently active ads on the target company's social media site are shown to the outside reviewer. Also, video format, which is the most attractive advertising format today, based on research over the past several years, is increasingly used in social media channels. It seems that companies invest in the quality of the videos. Images and videos are mostly carried out professional way. On Instagram, a few competitors also have IG TV in use. Based on the data collected through benchmark study, it can be stated that the case company utilises social media channels in many respects as actively as its competitors. However, customer acquisition could be made more efficient by, for example, increasing the opportunity to purchase services directly through social media channels, as some competitors do.

Third, response times for contact requests are very quick, except with Competitor 1. Depending on the type and timeframe of the responses got during the benchmark process, the data shows that it is obvious that Competitor 4 and 5 use automation in their

communication. This type of technology might also help the case organisation to communicate more effectively with their potential customers.

Based on this comparison, on average, customer acquisition does not appear to be very effective also in most competitors. From the perspective of an outside reviewer, most competitors implement their customer acquisition relatively simply, utilising targeted social media advertising and, or, associated retargeting ads. Customer acquisition marketing most often focuses on the price of the service or the availability of a wide range of services. Landing pages and their electronic forms differ in both ways, easiness to use and with their visual appeal. From the point of view of the customer acquisition process, it would be important to pay special attention to the placement and the user-friendliness of the forms. When these things are implemented well, as few competitors have, it is easy for a landing page visitor to book an appointment, upload a free guidebook, or buy membership for example. In comparison it was found that the ease of filling out the form plays a really important role. For example, if a customer wants to start a gym membership in the middle of the month, the price for the first month may be adjusted according to the number of days. In other words, the price is different from the normal monthly fee. As in the example, for one competitor, the pricing was stated so vaguely that the potential customer could easily skip filling out the form if it was too cumbersome or unclear. In this case, there is a risk that the person will not return even later back to the form and the interest ends.

Competitor no. 5 stood out in comparison by offering completely different customer path with marketing content that led to a contact request or newsletter subscription, after which the site visitor was offered various fitness-related guides. This competitor's process ensured that if the site visitor was really interested in the marketed fitness services, he or she most obviously followed links and ended up giving contact information in exchange of subscribing guides or other free material by email. After that more marketing efforts was targeted to the potential customer and eventually the lead handed over to salesperson. It was also recognisable from the process that marketing technology had been utilised in the background.

3.6 Strengths and weaknesses

Based on a start-up interview on current situation and a comparison of competitors, the case company's situation in the fitness market became more apparent to the author of this study. In addition, some issues that raised up in the interview strengthened even more when examining the quality monitoring survey results. Next, the strengths and weaknesses found, based on the collected data, are presented.

Strengths

- The actual service concept is versatile with all its supplementary services
- High level of customer service
- Great location, lots of urban settlements and business parks nearby
- Welcoming, customer-appreciating atmosphere and physical environment
- Private, agile company → capability of making quick changes and decisions

Weaknesses

- Lack of strategic and long-term marketing planning
- Lack of data collection and use
- Website navigation
- CTA prompts / buttons are missing
- Visibility poor, low amount of sponsored advertising vs. need
- Content does not support customer acquisition
- Small marketing budget

3.7 Summary of current state analysis

Based on current state analysis, pain points related to customer acquisition marketing and lead generation was found. It appears that customer acquisition and marketing are carried out in many ways, but the systematicity and completion of plans in marketing needs to be strengthened. Interviews and marketing materials analysis also revealed that the contents of the marketing support rather maintaining existing customer base than acquisition of new customers. Also, marketing content is not sufficiently distributed to the new customer target audience. The content of the websites is informative, and it

seems that more customer-oriented approach including CTA prompts would probably increase overall interest towards the company.

Case company's strengths are related to the high level of customer service and customer experience. For a case company to gain a competitive advantage by leveraging these strengths, this competitive advantage should be highlighted more effectively. The location of the fitness centre is also optimal for the nearby business parks and attracting the working customer base would be a profitable option based on the information gathered.

The number of leads is small, and the quality of the leads is relatively poor. Systematic lead scoring has not been used but almost all collected customer contacts have been treated as sales leads. The best lead contacts are obtained through recommendations and therefore it is reasonable to develop the lead process through recommendations.

The same channels are used for marketing as competitors. Based on field research, it appears that the case company spends less money on marketing than its competitors. Active marketing automation measures were observed in the competitor field. Based on these results of the current state analysis, it was concluded that using marketing automation is likely to be a cost-effective way to intensify customer acquisition.

4 Conceptual framework - Inbound marketing

This chapter covers a literature review relevant to this study. First the change in the market and purchasing behaviour is described and after that the inbound method is explored. Next sections describe more deeply the inbound processes, lead generation and the usage and integration of tools. The final part of the chapter is about analytics and importance of reporting.

4.1 Modern markets and customers

The fundamental task of marketers is to make people to buy their product and services by spreading the word of them. To make products and services noticeable and to reach potential customers, marketers have used a combination of traditional (outbound) marketing techniques including e-mail marketing, telemarketing, direct mail, TV, radio, print advertising, and trades. (Halligan & Shah 2014, 3.) However, marketing has changed over the years and it is not just advertising and selling as many people still believe. According to Kotler (2016, p. 5), marketing rather is satisfying customer needs by understanding them and engaging potential buyers effectively, developing products and services that provide great customer value, pricing, distributing, and promoting products so well that selling becomes unnecessary. Halligan & Shah (2014, p. 3) also find old techniques problematic and those have become less effective at spreading the word since people find such marketing disturbing and annoying. The second reason is that people tend to search, learn, or shop for things online when and where it suits them best.

In practice, a modern buyer starts searching information, without an exception, from the internet. Information sources on the internet can be divided into three main platforms: search engines, blogosphere, and social media. Primarily, information is gathered using search engines such as Google. On average, an information seeker does dozens of searches a day and perceives it as more meaningful than reading spam emails and ads or listening to sales presentations. Another sources for data collection are blog posts, and the third is social media channels, through which shopping is also done. In order for a company to grow and succeed, marketing still needs to be done. However, marketing methods must correspond to the customer's preferred way of obtaining information and purchasing products and services. (Halligan & Shah 2014, p. 6.)

4.2 Method

The Inbound methodology is a method by which a company builds long-term and meaningful customer relationships by providing people interested in valuable and necessary assistance throughout the customer relationship. This way, the inbound method also supports continuous business growth and helps companies succeed better. (HubSpot 2020.)

According to HubSpot (2020) the inbound method consists of three steps: Attract, engage, and delight. These steps, and how they are connected, can be seen in Figure 3. After that, each step is described more detailed in the text.

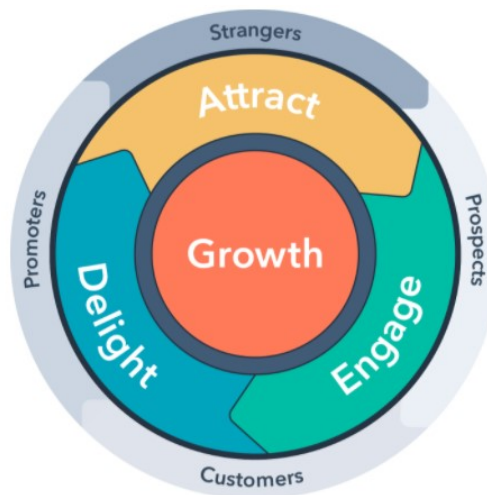


Figure 3. Three steps of the inbound method. (HubSpot 2020)

Step 1. Attract – From strangers to prospects. On this first step people are enticed to get to know a product or service, through content that interests them. At this point, the service provider wants to earn the trust of the consumer without forcing. However, it does not always make sense to attract all potential, but the goal is to attract those customers who are most likely to generate into leads and ultimately satisfied customers. A well-designed content strategy eases the effective implementation of the attracting phase. Well-functioning tools include, for example, paid advertisements, videos, and blog posts, while social media channels such as Facebook and Instagram act as effective channels, without forgetting high-quality SEO and SEM. (HubSpot 2020.)

Step 2. Engage – From prospects to customers. On the second step, potential customers are provided with solutions and insights that meet the current need or problem and thus to commit the client to make positive purchasing decisions. In the engagement phase, it is important to pay attention to the functionality of the lead funnel as well as nurturing leads so that potential customers do not run out of sales during the process. Tools such as email marketing can be used to deliver engaging content to clients. A particularly important tool at this stage is marketing automation so that the steps in the lead process can be tracked and, if necessary, the process can be improved quickly. (HubSpot 2020.)

Step 3. Delight – From customers to promoters. On the third step, the company offers assistance and support to strengthen the customer's purchasing decision. When customers are happy with their purchase and tell it onwards, they become company referrals and they attract new prospects to the company. This way, the inbound methodology stands as a strong basis for a flywheel business growth model (explained more specific in the next section 4.3) that attains momentum from new referral customers. With marketing automation tools, it is possible to produce customer-specific and current content at the right time and through the channels that are most favourable to the customer. For example, personalized messages, offers, or other gratifying content can be sent to a customer on a birthday or on a customer anniversary basis. (HubSpot 2020.)

In the book, *Inbound Marketing - Attract, Engage, and Delight Customers*, David Meerman Scott writes that inbound marketing is all about publishing engaging and useful information in real time, online, when people are interested in it. Inbound is a revolutionary way of marketing that deliberates marketers from painful and consuming ways to get customers' attention and it leads people land on our virtual doorstep when they are ready to buy. (Halligan & Shah 2014, p. xi-xii)

The purpose of inbound marketing is to add value to potential and existing customers by providing interesting and value-added content. By helping customers solve their problems, they are influenced to make business-friendly purchasing decisions. Inbound marketing, therefore, focuses on solving an already known problem or need and it also increases trust towards the company. Therefore, people voluntarily get interested in and approach the company through value-added contents. (HubSpot 2020.)

The customer is at the centre of inbound marketing and is helped in their problem with interesting and engaging marketing contents. Content formats include e.g. blog posts, newsletters, social media posts, podcasts, webinars, and videos. The best working format in different situations depends on the target audience and content itself. When people get interested in product or service through contents, they will more easily give a permission for the company to approach them in the future as well. If the problems of the target audience can be solved with the help of good marketing content, customer's trust towards the company also increases and they are most likely to become new customers. The functionality of inbound marketing is very much engaged into content. The role of contents is particularly important in all stages of inbound marketing. If customers do not find the content relevant to them, they do not get interested in the marketed product or service. It is important to understand that inbound marketing is not just one campaign, but it is the attitude and the angle of doing. (Sales Communications 2018b & 2019b.)

4.3 Processes

Next paragraphs introduce inbound processes that are essential parts of this thesis.

4.3.1 Sales Funnel vs. Flywheel

Marketing and sales processes have traditionally been clarified with observational images which describe people's route from strangers to buying customers. The traditional model is the so-called sales funnel in which, a potential customer always has a start and end point with a company. The customer flow starts at the top of the funnel. Marketing measures are targeted at the entire customer flow that is dropped into the funnel and customers who buy come out of the bottom of the funnel. The funnel is often referred to as the AIDA process, where the acronym AIDA stands for Attention, Interest, Desire and Action. These are the four stages that consumers go through to support them in making the final purchase (Hanlon 2020).

However, the problem with the funnel model is that the majority of people disappear during the process and only a fraction of the original amount of potential customers eventually ends up buying. As a replacement for the traditional sales funnel, Brian Halligan (Halligan 2018) introduced the flywheel model in 2018, in which the customer is at the centre of the process all the time from awakening interest until the buying decision and even forward throughout the whole customership. Figure 4 shows the difference

between the funnel and the flywheel, and the customer focus between the models can be observed concretely.

