

THESIS

Elina Makkonen 2012

**MARKETING SUGGESTIONS FOR
SOCIÉTÉ NOBEL FOUNDATION**



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Thesis

**MARKETING SUGGESTIONS FOR
SOCIÉTÉ NOBEL FOUNDATION**

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The objective of this thesis was to find new marketing ideas and improve the current marketing of Société Nobel Foundation, a private members club in the Netherlands.

This thesis is based on theory of marketing planning and marketing communication channels, most importantly e-marketing and websites. Also literature on themed interview and benchmarking are part of the theory base.

A themed interview was conducted to the marketing manager of Société Nobel Foundation to find out the basic information of the company, the current marketing actions and the goals for marketing in the future. Webpage benchmarking was conducted to similar purpose clubs in the Netherlands and London to find new ideas for Société Nobel Foundation's website.

The main results of this thesis were that Société Nobel Foundation should concentrate mostly on e-marketing, especially on their website. Suggestions were made to change the message the website offers to describe Société Nobel more realistically.

Key words: Marketing planning, marketing communications, members only club, private club, benchmarking, themed interview

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Tämän opinnäytetyön tavoitteena oli löytää uusia markkinointi-ideoita ja kehittää nykyistä markkinointia toimivammaksi Alankomaissa toimivalle, vain jäsenille tarkoitetulle clubille, Société Nobel Foundationille.

Opinnäytetyön teoriapohja koostuu pääasiassa markkinoinnin suunnittelun, markkinointiviestinnän, erityisesti nettisivujen ja muun internet -markkinoinnin käsitteistä, sekä teemahaastattelu- ja benchmarking kirjallisuudesta.

Opinnäytetyön tutkimusaineisto on kerätty suorittamalla teemahaastattelu Société Nobel Foundationin markkinointipäällikölle. Haastattelulla pyrittiin keräämään tietoa Société Nobel Foundationista, sen tämänhetkisestä markkinointitilanteesta, sekä tulevaisuuden toiveista ja tavoitteista.

Toinen aineistonkeruutapa opinnäytetyössä oli nettisivujen benchmarking -tutkimus samankaltaisille klubeille Alankomaissa sekä Lontoossa. Benchmarking-tutkimuksen tavoitteena oli kerätä tietoa muiden samankaltaisten klubien nettisivuista ja saada niistä ideoita Société Nobel Foundationin nettisivujen kehittämiseen.

Tulosten pohjalta tämä opinnäytetyö kehottaa toimeksiantajaa keskittymään markkinoinnissaan pääasiassa sähköiseen markkinointiin, erityisesti nettisivuihin. Opinnäytetyö tarjoaa myös ideoita yrityksen nettisivujen muokkaamiseen, jotta niiden välittämä viesti vastaisi paremmin Société Nobel Foundationin todellista luonnetta.

Avainsanat: Markkinoinnin suunnittelu, nettisivut, markkinointiviestintä, benchmarking, yksityinen klubi, teemahaastattelu

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1 INTRODUCTION

The idea for this thesis project came in November 2011 when I was looking for an interesting topic for my thesis project and found out Société Nobel was looking for someone to conduct their marketing plan. The topic seemed challenging and interesting. I chose this topic also because I was sure it would broaden my knowledge in the area of marketing. I chose to do the thesis report completely in English so it would be useful for Société Nobel. This brought more challenges for me since I have conducted my studies in Finnish. However, this was a challenge I happily accepted.

Société Nobel Foundation is a private members only club located in The Hague. To its members the foundation offers relaxed club nights where they can enjoy cigars, fine drinks, play snooker and enjoy each other's company. Société Nobel was founded spontaneously and therefore no marketing or business plan was ever constructed and the marketing planning has been based solely on verbal communication among the staff. The original goal of this project was to make a useful and complete marketing plan for Société Nobel Foundation. However, while writing this report it soon became obvious that, due to lack of any kind of marketing plan, Société Nobel is not really a clear product or a concept anymore since it has changed significantly during its existence. Even the staff could not properly explain what Société Nobel is at the moment. Also the message that current marketing gives to potential customers does not correspond to what Société Nobel's actually is. Due to this, I decided to change the thesis project angle and concentrate on new marketing ideas and making the current marketing more effective and more suitable for Société Nobel's image.

It was decided that to make most of the marketing ideas, it was best to concentrate on e-marketing and especially Société Nobel's website. The goal is to make their website more attractive to potential members and to make the message the website provides match the reality. These ideas were found

through marketing theory and by benchmarking the websites of other similar purpose clubs in the Netherlands and Great Britain.

To have a better idea of Société Nobel Foundation I spent a month in The Netherlands in the beginning of this project process working as a volunteer for Société Nobel. I followed the marketing manager at her work and got familiar with the practices and processes at the club. I also worked as a hostess at the club nights during that time to observe the members to acquire an overview of the members Société Nobel has.

To be able to create marketing ideas for Société Nobel, it was necessary to gather crucial information about the organization's current situation in general and in marketing and also to find out their goals for the future. All the information on Société Nobel was collected by conducting a themed interview to the marketing manager of Société Nobel and by getting to know the company's web page and Facebook profile. Due to the volunteer work and observations done at Société Nobel I had an overview of the club and its strengths and weaknesses. With the help of this information I was able to form the questions for the themed interview. In the marketing ideas the focus is mainly on e-marketing. Information about marketing planning, marketing communication channels and other marketing related topics are collected mainly from literature and online sources.

2 MARKETING THEORY BASE

2.1 Marketing Planning

Marketing planning means finding out the future goals and the actions needed to reach them. Planning the marketing actions forces the company to think from the customer's perspective. A marketing plan can be conducted to work as a guide in the marketing actions and is helpful when following the effects of marketing. (Isoviita–Lahtinen 1998, 25–28.) Planning the marketing encourages the company to think systematically and sharpen the policies of marketing (Kotler–Armstrong–Wong–Saunders 2008, 128). When planning the marketing it is important to define the vision the company is trying to reach and the strategy which gives the tools to reach this vision (Sipilä 2008, 18–19).

Marketing planning consists of three stages. The first stage is the strategic planning and how it affects to the marketing. The second stage is the marketing process and the third stage is the ways of putting the plans into action. (Kotler et al. 2008, 128) When planning their marketing, a company can prepare for example two different kinds of plans. It can be beneficial to start with an annual plan, which is a short-term plan and describes the current situation, objectives and strategy, as well as the action program, budget and control. A long-range plan narrates the primary forces and factors the company faces during the next years. It also includes the long-term objectives of the company, the marketing strategies used and the resources required to achieve them. A long-range plan should be updated annually. (Kotler et al. 2008, 129.)

There is not one model or way for marketing planning but the core content on all the marketing planning models searched for this project were basically the same. When planning the marketing the first step is to determine the mission and purpose of the planning process. It is also useful to state the basic information of the company, the products and serviced offered, the current

marketing actions, target markets, competitors, current financial condition and external forces effecting the company. (KnowThis LLC 2012.)

A helpful tool for marketing planning is the SWOT analysis (Halligan 2010, 3; Kotler et al. 2008, 153). The SWOT analysis states the company's strengths and weaknesses as well as the opportunities and threats it faces (Berry 2012; Kotler et al. 2008,129; Zahorsky 2012). Strengths and weaknesses are internal factors in the company whereas threats and opportunities are external factors (Zahorsky 2012). The SWOT analysis is handled more in depth later in Chapter 2.2 of this report.

An important part of marketing planning is to conduct customer analysis where the typical customers and the ideal customers, the target customers, are identified. It is also important to discuss how the target customers can be reached. (Halligan 2010, 6.) When planning marketing, the goals the company has for the future, for example in sales and profits have to be decided. The issues affecting these goals should be considered. After setting the goals it is crucial to plan the marketing strategy which states the marketing approach used to achieve the goals. To help the marketing strategy, a marketing implementation should be conducted, which states in detail what will be done and by whom. It also specifies when the actions are done and how much will they cost. (Kotler et al. 2008, 152)

Budgeting also plays an important role in the marketing planning. The marketing budget should present a clear and detailed picture of the costs of implicating the planned marketing actions. (KnowThis LLC 2012) After planning the marketing actions and performing them it is important to measure how the performance was done and evaluate possible differences between the set goals and performance. If differences or gaps are found, it is crucial to close the gaps by changing the action programs or even by changing the goals. (Kotler et al. 2008, 152, 161.)

The return of the marketing investments (marketing ROI) measures the profit received from investments in the marketing activities. It is counted by dividing

the net return from the marketing actions by the costs of the marketing investments. The counting of the returns of the marketing investments can be difficult to conduct, since the returns of marketing investments cannot always be counted numerically. It can be, for example, an increase in brand awareness. (Kotler et al. 2008, 160–161.)

Some of the marketing planning theories presented in this chapter will not be used later in this report. The commissioner, however, requested to have a more detailed marketing planning theory section included in this report to give information on marketing planning and to help the commissioner to understand the choices of methods used in this thesis project.

2.2 SWOT Analysis

As mentioned earlier in Chapter 2.1 of this report, the SWOT analysis consists of 4 parts: strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. The strengths are the positive attributes concerning the company. It includes the tangible resources in the company such as the available capital, the current customers and the equipment available. Also the intangible attributes such as the knowledge and the skills of the staff, the reputation of the company and the contacts made can be counted as strengths. Strengths are the attributes in the company that add value or bring competitive advantage. Simply put, strengths are the attributes a company does well. (Berry 2012.)

Weaknesses are aspects that affect negatively the value of the company. They are factors within the company that the company is in control of and that can be improved. The more accurately weaknesses in the company are identified, the more useful the SWOT analysis will be. Weaknesses can be for example lack of expertise in a certain area, limited resources or bad the location of the company. (Berry 2012.) High cost of production or the similarity of the product or service to that of competitors' can also be a weakness (Zahorsky 2012). Strengths and weaknesses can be called critical

success factors. They are the aspects affecting the company's success the most. (Kotler et al. 2008, 138.)

