

## **Marketing Communications in Public Administration**

Case: Municipal IT Unit

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<p>Marketing communications is traditionally associated with the private sector and commercial activities, but the term is nowadays also widely used in public sector contexts. In this thesis marketing communications is analysed from a public administration point of view. The empirical part deals with marketing communications executed by the Municipal IT Unit of the Ministry of Finance.</p> <p>The objective is to find out what is considered important when it comes to planning and implementing marketing communications in public administration, to clarify how this has been done in the Unit and to ascertain whether its marketing communications objectives have been reached. Reputation and image management, along with marketing strategy and tactics, are not discussed.</p> <p>The research method used is traditional qualitative research. In addition to a literature review, a questionnaire was compiled and sent to a group of municipalities' IT managers in order to obtain supplementary data. In its entirety, the work was done from April to October of 2011.</p> <p>It was discovered that there are certain steps that should be taken when planning marketing communications in public administration. Special attention should be paid to customer orientation and integrated marketing communications.</p> <p>It turned out that the Unit's marketing communications plan contains most of the essential stages of marketing communications planning. The Unit had also largely achieved its marketing communications objectives. It was recommended that special care be taken in ascertaining that the Unit's employees are acquainted with marketing communications concepts and committed to carrying out consistent marketing communications. It was also suggested that one person be responsible for all major marketing communications tasks in the Unit and that customer research, especially concerning the success of marketing communications, be conducted on a regular basis.</p>	
<p><b>Key words</b> Marketing communications, integrated marketing communications, marketing communications planning, public administration</p>	

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# 1 Introduction

The concept of marketing communications is nowadays widely used within the public sector, even if the term is traditionally connected to the private sector and commercial activities. Well-functioning marketing communications is a vital part of business activities but it is also important for organisations in the public sector to recognise its essence.

In this thesis marketing communications is analysed from a public administration point of view. The empirical part deals with marketing communications executed by the Municipal IT Unit of the Ministry of Finance. No studies have been conducted before to examine this very topic.

## 1.1 Objectives of the thesis

The purpose of this thesis is to ascertain what is considered important when it comes to planning and implementing marketing communications in public administration and to discuss how this has been done in the Municipal IT Unit. The successfulness of the Unit's marketing communications as such is not evaluated but it is analysed whether the marketing communications objectives of the Unit have been reached. Some useful tips on how to improve their marketing communications are given to the Unit as a result of the study.

In order to achieve these objectives, the following questions need to be answered:

- What is important when applying marketing communications in a public sector or non-profit context?
- How is marketing communications planned in public sector organisations?
- What specific types of marketing communications approaches could be applied in public sector organisations?
- Does the marketing communications plan that the Municipal IT Unit has been applying include elements that are considered important on the basis of the theory?

- What marketing communications objectives specific for the Municipal IT Unit have been set in the marketing communications plan that the Unit has been applying?
- Have the marketing communications objectives of the Municipal IT Unit mentioned in the previous question been reached?
- How could the marketing communications of the Municipal IT Unit be improved?

The three first items are discussed on the basis of reference material in the theoretical part of this thesis. The marketing communications objectives of the Unit are determined by examining the marketing communications plan they have been using, and the achieving of those objectives is analysed with the help of a questionnaire. Improvement suggestions are developed by reflecting over the Unit's current marketing communications against the theoretical part of the thesis and by analysing the results from the questionnaire.

## **1.2 Scope of the thesis**

Even if marketing communications is closely related to reputation and image management, those aspects are not covered in this thesis. The decision was based upon the fact that the subjects mentioned are so broad that they would deserve a thesis of their own. Also marketing strategy and tactics have been decided to be left out, since they would constitute too extensive a topic in relation to the theoretical framework chosen.

## 2 Marketing communications in the public sector

Marketing and marketing communications are terms that are traditionally associated with commercial activities and the private sector. Vuokko (2010, 39) defines marketing as something with which the marketer seeks to influence his/her target group in order to make known an organisation and/or its products or services, and also to satisfy the needs of the target group.

According to Siukosaari (1999, 17), the purpose of marketing communications is to tell about a product, a service and their features or to create positive images of those or the organisation in a way that persuades the consumer to make the decision to purchase. One could say that the aim with marketing is to gain profit. Communications, again, could be defined as a process of interpreting the state of something by giving it a meaning and conveying this interpretation to others through an interactive network (Åberg 2000, 54).

Non-profit organisations do not strive to make profit but instead emphasise their mission. Most institutions within the public sector are non-profits. Only state and municipal enterprises aim at making profit. (Vuokko 2010, 14 – 16.) Throughout the rest of this thesis the term non-profit organisation encompasses public administration organisations, unless stated otherwise.

Despite the fact that the main objective of non-profits is not profit-making, marketing is something that also non-profit actors should study and implement in their daily operations. Andreasen and Kotler (2008, 6 – 7) justify this by stating that traditional businesses and non-profit actors are actually aspiring to reach the same outcome: “influencing behavior”. They also claim that understanding non-profit marketing is useful not only for those who work within the non-profit sector but for representatives from other sectors, as well, since they might end up cooperating with a non-profit organisation.

The challenge of successfully implement marketing communications in the public sector is to understand what kind of a mindset is required in that environment. It also

seems that another challenge is the fact that many public sector organisations have not yet realised the importance of marketing communications and how it could have a positive impact on their operations.

## **2.1 Is marketing communications a suitable term for non-profits?**

It was said earlier in this chapter that one of the main objectives with marketing is to influence a target group. That definition has been elaborated further by Vuokko (2010, 46) so that it better suits the non-profit context: she defines non-profit marketing as a way of thinking and a management procedure, the mission of which is to identify and satisfy the needs of the organisation's most important reference groups. This should also happen in a way that supports the fundamental objectives of the organisation.

The essence here is the concept of reference groups and how widely it should be understood. If marketing communications was in its early days considered to be communicating targeted at customers, it has since developed to comprehend communications directed to external reference groups, the organisation's own personnel and, finally, organisations and partners operating within the same network (Vuokko 2003, 15 – 17). This development is visualised in figure 1.



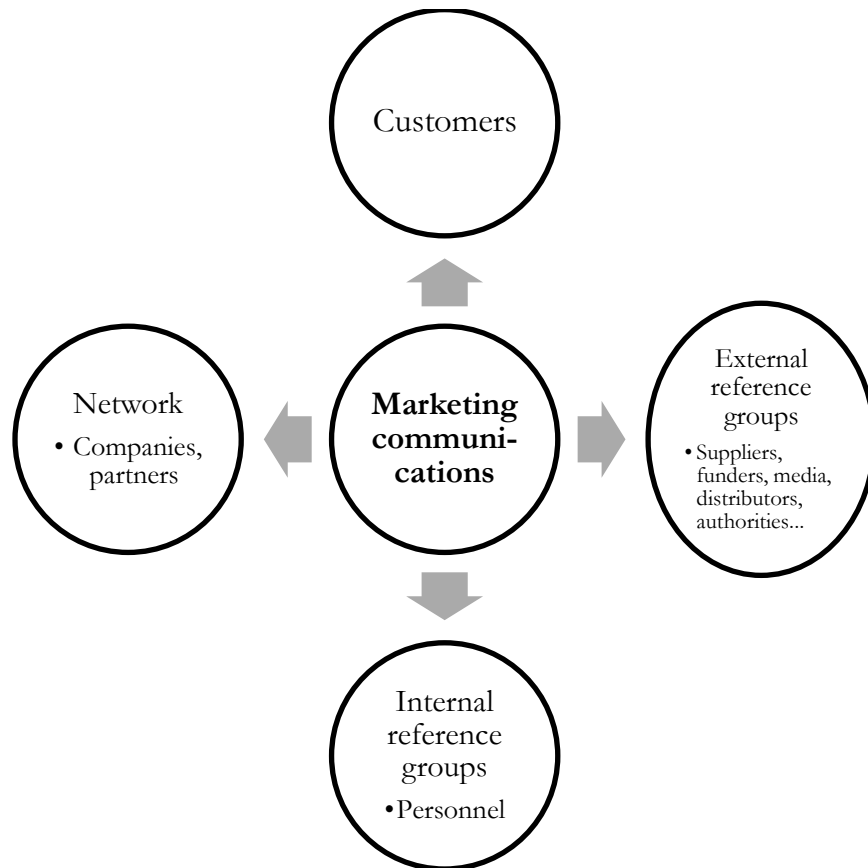


Figure 1. Marketing communications and the target groups it is perceived to have (Vuokko 2003, 15 – 17)

Thus, even if some non-profit organisations do not consider themselves to have “customers”, they certainly have some connections to all of the other reference groups defined. It is also a matter of definition whether you choose to call your main reference or target group customers or something else – the fundamental principle is the same.

Brassington and Pettitt (2005, 456 – 458) believe that non-profit organisations can apply similar marketing communications tools as for-profits. They only need to pay additional attention on issues that differentiate them from the commercial sector, for example the fact that the funding party tends to be different from the receiving party of what they provide.

In the light of these points of view, it could be argued that marketing communications is a term that can be used in non-profit contexts as well as in profit-making contexts.

## 2.2 How to plan marketing communications in the public sector

It is important to plan your marketing communications, regardless of whether you operate in a for-profit or non-profit environment. The goal with planning is to enable coordinated, focused and well executed operations (Brassington & Pettitt 2005, 389). This relates to all kinds of organisational planning. However, marketing thinking is relatively new to the non-profit sector, which sometimes leads to a negative attitude towards the whole concept of marketing communications planning and the fact that the term is even used in non-profit contexts (Vuokko 2010, 113).