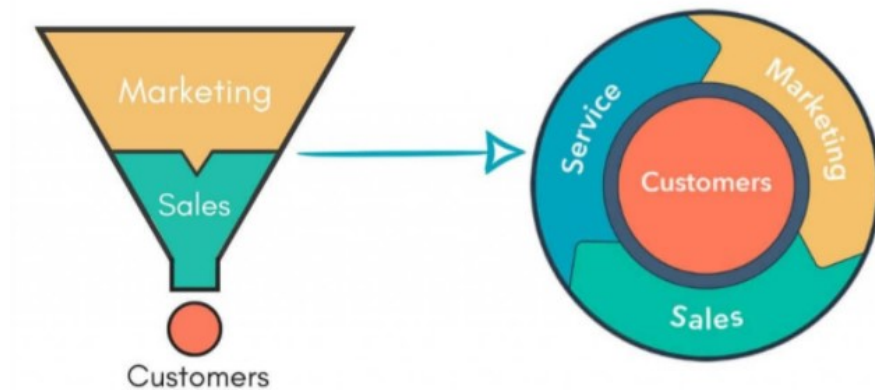


Figure 4. Sales funnel vs. Flywheel model (HubSpot)

The Flywheel is a model for business growth adapted by HubSpot to explain the momentum a company achieves when it aligns the whole organisation to deliver remarkable customer experience. Originally invented by James Watt, the flywheel is simply a wheel that stores energy. The amount of energy depends on how fast it spins, how much friction it encounters, and how big the wheel is. To explain this more deeply it means that the speed of the flywheel increases when force is added in it. Force is a strategy or a programme that is implemented in an organisation for example by using inbound marketing, customer referral programme, or paid advertising campaign. Friction, instead, is anything that slows the speed of the flywheel and that is why it is desired to eliminate these distractions as well as possible. Friction occurs, for example, when customers get poor service. Then they do not recommend it to their friends or other stakeholders but on the contrary, they can tell about poor service forward. This immediately decreases the speed of the flywheel. Another example of friction is when organisation's internal processes do not work properly, or communication between teams is unclear. In these examples, friction is reduced by improving processes and practices to which they apply. The more speed is increased, and friction is decreased, the more promoters is gained for the business. All those promoters become a force that spins the flywheel forward. (HubSpot 2020a)

Using the flywheel model is a fundamental change for the whole organization. When customers are put at the centre of the company's flywheel and the process is visualized

as a continuous circle, a company then has more efficient and productive marketing and sales model that they would have with a traditional funnel (Deater 2020). When a company's flywheel is based on inbound, every team and function of the organisation can add force in it and is also responsible for decreasing friction through attract, engage, and delight phases. Through company-wide cooperation, the organisation is able to gather enough customers who keep the flywheel spinning by recommending the company forward and bringing in new customers. This way, the flywheel grows larger over time without large ongoing customer acquisition investments. (HubSpot 2020.)

4.3.2 Buyer personas

Customer segmentation has traditionally been used to help target marketing. Segmentation allows customers to be divided into more manageable target groups. The advantage of target group thinking is, that costs of customer acquisition can be minimised and already acquired customers can be served better and retained. Creating buyer personalities is one way to segment customers. (Sales Communications 2019a.)

The buyer persona is a tool that is used to build customer understanding of the persons desired to be customers for a company (Prami 2020). A buyer persona is a semi-fictional and general character representation of an ideal customer. Buyer personas are based on customer data, interviews, market research, but also, they include reasonable assumptions and estimates about the most potential customer type. (Jepson 2020.) The word, persona, describes well the depth of this fictional character. In creating buyer personas, it is good to go so deep that the fictional persons could be considered as real humans with their habits, characteristics, experiences, and challenges. When there is a story built around a buyer persona, one can understand the reasons and consequences for his or her behaviour and choices he or she makes. (Sales Communications 2019a.)

When creating a buyer persona, the best result is obtained when it is built together with different parties, management, marketing, sales, and customer service. The more different views are gathered, the more comprehensive is the result. This way the customer also benefits from receiving a seamless end-to-end experience, and the company's internal teams will enjoy the benefits of being well aligned with each other. Buyer personas and buying behaviour also change over time, so the development of the personas must be monitored and refined from time to time. (Jepson 2020.)

Data for creating buyer personas is collected from existing customer data, sales statistics, customer surveys and market research (Jepson 2020). Other relevant sources can be used as well as long as they support customer acquisition targets. For example, bringing different teams together and combining information and goals in a workshop project, is an effective way creating a buyer persona. When creating buyer personas, it needs to keep in mind that they need to be partially imaginative, and the fictional character cannot be defined too strictly, so that they can be set to suit the company's target groups. Nor a buyer persona cannot be too detailed to enable a particular person or, for example, an existing customer to be identified from it. (Sales Communications 2019a.)

To create a trustworthy buyer persona, one should focus into important factors that have influence on the persona. Newberry (2020) lists five steps that are critical in creation process.

1. **Thorough audience research** based on real data of existing customers and social audience. This data should include basic customer information like: age, location, consumption habits, interests, challenges, and stage of life. This information is gathered from customer database, social media, and Google analytics. Customers must be reached through the right channels. Therefore, it is important to first learn in which channels customers spend their time online.
2. **Identifying customer pain points** is the step of solving what problem potential customers are trying to solve and what obstacles are they facing along the way in trying to achieve their goals? These issues can be clarified by participating in social listening and analysis of social media opinions. People's opinions about a particular product, service or a company can be found online. This is accomplished by setting and tracking search flows. Search streams provide real-time research information and can be used to learn why products or services are considered or which parts require development. In addition, consulting customer service reveals what kind of questions customers ask and thus makes it easier to identify patterns of which groups tend to face different challenges.

3. **Identifying customer goals** which might be personal or professional, depends on the kinds of products and services. At this point the key issue is to find out what motivates customers and what is their final goal. Sales team is a good source for identifying customer goals since they talk to customers and have deep understanding of ambitions that clients want to achieve. Social listening is also a good way to gather information of customer goals.
4. Once customers' pain points and goals are understood, the next step is **understanding the ability to help**. Here, it is a possibility to crystallise how products or services help the customer by analysing the benefits offered to customers. Instead of characteristic thinking, products and services must be thought from the buyer's point of view, i.e. how the product or service makes the customer's life easier or better.

Three key questions can help clarify the benefits of each pain point and goal collected: 1) How can we help? A one clear sentence must be captured and added to the persona template. 2) What are the target customers' main purchasing barriers and how to help the audience to overcome them? 3) At what stage followers are at in their buying journey? This means if they are already ready to buy, or still making research, or for example looking for reviews.

5. **A buyer persona is created** once all the relevant information has been collected. Common features are searched and grouped from the collected data to build a foundation for an ideal buyer. First, an abstract perception is formed, for example, of people of a certain age and who belong to a special group. The group is then formed into a real-looking person with a name, job title, place of residence, and other defining characteristics, just as if it were a real person. The goal is to incorporate the persona as much information as one could learn about the person during a short conversation, including information about the person's pain points and goals. (Newberry 2020)

Creating a buyer personality requires time and cooperation between the various functions of the organization, but the more time and effort is invested in personality building, the more comprehensive the result will be. Variety of free templates can be

found online to ease the marketing and sales departments process in buyer persona building.

4.3.3 Customer journey

HubSpot (2020) defines customer journey, or in other terms, buyer's journey as being a process that buyers go through to become aware of, consider and evaluate, and decide to purchase a new product or service. At the beginning of the buyer's journey, potential customers search the internet for more information about the object of their interest or help with their challenge. The solution can be either a product or a service offered by the company, but potential customer does not know it yet. Figure 4. below, visualises how a buyer progresses the purchase path step by step.



Figure 5. Buyer's Journey stages (Hubspot 2020)

Awareness stage is at the beginning of the buyer's journey. At this stage potential buyers realise they have a problem, and they want to identify it (Hintz 2018). Buyers are also unaware of what product or service could solve their problem. The best way to help buyers here, is offer them content that focuses on their pain points. (Pardot 2020.)

At the Consideration stage, potential customers are already aware of their needs and are actively seeking solutions to their problems. At this point buyers make internet searches to better understand the matter and to find the most suitable solution. If there seems to be several suggested solutions available, buyers will look for more information on the subject. (Hintz 2018.)

At the Decision stage, potential buyers have become aware of their problem, they have compared different choices and decided on a solution category. After the comparison

and evaluation of specific offerings buyers will make the decision on the one that meets their needs best. (Hintz 2018.)

Once the stages of the buyer's journey are known and understood, other parts of marketing, like content marketing and marketing channels, can also be considered and developed further (Pallonen 2019). Also, buyer personas, represented in chapter 3.3.2., significantly influence marketing contents and channelling them. In ideal situation, high-quality marketing totality eventually lead customers onto positive purchase decision in their buyer's journey. Additionally, a well-managed totality also has a positive effect on the customer experience, which will turn customers into referrals.

4.4 Lead generation

Generating leads means, according to Prami (2020) a process in which contacts interested in a company's services or products are filtered out of a completely unidentified mass and then sorted out. Kolowich (2020) describes lead generation being a process of attracting and converting strangers and prospects into someone who has indicated interest in the company's product or service. From inbound marketing perspective, lead generation takes place in the second phase of the methodology, occurring after the target audience has been attracted, and they are ready to be converted into leads. Next page, in Figure 6. converting visitors into leads can be seen as a basic pillar in an individual's journey in becoming a delighted customer who promotes the company forward. (Kolowich 2020.)

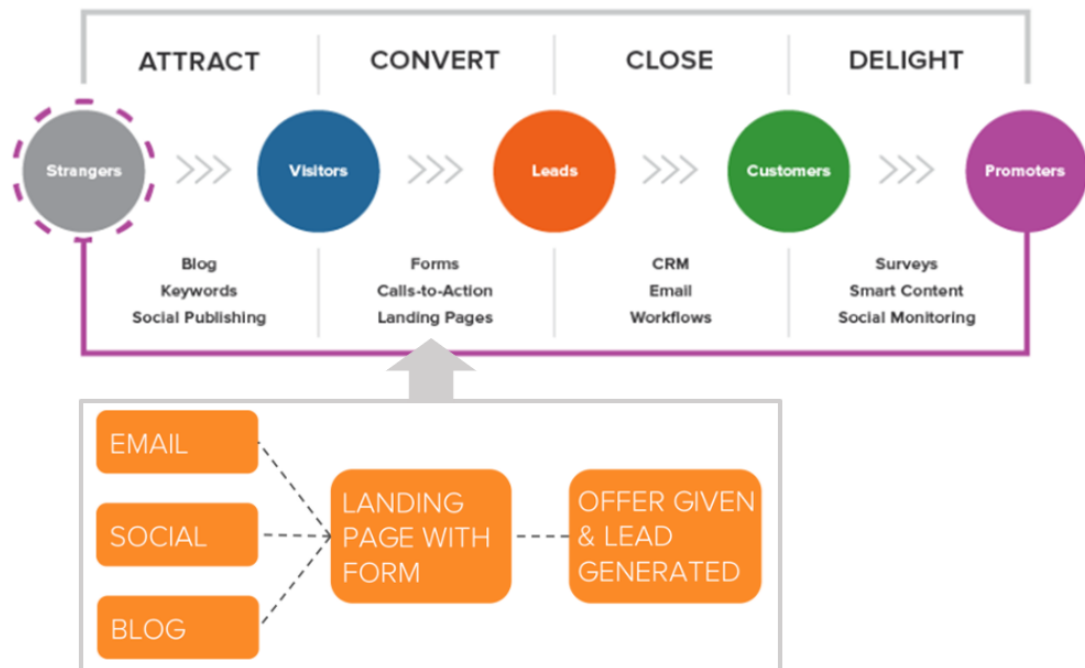


Figure 6. Lead generation in the larger inbound methodology diagram. (edited) (HubSpot, 2020)

Acquiring leads is also profitable for the very reason that through the process, the company gets to know about interested customers and customers are correspondingly able to identify the company that offers the product or service they need. Without marketing, that is based on inbound methodology, potential customers maybe never identify or notify the target company among competitors and are likely to end up as a paying customer elsewhere.

4.4.1 Lead types

Prami (2020) describes leads as persons that have shown interest in a company's products or services, for example by answering a survey or visiting certain pages of the website. They may also have registered for an event or contacted themselves via chat. In short, a person becomes a lead when he or she has indicated interest in some way, shape, or form. All leads have their own lifecycle. That means they move from visitor to customer at their own pace. Therefore, not all leads are of equal value at the same time and thus they cannot be handed out for sales simultaneously either. (Kolowich 2020.)

Kolowich (2020) from HubSpot classifies leads into four different types based on their life cycle stage:

1. Marketing Qualified Lead (MQL); a person who is interested in the product or service, but not ready for sales contacts. For example, this person has fulfilled a form in web page to subscribe a newsletter to get interesting information and offers.
2. Sales Qualified Lead (SQL); a person who has indicated real interest in a product or service, for example, by asking details of it, or the lead has filled a contact request form in a company's web page.
3. Product Qualified Lead (PQL); is a person who is already familiar with a product by having used the trial version, and now indicates interest in paid version.
4. Service Qualified Leads; are persons or customers who tell the service team that they are interest in becoming paying customers or that they want to upgrade their subscription.