Opportunities are the factors external to the company that can help the company to grow or benefit the company in some other way (Berry 2012). Opportunities can be political, legal or technological factors that benefit the company such as development of new technology, changes in government regulation or growing trends (Zahorsky 2012). An opportunity can either be an ongoing opportunity or a window of opportunity when timing in benefiting from the opportunity plays a bigger role (Berry 2012).

Threats are the external factors that can place the marketing strategy or even the whole company at risk. Since threats are external they cannot be controlled. However, it is important to recognize them and try to prepare for a situation where they occur. Threats can be for example potential or existing competition, price increases from suppliers or changes in governmental regulation. Also changes in consumer behavior or economic downturns can be threats. The threats in the SWOT analysis can be categorized according to their probability and seriousness. (Berry 2012.)

2.3 Marketing Mix

Marketing mix is an important concept in marketing. A marketing mix consists of tools the company can use to influence the demand for its products and services. (Kotler et al. 2008, 157–158.) Traditionally a marketing mix is divided into four parts; the four Ps. The four Ps are product, price, place and promotion. (Kotler et al. 2008, 158; Pelsmacker et al. 2007, 2–3.) These four parts will now be explained more in depth.

A product is a combination of goods and services the company offers to its target markets (Kotler et al. 2008, 158). A product is considered to consist of three layers. The first layer is the core product which is normally the main reason for a consumer to purchase the product. The middle layer consists of

the brand and the features of the product such as the quality, design and packaging of the product. The last layer in a product is the service layer and it includes the delivery of the product, after-sales service and warranties. (Pelsmacker et al. 2007, 2-3.)

The price is an important aspect for selling a product or service. The higher the price, the more value and quality the customer expects. (The Chartered Institute of Marketing 2009, 5.) If the price is too high, the customers will not buy it. If the price is too low, it might give the impression that the product is of bad quality or does not cover the costs for the company. This may again lead to the customer not buying the product. All the internal and external aspects, such as marketing strategies, competitors' strategies and the demand of the market, have to be taken into consideration when deciding the price to a product. (Kotler et al. 2008, 639.) Discounts, payment periods and incentives can make the product more attractive to the customer. However, it has been advised to avoid using price as a marketing tool. This can potentially be harmful when building a strong brand or position. (Pelsmacker et al. 2007, 2-3.)

The activities of the company making the product available to target consumers are included in the place part of the marketing mix (Kotler et al. 2008, 158). Place includes the distribution of the product. Distribution includes the transportation of the product to the chosen places where it can be purchased. Also keeping inventories is a part of the distribution process. (Pelsmacker et al. 2007, 3.)

Promotion is the most visible part of the marketing mix and can also be called marketing communications. Promotion includes all the communication tools used to give information about the product to the chosen target markets. (Pelsmacker et al. 2007, 3.) The purpose of promotion is to give information about the other parts of the marketing mix. It offers information about the offered product or service, where it can be bought and at what price. (Vuokko 2003, 23.) The marketing communication channels are explained more in-depth in Chapter 2.5 Marketing Communication Channels.

Traditionally marketing mix has been considered to consist of the four Ps. However, more recently marketing mix has been seen to include also three extra parts. The parts are people, process and physical evidence. Especially process and physical evidence parts are seen to concern mainly the service industry. (The Chartered Institute of Marketing 2009, 3.)

All the staff working in the company who are in contact with customers, give an impression of the company to the customer. That is why the fifth P in the marketing mix is people. The impression given can have a considerable effect on customer satisfaction. To ensure that the right kind of impression is given, the staff should be well trained for their tasks and possess the right kind of attitude. Good service can become a competitive advantage against competitors. For some consumers the quality of the service can be more important than the price of the product or service. (The Chartered Institute of Marketing 2009, 6.)

Process is considered to be the sixth part of the marketing mix. The process part includes the whole service giving process from waiting times to the helpfulness of the staff and the information given to the customer. Process part of the marketing mix can be easily overlooked even though aspects such as waiting times can have a crucial effect on customer satisfaction. If the process is handled wisely, it can be an effective competitive advantage. (The Chartered Institute of Marketing 2009, 6 - 7.)

Part seven of the marketing mix, physical evidence is the actual service conducted to the customer. Services are intangible and cannot be seen or experienced before they are purchased and delivered. It is advisable to help the customers to see what they are buying. For example, the cleanliness of the facilities where the service is provided can be a sign of a good service. Consumers often share their experiences with others. This can be useful to the company when harnessed in the right way. Asking for customer feedbacks and showing customer testimonials to potential customers can

make the potential customers more confident in buying the service. (The Chartered Institute of Marketing 2009, 7.)

2.4 Market Segmentation, Targeting and Positioning

In marketing the concept of market signifies the group of consumers that are interested and have resources to purchase a product (Internet Center for Management and Business Administration, Inc. 2002–2010). It is the company's best interest not to try to serve all possible customers but to target the marketing strategy and the actions to the customers that the company can serve best and that are most profitable and useful to the company. The whole market is normally too wide for the company to focus on, which makes it ideal to find the potential customers in the whole market and concentrate on them. (Kotler et al. 2008, 51) Through market segmentation the large heterogeneous markets are divided into smaller segments. The smaller segments can be reached more efficiently with products or services that match their needs and wants. (Bowie–Buttle 2004, 63–64; Kotler et al. 2008, 410.)

There are many different ways to segment markets. In geographic segmentation the markets are divided into different geographical units such as nations, regions, states or cities. After using geographic segmentation, companies can plan their products and marketing to fit the needs of the specific demographic area chosen. (Kotler et al. 2008, 411.)

In demographic segmentation the market is divided into groups based on variables such as gender, age, income, occupation, education, religion, race, family size or nationality (Bowie–Buttle 2004, 68). Demographic segmentation is the most popular way of segmenting. Especially age is an easy variable, since people's wants and needs change remarkably with age. (Kotler et al. 2008, 413.)

Psychographic segmentation divides the customers into different groups based on lifestyle, personality characteristics or social class. Markets can be segmented by lifestyle, since the products bought often reflect consumers' lifestyle. In this case the marketing strategy should be based on lifestyle appeals. (Kotler et al. 2008, 415.)

In behavioral segmentation the market is divided into groups based on the attitudes, knowledge or use or response towards a product. Customers can be segmented to groups based on for example how often customers buy a certain product or service, how informed they are of a product or how likely they are to be loyal to a certain brand. (Kotler et al. 2008, 412–417.)

After segmenting the market it is time to choose the target markets. A target market is the segment or segments the company chooses to serve. Target market is a group of buyers sharing common needs or characteristic. (Kotler et al. 2008, 423–424.) In the targeting process the company chooses how many segments it wants to target in and which segments are the most attractive ones for the company (Pelsmacker–Geuens–Van den Bergh 2007, 131). The most attractive segment is not necessarily the largest and most rapidly growing. Especially for a small company it can be wise to concentrate on small and less competitive segments that suit the company's resources and skills better. (Kotler et al. 2008, 423–424; Pelsmacker et al. 2007, 133.)

Positioning a product or a brand signifies differentiating them from competitors in the consumer's mind (Kotler et al. 2008, 432; Pelsmacker et al. 2007, 133–134). A product's or brand's position is the place the product holds in the consumer's mind relative to the competitors. If the product or service the company offers is exactly similar with competitor's product, the consumer has no reason to purchase it. An important aspect is to think why consumers are willing to pay more for your brand than that of the competitor's. Finding the answer gives the company a big competitive advantage. (Kotler et al. 2008, 157.)

2.5 Marketing Communication Channels

A mix of different marketing communication methods chosen for a certain company and for a certain product is called a promotion mix or a marketing communications mix. With the help of a promotion mix the company builds customer relationships and promotes its products. (Kotler et al. 2008, 691.). With the communication channels companies try to influence or persuade the potential customers to purchase their products. The marketing communication is either personal communication where the message is targeted to a single person or mass communication where the message is targeted at a group of receivers by mass media. Personal communication is normally direct personal selling and interactive marketing. Other promotional tools are counted as mass communication. There is a large variety of different communication channels to choose from. (Pelsmacker et al. 2007, 5–6.)

Advertising is a non-personal mass communication tool. (Pelsmacker et al. 2007, 5.) In advertising the cost are usually quite high however through advertising it is possible to reach large groups of potential customers. (Vuokko 2003, 149.) Advertising means sharing the information on products and services through mass media which includes for example newspapers, television, magazines, billboards and radio (Pelsmacker et al. 2007, 5). Nowadays also internet should be considered a growingly important part of the mass media.

When using advertising the objectives of the campaign need to be set. The objectives can be among other things, reminding the customers of existing products and services or informing the target audience of new products and services. After determining the objectives the advertising budget has to be decided. If the object of the advertising campaign is to introduce a new product or service the budget is usually bigger than when reminding customers of existing products and services. If the product or service is very similar to competitors products and services there might be a need for bigger budget and a bigger advertising campaign. (Kotler et al. 2008, 739–740.)

After setting the objectives and deciding the budget it is time to develop the advertising strategy. The advertising strategy includes creating the advertising message and deciding which media to use. The advertising message should be well thought out. A memorable and creative advertising message brings more benefits from the advertising campaign. (Kotler et al. 2008, 742–744.)

When deciding the advertising media it is important to think how many potential customers the media reaches. Another important aspect to think when choosing the advertising media is how many times the average person in the target market is reached by the advertising message during a certain time. The character of the product also has an effect on which media to choose. If the use of the product needs demonstrating it is more effective to advertise it in television than in radio. (Kotler et al. 2008, 747.)

After the advertising campaign has been conducted it is important to evaluate the results of the campaign. The evaluations are conducted to find out if the campaign has increased the awareness and knowledge of the product in the target market. Evaluating the advertising campaign can be done also before launching the campaign by showing the ad to consumers in the target market and finding out how it affects to their opinions about the product. (Kotler et al. 2008, 753.)