Marketing communications planning should always be based on marketing planning which in turn should base on the organisation's strategic planning (Vuokko 2003, 132; Siukosaari 1999, 32). Lehmann and Winer (2008, 3 – 4) state that these two terms are often confused with each other, and their definition of the terms' difference is that while a marketing plan is an operational document containing strategies, it focuses on a shorter time span than a strategic plan. The latter is also often designed at a higher level than the former.

According to Kotler and Armstrong (2009, 433 – 438), at least the following tasks are important when planning marketing communications:

- Identifying the target group.
- Determining the objectives of communication.
- Designing a message.
- Choosing the media.
- Collecting feedback.

As Kotler and Armstrong focus more on the private sector in their paper, a supplementary insight from Vuokko (2010, 122 – 123; 2003, 133 – 134) is added to determine the steps that should be taken when planning marketing communications in the public sector:

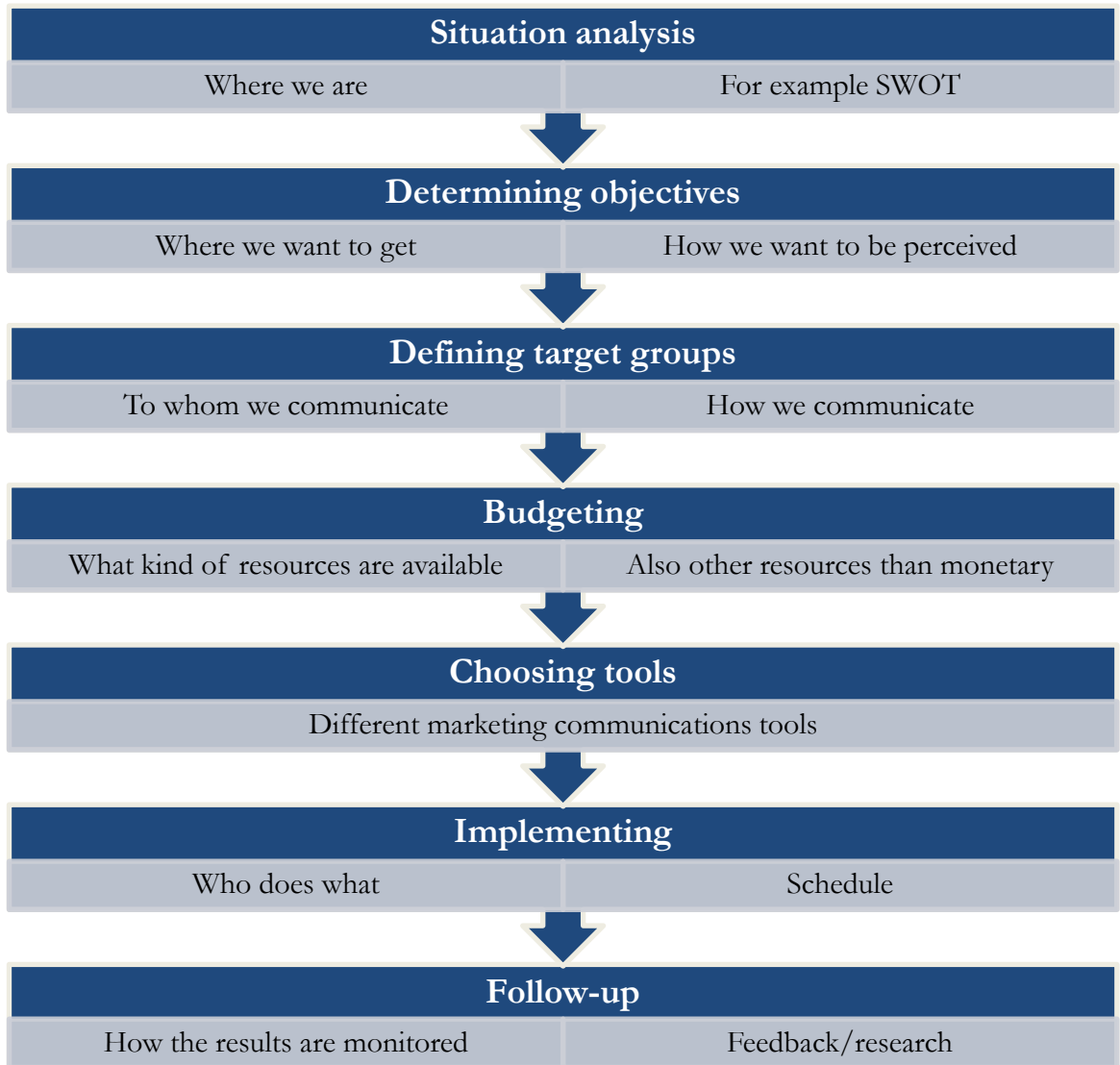


Figure 2. Important steps in planning marketing communications in the public sector (Kotler & Armstrong 2009, 433 – 438; Vuokko 2010, 122 – 123; 2003, 133 – 134)

In Vuokko’s (2010, 125) opinion, the determining of target groups and marketing communications tools are part of the organisation’s strategic and tactical decision making, but in this thesis the focus is not on strategy and therefore they will simply be regarded as part of the marketing communications planning process. All the steps itemised in figure 2 are examined more closely under the following subheadings.

### 2.2.1 Situation analysis

The meaning with a situation analysis is to define where the organisation is standing presently. Oftentimes some kinds of analysing methods are used as tools to gain a deeper understanding of the current situation, for example a SWOT analysis, a means

of evaluating the organisation's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. If such analysing methods are used, the outcome should lead to actual reflections over the situation and not just to a situation statement. The reflections can help the organisation to realise which features to strengthen and utilise, and which to compensate, avoid or reduce. (Kamensky 2004, 191 – 192.)

The depth of the situation analysis depends on how much information is needed. For example, if a totally new government agency is founded, that agency needs to do a more profound situation analysis than an agency that has existed for several years and is operating in a similar fashion than before. (Vuokko 2003, 135.)

### **2.2.2 Determining objectives**

Marketing communications objectives should always be aligned with the organisation's strategy. Vuokko (2010, 124 – 125) determines that the objectives should be relevant, accurate enough, hierarchically arranged, aiming at the same direction, measurable, schedule-bound and realistic but challenging. Ace (2001, 41) uses a mnemonic called SMARTT to demonstrate what marketing communications objectives should be like in her opinion. The letters stand for specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, timed and targeted – it can be concluded that Vuokko and Ace have rather similar thoughts in this matter.

By being relevant, the objectives are also aiming at the same direction, towards the objectives determined in the organisation's strategy. They should be accurate enough in order for them to guide the operations and choices, not vague intentions. There can be many objectives, but they should be hierarchically arranged so that enough attention is paid on their importance.

The measurability of the objectives requires that it is possible to measure whether they have been reached, either quantitatively or qualitatively. It also means that the achieving of the objectives *should* be measured – how would you otherwise know if or when they have been reached. The objectives having been bound to a schedule makes it pos-

sible for setting up milestones and makes it easier to monitor that progress is being made. Scheduling is also a means to guide the operations.

Finally, the objectives being realistic but challenging means that it is possible to reach them but that they are set at such high a level that some effort must be made. It is more motivating to aim at a goal for which you have to push yourself a little. On the other hand, it is discouraging to try to achieve goals that are set *too* high.

When determining the objectives the organisation also needs to establish their compelling value proposition, that is, a behaviour which the target audience is willing to undertake because they think it is, long term, better to do so instead of doing something else or doing nothing at all (Andreasen & Kotler 2008, 191). That and deciding how to achieve the objectives mean specifying the marketing strategy and tactics. Those are, however, falling outside the scope of this thesis and thus not elaborated upon further.

### **2.2.3 Defining target groups**

It is not possible to communicate with all the people in the world simultaneously and all the time. Hence it is important to choose whom you want to address in order to be able to carry out target group oriented marketing communications which in turn best yields the desired results from the communication. The process of dividing the audience into smaller groups is called segmentation. (Vuokko 2003, 141 – 142.)

Brassington and Pettitt (2005, 109) state that segmentation is about “discerning and defining meaningful differences between groups of customers”. That way each customer group or segment can be approached in the way best suitable, through the most relevant channels.

It is important to select such segmentation criteria that really separate one segment from another. Otherwise, if all the segments are too similar, there is no use in opting for differentiated means of marketing communications for each segment. It is also vital to target segments that are of importance regarding the objectives of the organisation.

Finally, it is essential to know the segments, because by knowing them it is possible to plan the marketing communications in a way that affects them. (Vuokko 2003, 144.)

#### **2.2.4 Budgeting**

According to Vuokko (2010, 125), the resources that need to be budgeted can be divided into money, people, time and other resources, for example facilities, equipment and material. When budgeting these, it is decided how much or many of each are needed in order to achieve the objectives set and to implement the measures planned.

Vuokko also points out that it is advisable to do a preliminary resource analysis at the beginning of the planning process, when analysing the situation as a whole, so as to ascertain that the set objectives are realistic in terms of resources. The more specific budgeting is then done a little later on. This way it is ensured that the creativeness of the planning process is not disturbed by having conducted a very strict resource analysis already at the beginning and thinking that there are not enough resources to execute any new ideas because of that.

Kotler and Armstrong (2009, 439 – 440) outline four different methods that are commonly used when setting the budget for marketing communications:

- the affordable method
- the percentage-of-sales method
- the competitive-parity method
- the objective-and-task method.

The first of these four methods means that the organisation allocates to marketing communications only as much resources as they think they can afford or what is left when other expenses have been taken into account (Brassington & Pettitt 2005, 297). The risk with this method is that the long-range planning of marketing then becomes very difficult. It may also lead to situations where too big a portion of the resources are allocated on marketing communications when the organisation is doing well and too scarce when it is doing poorly (Vuokko 2003, 146).