The most important lead types for this thesis are Marketing Qualified Lead and Sales Qualified Lead. It is important to be able to differentiate them so that they can be used effectively in the right way. MQL needs to be nurtured properly in order to develop into SQL and to be ready for sales contact later, while SQL is already ready for sales contact. (Riserbato 2020.)

4.4.2 Lead scoring

Depending on business, product, and service, inbound lead cycle can take from fifteen minutes to several months converting to sales. To determine the effectiveness of marketing and to allocate time to follow-up the best leads, it is important to measure both the quantity and quality of inbound leads. (Halligan & Shah 2014, p. 125.) Lead scoring helps marketing and salespeople better understand and judge how close a prospect is to make a purchase. By scoring and grading leads marketing officers can also prioritise their time and resources better and allow salespersons to focus on customers who are about to finalise a sale. A well-executed lead scoring system is likely to improve conversion rates. (Salesforce 2020.)

To measure the quality of leads they need to be graded first. Based on the grade, some leads are immediately qualified and ready for sales follow-ups and some leads may need

nurturing before they are ready to buy. (Halligan & Shah 2014, p. 126, 128.) MQL's turn into SQL's through a lead scoring process and companies determine the terms of their lead scoring process individually based on the company's needs. According to HubSpot flywheel model, a MQL grows towards SQL as lead scores increase. Lead scores accrue as a result of actions taken by a potential customer. With the accumulated points, a MQL converts to a SQL when the sales lead criteria and scoring conditions set by the company are met. (Riserbato 2020.)

Leads can be graded using specialised software application which automatically calculates the grade, or it can be done manually. This data is then stored with the other information about the leads in company's database. (Halligan & Shah 2014, p. 126.) Lead scoring starts by assigning value points of each action a lead takes. These actions may include referral sources, pageviews, searches in company's web pages, material downloads, email actions, landing page visits, and many more. (Salesforce 2020.) Simple lead scoring can be explained, for example, as follows: Some lead actions accumulate ten points, and some actions may accumulate twenty points per action. A lead is considered sales qualified when it has accrued hundred score points. In other words, a lead needs to make several actions to gain enough value and convert into sales qualified lead. If the lead has not yet earned enough scores, i.e. its grading is too low, marketing will recognise that the lead still requires nurturing before it can be handed out to sales (Halligan & Shah 2014, p.128).

4.5 Tools

According to the inbound methodology, lead generation requires a functioning marketing technology. Inbound marketing tools are used to generate traffic and leads to a company's landing pages and ensure their flow toward purchase decisions. The most important tools for this development project are reviewed in this section; web pages, e-mail, CRM system and HubSpot, as well as integrations between systems that affect the quality of operation and management of the whole in inbound marketing.

4.5.1 Web pages

The website encounters customers long before a company's representative gets to talk to them. The purpose of the website is to answer questions, serve, collect contacts, and sell. It attracts visitors, converts them into leads by convincing the leads to make a

positive purchase decision and become customers. (Prami 2020.) Up to a certain point, customers can also search for information elsewhere on the web, but in the end, companies' own websites are the ones where the customer believes they can find the information they want most certainly. Websites are the most important tool for a company, where one should find all the necessary information about the company and what it has to offer. The website is intended to serve as the home of the company, to which customers are eventually redirected, for example through ad clicks or blog posts. If guidance is not done, investing in digital marketing and customer acquisition is wasted. (Miller 2012.)

Website visitors are meant to convert into leads and eventually into paying customers. For this purpose, customers are tried to get engaged and at the same time collect contact information from interested customers. This is done, for example, by offering to subscribe to the newsletter on the website, by filling out a form or requesting a product demo. (Halligan & Shah 2014, p. 109.)

Since all customers do not end up in the company's website with instant searching, but perhaps a result of other topic related searches or via third-party webpages it makes sense for a company to use landing pages, i.e. those pages that visitors land on when entering from another site. The content of the landing page must be designed for the purpose for which it is used. This means that if a customer clicks on a link for a particular service, the landing page must have relevant information about this particular service in order for the customer to continue on their purchase path. If the content of the landing page does not meet the customer's expectations, it is also unlikely to expect this online visitor to commit and take any desired follow-up action, such as request a service demo or the like, and leave contact information in exchange. (Miller 2012.)

Leads arrive at the landing page via the CTA (call to action) buttons. They are prompts for action to get the customer to do the desired action. Relevant prompts work best. The CTA directs website visitors to a landing page where the visitor is given access to some free resource in exchange for leaving contact information. Contact information is submitted via a contact form. The information collected can be, for example, name, phone number, email, and organisation. The form should be as simple and easy to complete as possible, as the less information to fill in the form, the more conversions it will generate. On the other hand, the more data obtained, the better-quality leads are

produced. The best workable combination will be found via testing different options. (Sales Communications 2020)

4.5.2 Email

According to HubSpot over 90% of consumers check their emails daily and email subscribers are three times more likely to share social content than other consumers (Perricone 2020). Email still is the most effective way communicate a direct message to a specified individual. Email marketing reaches target people and desired groups like in one-on-one conversations and it prompts people to make decisions instead of just searching or negotiating of them. Email marketing is also easily measurable and with metrics like message openings, clicks, and CTRs email marketing's efficiency is uncomplicated to follow. (Hanna et al. 2015, p. 2-3.) With the exception of the GDPR aspect, e-mail is completely under the company's control, which makes it a meaningful marketing channel for the company as well. (Perricone 2020).

It makes sense for a company to only send messages to its target audience that add value. Messages need to be well targeted and personalised, otherwise the recipient will soon ignore the messages or even unsubscribe email letter (Hanna et al. 2015, p. 8-9.) Personalisation means talking to the recipient about relevant things and showing that his or her situation is known. The purpose of an email is to direct the recipient to do something like download the posted content, answer a survey, or invite a customer to an event. When the message is clear, the success of the conversion is more likely. (Viinamäki 2017.)

In inbound marketing, email is an integral part of nurturing leads, as email marketing is a great way to ensure that the lead stays connected to the business. Workflow emails, or automated threads, work great in this case. For example, there may be three messages in a chain that are sent to a customer every week. For example, if a lead has originally subscribed to an electronic guide, each workflow message will provide the customer other interesting information related to the topic, allowing the lead to learn more and be more likely interested in buying. In this case, the last automated message can provide, for example, a suggestion for an appointment since the customer probably is more willing to buy than earlier. (Salminen 2015.)

4.5.3 CRM

Customer relationship management (CRM) technology is a tool that helps businesses aggregate, organise, and analyse customer data. In other words, the purpose is to support company's operations handling. The system helps to control and manage customer relationships. Collecting and storing customer information on existing and potential customers can improve customer understanding, better meet customer needs, and market smarter. CRM system is not helping just salespeople to sell. Rather it works best when utilised in all business functions including marketing and customer service. (Mailchimp 2020.)

Inbound marketing uses many alternatives to reach and connect with potential customers online, through social media, a website, and other channels. Therefore, it is important that the data is always up to date and that different parts of the organisation use the same data. (Baker 2020.)

4.5.4 HubSpot

HubSpot is a software platform designed to help companies to market and sell more effectively. It is a cloud-based platform on which all a company's digital marketing efforts can be located. The software platform consists of four modules which integrate seamlessly. These are HubSpot's CRM, Marketing Hub, Sales Hub, and Service Hub. (Deater 2019.) These modules and their main features are introduced in the following sections. However, it is important to note that only the Free and Starter versions of the HubSpot's range of services are relevant to this thesis. Therefore, this text does not represent Professional and Enterprise versions of the services.

CRM

HubSpot CRM was originally developed primarily for marketers' tool. In the beginning it offered a way for organising all leads the marketers were talking to, to nurture leads in the way the buyer personas and their unique pain points required, and finally pass them smoothly onto the sales team. However, HubSpot CRM has evolved into a robust system that comprehensively helps all customer-facing teams from marketing to sales to customer service. CRM system is completely free for all users which makes it easy to approach also for small businesses. (Deater 2019.)

All company contacts and leads can be saved in CRM and each department can access lead data, and utilise additional tools needed in their own department to improve lead's relationship with the company. The system stores all contact records and conversations which makes it easy to follow each contact's actions and enrich data. For example, functionalities like deals, tasks, and ticketing allow to keep track of at what stage a prospect is in the sales process and make tickets for clients who have questions. (Deater 2019.)

Marketing Hub

HubSpot Marketing Hub module includes a wide range of tools designed to help the marketing department in its work. Marketing Hub integrates seamlessly with HubSpot CRM and helps the marketing team attract and nurture more qualified leads for example by increasing traffic to company's website and converting more visitors into leads. (Deater 2019.)

Marketing Hub tools can be used to create content for blogs, emails, social media accounts, and website. In addition, the tools include versatile reports that provide key marketing information, including how many people arrive at the site, where they go, and how much time is spent visiting the site. Different versions of the marketing module are available depending on the size of the company and the number of tools desired. These are Free, Starter, Professional, and Enterprise versions. (Deater 2019.)

Free version of Marketing Hub tools provides introductory functions. With the free version ads tool, personalised ads can be targeted for right audience, the landing page builder assists in creating well designed landing pages to capture visitors' attention and building up forms and emails that can be tracked. Although this version has limited range of tools available marketers still have multiple opportunities to convert visitors into leads. (HubSpot 2020b.) The most essential feature of the free version is that it can track the behaviour of contacts. That is, when a person submits a form on a website, the contact's visit history can be tracked from HubSpot. (Matter Agency 2019.)

The Starter version is suitable for small teams with a lot of tasks but only a limited budget. This version has all the features which include to the free version as well as other practical marketing tools. For example, the visit history of contacts can be monitored

unlimitedly, and contacts can be grouped in various ways. With the Starter package, advertising can be managed diversely and see, for example, the effects of different advertisements on the conversion of leads. (Matter Agency 2019.)

Sales Hub

The HubSpot Sales Hub is designed to help sales teams get deeper information of leads and close better deals, more quickly. Tools on this software are designed to enhance sales process so that sales teams can focus on closing deals with qualified clients with the inbound marketing methodology in mind. Sales Hub has a vast offering of sales tools that can be chosen depending on the package that suits best for the company. (Deater 2019.) Nevertheless, Sales Hub can be used also as a free version with limited number of tools.

Sales Hub let salespeople see which leads are visiting company's website, on what pages, and how often. The software also gives notifications whenever a prospect opens an email, and a salesperson can even automate personalised workflows to offer quality information for the lead when the time is right for it. Sales Hub also syncs up with the HubSpot CRM, which helps a sales team to stay up to date of which deals are won, lost, or still in progress. Reporting dashboards allow to follow sales metrics. These can be used to monitor, for example, how much a salesperson is selling and why. This helps in monitoring how processes work in total and sales actions can be tailored to meet the unique needs of different buyers. (Deater 2019.)

Service Hub

HubSpot Service Hub is designed to support customer service. It offers a full range of tools to help customer service identify problems faced by customers and resolve them quickly in a way that makes clients happy. (Deater 2019.)

The most important features of the Service Hub are the utilisation of customer database and automation of customer service. Utilising customer database means that customer servants can pull up all the information that has been communicated with the customer in the past. In this way, clients can be served with high quality and the right kind of solutions can be offered to the customer as quickly as possible. With service automation, customers get help with their questions at any time by using a live chat or chat robot

service. In addition, for example, frequently asked questions can be stored and answered for customers in plain language without the need for a customer service person to contact each questioner individually and clarify the situation. (Deater 2019.)

The HubSpot Service Hub integrates with the HubSpot CRM service, allowing any member of the service team to see the customer's past interactions with marketing and sales teams and quickly determine the best way to resolve potential issues. This streamlines the overall service and ensures that the customer experience is the best possible. (Deater 2019.)

4.5.5 Integrations

Integration refers to systems or software built on different platforms and technologies that are interconnected. A company often has a need for integration when the system in use lacks the necessary functions or data needs to be transferred between different systems. The key benefit of integration is that the data is valid, and the same valid data is available to all parties in the organization who need it. This simplifies manual reporting work and clarifies data analysis. (Ahonen 2019.)