Oral and written recommendations made by satisfied customers of a product or service, are called word of mouth marketing. Word of mouth marketing can be considered to be the most powerful marketing form existing (Halligan 2010, 7; WebFinance, Inc. 2012). It is also considered to be the most credible form of marketing since the person sharing an experience about a product or service puts their own reputation and credibility on the line. Consumers are often triggered to word of mouth marketing easier when experiencing a product or service exceeding their expectations. An even more efficient trigger can be unmet expectations. (Entrepreneur Media, Inc. 2012.)

Consumers spend an increasing amount of time in the internet which has lead companies to direct their marketing budget more towards online advertising. The goal of online advertising can be to attract visitors to the company's web pages or increase brand awareness. E-marketing or online marketing can be described as the efforts a company does over the internet to market their products and services and build customer relationship. Online marketing is noted to be the fastest growing form of direct marketing. (Kotler et al. 2008, 839, 854.)

Normally creating a website is the first action for a company when starting online marketing. The most important aspect of creating a website is that it is attractive to customers and gets consumers to visit it often and spend time on the website. A company can build two kinds of websites. Corporate websites are not for directly selling the products online but to offer information about the company and their products. A corporative website offers answers to customers' questions, builds customer relationships and creates interest to the company. Corporative website can include information for example on the products and services the company offers and on the company's mission, philosophy and its history. A corporative website can also include information about the staff, events and possible employment opportunities. A corporative website often offers entertainment features that attract and make visitors spend more time on the webpage. (Kotler et al. 2008, 850.)

Another type of website is a marketing website. The purpose of a marketing website is to engage visitors and interact with them. A marketing website aims to bring customers closer to purchasing the products the company is offering. A marketing website can include product catalogues, coupons, contests, sales events and shopping tips. Often the products offered by the company can be bought from the website by credit card. (Kotler et al. 2008, 850.)

Having people and especially potential customers visit the webpage is not a foregone conclusion. A company can attract people to visit their website by

for example putting ads and links on other sites and mentioning the link to the website in other advertising used. (Kotler et al. 2008, 851.) Another way to attract people to a webpage is to use search engine optimization. Roughly half of internet users use search engines to find information. It is also researched that the ten first websites in the search query results receive about 80% more visits than the ones below them. With the help of search engine optimization companies can make their website appear earlier in the search query results. Search engine optimization is done for example by adding hidden keywords to the webpage or using specific page titles. (Pelsmacker et al. 2007, 497–498.)

After attracting people to visit the webpage it is important that the webpage is effective and interesting enough from the first view to keep the customers on the webpage and make them return regularly (Kotler et al. 2008, 851). A well made website is a combination of content and delivery, however, the content is the most important part of the webpage (Scoble 2007, 108–109). The content often includes text, pictures, music and videos. Colorful and graphically intelligent and useful websites with good content can encourage revisits. Revisits are encouraged also by changing the page constantly to keep it interesting. (Kotler et al. 2008, 851)

In addition to web pages there are other forms of online advertising such as various commercial messages. The most common of these are banner-shaped ads at web pages. (Kotler et al. 2008, 854.) The purpose for banners is to make Internet users click the banner which will lead them to the advertisers web page (Mohammed–Fisher–Jaworski–Paddison 2003, 354). Interstitials are ads which appear as a separate window between pages when changing a screen. Pop-up and pop-under ads are type of interstitials which suddenly appear over or under the webpage viewed. Ads that include animation, sound, video and interaction are called rich media. (Kotler et al. 2008, 854; Mohammed et al. 2003, 355–356.) Rich media is more expensive to produce than other online advertising ways (Mohammed et al. 2003, 356). Search engine ads are another form of online advertising where a company can place their ads to appear next to the search engine results (Kotler et al.

2008, 854; Mohammed et al. 2003, 356). Search engine advertising can be done in a relatively small budget since the company can decide a maximum daily budget and has to pay only when someone clicks the ad. This way a company pays only when their website is visited through the ad. (Google 2012.)

Another form of online marketing is e-mail marketing. It has been seen as the most effective online marketing form to increase sales with the existing customers by sending newsletters of special promotions or upcoming events. It has been however considered to be quite an ineffective way to reach new customers. (Mohammed et al. 2003, 359.) Consumers may find marketing e-mails irritating and therefore it is best to ask the customers permission for sending them (Kotler et al. 2008, 858).

Another possible way to use online marketing is to participate in social media where different communication channels are used and connected societies are created through different social media platforms. These platforms are for example Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, wikis and blogs (Agresta–Bough–Miletsky 2010, 2-6). Blogs are independent web journals presenting the ideas and opinions of individuals or occasionally a company or a department from a company. Blogs are technically easy to create which has led to some small companies to start a blog instead of creating a webpage. (Meerman Scott 2007, 46–47.) Social media gives the company a chance to get close to the customer and deliver the message in more individual form. Following social media can also give a company a better understanding of the mindset of online consumers. However in social media the message a company wants to send does not always dominate the message spreading across social media users. Consumers rely heavily on reviews on blogs and ratings on for example Amazon when making decisions on product or service purchase. (Agresta 2010, 6–8)

Other marketing communication tools are sponsorship deals, sales promotions, public relations, trade fairs and exhibitions, personal selling, catalogue marketing and telephone marketing (Pelsmacker et al. 2007, 5).

These are not explained more in detail in this report since they are not considered to be the most effective and useful marketing communication tools for Société Nobel.

3 SOCIÉTÉ NOBEL FOUNDATION

3.1 Basic information

Société Nobel is a foundation that was founded in May 2009 to fulfill a desire to enjoy a cigar while playing a game of snooker. Within the past three years it has developed into a luxurious hangout place for business men and women in the Netherlands. Société Nobel is situated in the centre of The Hague in Nobelstraat in an old warehouse modified into an exclusive private club. The facilities at Société Nobel are luxurious and extensive. Société Nobel is also located close to many other big cities in the Netherlands, such as Amsterdam, Rotterdam and Utrecht (Makkonen 2012a). It keeps a low profile and chooses its members carefully, making sure that its purpose is fulfilled: providing a luxurious setting and relaxing atmosphere for enjoying life. (Société Nobel 2012.)



Picture 1. Société Nobel Club Room. (Bollen, M. 2009.)

Société Nobel is owned by its founders Jerrel Manbodh and Edwin Ooms. Besides the atmosphere, luxurious location and friendly service, a big attraction in the club is its wide range of wines, whiskies, cognacs and champagnes. Société Nobel also has a wide collection of cigars in its walk-in

humidor. (Société Nobel 2012) Many of the cigars are difficult to find for regular consumers or are impossible to purchase in small quantities in other places (Makkonen 2012a).

Holding club nights for its members is the most important reason for Société Nobel's existence. Besides catering to its members, the foundation also rents out its premises for various events such as product launches, business meetings, social gatherings and fashion shows. In addition Société Nobel organizes events with other organizations such as Club Cigar. These events are often open to a broader clientele. (Makkonen 2012a.)

Société Nobel organizes club nights for its members every Thursday. Once a month club nights have a theme or are held in cooperation with companies that showcase their high-end products. The members receive personal introductions to the details of these products and also have the possibility to purchase them. These products can be for example fine whiskies, champagnes, vintage watches or special cigars.

It is also possible for the members to share club nights with their friends from outside the foundation. Each member can bring a guest they cater for the night. This is a great way for them to impress a business partner, a date or show the club to a friend they perhaps wish would become a member as well. (Makkonen 2012a) All the members also have the privilege to book Société Nobel's facilities once every calendar year for private or business purposes such as product launches or company presentations (Société Nobel 2012). Like mentioned earlier, the club nights are also often held with different themes such as Casino night or Queen's day pre-party (Makkonen 2012a).

To become a member, it is easiest to contact Société Nobel through their e-mail info@societenobel.nl. After this an application form will be received within five working days. After becoming a member, 150 euros is donated to the Société Nobel Foundation each month. The contract is always made for one year at a time. From the donation 100 euros each month goes to the

member's personal spending account and is added to their spending limit. (Société Nobel 2012) If a potential member is interested in participating to a club night, an introductory membership can be bought for the price of 50 euros. Introductory membership allows the potential member to participate in a club night and enjoy the basic products offered by Société Nobel's bar and humidor. Société Nobel does not handle cash payments so all the purchases are paid via invoicing (Makkonen 2012a).

Société Nobel is a nonprofit organization. Its members are automatically participating in charity work since Société Nobel foundation donates 100 euros per member every year to the Cigar Family Charitable Foundation of the Fuente Family. Société Nobel also organizes separate charity events for various local causes. (Société Nobel 2012; Makkonen 2012a.)

Société Nobel club area is 65 square meters and includes a bar, a small library with leather Chesterfield armchairs, a walk in humidor, snooker table and two large tables with benches. As can be seen from Picture 1. the club room has also a small loft with armchairs and tables. The interior at the club room is dark and plenty of wood, black leather and steel is used. For large events it is possible for Société Nobel to rent two rooms connected to the club room. The combined size of the two rooms is 165 square meters. The interior in the additional rooms is white. (Makkonen 2012a; Société Nobel 2012.)

Société Nobel has 25 paying members at the moment and they wish to increase the amount to 100 in the near future. This amount would be perfect for Société Nobel since the club room can fit about 50 persons comfortably and with 100 members it is unlikely to have the club area too crowded but it would still guarantee enough visitors for each club night and other events. A long term goal is to increase the amount of members noticeably. The goal is to have a sufficient amount of members that the club could be open six days a week and also during daytime. This would allow the members to come for a coffee and relax at the club more often. At the moment the club is open only once a week on Thursday evenings. In the future, if the amount of members

increase noticeably, it is possible for Société Nobel to rent the two additional rooms connected to the club for all the club nights and other events as well. (Makkonen 2012a)

3.2 Current image and target markets

At the moment Société Nobel presents itself as a luxurious club for carefully selected members. Société Nobel's current slogan is "Ontspannen Netwerken Op Niveau"(Société Nobel 2012). Freely translated to English it means "Relaxed Networking in Luxury". Société Nobel's webpage has a long list of rules that members and visitors have to obey (Société Nobel 2012). Société Nobel's webpage is their most important marketing tool and at the moment it portrays a picture of a very luxurious, strict and exclusive networking club. Société Nobel's Facebook profile gives a bit more relaxed picture of the club with humoristic posts written on the profile wall.