Setting the budget on the basis of a comparison method, for example the percentage-of-sales or the competitive-parity method is a rather simple means. The first one, though, falsely gives the impression that turnover is the cause of marketing communications rather than the result. Sometimes the spending on marketing communications needs to be increased in order to get better results – either monetary or, many times in the case of non-profits, behavioural. If, again, the budget is determined on the basis of a competitor's, it is not taken into account that all organisations have different objectives and thereby different marketing needs. Additionally, there is no valid reason to believe that one's competitors know better how much should be budgeted on any specific area of operations.

In Kotler and Armstrong's opinion the objective-and-task method is the most sensible and at the same time the most difficult one of the four methods listed. It forces the organisation to make assumptions on what the tasks are that need to be completed to achieve the objectives and how much should be spent on them to do so. Brassington and Pettitt (2005, 298) are of like mind: they also think that this method is by far the best and also the most challenging one. In their opinion the complication with the objective-and-task method is that sometimes the budget proposals become too ambitious and will not be approved. The trick is to bear in mind what is reasonable and realistic.

Ace (2001, 43) claims that the most commonly used budgeting method is the composite method that is a mixture of several techniques, for example those listed above. Utilising the best sides of every method is, of course, better than to stubbornly stick to just one and ignore its potential negative sides.

### **2.2.5 Choosing tools**

The most common marketing communications tools are, as itemised by Vuokko (2003, 149), personal selling, public relations, publicity, advertising, sales promotion and sponsorship. In her later work she (2010, 172) proposes that these are relevant in a non-profit context, as well. The tools are presented in this subchapter.

**Personal selling and influencing** requires lots of human resources but, on the other hand, they provide an excellent opportunity to exploit customised marketing communications: it is possible to tailor the marketing communications according to the needs of a customer group or even an individual customer. It is of utmost importance that the persons used in sales and influencing work are suitable for the task and that they are trained, motivated and supervised. Also the aspect of ethics should be taken into consideration; personal selling and influencing must be ethically sustainable. (Vuokko 2010, 172 – 173.)

In addition to the versatility of personal selling, it enables the sales representative to adapt the message or approach to the situation at hand: if the receiver of the message seems reluctant to listen, a new appointment can be scheduled or some promotional material can be left to the receiver for further examination. Personal selling situations also make it possible to cultivate long-term business relationships. (Brassington & Pettitt 2005, 325 – 326.)

**Public relations (PR)** is a means of creating goodwill. It can be divided into internal and external PR, both of which are important for non-profit organisations. By, for example, attending events organised by its external reference groups, the organisation indicates interest in them. By being open and honest with its personnel, the organisation creates a feeling of “you are important for us”. Using PR to its advantage the organisation gains support and understanding from its reference groups. (Vuokko 2010, 173.) Ace (2001, 122) stresses that PR is not simply something coincidental but a process or set of actions that need to be planned and overseen.

People often connect PR with **publicity** (or, that is to say, media publicity) which is a term that is used for the conscious attempt to obtain positive media time and space “free of charge”. In other words, the organisation is actively in contact with the media, offering them news releases, inviting them to events, sending them material and giving them interviews. In that sense publicity is not entirely free of charge, as investment is required at least from the person who, for example, writes the news release, but the organisation need not pay for the media space, as opposed to when doing advertising. (Vuokko 2010, 174.)



Publicity appears to be a good means of conveying a positive image of the organisation, especially because of the fact that people tend to consider pieces of information released by the media more credible than paid advertisements. However, the disadvantage with publicity is its uncontrollability. You cannot control what the media says about your organisation; in fact, you cannot control whether they say anything at all. The message can be distorted or something downright untrue can be said. The risk of negative publicity can be minimised by maintaining good press relations and serving the media with press releases that support a positive image of the organisation. It is also useful to devise a crisis management plan so that potential crises can be dealt with accordingly. (Brassington & Pettitt 2005, 376.)

**Advertising** differs from publicity in the way that, as already mentioned, a medium is paid for the time or space acquired in the media. It tends to be more impersonal than the other marketing communications tools and usually it is used for reaching a large number of people. (Brassington & Pettitt 2005, 305.) The meaning with advertising is to inform, persuade and remind in a way that the objective set is reached. Advertising can be divided into two main categories: media advertising and direct advertising. (Vuokko 2010, 176.)

When taking use of advertising, the organisation needs to consider what is said, how it is said and what media are used. Vuokko (2010, 177) claims that a common problem deriving from unfamiliarity with their target group or the inability to or fear of making choices is that organisations do not know how to only say the most essential things in advertisements, but instead they are trying to say everything at once. Also the following two aspects need to be taken into account: what kind of effects are used in order to enhance the message but not conflict with the principles and objectives of the organisation, and which media have the right qualities to both reach the desired target group and to be plausible conveyors of the organisation's messages in terms of abilities and image.

With **sales promotion** here is meant the process of providing the target group with a concrete benefit or incentive. It could be for example an additional product or gift,

money or possibility to take part in a prize drawing. The meaning is that it should add some extra value for the target group and thus influence behaviour – lower the threshold to buy, participate, take contact, apply for membership and so on. The problem with the system is that a benefit or incentive may become the primary factor influencing decision, which is not beneficial for the organisation. However, sales promotion is something that also non-profits can make use of: is there anything additional that we can offer our target group? (Brassington & Pettitt 2005, 347; Vuokko 2010, 179 – 180.)

The definition of **sponsorship** determines that the image of an individual, group, occasion or other activity is rented and used for certain marketing related purposes. It is not a question of charity, because the sponsoring party expects value for their input. This is why non-profits oftentimes cannot or do not want to act as sponsors, but rather be sponsored. All the same, it is possible. For example, a municipality can sponsor a local sports team but it could be questionable if it sponsored a team from another municipality. It is also wise to deliberate whether it is sensible to spend some of the possibly scarce resources on sponsoring someone – perhaps the organisation could offer other than monetary input in return, such as expertise, products or services. (Vuokko 2010, 180 – 181.)

Sponsorship is always to be considered as a method of supporting other marketing communications measures and alone it cannot yield concrete results. Managing sponsorship is rather difficult, as one should push aside personal interests and likings when deciding what or whom to sponsor. Supporting a good cause is one thing but allocating money from the marketing communications budget into sponsoring something or someone is another. (Siukosaari 1999, 163, 169 – 170.)

### **2.2.6 Implementing**

The implementation process of a marketing communications plan includes designing a list of procedures or tasks, a schedule and a division of responsibilities. It is important that all these are done, because it helps the organisation to keep track of what actions need to be taken, in what order and when and who is responsible for what. Otherwise

it may happen that everyone assumes someone else to complete the tasks and, in reality, no progress is being made. (Vuokko 2010, 126 – 127.)

The scheduling of the plan encompasses placing the different tasks within the calendar year but also in relation to another. Different marketing communications tools have different purposes: some of them evoke interest and supply information, some of them persuade customers to try the product/service/behaviour and some of them have other functions. The best effect is reached if the tools are used in a logical order. (Vuokko 2003, 161 – 162.)

In Ace's (2001, 150, 153) opinion you should consider both internal and external resources when implementing your marketing communications plan. With internal resources are meant the person/s from your organisation executing the plan and with external those from outside of the organisation. Sometimes internal resources are enough but sometimes you need to consult an agency of some kind. Nowadays there are myriads of different kinds of marketing communications agencies and the most important thing to do when choosing one is to know what you want and need.

### **2.2.7 Follow-up**

Last in the list of to-dos for a marketing communications plan is the follow-up or evaluation. It does not, however, mean that evaluating should only take place after the planning period. Instead, evaluation should be an ongoing process that helps detect possible needs to readjust any of the phases. (Vuokko 2003, 163.)

There are lots of different ways of monitoring, thus the organisation needs to decide what to monitor and how, and if deviations to the initial plan are detected, how they should be tackled. Analysing the deviations and the reasons that lead to them makes it possible to realise what was done insufficiently and what was accomplished really well. The analysing process is already part of the following planning period, as it should be used to determine whether something should be done differently, timings should be changed or if the old methods should be used again. (Vuokko 2010, 127.)

A good rule of thumb for evaluating marketing communications is to constantly review the outcomes of marketing communications efforts and compare them with the objectives. If any deviations are detected, those should be analysed and possible problems solved. It is possible to learn from one's mistakes but also from successes – one should note which factors lead to the achievement of goals, not only which factors lead to failure. (Brassington & Pettitt 2005, 423.)

### **2.3 The importance of customer orientation**

In addition to careful planning, some other aspects need to be taken into consideration in marketing communications within the public sector. In today's world of business it is important to adopt a customer-oriented mindset, irrespective of whether your operational environment is for-profit or non-profit.

Vuokko (2010, 66) determines customer orientation in non-profit marketing as “recognising and taking into account the needs of those interest groups that are valuable for the organisation in terms of its objectives [translated from the Finnish].” Having a customer-oriented approach does not mean that no other viewpoints can be applied or that the needs of the organisation itself are to be neglected, but instead that there ought to be a balance between customer and organisational orientation in the planning and operations of the organisation (Vuokko 2010, 65).

Mattila and Ollikainen (2008) explain in their article that it is essential for an organisation to connect customer orientation to their strategy and give concrete operations models in order to facilitate the personnel's encounters with customers. However, no guidelines cater for every individual situation so those working with customers should be ready to sometimes improvise and act as the situation requires. Additionally, no one can be forced into adopting a customer-oriented mind set but the aspiration must come from the inside.