Each company has its own needs and starting points for integrations. This is affected by what systems the company has in place and what goals they have set for the business. Integration between different systems requires research, planning and defining of integration goals. This ensures that integration becomes functional, serves the goals set for it and enables business benefits. (Ahonen 2019.)

The most important integrations for this thesis are between CRM, email, website, social media, and marketing automation system. These tools and channels are used to build a suitable entity for customer acquisition, which can be used to convert leads from web visitors. The integration of marketing automation and CRM enables smooth marketing and sales collaboration and data accuracy (Ahonen 2019), while social media, website and email integrations enhance marketing tracking and monitoring contact activity.

4.6 Content marketing

Content marketing covers all types of content that add value to consumers and thus directly or indirectly promotes a company, brand, product, or service. Content marketing

takes place both online and offline. It focuses on creating content that is meaningful and useful to consumers, generating added value and thus driving sales. Typical long-form content marketing types are blogs, articles, ebooks, and videos and short form types are for example Facebook updates and images. (Gunelius 2011.)

From an inbound marketing perspective, it is important to pay attention to what marketing content is shown for the target audience at different stages of buyer's journey, as potential customers are interested in different content at each stage (Ahvenainen et al 2017, 39). Section 4.3.3 explained that buyer's journey consists of awareness stage, consideration stage, and decision stage. At awareness stage potential customers are most likely looking for information about their problem in search engines with keywords. According to Ahvenainen et al (2017) people may be interested in phenomena on the subject and willingly read related articles or blog writings. At consideration stage, the potential customer has already identified various options from service providers online. Marketing content should at this point provide answers to customers' questions like, why the product or service offered by the company best meets his or her need? For example, guides, whitepapers, or videos are functional content at this consideration stage. At the decision stage a potential client is ready to make the purchase that has been considered earlier. Demos and trials are workable content here. (Hintz 2018.) Ahvenainen et al (2017) clarify that at this point, the purpose of the content is to facilitate purchasing.

4.7 Content distribution channels

Content distribution promotes content to online audiences on a variety of media channels. These channels can be classified into three groups: owned, earned, and paid. Owned content distribution refers to the distribution of content through channels owned or managed by the organization, such as a corporate website, blog, email newsletter, or social media site, whereas paid content distribution includes channels where the desired content is distributed on different channels for a fee. Paid content marketing is, for example, click-based search engine advertising or sponsored social media advertising. Earned content channels refer to content voluntarily produced by third parties that is distributed in the press, guest articles, social media sharing and likes, or product reviews, just to mention few examples. (Fleiss 2017.)

Because this thesis focuses on converting web visitors into leads, the most relevant owned distribution channels are website, email, and social media. Paid distribution channels include Facebook advertising. As web pages and email have already been covered earlier in sections 4.5.1 and 4.5.2, they will not be discussed again here. Social media's owned and paid channels are covered in the following subsections.

Halligan and Shah (2014) define social media as: people connecting, interacting, and sharing things online. Social media has changed the way marketers and consumers communicate. It provides a platform to acquire product information through peer communication and offering peer influence on buying decisions. (Gupta 2016.) For businesses, it provides a great way to reach and engage potential customers. Variety of social media sites are available on the web today such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn. Each platform is targeted to different users although they have same kind of ideology letting users connect to others, interact, and share information with the network's community of people. (Halligan & Shah 2014, p.67)

Facebook is one of the largest and most active social networking sites on the web. It has globally over 2,7 billion users (Elo 2020) and over three million users in Finland (Innowise 2020). The advantage of having a Facebook presence for a company is reaching as many people as possible. Setting up and using Facebook business page is free and it allows numerous features to help engage the community better. Discussion forums, photos, videos, testimonials, and other features created by third parties make Facebook a living community where like-minded people can interact and share things. Together, these features make Facebook a meaningful channel for all ages and, therefore, it is an appropriate channel for almost any business to be present and to market. (Halligan & Shah 2014, p. 70.)

4.8 Analytics and reporting

Marketing needs to be measured to know how the different measures and components work (Miller 2012). A properly implemented analytics process helps marketers to avoid negative consequences and optimise marketing performance. Rackley (2015) defines marketing analytics a process of identifying metrics that are valid indicators of marketing performance to achieve its goals, monitoring those metrics over time, and using the results to improve marketing performance.

Inbound marketing is goal-oriented and result-oriented, which is why reporting tools are needed to support marketing to see if the direction is right and whether goals are being achieved (Sales Communications 2018a). Measuring and comparing marketing from different sources can be laborious and challenging. Therefore, it is worth considering the use of a marketing system where comparison and analysis work is easy on one platform, even when there are several data sources, and a lot of measurable data is accumulated. (HubSpot & GA 2020, p. 57.)

In practice, all values of digital advertising can and should be measured. However, it is essential to focus on reporting and data analysis on those issues that are of real importance in evaluating and developing the marketing effectiveness of the business. (HubSpot & GA 2020, p. 6.)

Indicators related to lead generation activities are a very important part of many marketing analytics efforts. In fact, lead generation is the primary activity of many marketers, and because much of lead generation is digital, there are plenty of options for data collection and analysis. (Rackley 2015.) For example, it is essential to know how many leads can be produced through inbound marketing. However, there are several other parts in the process that need to be measured to further develop lead acquisition. These metrics may include for example traffic and conversion rates from social media, CTA performance on landing pages or emails, or measuring new vs. repeat visitors on webpage. (HubSpot & GA 2020, p. 11-19.)

4.9 Key findings of conceptual framework

The theoretical part of this work explains people's buying behaviour and motivations behind purchasing decisions. In outlining the theory, the purpose was to go through the processes involved in the inbound method, the tools, distribution channels, and reporting measures relevant to this work, and based on this information, to build a customer acquisition development plan. However, as the work progressed, it was found that the framework as such is not sufficient and that the implementation of the plan requires a more in-depth study of the leads. Thus, for example, defining different lead types as well as the scoring of leads were necessary to include in the theoretical analysis.

The theory helps to understand the importance of inbound processes and related tools, as well as the synergies achieved with the joint usage of the various components. All processes are essential for the whole operation to work properly and the steps of the inbound processes are supported by several different tools. If the scope of this work were broadened, the theory-based information could also be expanded, which would enable a more comprehensive customer acquisition plan drawn up. Although the focus of this work is on lead acquisition, the elements of the theoretical chapter can be used as a basis for a broader plan.

As a summary, the conceptual framework chapter includes all the necessary information needed to be able to construct the logical, clear, and measurable customer acquisition development plan that is the objective of this thesis.

5 Customer acquisition plan proposal

This chapter reviews the initial customer acquisition plan. The plan is based on the inbound methodology presented in the theoretical part of this thesis.

5.1 Overview of the proposal building stage

Right at the beginning of the work, the case company hoped to get help with customer segmentation and selection of digital marketing channels. However, it very quickly became clear that the channels in use are exactly those digital channels that are favoured by the current customer base and by the case company's b2c target customers. Instead, it was noted that there is room for improvement in marketing practices and the customer acquisition process itself.

After the initial interviews, the processes and marketing contents of the competitors were also benchmarked, and the relevant theoretical knowledge of the topic was studied. Based on the benchmark analysis of this research, it can be stated that various marketing campaigns on social media channels are widely used among gym companies and content marketing is already actively used by many actors. In contrast, inbound marketing is hardly used yet, with a few exceptions. Based on the information collected in the conceptual framework section of this research, the inbound marketing method was selected as very effective in customer acquisition marketing and providing a better basis for business growth and continuous development of customer acquisition compared to shorter-term, traditional outbound marketing. Familiarisation with the theory opened new aspects for the author. Some matters, for example integrating different inbound tools, needed more attention and deeper studying than expected.

Therefore, the content of the thesis work was fine-tuned a couple of times as the development work progressed. There were also some personnel changes as well as work tasks changes in the case company during the development work, which had the effect that the original development plan was also changed in a more strategic direction.

Based on the analysis of the current customer acquisition process, it was found that customer acquisition marketing is generally implemented short-sighted and customers are attracted through brief campaigns. Investments to marketing campaigns are rather

small, leaving their visibility relatively low. Purchasing paths for marketing campaigns also remain superficial and the technical implementation does not quite support the customer becoming a sales lead or a buying customer.

Based on the current state analysis, another issue found was that contacts are collected through various channels, but they are rarely sales qualified leads at that stage. Lead generation must be an intact process in order for contacts to become marketing leads and thus hopefully also sales qualified leads. In efficient lead generation and customer acquisition in general, it is essential that the process works smoothly. For this reason, this plan will later introduce a marketing automation system that meets this demand.

The third essential point of development, based on all the data previously researched and suggestions from literature, was the company's marketing content. Although the scope of the thesis does not allow to explore and develop content production, the topic and significance of the contents was discussed with the case company during the thesis work and improvement suggestions were given to marketing personnel. Even before the completion of this plan, the company already took big steps forward in terms of content production.

The proposal building seemed difficult at first. As the thesis author acts as an external consultant for the client company, the activities of day-to-day operations and processes could not be monitored as intensely as if the author were an employee in the company. The company also had to make a lot of special arrangements due to the Covid-19 epidemic, and the customer acquisition development plan was therefore not at the top of the priority list. This also significantly affected communication between the author and the case company. In spite of all these challenges, the proposal was co-created with the case company, and the key elements of the proposal are presented below.

5.2 Objectives and success metrics

As customer acquisition is perceived as a special challenge in the company and yet it is vital for its existence and growth, the wide scope goal of this work is to offer the case company tools and guidance with which the company's customer acquisition activities can be improved permanently.

The objective set for this thesis in the beginning is to create a development plan that will enhance case company's customer acquisition by improving lead generation. With this objective in mind, a lead generation model will be produced for the client company to increase the quality and quantity of leads. Higher quality of leads mean that the leads are not random contacts but belong to a defined target group, which will evolve into marketing qualified leads, and eventually into sales qualified leads.

Also, a practical action plan will be included to the customer acquisition plan to enable the client company start using inbound method more comprehensively in its marketing. In this way, the company gets a concrete guide to support marketing as well.

The most important success metrics of this project are qualitative. Success is evaluated through validation discussions with case company representatives. If the customer acquisition plan is realistic to implement and corresponds to the desired result in terms of content, it can be considered to be successful.

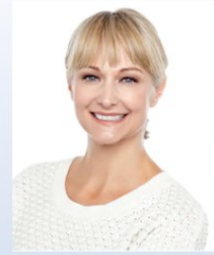
5.3 Buyer persona

The case company sells fitness services to both women and men, regardless of age and fitness level. However, an ideal buyer persona was analysed and identified from the customer base, and the persona is presented next in Figure 7.

Buyer Persona: Paula

Background:

- Female, age 35-55 years
- Married, two children (over 10 year old)
- HR Manager in IT company
- Workplace close to case company (less than 1km)
- Uses public transport for commuting



Consumption habits:

- Makes basic purchases from Prisma, Intersport, KappAhl, Halonen, and uses local services
- Makes occasional purchases online
- Uses mostly average priced brands, but has some interest in luxury brands as well
- Frugal, but willing to invest in herself as well

Interests in life:

- Cooking, self-development, wellbeing, outdoor activities, quality time with friends

Challenges in life:

- Hectic everyday life and stressful work affect endurance
- Self-searching period of life

Goals and motivators in achieving goals:

- Desire to learn a new skill or fulfil
- I become a better person as I develop myself
- When I get encouragement and results my motivation stays higher

Pain points in achieving goals:

- Difficulty to find a hobby that is inspiring and suits to my schedule
- Do I deserve to have more of my own time?
- I need encouragement and results to keep my motivation up.

Paula's normal work day includes a lot of meetings, routine tasks, work organization, etc. After the work day, she spends time doing housework, taking the kids to hobbies, doing the Spanish course assignments, and watching her favourite series on TV if she has time.

Figure 7. Buyer persona

Based on the analysis of the current customer base, the ideal characteristics of the buyer persona was identified and discussed extensively during the co-creation process. In terms of demographics, the personality has been created to match the current customer base.

The results of the customer survey and discussions with the staff about the characteristics of ideal customers were also utilised in the co-creation. In addition, the location of the case company, the service offering, and other individual factors were considered when creating the persona.