Société Nobel's current target markets are quite broad in a way. The goal is to attract open minded and friendly people who are open to conversations and making friends. Members can be interested in cigars, fine drinks or simply good company. Targeted customers live in The Hague or in the nearby cities or are willing to travel to the club nights frequently. Both men and women are welcomed. The age limit to becoming a member is 18. Société Nobel does not target to a certain age group but welcomes members from all age groups exceeding the minimum limit. There are no requirements for the member's background. However the membership fee requires the members to have an above average income or for example be very interested in the products sold at Société Nobel and therefore be willing to pay the membership fee. (Makkonen 2012a.)

The market segmentation ways suitable for Société Nobel are demographic segmentation and psychographic segmentation. The targeted customers have at least a bit above average income level and they have to be over 18

years old. From psychographic segmentation point of view the members enjoy certain lifestyle including enjoying cigars or fine drinks or simply enjoying the atmosphere Société Nobel offers. The required income also results to the members belonging to a certain social class.

3.3 Current Marketing

The most important marketing tool for Société Nobel at the moment is their webpage which gives a lot of information about the club. The information in the webpage is provided in Dutch and in English. The webpage states the purpose of Société Nobel, gives information on the facilities, charity done by the foundation and about the membership. The house rules are presented at the webpage as well. The webpage has also a gallery with pictures of the facilities and from different events held at the club. In the calendar section the future events and possibilities for a visit are presented. The event calendar is however only available in Dutch. (Société Nobel 2012; Makkonen 2012a.)

An important E-marketing method for Société Nobel is their Facebook profile. Earlier the foundation also used Facebook advertising as a marketing tool. An advert about Société Nobel's profile appeared to the side bar of the Facebook users in the certain area with chosen interests mentioned in their profile. If the user clicked the link to end up at Société Nobel's profile, Facebook charged the foundation. This marketing tool however proved to be too expensive for Société Nobel compared to the benefits and results it provided. At the moment Société Nobel's Facebook profile is used to inform people about future events and to remind them from the clubs existence by posting videos and opening questions anyone liking the profile can take part in. At the moment the Facebook profile has about 450 likes and it is meant for the members and everyone interested in Société Nobel. (Makkonen 2012a.)

Société Nobel does not use television, radio or telephone marketing. Nor is sponsorship or personal selling used as a marketing method. The foundation

does, however, occasionally advertise in magazines related to cigars. So far the foundation has advertised in magazines such as Elsevier Sigaren and The Big Black Book. Société Nobel has also advertised its' location rental in The Hague marketing magazine, The Hague Meeting Guide 2011/2012 and Bech Report magazine. (Makkonen 2012a.)

Société Nobel relies on Word Of Mouth marketing quite heavily. The current members tell their friends about the club and bring them for a visit as their guests. If the guests have enjoyed their visit they occasionally are interested in joining as well. This is why members are encouraged to bring visitors to the club nights. Unfortunately the foundation doesn't yet have enough members for this method to secure sufficient growth in membership numbers. Currently the biggest challenge in marketing for Société Nobel is therefore to reach the right target market and to get the potential customers interested enough to become members. (Makkonen 2012a.)

3.4 SWOT Analysis

A remarkable strength for Société Nobel is its location. The club is situated conveniently in the city centre quite close to train and tram stations. Members often drive to club nights with their own cars. There is a large public car park situated close to Société Nobel. The facilities at Société Nobel are designed to serve the needs of a private club which is also a strength. Société Nobel has motivated and highly professional staff and devoted founders which is an important strength as well. A big advantage for Société Nobel is also the lack of exactly similar purposed clubs in the Netherlands area.

Société Nobel has also some weaknesses. The facilities of Société Nobel are perfect for their purpose. However, if the number of members increases remarkably the facilities can become too small. Also the facilities for Société Nobel are on the second floor and the only way to reach them is to climb steep stairs. For this reason it is not possible for people with reduced mobility to become members. At the moment the average age of a member is about

40 years. Due to the increase in the number of members in the future and natural aging there will be older members in the future. The steep stairs can make participating in the club events more difficult to elderly people.

The price of the membership can be a weakness for Société Nobel. Currently the membership fee is 150 euros per month. This may be too much for many potential members even though 100 euros from the membership fee is transferred to the member's own membership account. A big weakness in the marketing field is that the message sent to the target market does not match the reality. The marketing message is too formal and strict compared to the actual atmosphere at the club.

Changes in the global economy can be an opportunity for Société Nobel. If economic conditions improve, consumers may increase the amount of money they spend on luxury products and services. This might increase the amount of potential members. The number of expatriates living and working in The Hague also creates opportunities for Société Nobel. These foreigners often get paid well above average wages as well as enjoy large tax relieves and are very interested in meeting people, socializing and making friends.

Société Nobel can also encounter some threats. A large number of products sold at the club are brought specially for Société Nobel from South America. If the companies producing for example cigars face difficulties in their own country, it might lead to difficulties for Société Nobel to receive these products. Also changes in the legislation affecting importation of goods can cause harms for Société Nobel. Another threat the club may face is increase in the competitors. Changes in the global economy can also be a threat. If the global economy weakens, consumers might not be willing to spend on luxury products and services.

4 RESEARCH METHODS, IMPLEMENTATION AND FINDINGS

4.1. Themed Interviews

Researches are usually divided in two different categories: quantitative and qualitative. Quantitative research is a numeral and statistic method and it can be used to find out quantities. (Ronkainen–Pehkonen–Lindblom–Yläne–Paavilainen 2011, 80.) The qualitative research method on the other hand focuses on meanings and matters that are not simply countable. The goal in qualitative research is to acquire information on the researched target as comprehensively as possible. (Hirsjärvi–Remes–Sajavaara 2009, 162) People are treated and analyzed as people who experience life and this is why qualitative research is very strongly bound to a certain time and place (Ronkainen et al. 2011, 81–82).

In qualitative research the research process itself is very much emphasized and the analyzing methods for the research material are not as strict and accurate as in quantitative research. (Ronkainen et al. 2011, 82–83) In qualitative research also the writing itself is part of the research and it proceeds along with the research itself (Hirsjärvi et al. 2009, 162). In qualitative research the material collected is usually in a written form (Ronkainen et al. 2011, 80). The material can be for example transcribed interviews. After collecting the material the first step is analyzing and interpreting it. At this phase the most relevant material is separated from the whole research material. The last phase of qualitative research is to find the results for the research questions made in the beginning of the research. (Wengraf 2001, 224–225.)

One of the chosen research methods for this thesis project was themed interviews. A themed interview is a conversation with a meaning that is decided beforehand. The structure of the interview is in the interviewer's hands and should follow the themes decided beforehand by the interviewer. The themes can usually be discussed in any order but some topics require

them to be handled in a certain order. A themed interview is a way to find out people's opinions and experiences on the researched themes. (Aaltola–Valli 2007, 25–26; Virsta 2012.) A themed interview can also be called a half-structured interview (Vilkka 2005, 101).

The goal in themed interviews is to receive some kind of answer to all the required subjects or themes needed to solve the research questions. This is made by discussing the themes and not by supplying straight questions. (Hirsjärvi–Hurme 2009, 48.) It is the interviewer's responsibility to have all the decided themes handled during the interview (Virsta 2012). If the interview is performed to multiple people at the same time, it is once again the interviewer's responsibility to make everyone participate in the conversation (Vilkka 2005, 103).

In a themed interview the place where the interview is held can have an effect on the results of the interview. The best place to hold interviews is a place with very little distractions and where the interviewee feels comfortable and relaxed. To make the interviewee relax it is also important to have a little small talk in the beginning. The interviewee should not be provoked by the interviewer in any way. For example clothes and the way of talking should be as neutral as possible. (Aaltola–Valli 2007, 28–31.)

The decided themes and helping questions should be decided based on the information needed. It is important to think beforehand what is important and useful to know from the different themes and create a loose base for the interview. With the interview base it is easier to make sure all the topics related to the themes are covered. The interview base can be created with the help of interviewer's own creativity and knowledge about the subject or by using related theories and earlier studies. The interviewer should participate in the interview and comment on the interviewee's answers. However, the comments should be neutral and not bring up the interviewer's own opinions on the subjects. If the interviewer takes notes during the interview it is best to use short language and possibly abbreviations. Afterwards the interview,

results are analyzed and can be put under different themes. (Aaltola–Valli 2007, 34–36.)

4.2 Themed Interview for Société Nobel

In order to find information on the current situation and the future hopes for marketing, a themed interview was made with the marketing manager of Société Nobel Johanna Makkonen 9.7.2012. The purpose of the first interview was also to find out what Société Nobel actually is and what it offers to its members. An important goal for the interview was to find out the main target market. To find out the target market, it is crucial to know what kind of members Société Nobel has at the moment and what kind of members they want to have in the future. I decided to divide the needed information to four different categories, the main themes: Société Nobel in General, Members, Marketing and Finance (in marketing). A base (Figure 1) was used in the interview to make sure all the information needed from the interview was collected.

The goal of the first theme Société Nobel in General was to collect information on Société Nobel. Information needed from the interview was how the managers see the club and what the main purpose and idea of the foundation is. Needed information was also the image Société Nobel wants to portray to its members and to the potential members in their marketing communications. An important matter was also to find out if Société Nobel is satisfied with its actions and image and if it wants to change them in the future.

The second theme in the interview was members. The goal for this part was to find out how many members Société Nobel has and if they are interested in increasing the amount of members in the future. It was also important to discover what the current members are like, from what kind of background they come from and to receive Société Nobel's opinion on why the current

members have joined the club. Another goal for this theme was to find out if Société Nobel has certain requirements for the future members.