Customer orientation is proved to have a positive impact on sales – if there are options, customers obviously choose the organisation that satisfies their needs over an organisation that offers something else (Vuokko 2010, 69). Non-profit organisations

do not focus on sales and therefore it could be asked what they get out of a customer-oriented approach. Especially within the public sector there still seems to predominate the mindset that public sector organisations merely need to exist and fulfil their functions and that is enough (Andreasen & Kotler 2008, 41).

### **2.3.1 Reasons to adopt a customer-oriented approach**

Nevertheless, there are reasons why public sector organisations should feel pressure towards customer orientation. Firstly, finding out what is really needed helps the organisation to for example reduce unnecessary services and focus on the essential. Secondly, citizens have started to demand better service from public sector organisations. They pay taxes that contribute to the financing of the public sector; hence they want value for their money. It could also be considered a moral obligation to serve citizens in a customer-oriented manner. (Vuokko 2010, 96.)

Thirdly, a satisfied customer speaks on behalf of the organisation and its services, in this case for example public health care. Dissatisfied customers, in their turn, spread bad experiences and do not contribute to a positive image. Fourthly, public sector organisations have got private sector competitors in several industries, for example health care and children's day care. Here, again, it oftentimes depends on previous good or bad experiences and perceptions whether customers turn to private or public organisations. Competition is also experienced when it comes to attracting inhabitants: if the quality of public services in a given area is considered superior to that in another area, people easily choose to move to the area with better services. (Vuokko 2010, 97.)

Finally, it is more rewarding to work in an organisation that receives positive feedback from its customers and that has a good reputation. A common goal to serve the customers as conscientiously as possible unites and develops the personnel and its motivation, methods of working and working moral. (Vuokko 2010, 97.)

Andreasen and Kotler (2008, 201) claim that really trying their best to meet the needs and desires of the target group is the key to success for many for-profit and non-profit organisations.

### **3 Integrated marketing communications**

Appealing to the fact that the world has changed is commonly used as an excuse or reason to justify or explain a change in something, and that is the case in marketing communications, as well. Given the exponential development of means of communication in the recent 20 years, it is no surprise that also marketing communications has had to change.

This was noted by Schultz et al. (1996, 19 – 20) already some 15 years ago, when they claimed that since the way how people communicate has changed, the way of communicating marketing must change, as well. This, not anymore a very new way of marketing communications is called integrated marketing communications (henceforth IMC). In this chapter the concept and its benefits are explained and the reason why it should be used in public sector marketing communications is reasoned.

#### **3.1 Definition of the concept**

IMC has its roots back in the late 1980's. Nonetheless, it is a popular topic even today, due to the changes that continue taking place in marketing communications (Kotler & Armstrong 2009, 427).

Laura Brooke-Smith, D.Y.B Strategies, has defined IMC as follows:

The co-ordination of a business's promotional efforts by determining [e.g. through measurement] the most effective way of meeting the objectives of informing, persuading and reminding customers and potential customers of the business as well as reinforcing attitudes and perceptions. (Arikan 2008, 16.)

Kotler and Armstrong (2009, 429) also use the verb “to coordinate” in their definition, which takes us to the core of the concept.

Let us paraphrase the idea of IMC: if all marketing communications tools were instruments in an orchestra, IMC would be the conductor who coordinated the instruments to play the same piece of music in perfect harmony, so that the message of the piece

would be understood by listeners in a similar manner irrespective of whether they heard all the instruments at once, a couple of them at a time or just one.

Another central point concerning IMC is that even if you target several different segments, the message to each particular segment should be consistent. For example, there is no use in advertising to a certain segment a given product's feature A through one channel and feature B through another – it will only confuse the targeted customers. (Arikan 2008, 16.)

## **3.2 Benefits of IMC**

IMC can offer many benefits when taken into use. Some of these advantages are presented in the following two subchapters.

### **3.2.1 Effectiveness and increase in profits**

Smith and Taylor (2004, 16) put across that with the help of adopting IMC, even if it necessitates some effort, an organisation can gain competitive advantage, increase sales and profits, and save time and money. They claim that by constantly delivering a consistent message and, in a way, “helping them [customers] move through the various stages of their buying process” the organisation is able to fortify its image, develop a dialogue and cultivate the relationship to the customer, which in turn may lead to life-long loyalty on the customer's side and thus a major competitive advantage.

The growth in sales and profits can be reached as a result of augmented effectiveness. It has become clear that one harmonised message delivered through several channels, with right and carefully planned timing, has a much more powerful influence on customers than the multitude of miscellaneous messages that are targeted at them from various sources every day.

Time and money is saved by the organisation because a single agency can be used for all marketing communications. Also the marketing communications material can be

used in several contexts, as the message in all different channels strives to make a similar impact – key word here, too, is effectiveness.

### **3.2.2 Credibility through synergies**

Arikan (2008, 17) is on the same wavelength with Smith and Taylor. He suggests that IMC is influential because of the synergies formed, increased coverage and frequency, systematic choosing of best medium for each phase, and measuring and evaluating of results.

The methodical communicating of a consistent message through several channels makes the message seem more credible to the customers. A larger coverage is achieved, as not all target groups are available through one single medium. The use of different channels also prevents the message from becoming boring, even if it is delivered rather frequently – if different channels are used, people are less prone to grow bored with a message, even if it is delivered to them often.

Opting for the medium that best suits each phase of marketing communications increases effectiveness and helps take full advantage out of the media's capacities. Finally, measuring and evaluating the results helps in the optimisation of the marketing communications, which, again, leads to amplified efficiency.

### **3.3 Why IMC is needed**

The most evident reason why IMC should be implemented in the operations of any organisation is the change in the setting of contemporary marketing communications. Traditional mass media is losing its foothold at the emergence of modern, ever-developing technologies. Consumers have changed from information recipients to self-motivated information seekers, who not only have availability to massive amounts of information through, for example, the Internet but who also share and exchange ideas with other consumers from all over the world. The drifting away from mass marketing means more and more narrowed segmentation strategies, as the customising of offerings is facilitated by new technologies. (Kotler & Armstrong 2009, 427.)



All these factors lead to the situation where consumers receive lots of messages from a myriad of channels. The problem with this, from the viewpoint of the marketer, is the fact that consumers tend to create in their minds coherent conceptions of the marketed topics. In other words, if an organisation is doing radio and newspaper marketing, consumers do not shape a separate radio image and newspaper image for the organisation but a holistic picture composed from information gathered from both sources. Consequently, integration takes place in the consumer's mind, regardless of whether the marketer intends it or not. (Kotler & Armstrong 2009, 429.)

When developing one's IMC activities, it is important to distinguish all the channels through which customers may come across with information about the organisation. Kotler and Armstrong (2009, 430) call these encounters "brand contacts". If all the different brand contacts convey a consistent, positive and clear message about the organisation and its operations, products and services, the IMC has been successful.

IMC simplified is all about thinking "What kind of an impression do we want to create?" instead of "In what different ways do we communicate?". It is about choosing a target group oriented mindset over a sender oriented – a viewpoint that was also emphasised in chapter 2.3, albeit in other words and a slightly different context. (Vuokko 2003, 325.)

### **3.4 IMC and public sector marketing communications**

There is no reason why public sector organisations should not exercise IMC. It was mentioned earlier that the adopting of IMC may require some effort and involvement from the organisation, but, as it was discussed in chapters 3.2 and 3.3, the results can be very rewarding.

Probably the most fundamental motive concerns money. Henley (2001, 144) argues that because resources are usually scarce in the non-profit sector, it is important that they are utilised to their fullest potential. The gain in efficiency most likely outweighs the potential efforts. It could be said that especially within the public sector organisa-

tions need to consider their spending very carefully, since they are, more or less, using tax money for their operations.

With the help of IMC organisations can harmonise their marketing operations by reducing overlapping activities. Kotler and Armstrong (2009, 429) give an example: if all the different marketing communications messages are designed by different departments of the organisation – for example advertising, public relations and communications departments, just to mention some – the result may be an array of mixed messages that confuse the target group. It may also happen that the departments are doing some parts of the job twice, without knowing it, inevitably leading to inefficiency. Some companies have solved this problem by appointing one person as marketing communications executive, who has the main responsibility for coordinating and supervising all the marketing communications activities in the company (Kotler & Armstrong 2009, 431). That way there is at all times someone who has an overall apprehension of the situation and also power to affect the operations of the different departments that are involved in the marketing communications operations.

Another reason why public sector organisations should apply IMC pertains to the fact that it has a positive impact on the credibility of marketing communications messages. It was said in chapter 3.2.2 that when consistent messages are delivered to the target group through several channels, they are perceived more credible than one single message or several, nonconforming messages. Public sector organisations have important functions and tasks, which often involve somehow influencing their target groups, thus credibility plays a major role in their communications.

## **4 The Municipal IT Unit**

The empirical part of this thesis deals with the marketing communications of the Municipal IT Unit that forms part of the operational unit of Public Sector ICT in the Ministry of Finance. (Ministry of Finance 2011a.)

The Municipal IT Unit was a part of the Public Management Department at the time when this thesis project started. However, as of 1 April 2011, it was merged, together with two other units from the same department, into a whole new operational unit that operates directly under the Permanent Secretary. This new operational unit is called Public Sector ICT, and its main functions include all kinds of developing of public administration information management, promoting of cooperation between central and local government in ICT related activities and being in charge of data security issues in central government. (Ministry of Finance 2011b.)

### **4.1 Structure of the Ministry of Finance**

The Ministry of Finance is led by the Minister of Finance. Currently there is also another Minister in the Ministry, the Minister of Public Administration and Local Government. These two divide the tasks that fall under the competence of the Ministry in accordance with how they are decided when the Government is formed. The highest civil servants in the Ministry are the Permanent Secretary of State and Permanent Under-Secretary of State.