5.4 Buyer's journey

Based on the current state analysis and suggestions from literature the buyer's journey consists of three stages that a person goes through before actual purchase. These stages are: awareness stage, consideration stage, and decision stage. The suggested buyer's journey for the case company is illustrated in Figure 8.

Buyer's Journey	Awareness Stage	Consideration Stage	Decision Stage
<i>What is the customer thinking or feeling?</i>	The buyer is bored or stressed and needs a counterbalance to the work. She wants to promote her own well-being, and to develop herself.	The buyer is confused of the large amount of fitness centres nearby. Consider the value for money and the key features that the fitness centre should be able to offer.	The buyer seeks confirmation of her thoughts of which service provider she will choose. -Do I certainly get quality guidance? -Does this help to improve my everyday life?
<i>What is the customer's action?</i>	Google searches, reading related articles and blogs, observing friends and colleagues.	Comparison of service providers, outlining the most essential personal service needs.	Double-checking received marketing newsletters. CTA clicks, email openings etc.
<i>What or where is the buyer researching?</i>	Health and wellness themes, new types of exercise and trendy hobbies.	Ease of buying and terminating membership, most suitable service range, quality of the gym and its personnel.	Searching user experiences and possibility to trial period before purchase from websites and social media.
<i>How will we move the buyer along his or her journey with the case company in mind?</i>	Social media sponsored advertising +adding interesting content to our own media channels.	Offering valuable information and insights via email, social media and webpages. Keeping the buyer engaged all the way.	Offering easy online buying process and unparalleled membership benefits. Tracking customer's actions and conversion to SQL → sales call.

Figure 8. Buyer's Journey.

At the awareness stage, a potential buyer begins to search for information about the problem most often through online search engines such as Google. Through a search engine, a person ends up in different channels. She may read fitness-related trends as well as blogs and articles about the health benefits of exercise and, for example, the effects on coping at work. The person may also browse interesting information on fitness-related topics such as blogs about healthy food or mindfulness courses that are linked to the target company through marketing means, e.g., blog collaboration. The role of

websites, blogs and social media is significant from the buyer's point of view, so the task of marketing at this stage is to provide the buyer with content that eases her problems and to guide the customer to the company's services.

Search engine optimisation (SEO) is an effective way to improve the discoverability of websites in different contexts. Optimisation ensures that a potential customer has a lot of possible online contact points for the company as she will most often find a business through search engine's organic and keyword advertising search results or through targeted advertising on Facebook. The contents of social media corporate accounts, social media advertising and search engine marketing (SEM) also help the company and the customer to meet the awareness stage.

At the consideration stage, a visitor has been converted a lead for the company, i.e. a visitor has left her contact information for the company. At this point, a company can approach a lead in different ways, such as sending marketing emails and engaging the lead by offering free visit days, informing about the benefits and upcoming events, or proposing the lead to join a social media follower. The potential customer is provided with information and high-quality content so that her interest does not end but she will be better engaged and her continuation on the buyer's journey process is ensured.

At the decision stage, the potential buyer has become acquainted with the company and alternative competitors and made the decision to acquire a gym membership. If the potential customer has not yet purchased the membership on their own, for example online, salesperson must be in contact with the customer as soon as possible. The buyer can still be influenced by strengthening his or her confidence in the company and thus ensuring this prospect to make a positive purchase decision for the case company. The emergence of a new customer relationship is ensured by personal sales work and quality service.

5.5 Benefits, offerings, and elements of lead generation

Based on suggestions from literature of inbound process the buyer needs different content at different stages of the buying process. In the theory of inbound marketing process lead generation is described as a process pillar which settles at the end of the awareness phase and the beginning of the consideration phase on the buyer's journey.

As a result of co-creation process with the case company, the following section describes the proposed steps and channels in lead generation that will help leads to continue the journey in the process.

From a practical point of view, it does not matter which route a potential buyer finds to the company, but what happens next in lead acquisition. With interesting content, that meets the needs of the potential customer, and targeted advertising, she becomes more interested in the company. The content can be, for example, a hot offer or themed ad that explains, for example, how the services of the fitness centre improve the quality of life, explaining the benefits of membership and creating customer value. A potential customer is attracted further in the buying process by means of call to action (CTA) prompts to a landing page which provides relevant sales content and at the same time the customer is requested to leave her contact information to the company. For example, free downloadable material is offered in exchange for contact information. CTA prompts on social media sponsored ads, on the company's website, on landing page, or elsewhere, help activate the customer and take her further in the buying process. Suitable CTA prompts include, for example: GET A FITNESS MEMBERSHIP HERE, BOOK A CONSULTATION or DOWNLOAD A WORKOUT GUIDE. When a visitor leaves their contact information with the company, they become a lead. If, on the other hand, the visitor does not fill in the contact form, she is not yet convinced enough about the service provided by the company. In this case, even more value must be produced. This is accomplished, for example, by retargeting advertising. However, retargeting content preferably needs to offer a new marketing perspective, such as a customer-driven service provided by the company that can be supported by customer references.

Based on suggestions from literature, leads need nurturing to evolve into SQL. The development can be implemented with email workflows, i.e. the lead is provided with personalised content, downloadable material, home training videos or such via email. The purpose of the workflow is to provide added value to a potential client, but also to strengthen her commitment and trust in the company and thus accelerate the buying process.

The development of leads is monitored by lead scoring. At this stage, however, the lead is most likely not yet ready for sales contacts, but will require more warm-up, i.e. engagement. Therefore, it is reasonable to use lead scoring to classify whether the

different leads are marketing qualified (MQL) or sales qualified leads (SQL). Based on the grading, it is decided whether the leads will be contacted immediately or wait until lead scores increase. Lead scoring system is represented in section 5.7 (Production plan).

5.6 Tools and channels

The range of tools and channels of the development plan were selected in co-creation with the case company by utilising the tools and channels which are already used by the case company and then adding the necessary new parts to complete the customer acquisition plan into a functional entity. The tools needed to implement the customer acquisition development plan are: company website, email, CRM system and HubSpot marketing automation tool. Additionally, Facebook is chosen the main marketing distribution channel for the plan.

The company's website acts as a hub, to which potential customers are directed to gather more information, become more interested in the company's services, and make purchases. That is why it is important that the content of the web pages is attractive and adds value. Another important point is that the web pages are technically user-friendly, navigation is easy and contacting and purchasing is effortless. Even if websites are working properly, they need to be well optimised. Search engine optimisation (SEO) must not be forgotten, because through high-quality optimisation, web pages are also found through search engines and they will attract potential customers to the pages.

Email is used for workflows and other messaging purposes to engage potential customers and to develop marketing leads into sales leads. When a person has given their contact information and accepted the data can be used for marketing purposes, for example, when subscribing to the newsletter, he can be approached in different ways later. The goal is to get the customer to become a sales lead or make a positive buying decision independently online.

A CRM system is an essential tool for managing customer data. Multiple CRM systems can be integrated with the marketing automation system or, alternatively, customer data can be synchronised with the marketing automation system. For this plan, the intention is initially to compile new customer data into both the HubSpot CRM system and the

case company's current CRM system. The integration of the CRM system with HubSpot and the possible exchange to HubSpot CRM will be considered once the customer acquisition plan has been implemented and the user experience of the HubSpot CRM system has been gained.

With HubSpot, lead traffic can be accurately tracked and managed, for example, by automating scheduled email flows. Advertising campaigns, other customer communications and customer data can also be analysed efficiently with this single tool. HubSpot tool produces a wide variety of reports that make it easier to monitor marketing and sales results and allow the company to draw conclusions and make further plans for customer acquisition.

Facebook is used to attract and engage potential customers. The means used are sponsored, targeted, and re-targeted advertisements as well as interesting content that is created on the company's Facebook page and also shared from other sources, such as blog posts.

5.7 Budget

The suggested budget for the customer acquisition plan is based on the interview data from the current state analysis and collaborative discussions with the case organisations' representatives. The annual marketing budget in use is about 1% of the total turnover of the case company. The estimated budget for the implementation of this plan concerns the acquisition costs of marketing tools as well as the advertising budget to be paid for the channels themselves like Facebook. The costs of external advertising agencies, Facebook advertisement creation in marketing campaigns, have not been considered.

HubSpot offers a free version with 1000 customer contacts maximum. The free version features and the quantity of messages sent are limited, but it enables to follow lead traffic to some extent, to implement landing pages and promotional emails, and schedule marketing activities. The free version allows to try out various functionalities in a relatively versatile way.

A more comprehensive set of marketing management from HubSpot is the Starter Growth Suite which includes all essential features the case company needs. The package includes Free Tools, Marketing Hub, Sales Hub and Service Hub functions.

With this totality a small or medium-sized company can manage its marketing operations extensively at a relatively low cost of 46 euros / user. Using the Starter Growth Suite package is recommendable choice to ensure that the marketing automation of this development plan works optimally.

Facebook's advertising budget is affected by the size of the target audience and how actively ads are wanted to appear to the target audience. A target group was formed with the Facebook advertising tool corresponding to the buyer person (represented in phase 5.2) and comparing different reachability figures in relation to the price of the campaign. Based on the testing, a realistic budget estimate was formed for targeted Facebook ads as well as retargeting ads.

Subject of payment	Budget per month
HubSpot Starter Growth Suite (2 users)	96 €
Facebook ads	150 €
Total	246 €

Figure 9. Expenditure budget for new expenses

Lead acquisition will incur new costs for the company. However, the new costs of the plan, shown above in Figure 9, are estimated to be very reasonable. It is also good to note that in addition to generating leads, this marketing entity will significantly improve the visibility and customer engagement of the case company in the long run. However, it is possible and worthwhile to increase the budget so that, for example, targeted advertising can be shown to the target audience more often and different contents can be presented simultaneously.

5.8 Production plan

The proposed production plan reviews customer acquisition process and the steps by which lead acquisition is initiated according to the inbound method by attracting, engaging, and delighting potential customers. With the help of the production steps, the process of lead acquisition is concretised, and it is visualised with appropriate examples.

After that, a lead scoring system is described, and the most relevant issues related to reporting is explained. In the final part of this section, other production issues related to customer acquisition, which need to be put in order, are discussed. The purpose of these general-level advices is to support company's further customer acquisition development. Figure 10 (next page) illustrates the progress of the customer acquisition process in practice.