The third theme in the interview was marketing. The purpose of this theme was to receive information on the marketing actions Société Nobel takes at the moment and if are they effective. Another goal was to find out if Société Nobel is satisfied with their current marketing and if they want to change it in the future. It was also important to determine Société Nobel's target market.

The last theme was finance. The goal of this theme was simply to find out how much money Société Nobel uses on marketing at the moment and whether they are planning on increasing or reducing that amount. It was also important to obtain information on how the money is divided between different marketing actions.

The interview was held at Société Nobel's facilities. The location was chosen since it is very familiar to the interviewee and she felt relaxed there. The possible distractions were minimized by not having anyone else present during the interview and by not having mobile phones or music present. Since I know the interviewee well, the atmosphere was relaxed and trusting. The conversation stayed well in the decided themes.

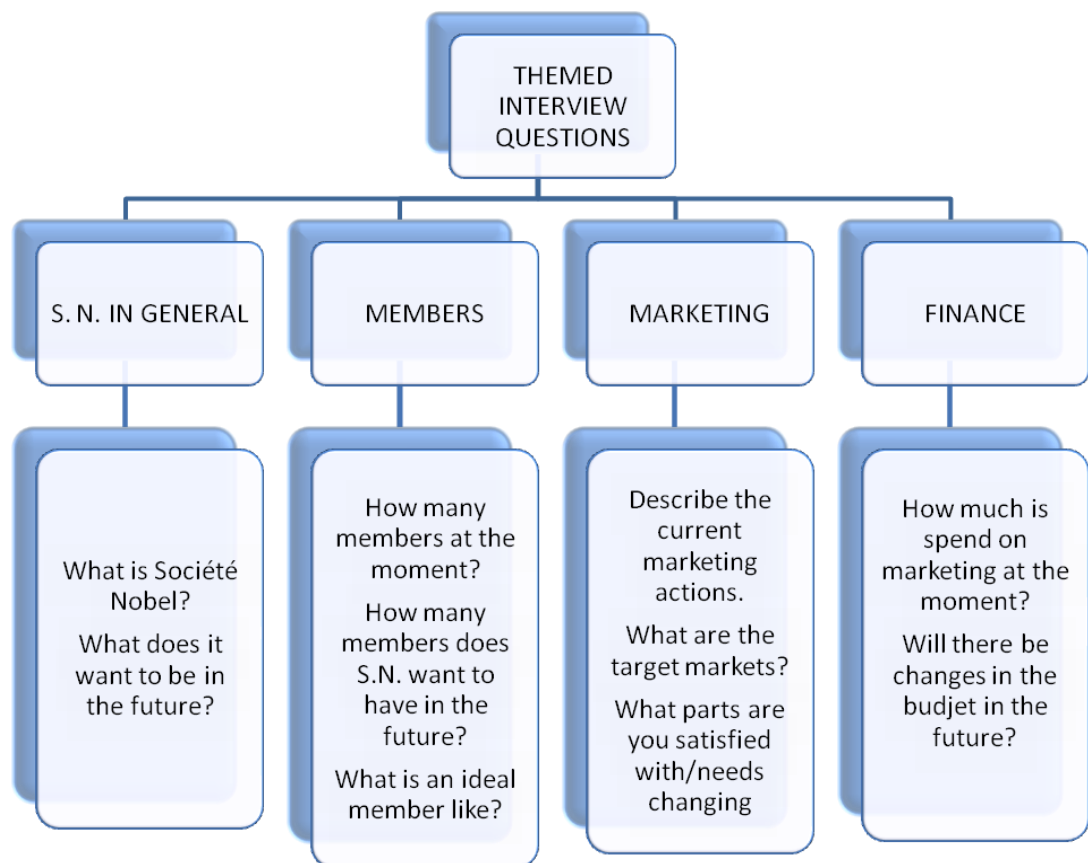


Figure 1. Themed Interview Base

4.3 Research Findings and Analysis

The conducted interview was about the basic information on Société Nobel, their current target markets and marketing actions. Most of the findings from the interview can be found from the Chapter three (3 SOCIÉTÉ NOBEL FOUNDATION) of this report where the current situation of Société Nobel's basic information, image, target markets and marketing actions are explained.

Immediately after the interview the interview notes were transcribed. The result analyzing process was started by reading through the transcribed interview notes several times. After this the received results were divided in different themes for analyzing. Five different themes were chosen: Purpose

and image of Société Nobel, current marketing situation, future marketing situations, marketing financing and members.

In the result analyzing process it came very clear that the image Société Nobel has is not consistent with what Société Nobel is. Société Nobel started out as an extremely luxurious and exclusive AND expensive club with a high membership fee. However soon after the opening of the club the economic situation in Europe got worse and presumably effected people's ability and willingness to pay large sums of money from a club membership. The membership fee soon became considerably lower and therefore more reachable for a bigger amount of people. Nowadays Société Nobel is much more relaxed than in the beginning and mostly focused on relaxing and enjoying good quality products.

Société Nobel's slogan is "Relaxed Networking In Luxury." Currently the managers at Société Nobel do not see the club as a place of networking. Of course when like minded people meet and become friends it can also lead to business cooperation. This however is not the purpose of the club. The current slogan is therefore extremely misleading. Potential members who are interested purely in relaxing and enjoying can be scared away by the slogan. The potential members who in turn would be interested in networking can get disappointed after joining Société Nobel and noticing it does not match its slogan. This is why the slogan should be changed. The most important thing for Société Nobel at the moment is to be able to keep the relaxed atmosphere despite the growth.

After analyzing the results of the interview it also became clear that even the managers at Société Nobel could not really put into one sentence what Société Nobel is. They have encountered difficulties in explaining to people the purpose and the basic idea of the foundation. This has made the personal selling, that happens when potential customers are met face to face, very difficult.

The second analyzed theme was the current marketing. Current marketing actions are explained in the chapter 3 of this report.

Société Nobel's webpage is their most important marketing tool at the moment. The webpage looks formal, stiff and a bit intimidating with a big list of house rules. Also the current slogan is used in the webpage. The webpage is not at the moment easily approachable and does not encourage to contacting Société Nobel.

The extra events held at Société Nobel are also a form of marketing or promoting the foundation. They are a way of getting new people into the club space and increasing the awareness of the existence of the foundation. Word of Mouth marketing has been an important marketing tool for Société Nobel, since most of the current members have found their way to Société Nobel through word of mouth marketing.

The third analyzed theme was future marketing. Société Nobel wants to increase the amount of members significantly so good marketing actions are needed. Société Nobel does not want to necessarily change the marketing channels but would like to direct the marketing better to the target market. This is stated to be the biggest challenge in marketing at the moment. Another big challenge in marketing is to make all the marketing communication to match the reality of what Société Nobel is at the moment.

Marketing financing was the fourth theme analyzed. At the moment the marketing budget for Société Nobel is about 15 000 euro per year. The budget is hoped to stay the same in the future. At the moment about 4000 euro per year is spent on marketing the club area for rent. In the future Société Nobel wants to focus more on marketing that brings members and the money spent on the rental marketing will be redirected to finding members. Quite a small part, 600 euros yearly, is spent to Société Nobel's website. 535 euros yearly is spent on a banner advert on a cigar platform. Most of the marketing budget is spent on additional promotion such as magazine adverts, flyers and promotional events. If a marketing method that

can be proven to be effective is found, Société Nobel is willing to increase the marketing budget.

Fifth theme analyzed was simply members. The results of this theme are mostly presented in the chapter 3 of this report. Société Nobel is quite open minded when it comes to members and a certain background is not required. However the membership fee makes it common for the members to have at least a bit above the average income. Most of the members at the moment are entrepreneurs. This is not a conscious choice from Société Nobel. Most of the members have found their way to the club by word of mouth marketing. In other words they have heard about it from their friends who are members.

Société Nobel is a special club in a way that it is not a men's only club. The ratio between men and women at the moment is 75/25 %. Société Nobel is interested in balancing the ratio even further in the future.

After analyzing the themes and getting the results mentioned earlier It became clear that the concept and the purpose of the foundation seemed unknown or undecided even for the managers and that the message current marketing actions display does not match the image and concept Société Nobel wants to portrait. I therefore contacted Société Nobel and suggested they would have a meeting with the managers to make a clear decision on what Société Nobel is and what is its purpose. I also suggested them to think of a better suiting slogan.

I was answered quickly and an extra staff meeting was scheduled to be held once all the managers found mutual free time. This took a bit longer than expected but at 4.10.2012 I received an e-mail from Johanna Makkonen stating the results of the extra staff meeting. As I suggested, everyone participated in the meeting had to describe Société Nobel with one sentence. The sentences were: "Enjoy and relax.", "A social and relaxed private members club/lounge.", "A place where people come together to enjoy.", "Enjoying the finer things in life." The last one was also decided to be the new slogan for Société Nobel. (Makkonen 2012b.)

4.4 Benchmarking

Benchmarking cannot be defined in only one way but has many definitions and methods. This is why it is best not to try to define benchmarking exactly but to describe it. (Saari 2007.) Benchmarking is basically a concept of learning and sharing. A company can gain valuable information by comparing their own work practices with others'. This information is then adapted to their situation. (Kepler–Mapson–Patterson 1995, 4) In other words, the company's products, processes or practices are compared against other companies' better products, processes or practices (Fleming–McGonagle 1998, 39).

Benchmarking is a useful way to continually improve processes and actions. To be able to use benchmarking, own strengths and weaknesses should be identified in areas where benchmarking is used. After this, it is possible to study others and identify what they might be doing better. (Kepler et al. 1995, 4) Benchmarking is accepting others' superiority and being wise enough to learn from it (Saari 2007). Any kind of practices can be benchmarked (Kepler et al. 1995, 4). Benchmarking is an inexpensive and easy tool and does not require plenty of assets or training time. (Kepler et al. 1995, 7.)