The Ministry is formed by eight departments that each deal with tasks designated to them. The departments are called the Economics Department, the Budget Department, the Tax Department, the Financial Markets Department, the Personnel Department (Office for the Government as Employer), the Public Management Department, the Department for Municipal Affairs and the Public Sector ICT. (Ministry of Finance 2011c.) The organisational chart is displayed in figure 2.

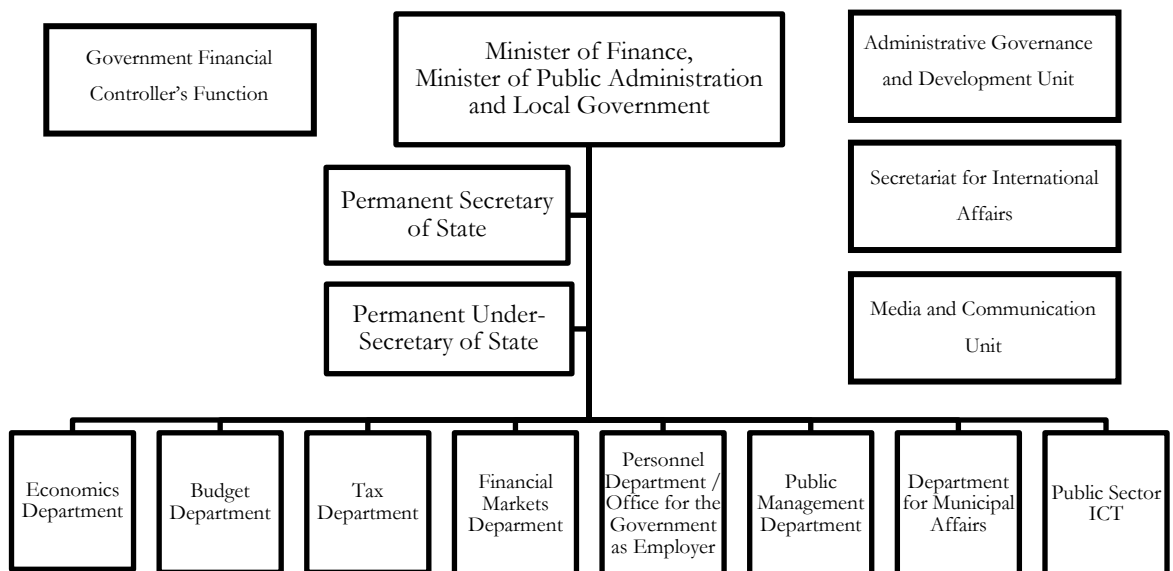


Figure 3. Structure of the Ministry of Finance (Ministry of Finance 2011d, 1)

## 4.2 Operations of the Municipal IT Unit

The Municipal IT Unit develops ICT related solutions together with municipalities to help them make their operations and services for the citizens more efficient. The Unit constantly manages several different projects nationwide. (Ministry of Finance 2011e.)

The projects of the Unit are generally piloted in one or several municipalities, and the idea is that it is possible to implement the solutions in all the other municipalities, as well, once the project is completed. The solutions are not free of charge in the sense that taking them into use results in some form of costs to a municipality – for example, the municipalities “pay” for the developed services in the form of losing state subsidies.

One concrete example of the Municipal IT Unit’s projects is a recruitment web service, *Kuntarekry*, which is aimed at municipalities, federations of municipalities and other municipal employers. The recruitment service was developed together with municipalities and the Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities, and launched on 1 September 2010. It is maintained by KL-Kuntarekry Oy, a service corporation owned

by the Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities. (Municipal IT Unit 2011.)

It is regulated in the Finnish Local Government Act, Chapter 1, Section 2 (1995/365), that local authorities have autonomy in the decision-making concerning their functions. This is why the state does not or cannot force the municipalities to take into use any services that are developed by governmental organisations, even if the very purpose of the services were to facilitate and benefit the operations of the municipalities. Therefore, the Municipal IT Unit needs to promote their services and solutions to the municipal authorities by way of marketing communications.

In Article 9, Section 7 of the European Charter of Local Self-Government that was partly enacted in Finland (66/1991) it says that state subsidies must not be “ear-marked” to be spent on a specific target, but the local authorities are entitled to independently decide how to use them. This means that even though the state develops solutions that are meant to be used by all municipalities and that would actually save resources in the long run, the municipalities are not obliged to utilise those – in spite of the fact that they get state subsidies.

### **4.3 Obstacles concerning the topic unit**

One of the most challenging issues dealing with the topic of this thesis concerns the main concepts and thereby also the approach. Customarily the term marketing communications is associated with commercial activities, but as it was already mentioned before, the concept is commonly used in public administration related contexts, as well. Especially in this particular case it feels natural to talk about marketing communications instead of perhaps internal marketing or mere communications, seeing that the state and the local authorities are not to be considered to form one large organisation, even if they all operate in the public sector. Additionally, it was earlier remarked that marketing communications is mainly a question of influencing behaviour, which is something that the Municipal IT Unit is striving to do – they try to persuade municipalities and citizens to start using their solutions and services.

As the Municipal IT Unit was transferred to another, newly established operational unit in the middle of the writing process of this thesis, yet another question arose: would the chosen thesis topic still be relevant, since until then the Unit's marketing communications had been coordinated by the Public Administration Department but obviously not any longer after the reorganisation.

After discussion together with a representative of the Municipal IT Unit, it was decided that the initial thesis topic is still relevant due to the fact that the operations of the Unit are not to change in the nearest future. The marketing communications plan they have used until the reorganisation process will most likely be applied as before, at least until a corresponding plan has been designed for the new operational unit.

Furthermore, there was one persisting matter that made the information gathering rather difficult: as the Municipal IT Unit is part of the Finnish government and only operates in Finnish and Swedish, there are not many recognised English translations for their projects or functions. The only solution to this was to try to find the translations that have been used within the organisation themselves, and to come up with the most suitable translations for those concepts that have not really been translated before.

## 5 The Municipal IT Unit and marketing communications

In this chapter the marketing communications procedures of the Municipal IT Unit are discussed. Firstly, the marketing communications plan of the Unit is reflected upon based on the theoretical framework presented in chapters 2 and 3, and secondly, the marketing communications objectives of the Unit are recognised in order for it to be possible to evaluate later on if they have been reached.

### 5.1 Marketing communications plan used

It was mentioned in the previous chapter that the Municipal IT Unit do not have a marketing communications plan of their own but the department they used to belong to have a plan that covers all the units in the department. From now on that plan is referred to as “the plan”.

It is stated in the plan that it is to serve as a set of guidelines for all the marketing communications conducted in the department but that it does not take a stand for the marketing communications of individual undertakings or projects (Valtiovarainministeriö 2010, 3). No project-specific marketing communications plans were used as material for this thesis for the following three reasons:

- The Municipal IT Unit is involved in so many projects and undertakings that it would be very difficult to take into account all the different plans that come with them.
- The general marketing communications plan is the only one that could be used as reference material.
- A general-level plan is the most useful in this case, as the meaning is to study the marketing communications of the Municipal IT Unit as a whole.

The plan consists roughly of defining the scope of application, analysis of the current situation and current means of marketing communications, risk analysis, marketing communications objectives, target groups and the core message of marketing communications. Additionally, it describes the marketing communications cycle, how to im-

plement and schedule marketing communications procedures and how to measure the results. Finally, the plan contains some suggestions for marketing communications tools, cost calculations and reflection over social media. The different parts of the plan are discussed in the following subchapters.

### **5.1.1 Scope and objectives**

It is stated in the analysis of the current situation that no consolidated marketing communications plan for the output of the department had been designed before but a desire to connect the marketing communications more closely to the strategic objectives had arisen, and therefore a consolidated plan was designed. The challenge with such a plan is that, as the projects that the units within the department manage are very different and at different stages, they require different kinds of marketing communications measures. (Valtiovarainministeriö 2010, 4.)

All marketing communications within the department should, according to the plan, create a comprehensive image of the operations and undertakings that fall under the competence of the department. The aim is to develop internal and external marketing communications so that the conspicuousness and use of the undertakings is increased, and, as a consequence, also a coherent conception of the operations of the department as a whole is reached. (Valtiovarainministeriö 2010, 5.)

A SWOT analysis is utilised to help define the current situation of the marketing communications in the department. One of the most important realisations in it is that there is willingness to communicate but the resources are scant – most of the units do not have human resources designated only to marketing communications but instead the experts for each given specialty areas are responsible for the contents of their communication. (Valtiovarainministeriö 2010, 6.)

### **5.1.2 Target groups and core message**

The target groups for the marketing communications of the department vary depending on the units and undertakings. The ultimate target group is, nevertheless, same for



everyone: the individual citizen or company. Media is considered both as a target group and as mediator of messages. It is noted in the plan that the structure of a message and communication tools used should depend on the target group. (Valtiovarainministeriö 2010, 7.)

The core message of the department is determined as follows: “We develop management and public services together with people. [Translated from the Finnish.]” (Valtiovarainministeriö 2010, 8). It is not used as slogan but as a background thought for all marketing communications, for all target groups (Valtiovarainministeriö 2010, 9).

### **5.1.3 The marketing communications cycle**

The three phases of marketing communications of the department’s projects are to be, according to the plan, direct communication, marketing and advertising. The first phase, direct communication, is mainly targeted at authorities, such as municipalities, governmental agencies and ministries, to evoke their interest. During the following phase, marketing, the authorities are encouraged to develop the projects, and the interest of citizens is aroused. In the plan it is explained that the marketing phase encompasses for example distributing of brochures, announcing through the reference groups’ channels and distributing of other publications. Gradually, citizens are encouraged to try the projects, and during the last phase, the authorities are prodded to provide the services developed and citizens urged to use them. (Valtiovarainministeriö 2010, 9 – 12.)