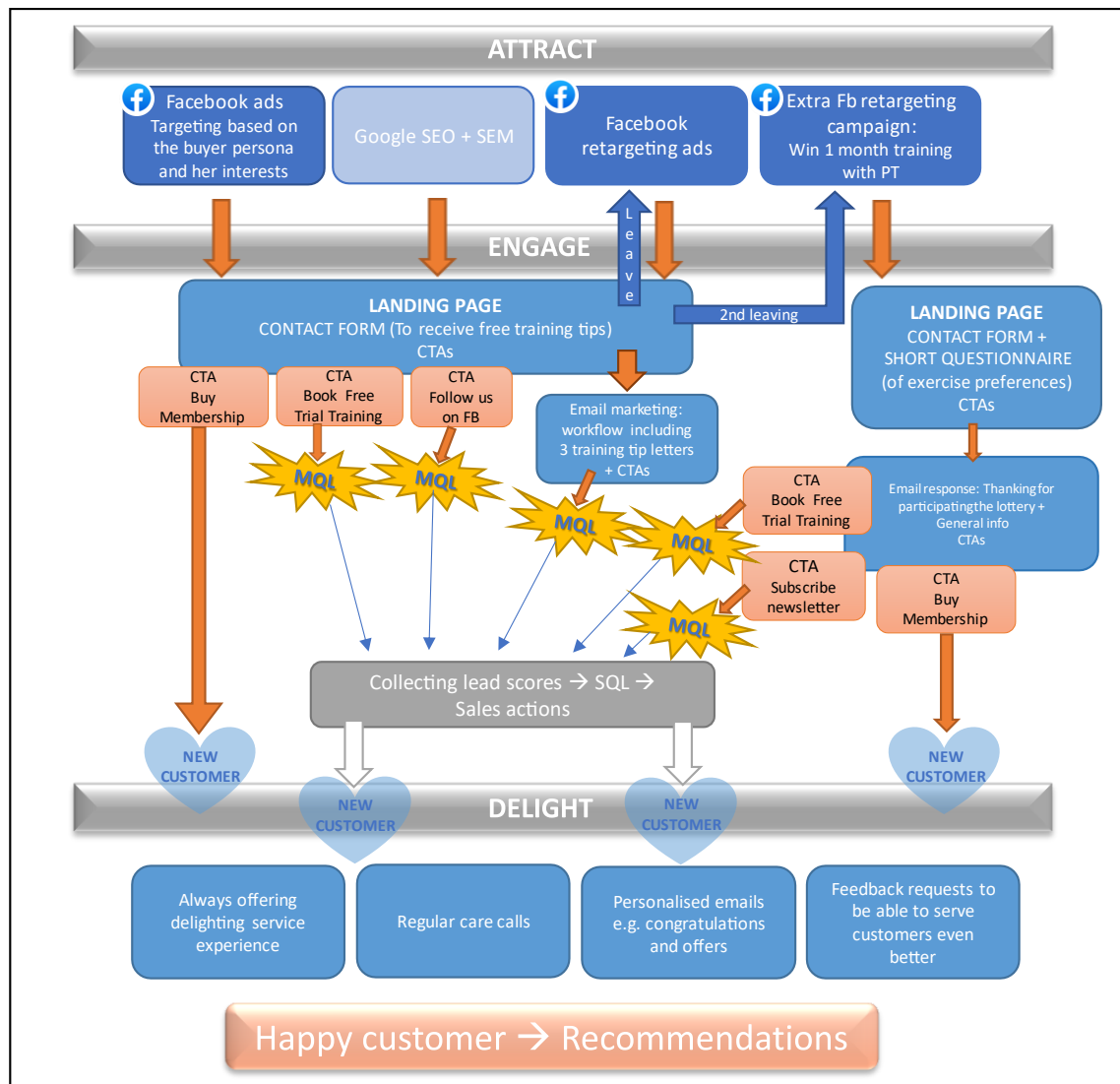


Figure 10. Customer acquisition plan process diagram

The production steps in this production plan focus on acquisition of leads. However, at a general level, the diagram also shows the stages of customer acquisition before and after the actual lead production. In this way, the diagram is more comprehensible, and it

is easier for the company to expand their marketing later by fitting the future marketing activities around lead generation process in this model.

The first step in implementing the lead acquisition process of Figure 10 is to set up a HubSpot account and add the necessary integrations. Setting up the business account is relatively easy with instructions and demos available in HubSpot. User information is added to the account and integrations are made with email and Facebook business account (see Figure 11). Other integrations will be implemented at a later stage, once marketing automation system more familiar and users have gained more experience of it.

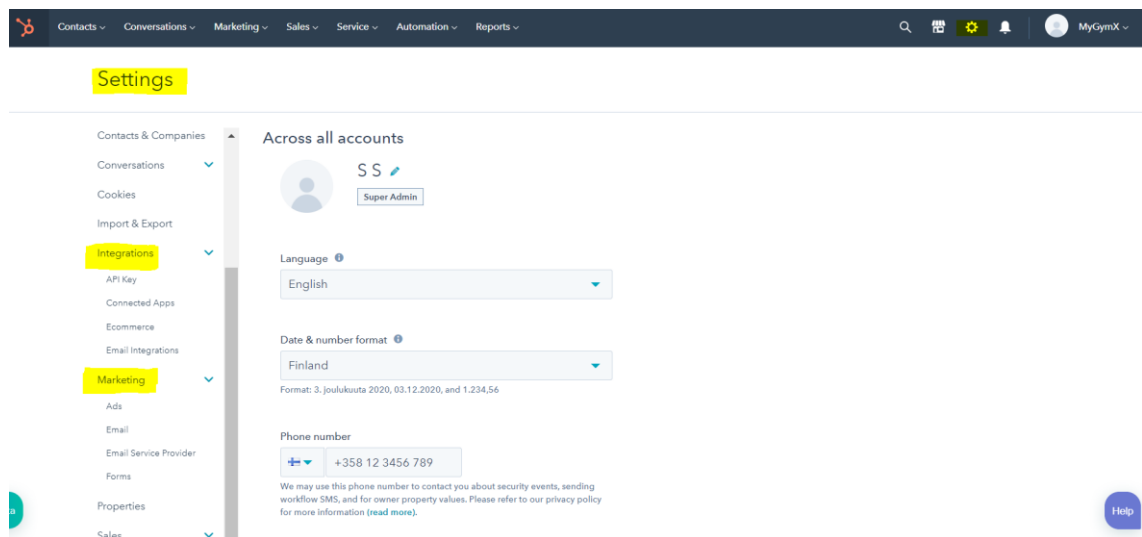
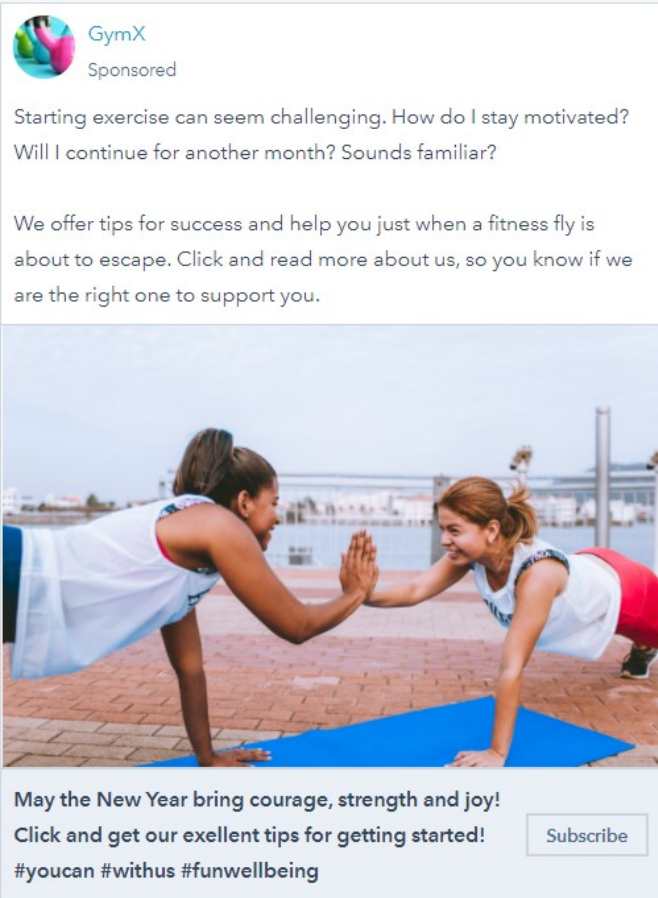


Figure 11. HubSpot settings page

The potential customer's awareness and interest in sports services has aroused based on information received from various channels. A potential customer is attracted to the company by taking advantage of SEO and SEM as well as social media advertising.

From a lead generation perspective, the process proceeds by attracting a potential customer to the company through Facebook advertising. Advertising targeting is based on the details and interests of the defined buyer persona. Figure 12 shows an advertisement in which the content is intended to attract a potential customer with the company's service offering as well as free workout tips.



GymX
Sponsored

Starting exercise can seem challenging. How do I stay motivated?
Will I continue for another month? Sounds familiar?


We offer tips for success and help you just when a fitness fly is about to escape. Click and read more about us, so you know if we are the right one to support you.

May the New Year bring courage, strength and joy!
Click and get our excellent tips for getting started!
#youcan #withus #funwellbeing

Subscribe

Figure 12. Facebook advertisement to attract potential customers.

When potential customer clicks advertisement it leads her to a landing page. Landing page includes more attracting and valuable information of the company in a simple form. The target of the landing page is to get customers fill in the contact form in order for the company collect contact information, i.e. leads, offering them free training tips in exchange. However, CTA prompts are included to the landing page to give the lead a chance to make other actions as well if she is already ready to buy a membership, book a trial period + counselling, or to join the social media follower. Landing page example is illustrated in Figure 13. If potential leads leave the landing page without leaving their contact information, retargeting is activated to return them back to the lead funnel.



Subscribe workout tips in your email here!

A healthier lifestyle will help you cope and be stronger. We will help you achieve your wishes.
Starting exercise is not easier than this.



First Name

Last Name

Email*

MyGymX needs the contact information you provide to us to contact you about our products and services. You may unsubscribe from these communications at any time. For information on how to unsubscribe, as well as our privacy practices and commitment to protecting your privacy, please review our [Privacy Policy](#).

SUBMIT

Nice that you found us!

Let us tell you a little more about us.

We have a safe workout facilities and a relaxed atmosphere. You may be in the gym for the first time or a long time has passed since the last workout. No problem! We will help you enjoy exercise again and encourage you to continue your journey with us far into the future.

You are welcome to us just as you are. Exercise makes you and us smile. We offer tips to help you throw old ideas in the trash. Here you can check our weekly [offering](#).

We will ensure you a good workout by offering you:

- Well equipped gym
- A comprehensive range of group exercise
- Wellness program
- Personal training
- Etc ...

You are welcome to us just as you are. Exercise makes you and us smile.

#youcan #withus #funwellbeing

BOOK FREE TRIAL TRAINING

BUY MEMBERSHIP

FOLLOW US ON FACEBOOK


 Create landing pages that convert [by Unbounce](#)

Figure 13. An example landing page with contact form and CTAs.

When leads have left their contact details on landing page, free training tips are sent by email. This email workflow is personalised, and it includes three scheduled messages, each including different theme of training tips. Marketing letters also include different CTA prompts that invite leads to Facebook followers or subscribe a monthly newsletter. The prompts also encourage potential customers to book free counselling + workout trial and buying a membership. The purpose of the prompts is to engage the customer more strongly with the company. Figure 14 shows an example of email marketing letter.

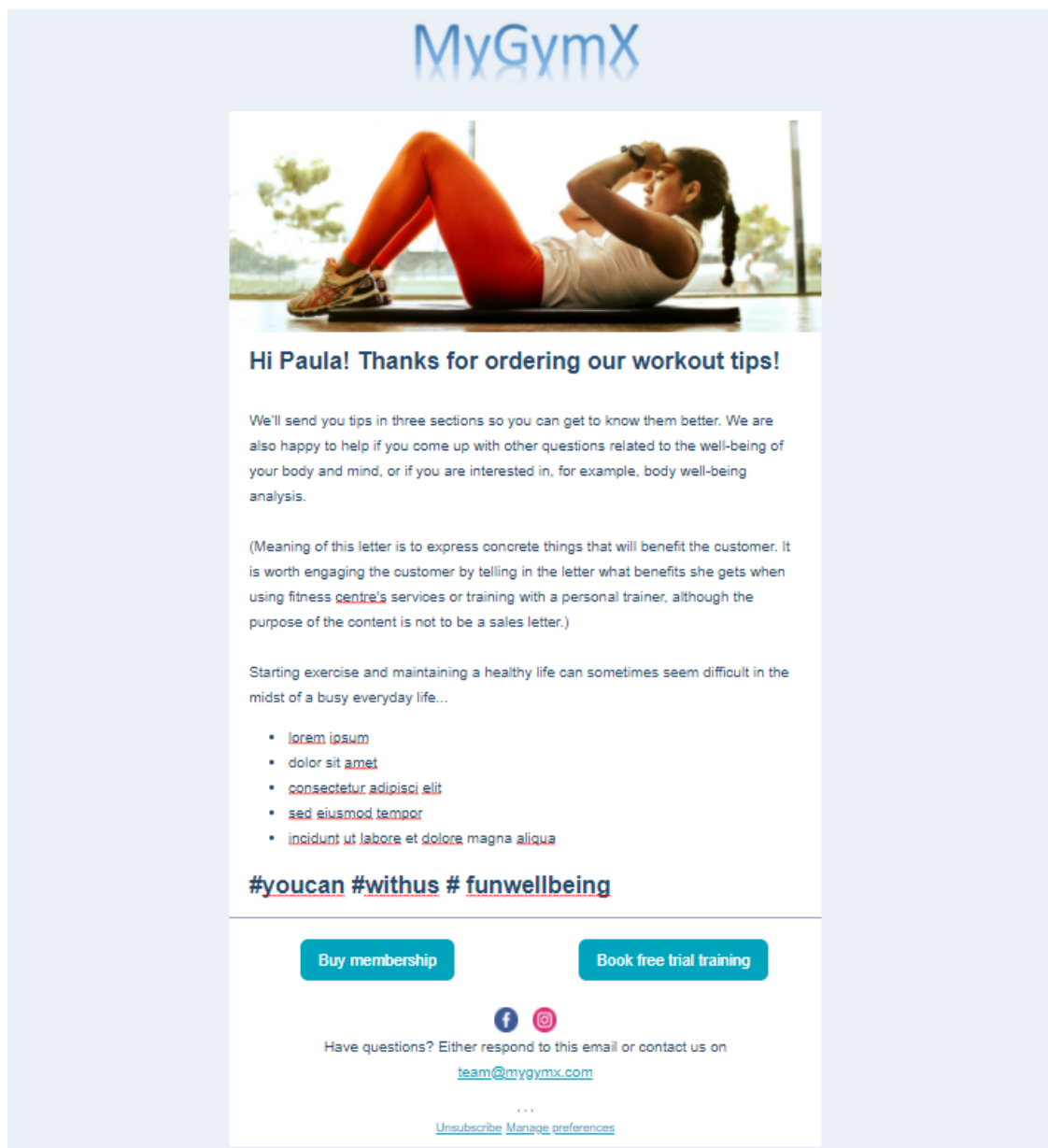


Figure 14. Email marketing letter

If a website visitor has repeatedly left the lead funnel during the process without providing her contact information, she will still be targeted with a separate retargeting ad campaign that includes a special offer. The special offer is scheduled approximately two weeks after the first visit to the landing page and is intended to strengthen the customer's confidence in the company and thus increase the courage to make a purchase decision.