Benchmarking can also help companies notice the changes in the industry and environment and help to adjust to those changes. Even if benchmarking does not give the expected information and results, it has led the company to measure their own actions more accurately. (Kepler et al. 1995, 9.) Benchmarking can give a company an early warning of falling behind from their biggest competitors in many key areas. The areas where benchmarking should be conducted are the ones most important to the business and the ones that can be improved in general. These are for example those products or processes that represent the highest cost in the company or those that are strategically most important or differentiate the company from their competitors. (Fleming–McGonagle 1998, 39.)

The fact that there are several different benchmarking types to choose from is acknowledged in all the benchmarking literature used in this thesis project. The separation to different types, however, varies a bit. McGonagle and Fleming for example divide benchmarking in five different categories in their article Options in Benchmarking. Kepler, Mapson and Patterson, on the other hand, divide benchmarking in six different types in their book *Benchmarking Basics : Looking for a Better Way*. Five of the types are similar but Kepler, Mapson and Patterson also introduce collaborative benchmarking which is an alternative for competitive benchmarking, which is explained later on in this chapter. In collaborative benchmarking companies exchange information, sometimes anonymously, in temporary voluntary association. Collaborative benchmarking is normally used to exchange information on quantitative statistics. The other benchmarking types concentrate more on qualitative analysis and the usefulness of collaborative benchmarking is slightly more limited, but can still be useful to companies. (Kepler et al. 1995, 34.) The different benchmarking types can be used for different situations and purposes but they all aim to make businesses more competitive. (Fleming–McGonagle 1998, 38.)

Internal benchmarking takes place inside the company. Processes and actions are studied between different departments or units. It can be done for example by questionnaires to the management. Internal benchmarking helps the company to find out their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. (Wöber. 2002, s 2.) Internal benchmarking is the easiest way of benchmarking but it also has the lowest benefit level since only the company's own processes are looked into. (Kepler et al. 1995, 31.) (Fleming–McGonagle 1998, 38–40.) The risk of failure is low but neither does it bring any fundamental changes in the company. The focus in internal benchmarking is normally in operations that lack a strategic focus and are often repeated. (Fleming–McGonagle 1998, 38–40.)

Competitive benchmarking is an excellent way to learn how to perform better from an outside perspective. In competitive benchmarking the biggest competitors in the industry are benchmarked, typically of their key product or

processes. The challenging part in competitive benchmarking is to find partners that are willing to participate. Some might fear sharing too much and giving the competitor a competitive advantage in the industry. If lacking willing partners, can information also be gathered from public data including for example internet, databases, newspaper, press releases and released legal documents. Together with competitive benchmarking method it is also possible to use collaborative benchmarking, (Kepler et al. 1995, 32–34.) since the information exchanged with benchmarking partners in competitive benchmarking does not usually include any kind of cost/pricing data or policies (Fleming–McGonagle 1998, 38–40).

Benchmarking is called shadow benchmarking when the benchmarked organizations are not aware of being benchmarked (Fleming–McGonagle 1998, 38) (Kepler et al. 1995, 35). Since there are no clear partners, information is not exchanged intentionally (Kepler et al. 1995, 35). Shadow benchmarking is useful when the company wants to gather information and prepare for market growth without alerting their competitors. It works best for processes that are similar with the benchmarking partner. Since there are no actual partners, the company conducting shadow benchmarking is not dependent on partner's cooperation. While the information is not received from the benchmarked partner itself, it is possible to have incomplete data that may be harder to use than complete data received willingly from the benchmarking partner. (Fleming–McGonagle 1998, 41.) (Kepler et al. 1995, 35.)

The Benchmarking style where similar but not identical functions within the same industry are benchmarked is called industrial benchmarking by Fleming and McGonagle. Kepler, Mapson and Patterson, on the other hand, call the similar benchmarking type functional benchmarking. Industrial or functional benchmarking is usually used to find new ideas or concepts that other compatible companies use and have proved useful. In other words industrial or functional benchmarking focuses on the future. (Fleming–McGonagle 1998, 41.) (Kepler et al. 1995, 35.) It can be easier to find willing benchmarking partners for this type than some other benchmarking types

since the partners are not direct competitors and do not think of the company as a threat. Since many of the partners are from different cultures, it can occasionally be difficult to transfer the gathered information to one's own company. (Kepler et al. 1995, 35.)

Kepler, Mapson and Patterson call a benchmarking type where processes are benchmarked regardless of industry world-class benchmarking. Fleming and McGonagle, on the other hand, call it transnational benchmarking. In this type specific processes that are the same for all industries are benchmarked. These can be for example order processing or marketing. Finding benchmarking partners for this type can be challenging since world-class companies are often reluctant to participate in benchmarking. To have them as a partner it is inevitable to make the company feel they really benefit from the benchmarking process. A good alternative is to use successful, almost world-class companies as a partner since they can be more willing to participate. The benefits from world-class or transnational benchmarking can be significant since different and beneficial ways of performing can be found with this method. Fleming and McGonagle as well as Kepler, Mapson and Patterson stress the fact that this form of benchmarking is the most difficult to conduct and should preferably be executed after the other benchmarking types. Also, the information gathered can be difficult to exploit, since it can come from highly different kinds of companies (Kepler et al. 1995, 36).

Sungsoo Pyo (2008) estimates in his book *Benchmarks in Hospitality and Tourism* that approximately 40 different benchmarking process models are presented by researchers over the years. The different models differ as for the number of phases and process steps. A simple way to describe the benchmarking process is to simply divide it into five different phases. The first phase is to describe the current situation. The second phase is to change information with the benchmarking partner. Analyzing the differences is the third part of the benchmarking process. After those phases it is time to set a new goal and finally apply the changes and evaluate the results. (HANKE DIA 13) Another way of dividing the benchmarking process is to divide it in to four different phases with 10 different steps. This model was presented by

Robert Camp in 1989 and has gained a lot of popularity since. This model was chosen to be used in this report (Figure 2). Though Camp's model is old it was found to be most suited for this thesis project. The different phases and process steps are handled more in-depth in the next chapter.

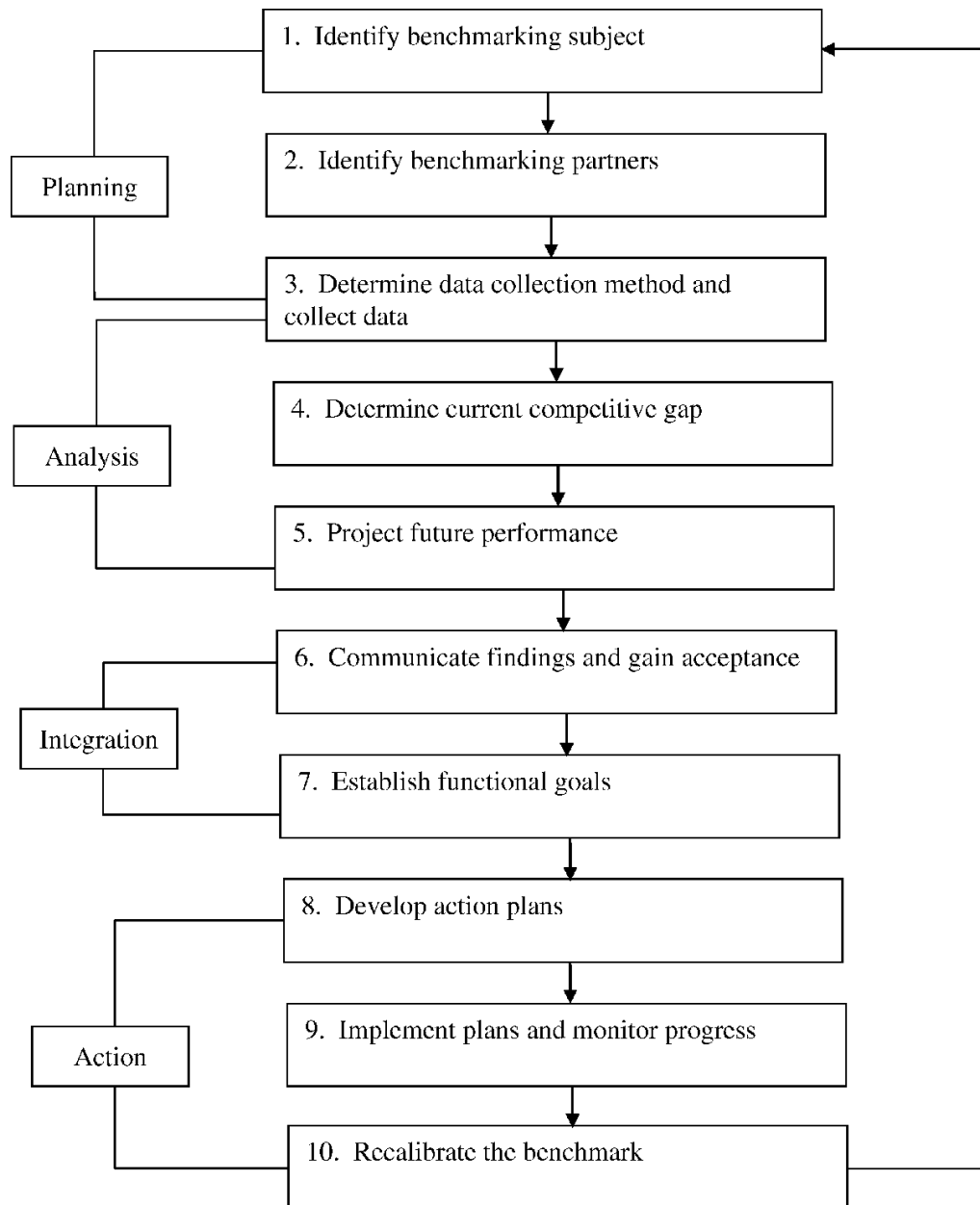


Figure 2. Benchmarking Process Steps (Camp 1989, 17)

4.5 Benchmarking Research Implementation and Findings

4.5.1 Benchmarking Process

An important tool of marketing at Société Nobel is their web page, which needs updating. Updating is needed so that the image the web page creates would be more suited to what Société Nobel is in reality (Makkonen 2012a). Ideas for the webpage were found by conducting webpage benchmarking to similar purpose clubs.