Also marketing communications tools are suggested for each phase, from face-to-face interaction and printed material in the first phase to advertisements in mass media during the last phase. Online communications and social media are proposed to be used throughout the whole cycle.

The marketing communications cycle describes effectively how for example the Municipal IT Unit promotes its solutions: the aim is to evoke interest in them, and gradually have everyone take them into use.

#### **5.1.4 Implementing marketing communications**

In the plan, it is remarked that a specified schedule for the marketing communications of each project should be designed. The importance of committing the whole personnel to marketing communications is emphasised – everyone is a messenger at all times. It is also noted that internal communications need to be well-functioning in order for external communications to be effective. (Valtiovarainministeriö 2010, 13 – 14.)

Ministries are notorious for using obscure jargon, which is probably why the topic is taken up in the plan, too. It is advised that special attention be paid to using understandable, simplified language as far as it is possible. It is also suggested that all physical evidence should have a connecting factor, for example a small logo of the department or the ministry, so that they are identified to belong to the same entity. (Valtiovarainministeriö 2010, 16.)

Following and measuring the results is, according to the plan, of paramount importance. The objectives and gauges are to be set for each marketing communications activity. An objective for a web page could be, for example, a certain amount of visitors during a certain period of time. (Valtiovarainministeriö 2010, 17.)

The rest of the plan contains some suggestions for marketing communications tools to be used in some of the department's most important or topical projects or undertakings, cost calculations for certain media and, finally, reflection over utilising social media in marketing communications.

## **5.2 Discussion on the plan**

When examining the plan on the basis of the theory presented earlier, it can be concluded that it rather nicely contains all the relevant points that should be taken into consideration when planning marketing communications (figure 2).

Marketing communications planning should always be tied to the organisation's strategy, which had clearly been understood in the department. It was stated in several contexts throughout the plan that the communications of the department should be aligned with the objectives of the ministry.

Taking the ultimate target group into consideration when planning marketing communications indicates a target group oriented mindset, which is recommendable to any organisation. The ultimate target group for all units in the department was defined to be the individual citizen or company, and this is also bore in mind when recommending the use of as simplified language as possible. Ordinary citizens become easily frustrated if they do not understand what public administration organisations are communicating to them.

It seems that the basic idea of IMC has been adopted by the Public Management Department, even if the term is not used. This is seen in the desire to create a coherent perception of the operations and undertakings of the department in the minds of target groups. Also the unification of all physical evidence and constant follow-up of the results signal an aspiration for efficiency, one of the core ideas of IMC.

When analysing the current situation, a SWOT analysis is a good tool to be used to identify possibilities and deficiencies, if actual reflection over the situation takes place as result. A SWOT is displayed in the plan, but merely one conclusion has been drawn from it. However, that single observation probably sums up the situation in many public sector organisations at this moment: the lack of marketing communications specialists is a major defect, because the people working in public administration come from various backgrounds and not all of them have education or experience in marketing.

What is missing from the plan, if figure 2 is used as yardstick for good marketing communications planning, is budgeting. The reason for this lies perhaps in the nature of the organisation in question: in a ministry the budgeting procedures are presumably slightly different than in any other non-profit organisations. For a ministry, the budget is determined in connection with the state's annual budget, whereas regular non-profit

organisations do not have this privilege or limitation, depending on how you choose to look at it.

The fact that the plan serves as guidelines for an entire department also places demands on the generalisation of it. In such a general-level plan the guidelines for budgeting of specific projects would be impossible.

Deriving from the plan discussed in this chapter, it can be concluded that the core marketing communications objectives of the Municipal IT Unit are to increase the conspicuousness of their projects and undertakings and to communicate in a way that is understandable to their target group.

## **6 Research method and implementation of the research**

The research method used in this thesis is traditional qualitative research. It was chosen over other possible research methods because the manner in which it is implemented suits best this research. In this chapter the chosen method is presented briefly, then the questionnaire that was conducted for gathering additional information.

### **6.1 Qualitative research**

Qualitative research is used to gain understanding on the research object and to find ways to explain the reasons behind its behaviour and decisions. It is said to answer the questions “Why?”, “How?” and “What kind?”, whereas for example quantitative research seeks answers to “What?”, “Where?” and “How much?”. (Heikkilä 2008, 16 – 17.) The most common data collection methods in qualitative research are according to Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2003) interview, questionnaire, observation and information that is based on different kinds of documents – these methods can be used separately, concurrently or in different kinds of combinations, depending on the research topic and resources allocated to the research.

Alasuutari (2001, 32) claims that qualitative and quantitative methods can and are often applied within one study, and that they are not to be considered opposites or excluding one another. However, for this thesis it seemed a good idea to mainly keep to the qualitative methods, since the research topic is rather specific and thus requires concentrating on qualities rather than for example quantities.

### **6.2 Data collection by way of a questionnaire**

A questionnaire, directed to the IT managers of municipalities, was conducted in order to gather information directly from one of the most important reference groups of the Municipal IT Unit. The main objectives with the questionnaire were to find out if

- the municipalities’ IT managers have heard of the Municipal IT Unit’s solutions and services

- the municipalities have been successfully reached through the communications channels chosen
- the IT managers are satisfied with the solutions and services they are provided
- the communications style used by the Municipal IT Unit has been clear and easy to understand
- their way of communicating is in accordance with that defined in the marketing communications plan the Unit have been using.

A questionnaire was considered a relatively easy yet useful way of obtaining valuable data on how the marketing communications activities of the Municipal IT Unit have succeeded. Besides, there were no realistic possibilities of collecting opinions from the representatives of municipalities in any other ways, as the number of municipalities is great and as they are situated all around the nation – it would have been impossible to, for example, interview all the respondents.

### **6.2.1 Compiling the questionnaire**

The questionnaire was not compiled before most of the theoretical framework was outlined, so that all the important aspects could be taken into consideration. Heikkilä (2008, 48) mentions that the stages of compiling a questionnaire are defining the topics to be studied, drafting the structure, formulating the questions, testing the questionnaire and, finally, correcting the structure and questions. This was kept in mind when working on the questionnaire.

It was decided to make use of mostly semi-structured and structured questions, as they are easy to answer and the results from them are easy to process. Some open questions were included, as well, but it was avoided to have too many of them, because they are rather laborious and because people tend to leave them unanswered (Heikkilä 2008, 49).

The questionnaire was kept short in order for it to be inviting for the respondents. The language and style were formal, and the setting of the questions was as neutral as possible, in order for it not to appear leading or suggestive.

The questionnaire was translated into Swedish, as some of the respondents were assumed to have Swedish as their first language. This way it could also be avoided that some respondents ignore the questionnaire because it is not available in both official languages.

### **6.2.2 Choosing the respondents**

In qualitative studies, the units studied are often not great in number and they are usually chosen discretionarily. The aim is not to form generalisations but to focus on the chosen topic. (Heikkilä 2008, 16.) Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2003, 87 – 88) point out that it is not essential that the material studied in a qualitative research is broad but that the persons who provide the information studied have some insight that is of use to the researcher. They also think that the researcher should use their own judgement when choosing whom to ask or interview.

The questionnaire was decided to be sent to 45 managers and executives or other officials that are responsible for information management in their municipality. There were 336 municipalities in Finland at the time when this thesis was made, and the reason why exactly these 45 were chosen out of all possibilities was that they had been at least in some kind of interaction with the Municipal IT Unit. Moreover, it cannot be denied that the availability of the contact information of these 45 persons also affected the choice – it is certainly much easier and more effective to send a message directly to the person you are trying to reach than hoping that your message will be forwarded to the right address if you approach an organisation through the official channel.

The group of respondents consisted of big cities, middle-sized cities and also some rather small towns. Part of the respondents came from bilingual municipalities, and geographically the respondents' locations represented nicely all parts of Finland. Even if the meaning with choosing the respondents was not necessarily to make the material as statistically representative as possible, it could not be considered a bad thing that linguistically and geographically the respondents came from different circumstances;

after all, the solutions and services of the Municipal IT Unit are meant for all the municipalities in Finland, regardless of language or location.

### **6.2.3 Sending the questionnaire**

After the structure had been designed, the questions were elaborated and sent for testing and correcting of possible factual errors to the representatives of the Municipal IT Unit. When having been tested, some alterations and corrections were made, after which two separate questionnaire forms were created with the help of the web-based survey software Webropol. The questionnaires can be found as attachments (see appendices 2 and 3).

A cover letter for the questionnaire (see appendix 1) was written so that all the information was both in Finnish and Swedish. That way one single e-mail could be sent to the whole group and the respondents could then decide themselves whether to answer in Finnish or Swedish. The layout of the letter does not follow any particular document standard, as it was sent as an e-mail not an actual letter.

The answering time for the questionnaire was set to a fortnight. A reminder message was sent to those who had not responded the questionnaire when half of the answering time had elapsed.



## 7 Analysing of results

It was known in advance that not all IT managers would have time or interest in responding to the questionnaire. The final response rate turned out to be about 30 %, as 14 out of 45 participated, which actually exceeded the expectations. One respondent claimed to not have heard of the Municipal IT Unit before, so he was redirected to the end of the questionnaire without having the possibility to answer the questions, so as not to distort the results. The results of the questionnaire are discussed in the following subchapters.

### 7.1 General observations

Eleven of the Municipal IT Unit's current projects or solutions were listed and the respondents were asked to pick those they were familiar with. The results showed that only two respondents knew all of the projects listed. Anyhow, all projects were known by most of the respondents, and almost everyone recognised the Public Administration Recommendations, a set of recommendations that concern state and local government information management. Least known was a project whose aim is to develop online services for families with children.