The delighting phase is followed when a potential customer becomes a paying customer. The sales situation is already an important step in delighting the customer. With a good sales experience, the new customers become more committed to the company and tell about their good customer experiences forward. To ensure the implementation of delighting phase, it is a good idea to develop customer service concept to be more systematic in terms of customer acquisition. Delighting is accomplished, for example, by making a regular care call to a new customer after the first and third months of membership, sending personalised email congratulations on the customer's birthday, or offering other personalised benefits.

All different lead generation phases, Facebook advertisements, landing pages, and email letters, can be produced with HubSpot Marketing tools. This is also recommendable if campaign production is not a core expertise area for the marketing team. HubSpot Marketing tools help implement ad structures and content, easily to make visually appealing layouts. However, the most important function of the marketing software is the seamless operation of marketing automation and reporting. This means that website visitors will be better identified, and automatic retargeting advertising can be directed to them. Lead activity, such as marketing letter openings, CTA clicks, and website returns, can also be documented and thus separate MQLs and SQLs from each other.

As leads develop at their own pace, scoring criteria and value limits of different lead types are defined for them. The lead is converted to MQL when it collects required amount of lead points. The lead is converted to SQL only after one hundred lead points have been accumulated. Points are accrued for lead performance actions such as CTA clicking, web browsing, Facebook liking or clicking. Table 3 defines the accumulation of lead points from different functions. Lead scoring criteria is always company-specific, and it is a good idea to look at it critically from time to time. The most optimal scoring criteria can be found by comparing lead activity and scoring reporting.

Table 3. Determination of lead scoring values and points per action

Lead contact	20 Points
Marketing qualified lead (MQL)	30 Points
Sale qualified lead (SQL)	100 Points
Subject	Points
Contact request on web page	100
Fulfilling landing page contact form	20
Subscribing a newsletter or email workflow	20
Email openings	20
Email CTA clicks	20
Landing page CTA / click	10
Facebook following	10
Facebook ad clicks/likes	10
Web page visit to membership page / click per action	10
Web site visit to schedule page / click per action	10

Lead acquisition reporting is an important part of customer acquisition development. HubSpot's visual charts and diagrams make it easier to interpret various reports. The most relevant reports to monitor for lead acquisition are the number of incoming leads from different channels and activities related to lead scoring. Figure 15 (next page) shows an example of the reporting page. However, HubSpot offers several different dashboard options for visualising reporting.

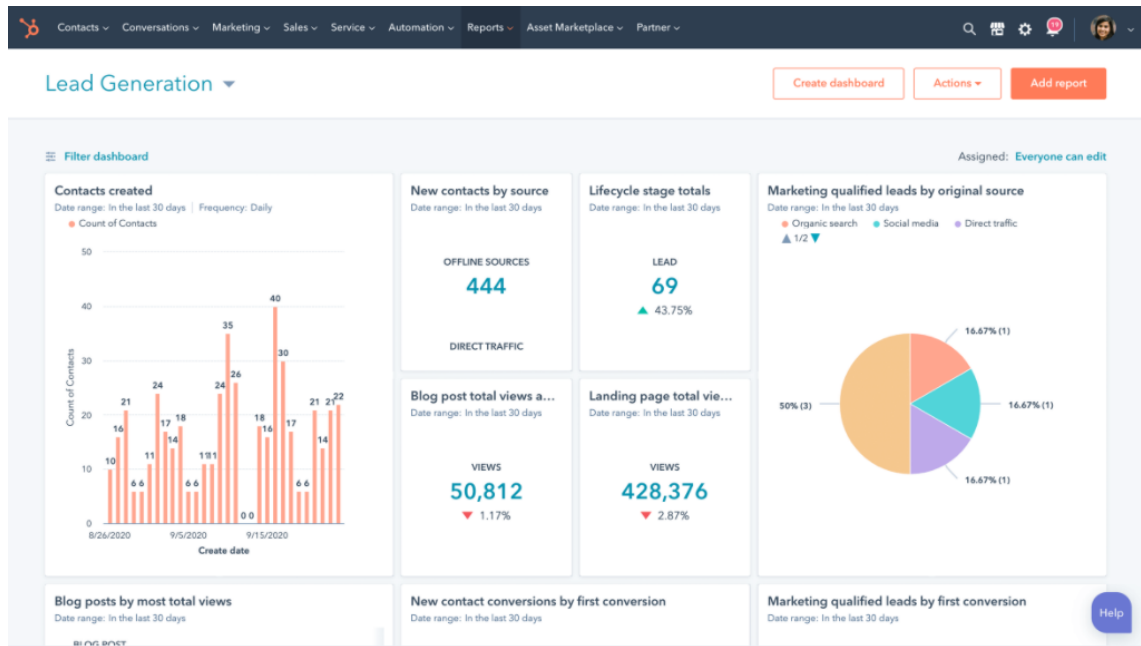


Figure 15. Example of the lead generation reporting page (HubSpot 2020c).

These last paragraphs discuss the subsequent production of customer acquisition. Customer acquisition is a multi-dimensional and multi-step process and lead generation is only one part of this process. Lead generation production is built on this plan so that the lead funnel works, although other phases of customer acquisition do not yet follow the inbound method. However, the planned lead acquisition will be further enhanced if other customer acquisition development measures are implemented systematically and on a long-term basis. Critical development targets for the company's customer acquisition are website SEO, content, and navigation, as well as the wider utilisation of data in customer acquisition. These matters are important to consider so that development needs can be assessed, budgeted, planned, and implemented according to the company's subsequent development plan.

Improving SEO is to ensure that visitors find the company's website in a multi-channel way, meaning that the company is listed in Google's search results more often. SEO development is essentially related to website content. It is important to produce informative but at the same time customer-oriented content. From the customer acquisition perspective, content needs to be interesting, up-to-date, and offer added value to a potential customer. The diverse content of the websites contributes to the SEO development work. In addition, by correcting website navigation deficiencies, it is possible to track visitors' website visits more closely and ensure that the potential

customers easily find the information they are looking for. Inadequate website content or difficulty of navigating usually directly effect on the visitors' interest and decreases browsing time on website.

In customer acquisition, it is possible to use an almost countless number of different metrics to monitor operations. HubSpot enables versatile collection and reporting of marketing and sales data. Analysing data helps the company to find marketing and sales pain points and improve them. In addition to measuring the number of collected sales leads or won customers, customer acquisition must also be measured with more accurate metrics in order to manage and develop it also in the future.

5.9 Implementation plan

The implementation plan helps to structure the start-up of inbound marketing process. When the deployment work steps are clearly scheduled and responsibilities are shared with the people involved, the project stays best on schedule.

As the company has an acute need for new customers the customer acquisition development plan is to be implemented as soon as the practical work steps of lead acquisition will be completed. The proposed implementation plan for lead generation and the scheduled time for the various phases are shown below in Table 4. The schedule assumes that the marketing contents and production are implemented by the company's own marketing team, i.e. the schedule does not take into account possible longer delivery times from external suppliers. In the production plan, demonstrated in section 5.7, the content topics were also outlined already for the implementation, which decrease the time and resources needed to spend on assembling the final implementation.

Table 4. Lead acquisition implementation schedule

Nro.	Subject	Scheduled time	Content
1.	HubSpot set up + integrations	1 week	The HubSpot account is opened, necessary integrations and pixel additions are made. A HubSpot ID will be created for 1-2 people

			from the company to manage the tool. HubSpot guidance, if needed.
2.	Content design for fb ads, landing pages, email workflow	4 weeks	Instead of product-oriented marketing the design takes into account customer orientation and the needs of the buyer person, so that the process becomes a high-quality, unified inbound marketing entity.
3.	Content production & refining targeting specifications	1 week	At this point, marketing content, tools, and distribution channels are connected for the process on a practical level, after which the lead acquisition process can be started.
4.	Testing & campaign launch (1-week testing period + 3 weeks live campaign)	4 weeks	The usage testing ensures the functionality of the automation, after which the first user experiences and leads can be collected through a live campaign.
5.	Analysing & evaluating results. Decisions on the continuation of the process.	1 week	The first user experiences have been gained and the first new leads have been collected. How the test campaign worked? Goals vs. results? How is the new tool (HubSpot) perceived?

The first implementation phase involves the deployment of HubSpot. This phase is quick to implement as the HubSpot software guides the user all the way through set up, step by step. However, sufficient time is set aside to allow marketing personnel to become familiar with the various features of the program and to practice its use.

The next step of the implementation plan is to create marketing contents. Plenty of time is set aside for this phase, as the contents are created by the company's marketing team itself, along with other basic work. As high-quality and customer-oriented implementation of content is one of the basic pillars of successful inbound marketing, it is desirable, at this stage, to stretch the schedule if necessary, rather than to introduce semi-finished plans.

In the next implementation phase, the completed marketing contents, the technical implementation of production and the distribution channels used are all brought together. The production process can be tested and launched.

The final step is process analysis and evaluation. After the first weeks of launch, a first analysis of the functionality of the process can be made and areas for further development can be considered for both lead acquisition and other stages of customer acquisition.

5.10 Summary of the proposed customer acquisition plan

The proposed customer acquisition plan addresses many of the key issues that emerged from the current state analysis. The objective set in the beginning was to develop a lead generation model, since acquisition of leads was found to be particularly challenging in the case company. In addition, the company's marketing team needed concrete implementation guidelines and ways to improve customer acquisition.

At the beginning of the project, it was found that customer acquisition is short-term, and the results of marketing campaigns have often remained modest. For the customer acquisition plan, the buyer persona was first defined, and the various stages of the buyer's journey were discussed. As a result, the overall understanding of the factors influencing the purchasing habits of a potential customer increased and thus it was also possible to better identify the points to consider in marketing.

Poor quality of data was also one thing that clearly needed to be fixed so that customer acquisition could be monitored and developed from now on. For the lead acquisition, a lead scoring system was built to track leads' activity and strengthen their potential before actual sales actions are made, so that potential customers are not eliminated due to premature sales activities.

The customer acquisition plan discussed the marketing elements and offerings relevant to the acquisition of leads, as well as the tools and channels used in this customer acquisition plan. HubSpot online software was proposed as a CRM and marketing platform, which enables the company to significantly improve both customer acquisition functionality by integrating different communications and marketing distribution channels, and to monitor and manage the data related to marketing and leads as well as existing customers. The use of the marketing automation platform also reduces the manual management of customer data, so that the data between customer service, sales and marketing is always up to date.

The production plan concretely reviews the various elements with which a functional lead production is carried out. The implementation plan explains in a practical way how the implementation will be carried out in order and ensure that the totality works properly. The stages of the production and the implementation plan of the process and their significance and causal connections have been presented in the development plan as easily as possible, so that the company can later expand and refine the plan to meet its future needs without compromising the usage of the inbound method.

6 Validation of the initial customer acquisition plan

This section describes how the validation process of the thesis was implemented.

6.1 Overview of the validation stage

As this thesis is a commissioned work and the case company is not affiliated with the researcher on the basis of an employment relationship or customer relationship, the research work is considered completed when the case organisation has confirmed it and the final customer acquisition plan is delivered to them. Therefore, the subsequent development, testing and use of the plan is at the discretion of the client company.