The benchmarking was chosen to be conducted by following a 10 step model created by Camp (1998) (Figure 2.). The first phase in the model is planning. The first step in the planning is identifying benchmarking subject. The subjects chosen were Appearance, Information provided and Marketing efforts. Shadow benchmarking was chosen since the websites can be easily examined even without an active benchmarking partner.

Next step in the benchmarking model is identifying the benchmarking partners. The goal was to find similar purpose private clubs. The search for the benchmarking partners started by searching popular members only clubs via internet. Many options for benchmarking partners were considered and the chosen partners were Adam's Street located in London, Shoreditch House also situated in London and Sociëteit De Witte located in The Hague. Adam's street was chosen to be a benchmarking partner since it portrays itself as quite a relaxed member's only club. Shoreditch House was chosen since it is relatively new members only club and seemed like a fairly youthful and relaxed club. Sociëteit De Witte was chosen due to its close proximity to Société Nobel.

The next step after choosing the benchmarking partners was determining data collection and collecting data. The data collecting method was chosen to be website content studying since the main goal from the benchmarking study was to find out what information other members only clubs provide in

their website, to find new ideas for Société Nobel's website and perhaps ideas for the Société Nobel Club in general.

To help the benchmarking process a checklist (Figure 3) presented below was conducted including the aspects searched from the websites. The checklist made the data collection easier since it reminded which topics should at least be looked into when collecting the data.

APPEARANCE AND TECHNICAL FEATURES

- Easy to read (color of the background and text)
- Pictures and videos of the club facilities
- Pictures and videos of members and events
- Several parts on the webpage
- Keywords

INFORMATION PROVIDED

Basic content

- Language options
- History and purpose of the club
- Information on staff, vacancy

Membership

- A special log in for members
- Information on how to become a member
- Age limit
- Both men and women allowed
- Membership prices
- House rules and regulations
- Information on events

MARKETING EFFORTS

- Links to Facebook, Twitter, YouTube or other social media sites
- Information on Wikipedia

OTHER OUTSTANDING FEATURES IN THE CLUB OR ON THE WEBPAGE

Figure 3. Checklist for Benchmarking

4.5.2 Adam Street

Adam Street is a members only club in London. The club offers an easily readable website with light grey background and white text. Adam street provided pictures of the club facilities in the website and had a link to YouTube where an introductory video of the club can be found. The

information provided in the webpage during the benchmarking process included extremely short explanations of the club's history and purpose. The website did not include information about the staff or open vacancies.

Adam Street's website does not state much information on how to become a member and what the requirements, such as age, are. The website did, however, include a place to leave an enquiry when wishing to receive more information on the membership. Neither membership prices nor house rules or regulations were presented in the website. Adam Street offers a special log in for members called Online members area.

Adam Street uses keywords in its website to make it more visible on search engines. Adam street provides links to its' Facebook, Youtube and Twitter pages. The tweets can also be seen in the bottom left corner on all the pages. Tweets were informative giving information and reminding of future events. There was no information about Adam Street on Wikipedia. Adam Street uses its' Facebook profile actively reminding and telling information on future events and posting photos of bygone events.

4.5.3 Shoreditch House

Shoreditch House is a members only club situated in London. It is a part of Soho House private club group. Shoreditch House offers extremely informative web site with easily readable black text on light grey background. The web site includes a large variety of pictures of all the parts and different rooms of the club. Some of the pictures are 360 degrees panorama pictures where the angle can be changed to see the area in the picture from all angles from roof to the floor. The webpage does not include any videos of the club.

The only language used on Shoreditch House webpage is English. History and purpose of the club is explained on the webpage as well as information on acquiring membership. Shoreditch House offers several different memberships and it is also possible for children to become members. The membership fees are noticeably lower for those who join the club when they

are younger than 27 years old. To become a member, recommendations are needed from two existing members. Membership prices and house rules and regulations could be found from the web page. Shoreditch House does not offer a special log in for members but it does, however, present a link to Soho House members private portal for Soho House members.

Some outstanding features on the club itself are 26 rentable bedrooms members and non-members can rent for a night. The room rates are lower for members. The club is spread across five floors with different themes. Shoreditch House includes a gym, roof top swimming pool, a spa, small bowling alley and a cinema.

Shoreditch House web page does not have links to social media portals. An account from Facebook could be found, however, it did not include much information and seemed to have very few updates.

4.5.4 Sociëteit De Witte

Sociëteit De Witte is one of the oldest members only clubs in the Netherlands. It is situated in the Hague center about one kilometer from Société Nobel. Their web page seemed most old fashioned out of the benchmarked web pages. The text is easily readable with black text on white background. The web page does not include many pictures or videos of the club.

The web page is in Dutch and in English, however, more information is found in Dutch. The history and purpose of the club is presented in detail. The web page does not include information on how to become a member. Neither does it present information on the membership prices or house rules and regulations. The web page has a login for members. Links to social media portals could not be found on the webpage. Sociëteit De Witte does not have a Facebook account. A short article about Sociëteit De Witte can be found from Wikipedia.

4.5.5 Continuance of Benchmarking Process

According to Camp's (2008) benchmarking model after collecting the data, the next step is to determine current competitive gaps and project future performance. In this benchmarking process big competitive gaps were not found with the appearance of the benchmarked websites. A small gap found was the easy readability of the pages. All three benchmarked web pages were easier to read than Société Nobel's web page. The color of the background and the text affect to the readability noticeably. The black background with white text used at Société Nobel's webpage look modern and classy but makes reading a long text more challenging. This competitive gap could be closed by changing the colors used at Société Nobel's web page.

The pictures at Société Nobel's web page are good quality however they could be even better and have more diverse in them. This is noted when looking at the pictures at Shoreditch House web page. Having 360 degrees pictures where the visitor of the web page can move the picture to see the area more is a way to attract visitors attention and gives a youthful and modern touch to the web page.

The content in the benchmarked web pages varied remarkably. Société Nobel's webpage gives more information on membership and how it can be acquired than two of the three websites benchmarked. Société Nobel however, is lacking a members only log in from webpage that can be in some form found in all the benchmarked web pages. This competitive gap could be closed by creating a members only log in also for Société Nobel. However, a members only log in might not be useful before Société Nobel obtains more members since creating the log in with interesting content requires quite a big budget. House rules and regulations could not be found from any of the benchmarked web pages.

Another competitive gap that can be found is the use of social media in the web page. Société Nobel has only a link to their Facebook page where for

example Adam Street uses Twitter actively and the tweets can be seen on their web pages at all times. Nevertheless, keeping a social media marketing interesting and up to date takes a lot of time and is therefore costly. For an organization as small as Société Nobel, this might not yet be profitable.

The sixth step in Camps (2008) benchmarking model is communicating findings and gaining acceptance and it is done to the third phase called Integration. The findings of this study will be communicated to Société Nobel in the form of this report. The acceptance part will be found out after this report is ready and given to Société Nobel. The integration part includes also a step named Establish functional goals. This step together with the last phase called action will be done by the commissioner if wanted. Action phase includes three parts, developing action plans, implementing those plans and monitoring success and finally recalibrating the benchmark.

4.6 Reliability of Researches and Thesis Process

4.6.1 Reliability of Researches

The close relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee might have affected the interview and the reliability of the results. The fact that the interviewee may have wanted to provide the interviewer with answers that they feel the interviewer wanted to hear, has to be considered. This is why the interviewer exercised extreme caution in avoiding stating personal opinions on discussed topics. The discussion in the interview stayed well in the decided themes. If anything, the close relationship between the interviewer and interviewee might have made the conversation more relaxed and open than an interview done between strangers. The trust the interviewee had for the interviewer made the information giving more detailed and profound and eliminated the need to withhold information on the foundation with the fear of misuse.

The interview process and the decided themes were explained in such depth that reproduction of the interview is possible. The fact that the close relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee may have affected the interview situation might result in conducting a complete reproduction. The results received from the themed interview would be more diverse and reliable if more than one interview had been conducted. A customer's point of view could have been received by interviewing the existing members.

The benchmarking process is explained precisely. The benchmarking checklist produced for the benchmarking process can be used for a reproduction of the research. Web pages can, however, change rapidly. This might lead to different results in case of a reproduction. The results received from the benchmarking study would most likely have been more reliable and offer more ideas if the study had included more benchmarking partners. Also including other web pages such as discussion forums and blogs where the benchmarking partners are discussed could have brought customer point of view to the web pages and to how effective the marketing is.

4.6.2 Thesis Process

The biggest challenge for me in this thesis project was the language. This thesis project is the biggest single assignment I have done and to do it in English instead of Finnish created occasional challenges. Creating text that was understandable but still sophisticated enough for a thesis report turned out to be difficult at times. Occasionally I focused on the language used instead of the content of the text. All in all I am extremely happy I accepted the challenge and wrote this report in English. It has made me even more confident about my English skills and due to this thesis project I will not be afraid to accept more challenges and big assignments that require the use of English.

Another challenge for me was my timetable. This thesis process took in total one year to complete, most of which I spent working beside my studies. The

time I was able to concentrate purely on the thesis project was shorter than I hoped in the beginning of the thesis process. The schedule changed a few times during the thesis process. The thesis group and the guidance of my supervisors helped me to stay in the final schedule and provided useful ideas to the thesis process. Also the thesis angle changed and evolved during the process as my knowledge of the topic increased.

This thesis process was a great learning experience. It increased my knowledge and expertise in the field of marketing and taught me to be more patient and to handle big entities successfully.