Since the questionnaire was answered by individual persons, it cannot be concluded that no one in a respondent's municipality have heard of the projects that the respondent failed to recognise. Nevertheless, the questionnaire was sent to those who are responsible for all information management related operations in the chosen municipalities, which indicates that they should have known the projects if those have been promoted to the municipality.

One question concerned the channels through which the respondents had obtained information about the solutions and services of the Municipal IT Unit. According to the results, colleagues and reference groups formed an important source of information. Also the web pages of the Unit as well as their newsletter had provided information to the respondents. It was interesting to see that the word-of-mouth system

had been the most efficient one of all the information mediating channels, seeing that it is a method you cannot really control.

Some respondents replied “no” to the question asking whether their municipality has taken or would like to take in use solutions and services of the Municipal IT Unit. However, the general opinion was that they meet the needs of the recipients’ municipalities. Even those in whose municipalities no solutions or services of the Unit had been taken into use felt that they satisfy their needs – this may imply that they are planning to implement some solutions in the future, or would like to do so.

The last question that was common to both language versions of the questionnaire was a statement concerning the Municipal IT Unit’s way of communicating, to which the respondents were supposed to choose one of four endings. The statement and its optional endings were formulated as follows:

The Unit’s communications is

- a) clear and understandable
- b) predominantly clear
- c) often difficult to understand
- d) very obscure.

The replies were distributed on the two middle options, b) and c). Some respondents were of the opinion that the Unit often communicates in a way that is difficult to understand. They happened to be the same ones municipalities had not taken into use any solutions or services. It could be contemplated whether there is a connection between them perceiving the Unit’s messages as unclear and their unwillingness to utilise the solutions.

It would have been interesting to find out if Swedish speaking respondents thought that there is enough information on the solutions and services in Swedish and therefore a unique question concerning that was included in the Swedish version of the questionnaire. Unfortunately, as there was only one respondent choosing to take the

questionnaire in Swedish, nothing much can be concluded from his answer. Besides, he chose the alternative “I do not know”.

## **7.2 Results in relation to marketing communications objectives**

The marketing communications objectives of the Municipal IT Unit, derived from the marketing communications plan, were to increase the conspicuousness of their projects and undertakings and to communicate comprehensibly and coherently.

Based on the results, it can be pointed out that the projects and undertakings of the Unit were fairly well-known amongst the IT managers. The ideal, of course, would have been that all respondents would have been familiar with all projects on the list. On one hand, without being an expert in the field it is difficult to tell whether some of the projects are more suitable for municipalities of certain sizes or with other determinants, and if that is the reason behind the varying degree of familiarity. On the other hand, as the solutions and services the Unit develops together with municipalities are meant for all municipalities, different attributes of municipalities should not matter but the solutions and services should be equally familiar to everyone.

It could be argued that a questionnaire like the one used for this thesis does not serve as valid evidence for proving that the conspicuousness of the projects is somewhat insufficient, as the number of respondents is so small, but then again, the very essence with qualitative research is that the respondents are chosen discretionarily. The respondents were, in a sense, supposed to know all the projects.

For these results to be able to properly answer the question “Has the conspicuousness of the projects and undertakings *increased?*” there ought to be data on the conspicuousness rates from some time ago for comparison. Now it can be concluded that there is room for improvement in promoting the projects to municipalities’ IT managers. The lacking of previous data is inevitable and it could not have been affected by formulating the questionnaire differently. There would have been no sense in asking the respondents if they had heard of the projects, say, three years ago, because results from that kind of survey would not have been very reliable. Therefore, it can be concluded

that the questionnaire answered the question as accurately as by any means possible in this situation.

As for the comprehensibility and coherence of communications, the results show that not all respondents regard the communications style of the Unit as clear and understandable. The fact that some people tend to avoid extremities in multiple choice assignments may partly explain why many of the respondents, who viewed the Unit's style of communicating rather positively, chose "predominantly clear" instead of "clear and understandable". It is also natural that everyone experience moments when something explained to them is not clear at first glance, and this may prevent them from choosing an alternative that suggests that there has never been any ambiguities whatsoever.

Some respondents choosing the alternative "often difficult to understand", in one's turn, suggests that in their case it is not so much a question of selecting tendency but they actually see deficiencies in the Unit's way of communicating. Only a few replies on the more negative side of the scale propose that, indeed, the communications of the Unit has been predominantly clear.

## 8 Conclusions

The objectives of this thesis were to study what is considered important when planning and implementing marketing communications in public administration and to discuss how this has been done in the Municipal IT Unit.

In this chapter the whole thesis is reflected upon on the basis of the research questions presented in chapter 1.1. Some development ideas for the Unit are introduced, as well.

### 8.1 Discussion on the basis of research questions

It was deduced that marketing communications is a term that can be used in public administration just as well as in private sector contexts. The viewpoint is just slightly different. It also became evident that planning of marketing communications in the public sector does not differ significantly from planning it in the private sector. The difference lies, once again, in the perspective: private sector organisations strive to make profit, whilst public sector organisations usually do not.

Implementing a customer-oriented mindset to marketing communications and taking use of IMC in the public sector were approaches advocated by literature sources. The former one is perhaps not a very usual way of thinking in public administration, and the latter maybe just not known by its name, even if its basic idea is often applied. According to the literature reviewed, both have advantages to offer.

The marketing communications plan that the Municipal IT Unit has been applying includes more or less the elements that are generally considered important in marketing communications planning. The plan is not very specific, as it has been designed to serve as guidelines for marketing communications of all projects and undertakings in an entire department. The marketing communications objectives of the Unit were, as determined on the basis of the plan, to increase the conspicuousness of their projects and to communicate comprehensibly. The results showed that the following can be said about achieving the objectives: the conspicuousness of the projects is on a fairly good level and the Unit's style of communicating has been principally comprehensible.

## **8.2 Development ideas**

The last one of the objectives of this thesis concerns how the marketing communications of the Municipal IT Unit could be improved. Suggestions that are based on literature sources and findings of this thesis are presented in the following subchapters.

### **8.2.1 Committing the whole personnel**

There seems to be some reluctance in public sector organisations to utilise the term marketing communications in their operations. This can depend on a misunderstanding of the concept – people may not realise that marketing communications is happening all the time in their own organisation, for example in the form of internal marketing.

An issue like this may not be easy to handle, seeing that it concerns the public sector as a whole and that it is a matter of way of thinking – you could say that it is in the public sector culture. Shook (2010, 66) explains that if you want to see a change in the organisation's way of thinking, you should address behaviour instead of trying to push a change of heart. If those who are trying to make the change happen provide a new model of acting and help the personnel to train the new kind of behaviour, the way of thinking will occur as a result.

The importance of committing the whole personnel to marketing communications was noted in the marketing communications plan that the Municipal IT Unit has been applying but it remains unclear whether anything concrete has been done about this. In the Unit it could be ascertained that all members are familiar with the basic concepts of marketing communications and that they are aware of the fact that they are all the time messengers of their organisation. Kotler and Keller (2009, 36 – 37) remark that internal marketing can be even more important than external marketing, because best results are achieved when the personnel is devoted to a common approach.

## **8.2.2 One person responsible for marketing communications**

This development idea is maybe not within the realm of possibility, but it is, notwithstanding, worth mentioning that it would be worthwhile having someone in the Unit taking care of all marketing communications related tasks. In some units in the ministry this is probably already happening.

It was mentioned in the marketing communications plan that one of the biggest risks with the department's marketing communications is that there are not enough qualified resources to put the plans to action. This could be dealt with by coordinating at least major marketing communications tasks to one person – not to mention actually hiring someone new to assume the role of being responsible for them.

It may be adequate to a certain point that the Media and Communication Unit assists all the other units with their marketing communications and it is good that all the units have their “own” persons in the Communications Unit who are specialised in their operations, but is it really sufficient in the long run? It could be argued that someone who worked on a daily basis in the immediate vicinity of the other unit members would be even better aware of all the details and would at least gradually gain the advantage derived from expertise in the matters.

## **8.2.3 Conducting customer research on a regular basis**

The Municipal IT Unit is trying to convince municipalities and citizens to start using their solutions and services. There may be many reasons why they are not always succeeding with this but there is also one vital viewpoint to remember when pondering over how to make it happen: an organisation should change to meet the needs of the target group, not the other way around (Andreasen & Kotler 2009, 43). That is why it is important to know what the municipalities and citizens really need.

There is no use in designing solutions that no one will need or want to use and therefore it is excellent that the Municipal IT Unit is developing their projects together with the municipalities. Andreasen (1982, 109 – 110) claims that the value of conducting

customer research is commonly underestimated in the non-profit sector and that it should be taken use of whenever planning for the year ahead.

The author is not aware of whether the Municipal IT Unit is conducting customer research regularly or not but the assumption is that at least some kind of ground work is done before starting a project. Consequently, the development suggestion is that also some kind of a marketing communications survey be conducted as a matter of usual practice. The survey could be something similar to the one used for this thesis. That way the marketing communications of the Unit would be constantly monitored and potential deficiencies could be detected at an early stage.

Another thing that relates to customer research is customer or reference group segmentation. Obviously, the predominantly used language in the municipality, Finnish or Swedish, necessitates some sort of division of the municipalities into two or more segments. It could be considered whether there are some additional factors that speak on behalf of segmenting them even further. In the author's personal opinion and experience, there are differences in how people do business in the different regions; in Ostrobothnia, for example, you cannot try to sell products or services in a similar manner than you would in the Finnish Capital Region. The Unit could contemplate if any additional segmentation should be done concerning their marketing communications operations.