As the thesis progressed, situation overviews were held with the case company in which the direction of the study was refined during the project. Before handing over the initial proposal, the case company received a raw print of the customer acquisition plan. Based on this draft, it was ensured that the plan was proceeding in the right direction. At the same time, the case company hoped to get more concrete, in their own words, “for dummies” type of working instructions for the plan. This was also an important step in validating point of view, as after this feedback received, I focused on the improving operating instructions even more so that the initial proposal could be presented to the case company as a more functional entity that better serves their needs.

The validation of the customer acquisition plan was organised with the case company via email. The validation questions can be found in Appendix 2. A preliminary validation discussion was held by telephone with the case company’s marketing officer and she also provided her evaluation and feedback on the initial proposal by email. Marketing officer’s questions and request for clarification of some details of the development plan related to the technical use of the tools as well as SEO, which is excluded from this study. However, practical recommendations for future, in section 7.2, provide recommendations related to SEO. These practical recommendations were also added to the final version of the customer acquisition plan.

6.2 Feedback on the initial proposal

In general, the case company felt that my input was useful in improving their marketing and they received help and good advices on marketing along the way even before the

customer acquisition plan was completed. The next paragraphs summarise the feedback provided by the case company.

The initial situation had been well taken into account in the thesis and a clear and feasible plan had been made on the basis of it. The case company now has a better understanding of the principles of the inbound method and why the steps in a customer acquisition plan are important for a successful outcome. The use of HubSpot had also been explained in an understandable way, so that the company believes that:

"The plan is clear and feasible. The implementation of the development plan is presented in such a way 'for Dummies' type', as we asked, that it is easy to follow what needs to be done and the timeline clarifies the implementation process. Special mention: Just after reading this, I have come up with ideas on what I could use on our social media advertising. Great!" (Informant 1)

The acquisition development plan was also useful in that it can be adapted and applied to different topics, and marketing can be carried out with different spearheads. The thesis had highlighted well things that were obvious in the case company, but they had been misused. As Informant 1 stated:

"For us, the leads had been all equal before, and they had not been distinguished from each other before. Now we have a better understanding of leads and that even if they do not immediately turn into customers, we are able to identify those leads that have shown interest and take action to turn the interest into a membership." (Informant 1)

Based on the feedback received, it can be stated that the case organisation is satisfied with the customer acquisition plan prepared for them. It has also given them a better understanding of the importance of the different stages of the customer acquisition process and will enable them to improve their customer acquisition and especially lead acquisition.

6.3 Final customer acquisition plan for the case company

Accordingly, practical recommendations of the next steps were added to the final customer acquisition plan. In other respects, since the initial proposal was approved by the case company, the proposal already presented in the previous chapter is the final version of the customer acquisition plan.

7 Discussion and conclusion

The final section of this thesis contains the summary of the research project, practical recommendations, and the evaluation of the outcome of the study versus the objectives set in the beginning. The very last paragraphs contain reflection and afterword.

7.1 Summary

The purpose of this project was to improve the case company's customer acquisition. The current marketing measures were not considered productive enough and the acquisition of leads was considered particularly challenging. The case company's customer acquisition has been carried out in many ways, mainly through short advertising campaigns. However, the company has not made a long-term plan and marketing strategy, and marketing and customer data are not utilised. These shortcomings result in a loss of sales and profits.

The objective of this thesis was to create a customer acquisition plan that will enhance case company's lead generation. The plan was to include a lead generation model and operating instructions for more effective customer acquisition plan.

The topic and objectives of the study were set after an initial discussion with the case company. After the topic and objectives were clarified the research design was build up. Due to the topic and nature of the research, the action research method seemed to be the most appropriate for conducting this study. It was necessary to analyse the case company's current marketing and customer acquisition processes first and then to examine what means can be used to improve the process.

The current state analysis revealed that the case company's customer acquisition was carried out in many ways, especially using short advertising campaigns and the process should be strengthened to be more systematic and efficient. For example, marketing data was not collected, analysed, or utilised further. The analysis also revealed deficiencies in gathering and utilising leads. Leads were collected in connection with events such as park workouts, but there was not systematic or ongoing way obtaining leads. In general, all collected contacts were treated as sales qualified leads without screening. By benchmarking competitors' marketing efforts, it was also found that, for

example, marketing automation could give more power to a case company's customer acquisition.

The current state analysis phase was relatively easy and quick to implement. However, as the work progressed, the author came to the conclusion that the scope of the thesis was too wide, and it was necessary to narrow it down so that the thesis could be carried out with sufficient depth. Since the author was quite familiar with the inbound method, it seemed right from the beginning that it could quite certainly help solving the company's business problem. However, writing the conceptual framework was a challenging phase due to the limitations of the work. This was because in the theoretical part it was necessary to present all the steps of the customer acquisition process so that the importance of these steps in the use of the inbound method would be understood correctly. Simultaneously, however, the author had to keep in mind the acquisition of leads as a core of the study and focus on adapting this process understandably in the centre of the customer acquisition process.

Once the current state analysis and the conceptual framework were completed, the initial customer acquisition proposal was built up. At the beginning of the proposal, an ideal buyer persona was created for the case company and the most probable buyer's journey was defined. After that the suggested benefits, offerings, and elements of lead generation were presented. A scoring system was created for lead generation and it allows the case company to identify the life cycle stages of different leads and thus ensure that leads are utilised as efficiently as possible in the customer acquisition process. The proposed development plan then reviewed the tools and channels needed, as well as the suggested budget within which the plan could be implemented. At this point, the HubSpot marketing automation platform was at the heart of managing the use of other tools and channels. Finally, a production plan and a implementation plan with suggested schedule were presented in a practical way to ensure a low threshold for the launch of all phases of the development plan.

Validation of the initial proposal was completed after the proposal was handed to the case company. The company had only a few questions about of the development plan and those issues were immediately clarified. According to the original project plan of the thesis, lead acquisition was at the heart of the proposal. However, based on the development plan proposal, the case company can apply the inbound method more

comprehensively in its customer acquisition. Therefore, some practical recommendations of the next steps of the case company were added to the proposal. Once these minor additions had been made to the plan, there was no need for other repairs or fine-tuning. Overall, the case company was satisfied with the outcome, and the preliminary plan was approved as the final form of the customer acquisition plan.

7.2 Practical recommendations for future

This section provides recommendations to support the use of a customer acquisition plan. Recommendations are also important development topics on a general level to enhance marketing, to improve the client company's visibility and customer orientation.

First, marketing strategy and marketing plan implementation are basically the most significant development targets in order to develop a long-term marketing systematically without the constant need for changes. Also, inbound marketing requires a long-term commitment to operate. With strategic long-term marketing planning, the benefits of inbound method can be converted from theory to practice. It is advisable for a company to develop a marketing strategy that spans on two- or three-years' time period, and a marketing plan for the entire year, rather than planning marketing only seasonally for a few months ahead.

Second, quality content plays a very big role in inbound marketing. In general, customer-driven, carefully thought-out content improves the interest of leads and existing customers in the company, increases customer satisfaction, and lowers the threshold for purchasing services. The content of the company's own website should be developed into a more customer-oriented direction, without forgetting the sales aspect. In other words, on service pages, for example, it is good to think about whether the content answers questions that concern the customer's mind, such as: What are the benefits of the service? How to buy the service? How do I start using the service? And so on.

Third, in addition to content production, the technical side of websites and SEO (Search Engine Optimisation) are recommended to be developed. The technical side here means navigating the pages and navigating from one site to another. It is important for a webpage visitor to find the information easily, so the structure of the website should be as simple as possible. For example, each sub-page should contain only one topic instead

of having many large topics on the same sub-page, to avoid the website visitor getting frustrated in searching information. Greater use of CTA prompts should be considered to better guide the website visitor's progress. SEO development often requires weeks or in some cases months of processing before it starts working at the desired power. The SEO development process is a big but worthwhile effort to improve the visibility of a company's website.

The final recommendation to support marketing development is large-scale data collection and utilisation. In the customer acquisition plan, the data was obtained from the lead process using HubSpot. However, more extensive measurement and analysis of marketing data is important to better understand marketing results and to drive marketing forward as planned. By using HubSpot's reporting tools alone, the level of data management will be raised significantly. Google Analytics is a great general tool for viewing Google-based data, and it is advisable to learn how to use it.

7.3 Evaluation of the thesis

The success of the thesis is evaluated by assessing how well the objective of the thesis corresponds to the outcome of the thesis. The objective of this thesis was to create a development plan that will enhance case company's customer acquisition by improving lead generation.

With the new customer acquisition plan, the case company should be able to improve the issues defined in the objectives of the thesis. A clear operating model was built for lead acquisition, and the lead scoring system was created to monitor the life cycle of leads, which will benefit both marketing and sales personnel. The customer acquisition plan also includes instructions on how the lead acquisition model is produced and implemented in practice. With the help of the plan, the case company should have the capacity to launch the lead acquisition process based on the inbound method, as well as a good capacity to expand inbound marketing to cover the entire customer acquisition process. Overall, the outcome of the thesis matches the objective very well, and the new customer acquisition plan can play a key role in increasing the number of customers and improving the profitability of the company in the future.

7.4 Reflection and afterword

My journey in doing this thesis began in late spring 2019, when I had the first discussions about implementing a development project for the case company. Due to personal matters, the actual research and writing phase only started in the summer of 2020.

Since I have made a long career in selling digital marketing solutions, it first seemed that the project had a lot of topics already familiar to me. From the beginning, however, it was clear that the project would be very challenging since the initial situation of customer acquisition and marketing with digital tools was in its infancy in the case company. When I started doing my thesis, I thought the end result would be a customer acquisition plan which focuses on sales processes. However, I realised very quickly that the biggest problems of customer acquisition are at the beginning of the process and not so much in the sales process. With this insight, I jumped into the deep end of the pool, so to speak, in my work.

Because there were a lot of issues to be developed and those were closely intertwined in marketing, the limitation of the thesis topic was quite challenging. Staying within the limits seemed difficult, especially when writing the theoretical part. As the boundaries of the work became clearer and the theoretical part was mostly outlined, I noticed some shortcomings in my work. I felt that some parts of the process still needed to be deepened so that the plan would serve the needs of the case company better and the implementation would not be left to the idea level. For this reason, a lead scoring system was built and added into the process and some steps of the production plan were refined.

If there would have been more time, I would have liked to have piloted the entire plan in a real online environment before the final version, so that any shortcomings in the pilot could still be remedied. However, piloting was not possible, so its success could not be assessed in this work.

Overall, the thesis journey has been very rewarding, although at the same time it has been a very challenging and time-consuming project. I feel that my personal learning process during the study has been tremendous and doing my thesis has strengthened my belief in my own skills and professional abilities.

It is good to end this paper with thanks. I want to thank my fellow students Niko Neuvonen, Anniina Leppänen, and Petri Perta for your great support and friendship during my studies. I hope our friendship will last, even though the studies are behind us. I would also thank my thesis supervisor, Pia Hellman, for guidance, advice, and encouragement through this thesis. Many thanks to Raija Rekola in the case company. Without your desire to develop the case company's customer acquisition and marketing, the implementation of this thesis on this scale would not have been possible. Finally, I want to express my deepest gratitude to my dear family who have been patient and extremely flexible in giving me time to complete my thesis.

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Interview 1: Current situation, marketing practices and customers

General questions:

1. Would you tell me about the company in general?
2. What is the competitive situation in the industry and how do you think you are doing?
3. What competitive advantages you have and how you stand out?
4. Which things you find challenging and where you would need help?
5. What things do you see as opportunities or threats for the future?

Marketing and customer acquisition:

6. Would you tell me about your services and how you marketed them?
7. Would you tell me more about marketing channels and content?
8. What kind of customer base do you have and how do you utilise customer data?
9. How is lead acquisition and customer acquisition currently implemented?
10. Other customer acquisition issues that I should consider when preparing a development plan?

Interview 2: Current situation update, conversation with case company CEO.

1. How has the Covid-19 pandemic affected your business?

Validating questions:

1. What is good in the plan and what is not so good?
2. Is there anything that should be changed? How and why?
3. How do you see the totality - How does it benefit the company? If not, then why not?
4. What would you think about the implementation of the plan in the future?
5. Is the plan understandable? If not, what parts in particular should be improved and how?