5 MARKETING IDEAS THROUGH MARKETING MIX

5.1 Product

The current slogan; “Networking in Luxury” should be changed, since it is misleading and does not send out the right image and information on Société Nobel. The word “networking” might be off-putting for those potential members who do not want to be part of a networking club. Those potential members who join Société Nobel because of the networking aspect can be disappointed and feel misled when noticing that Société Nobel is not really a networking club. This idea was found to be extremely important for Société Nobel and therefore it was presented to the commissioner already during the thesis project. The managers at Société Nobel agreed with the importance of a slogan change and an extra staff meeting was held on 4th of October 2012 to decide a new slogan. A more suitable slogan for Société Nobel was decided to be “Enjoying the finer things in life”.

Société Nobel’s facilities are good for running a private club. When the number of members increases remarkably and the opening hours increase Société Nobel will have more opportunities to diversify their actions. One option for diversifying the services offered could be holding art exhibitions at the extra rooms rented for Société Nobel. The rooms are completely white with a lot of free wall space. Art exhibitions would bring more value to the members and if the exhibition were open to non members at certain times, more potential members could be found as well. Holding art exhibitions would also be a way for Société Nobel to support new artists.

5.2 Price

The membership price should be lowered. Even though 100 euros from the membership fee goes to the member’s own spending account for purchases made at the club, 150 euros a month can be too much for many potential

members. Lowering the membership fee to 50 euros per month makes the threshold to join the club a lot lower. With this change the members would not collect spending money to their spending accounts from the membership fee but would pay their spending after club nights. This could be done perhaps through an invoice system. If a member visits a club night for example twice a month, it is most likely for them to spend the 100 euros at the club anyway.

Another suggestion for the pricing is that the payment for introductory membership should be removed. A potential member might be held back at visiting Société Nobel if 50 euros for one night visit needs to be paid. Visiting Société Nobel should be free of charge and the visitors pay only the amount they spend at the club, perhaps via invoice after the visit.

The new ideas for the pricing were seen as extremely important for Société Nobel's business and therefore the ideas were presented to the commissioner already during the thesis project. The pricing ideas were also discussed at the extra staff meeting organized for the managers at Société Nobel. While Société Nobel agreed that the 150€ seemed like a big sum for many to pay monthly, they are unable to abolish the 100€ per month personal consumption deposit since they need the members to transfer the money beforehand so it can be used to purchase the products offered at the club. Société Nobel is a non-profit organization and does not have the required funds to buy the needed products before receiving the deposits from members. Instead of lowering the membership fee, Société Nobel decided to present it differently; the membership fee is 50 euros per month and since Société Nobel does not use any cash money or card payments, the members will deposit money to their own spending account. This way an invoice does not have to be sent after every club night. The personal consumption deposit is 100 euros per month and it will be paid quarterly.

5.3 Promotion

Société Nobel should concentrate most on e-marketing. It is an affordable marketing channel that can be used to reach many potential members. Société Nobel's website and Facebook page create the first impression of the club to many potential members. This is why it is important to concentrate on sending the right kind of image, accurate information and an interesting picture of the club at the web page and Facebook page.

To make Société Nobel's web page send the right message of the club, the atmosphere of the web site needs to be changed. The current overall appearance is quite intimidating. The white text on black background looks expensive, classy and dignified but can seem off pushing and impersonal. The white text on black background makes it also quite difficult to read the page when it contains a lot of text. The color of the background and the text should be reconsidered. Grey background with white or black text could perhaps be a better option.

At the moment Société Nobel presents their house rules and regulations on their webpage. The long and strict house rules and regulations make Société Nobel seem strict and intimidating and can lead to some potential members to change their mind about contacting the club. House rules and regulations should be removed from the web page and should be instead delivered to the member when joining Société Nobel. The event calendar on the web page is presented only in Dutch at the moment. If Société Nobel wants to have expatriates living in the Netherlands to become members, it is important for all the information on the webpage to exist also in English.

Using 360 degree pictures of the club facilities would give Société Nobel's web page an interesting and modern touch. With 360 degree pictures the visitors on the web page can choose what part of the room presented in the picture they see since the picture can be moved from floor to ceiling and around 360 degrees.

After the number of members increases, Société Nobel should also consider creating a members-only log in for their web page. Members only log in should include special features and information on events. The members could also RSVP to events through the members-only log in. Building a members only log in requires assets and should not be considered before the number of members has increased remarkably.

Twitter or possibly Instagram could also be used as a marketing tool. The staff could send short texts or pictures from club nights and when preparing for a club night or other events. When preparing for example themed club nights, sending a sneak peek of the decorations or products might make the members look forward to the evening even more or tempt a member who has been thinking of not coming to a club night to join after all. Members and potential members could follow Société Nobel's tweets and Instagram pictures with their mobile phones. Tweets could also be linked to Société Nobel's web page and Facebook profile in order to reach those who do not use Twitter with their mobile phones. The downside to using Twitter and Instagram is that even though they are quick and easy to use, they still require working hours.

It could be useful for Société Nobel to invite journalists who work for magazines related to Société Nobel's products or services, or bloggers who blog about similar subjects and products used at Société Nobel in the Netherlands area to an event at the club where the club is presented to them. If the journalists like what they see, they might also enjoy writing about Société Nobel to their magazine or blog. However, this brings costs to Société Nobel since the costs of the night should be covered for the invited people. A good idea might be also to invite a few wild cards such as bloggers who might not completely fit the image of Société Nobel but who enjoy a bit more luxurious lifestyle and do not mind spending money on the finer products. The people reading blogs are usually interested in similar subjects with the blogger. Blogging is seen to be especially popular among women in their twenties and early thirties. Since Société Nobel wishes to increase the

number of female members this method might be a way to attract young, successful women in the club.

Société Nobel should also consider advertising more on websites concentrated on cigars and fine drinks. Advertising through banners can be expensive depending on the popularity of the webpage. However, if a suitable enough webpage is found, advertising more through banners should be considered.

Société Nobel uses search engine marketing on their web page to lift Société Nobel's webpage higher in search results. Search engine optimization should also be taken into consideration. It is a relatively cheap way to advertize on the internet since a company pays a fixed amount to the search engine only when their website is accessed through the ad. A maximum daily budget can be set.

Traditional advertising requires a big marketing budget. Mass advertising through television, radio and magazines does not suit Société Nobel well since it has such a clear target market. Mass advertising gives the information on Société Nobel also to the non targeted markets which makes it an ineffective marketing method. However, advertising through magazines targeted to similar target markets is a good way for Société Nobel to advertise. Advertisements in magazines are expensive but could be used occasionally in carefully chosen magazines.

5.4 People

Traditionally the fourth part of marketing mix is Place which includes the activities done by a company to make their products available to consumers. Since Société Nobel does not have a physical product, this part of the marketing mix was changed to People. All the staff members that potential members come in contact with affect the image Société Nobel gives. Good

and personalized customer service with skilled staff could easily become a trademark for Société Nobel since the skilled staff already exists. The staff plays a big role on club nights. The importance of staff could be easily increased even more by presenting introductions on each staff member for example on Société Nobel's webpage. This way the characteristics of the staff would come to the members' knowledge. Having introductions on the webpage might also make Société Nobel seem more down to earth and potential members might be more willing to contact Société Nobel.

6 CONCLUSION

The goal of this thesis project was to create new marketing ideas for Société Nobel Foundation. After interviewing Société Nobel's marketing manager Johanna Makkonen and familiarizing myself with Société Nobel's current marketing efforts such as their web page and Facebook profile, it became clear that the current marketing message and the image it portrays does not match the reality nor send the desired message to potential customers. This is why a new aspect, creating ideas to change the current marketing messages, was added to the report. The main focus was placed on Société Nobel's webpage.

Since Société Nobel was founded quite spontaneously, a marketing plan was never constructed. Marketing planning was a relatively unfamiliar subject for the commissioner, which is why it was decided to give the marketing planning theory base quite a big role in this report. The rest of the theory base consists of information on marketing mix, marketing communication channels and other marketing related subjects such as SWOT analysis and market segmentation and targeting.

A themed interview was conducted to find out the basic information on Société Nobel, its current marketing actions and its goals for the future. The interview themes were based on the knowledge and questions received while volunteering at Société Nobel for a period of one month. A benchmarking study was conducted to clubs with a similar purpose to find ideas to improve Société Nobel's webpage.

The results of the themed interview gave a good overall picture of Société Nobel, its marketing actions, goals and target markets. When the image that Société Nobel wants to portray and the current marketing message were compared, a remarkable difference between them was noted. The benchmarking study results on the other hand showed no significant gaps between Société Nobel's and the benchmarked clubs' webpages. The

benchmarking study gave a few ideas on how to change Société Nobel's website to be more attractive and less intimidating.

The marketing ideas in this report are presented through a marketing mix. The ideas were created with the help of studied literature, benchmarking results and the results received from the themed interview. The main idea for Société Nobel's marketing is to concentrate on e-marketing since it is the most effective way for Société Nobel to reach its target markets with its current marketing budget. In online marketing Société Nobel should concentrate most on their webpage and Facebook profile. Most traditional marketing methods such as mass advertising were seen too expensive and ineffective for Société Nobel, excluding occasional advertising in suitable magazines.

The most important aspect determined for Société Nobel's marketing is to make their marketing message more accurate. Their current slogan should be changed and the web page should be made less intimidating by removing the difficult, off putting house rules and regulations and softening the overall appearance. Another important suggestion made for Société Nobel was to lower the membership fee from 150 euros per month to 50 euros per month. Also the introductory membership should be made free of charge. The suggestions for price changes and changing of the current slogan were seen extremely important aspects for Société Nobel and therefore they were presented to Société Nobel already during the thesis project. Société Nobel agreed with the ideas behind the suggestions and decided to change some the prices according to them. Also a new slogan, "Enjoying the Finer Things in Life" was invented by Société Nobel.

The objectives of this thesis project were reached well. If Société Nobel uses the marketing ideas provided, a further study could be made on their effects to the number of new members Société Nobel reaches. This report does not bring significant new information to the field of marketing research. It does, however, provide useful and practical ideas for the commissioner and further increase the professional knowledge of the author in the researched field.

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