## 9 Evaluation

There is an ongoing debate on whether the traditional terms validity and reliability are relevant for qualitative research – some researcher have abandoned those and designed totally new ones that they think better suit qualitative contexts (Eskola & Suoranta 2000, 211). In this thesis, reliability was chosen as assessment tool because it tells how credibly and reproducibly the research has been conducted (Hiltunen, 2009).

These aspects are discussed in the following subchapter. In the very last subchapter the whole thesis process is discussed from the author's point of view.

### 9.1 Reliability of the thesis

The research method used in this thesis, qualitative research, was chosen because it is most suitable for studying a rather specific phenomenon. The data collection methods used in qualitative research also suited this thesis particularly well.

The research questions were formulated so that by answering them, the objectives of the thesis would be reached. The questions for the questionnaire were then designed on the basis of the research questions, and the respondent group of the questionnaire chosen in a way that is relevant for qualitative research. In the results section the findings were discussed from different angles and argued logically. The research process is explained as accurately as possible, so that it could be reproduced if necessary.

The reasons why exactly the theories chosen were actually chosen is explained, as well as the justification behind the choice of research method and means of conducting the research.

All the time there was a desire to make sure that the thesis is answering the research questions and thus also the objectives are achieved. The intention was that nothing in the thesis is mentioned in vain but there is a reason and meaning for every chapter, and that anyone reading this text will understand it as unambiguously as possible.

## 9.2 Evaluation of the thesis process

The topic of this thesis interested the author but it became clear during the gathering of information that it was not a very easy one. It seemed like there was not much literature on the topic, at least not specifically from a public administration point of view. The author's background as trainee in the Municipal IT Unit helped to understand the public sector as an environment but one of the biggest challenges was, still, to assure that things were explained clearly and correctly. Fortunately, the representatives of the Unit were truly helpful and proofread the most critical chapters in case of factual errors.

Another challenge, in no way related to the previous, was time management. In the spring of 2011, it was very difficult to combine studying and sports with working on the thesis, and in the following summer the situation exacerbated even further when the competitive season began and instead of studying a summer job was added to the mix. It turned out that the preliminary schedule for the completion of the thesis was too unrealistic, as far as mental coping was concerned.

At the end of the day, the thesis was completed not more than some two months behind initial schedule and did thus not endanger the graduating of the author, which was rather pleasing. It also proved that one of the most significant reasons for failing to complete one's thesis on time is poor time management.

Hopefully the commissioning party can utilise the findings of this thesis in some way – at least for coming up with new research topics, if nothing else.

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1. Cover letter for the questionnaire

Lyhyt opinnäytetyökysely KuntaIT:n markkinointiviestinnästä/Kort förfrågan gällande lärdomsprov om KommunIT:s marknadskommunikation

Hyvä vastaanottaja (På svenska: vänligen se nedan!)

Teen johdon assistentin opintoihini liittyvää opinnäytetyötä aiheesta *Marketing communications in public administration – Case: Municipality IT Unit*, eli tutkin markkinointiviestintää julkisessa hallinnossa, tarkempana tarkastelukohteena valtiovarainministeriön KuntaIT-yksikkö. Kyselyllä pyrin saamaan arvokasta lisätietoa tutkimukseeni suoraan yhdeltä KuntaIT:n tärkeimmistä kohderyhmistä, eli teiltä kuntien edustajilta.

Kyselyyn vastaaminen on helppoa ja se vie vain muutaman minuutin. Osallistumisestanne on minulle suuri apu! Lisäksi pystytte tätä kautta antamaan palautetta KuntaIT:n ratkaisuihin ja palveluihin liittyvästä markkinointiviestinnästä.

Tässä linkki kyselyyn: \*linkki\* (suomeksi). Vastaamisaikaa on 15.9.2011 saakka. Mikäli teillä on kyselyyn liittyviä kysymyksiä, vastaan mielelläni (\*sähköpostiosoite\*).

Kiitos jo etukäteen avustanne!

Ystävällisin terveisin

Terhi Teräväinen  
johdon assistenttiopiskelija  
HAAGA-HELIA

.....

Bästa mottagare

Jag håller på att slutföra mina studier vid utbildningsprogrammet för ledningsassistenter och arbetar nu med mitt lärdomsprov som heter *Marketing communications in public administration – Case: Municipality IT Unit*. Syftet med lärdomsprovet är att forska marknadskommunikation inom den offentliga förvaltningen, och speciell uppmärksamhet fästs vid KommunIT-enheten i finansministeriet. Med förfrågningen strävar jag efter att få värdefull tilläggsinformation till min forskning direkt från en av KommunIT:s viktigaste målgrupper, nämligen er, kommunrepresentanter.

Det är lätt att delta i förfrågningen och det tar bara några minuter att besvara frågorna. Genom att delta hjälper ni mig enormt, och dessutom är det möjligt för er att ge feedback om marknadskommunikationen gällande KommunIT:s lösningar och tjänster!

Här är länken till förfrågningen: \*länk\* (på svenska). Vänligen besvara förfrågningen senast 15.9.2011. Ifall ni har några frågor gällande förfrågningen, står jag till ert förhållande (\*e-postadress\*). Tack för hjälpen redan på förhand!

Med vänliga hälsningar

Terhi Teräväinen  
studerande vid UP för ledningsassistenter  
HAAGA-HELIA



## Appendix 2. Questionnaire in Finnish

1. Vastaaajan kunta (vapaasti täytettävä)
  
2. Kuntani on
  - a. Suomenkielinen
  - b. Ruotsinkielinen
  - c. Kaksikielinen
  
3. Oletko kuullut KuntaIT:n ratkaisuksista ja palveluista?
  - a. Kyllä
  - b. Ei
  
4. Valitse seuraavista ratkaisuksista ja palveluista ne, jotka ovat sinulle tuttuja (voit valita useita vaihtoehtoja)
  - a. Asiakaspalvelun kehittäminen
  - b. Kunnan rekrytointipalvelu
  - c. Lapsiperheiden sähköiset palvelut
  - d. Rakennetun ympäristön palvelut
  - e. Tietojohtamisen kehittäminen
  - f. Prosessipankki
  - g. Kilpailutusjärjestelmä
  - h. JHS-suositukset
  - i. Avoin arkkitehtuuri
  - j. Tunnistaminen ja käyttövaltuuksien hallinta
  - k. Sähköinen arkistonmuodostus
  
5. Mitä kautta olet saanut tietoa KuntaIT:n ratkaistuista ja palveluista? (Voit valita useita vaihtoehtoja)
  - a. Nettisivuilta ([www.kuntait.fi](http://www.kuntait.fi))
  - b. Jossain tapahtumassa, esim. Kuntamarkkinat
  - c. KuntaIT:n uutiskirjeestä
  - d. Kollegoiden tai sidosryhmien kautta
  - e. Kuntani on saanut yhteydenoton KuntaIT:ltä
  - f. Muuta kautta, selvennä:
  
6. Onko kunnassasi kiinnostusta ottaa tai otettu käyttöön KuntaIT:n ratkaisuja ja palveluita?
  - a. Kyllä, selvennä:
  - b. Ei

7. Vastaavatko KuntaIT:n kehittämät ratkaisut kuntani tarpeisiin?
- Kyllä, miten:
  - Ei, mihin olisi tarvetta:
  - En osaa sanoa:
8. Mikä seuraavista, KuntaIT:n ratkaisujen ja palveluiden viestintää koskeva väittämä mielestäsi vastaa parhaiten todellisuutta?
- Viestintä on
- selkeää ja ymmärrettävää.
  - pääosin selkeää.
  - usein vaikeasti ymmärrettävää.
  - hyvin vaikeaselkoista.

### Appendix 3. Questionnaire in Swedish

1. Respondentens kommun
2. Kommunen är
  - a. Finskspråkig
  - b. Svenskspråkig
  - c. Tvåspråkig
3. Har du hört om KommunIT:s lösningar och tjänster?
  - a. Ja
  - b. Nej
4. Välj från följande lösningar och tjänster de som du känner till. (Du kan välja flera alternativ.)
  - a. Utveckling av kundservice
  - b. Kommunens rekryteringstjänst
  - c. Elektrisk service för barnfamiljer
  - d. Tjänster kring den byggda miljön
  - e. Utvecklingen av informationsstyrningen
  - f. Processbanken
  - g. Konkurrensutsättning
  - h. JHS-rekommendationer
  - i. Öppen arkitektur
  - j. Identifiering och administration av behörighet
  - k. Elektronisk arkivbildning
5. Genom vilka kanaler har du fått information om KommunIT:s lösningar och tjänster? (Du kan välja flera alternativ.)
  - a. Webbsidan ([www.kuntait.fi](http://www.kuntait.fi))
  - b. På en tillställning, t.ex. Kommunmarknaden
  - c. KommunIT:s nyhetsbrev
  - d. Kolleger eller intressentgrupper
  - e. KommunIT har kontaktat min kommun
  - f. Annan kanal, vilken:
6. Har ni i er kommun tagit i användning eller finns där intresse för att ta i användning KommunIT:s lösningar och tjänster?
  - a. Ja, specificera gärna vilka/hurdana:
  - b. Nej
7. Möter KommunIT:s lösningar behoven i er kommun?
  - a. Ja, på vilket sätt:
  - b. Nej, vad skulle ni vara i behov av:

- c. Jag vet inte
8. Vilket av de följande påståendena, som gäller marknadskommunikationen av KommunIT:s lösningar och tjänster, tycker ni bäst motsvarar verkligheten?  
Sättet att kommunicera är
- a. klart och begripligt.
  - b. huvudsakligen klart.
  - c. ofta svårt att förstå.
  - d. mycket svårt att förstå.
9. Finns det tillräckligt med information gällande KommunIT:s lösningar och tjänster även på svenska?
- a. Ja
  - b. Nej
  - c. Jag vet inte