

Understanding the buying decision-making process of companies outsourcing video production

Case Company A

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<p>This is a research-based thesis that is made for the case company A, a small B2B video production company. The aim of this thesis is to investigate the buying decision-making process of companies that outsource video production by conducting qualitative interviews with marketers working at such companies. The main objectives of the thesis are to find out how companies search and find their suppliers, what factors affect decisions on choosing the suppliers in the companies, what channels are used in the buying decision-making process, and what kind of information is found useful during the process. The outcome of this study is suggestions and insights on the marketing activities of the case company.</p> <p>First, this thesis provides information about the case company A and its current marketing situation and explains how the idea for this research came up. In the next chapter, the author introduces a theoretical framework that covers Business-to-Business sales and marketing including Business-to-Business buyer behaviour and buying decision-making models, three key media types: paid, owned, and earned media, and their use, importance, and benefits for Business-to-Business and small businesses.</p> <p>The qualitative research method was chosen to investigate and understand the buying decision-making process of companies that outsource video production. The business buyer decision process model by Kotler and Armstrong was used to formulate interview questions and the questions are presented at the end of the thesis. Semi-structured in-depth interviews were carried out with five marketing professionals who have had some experience in the buying decision-making process at various industries and sizes of companies outsourcing video production.</p> <p>The research results show that the interviewees prefer recommendations and referrals from people in their networks as a method of supplier search regardless of the sizes of their companies and they make decisions on choosing the suppliers for video production projects based on the quality of work. The interviewees believe that LinkedIn is one of the most important channels for small B2B businesses.</p> <p>Based on the results, several recommendations were given to the case company for its marketing activities. It is crucial for the case company to have an updated website and social media channels, especially LinkedIn with quality content such as customer cases and referrals and to focus on the quality of work when having meetings with potential clients.</p>	
Keywords B-to-B Marketing, B-to-B buying decision-making process, Paid media, Earned media, Owned media	

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1 Introduction

Data published by Statistics Finland revealed that 93 percent of businesses in Finland are micro-companies that have less than 10 employees and surprisingly, enterprises with only 1 employee take up 68 percent of the entire businesses in Finland. (The Federation of Finnish Enterprises 2019, 3.) Small businesses confront various challenges when marketing themselves and one of the challenges is that they have small budgets to spend for marketing and they need to cope with it. (Forbes 2018.)

Business-to-Business buyer research conducted by DemandGen Report found that 79 percent of business buyers said the chosen supplier's content had a great influence on their purchasing decisions. The same research revealed that 75 percent of respondents are using more of their time on researching purchases. (Hall 2020, 1-2.) These survey results indicate marketing professionals should customize their content and messages better to their customers to influence the buyers and make them consider their services and products when the customers make a purchase. (Hall 2020, 2.)

This is a research-based thesis which is made for the case company A, a small B2B video production company. The aim of this thesis is to investigate the buying decision-making process of companies that outsource video production by conducting qualitative interviews with marketers working at such companies.

The main objectives of the thesis are to find out:

- how companies search and find their suppliers
- what factors affect decisions on choosing the suppliers in the companies
- what channels are used in the buying decision-making process
- what kind of information is found useful during the process

The outcome of this study is suggestions and insights on the marketing activities of the case company.

First, this thesis will provide information about the case company A and its current marketing situation. In the next chapter, the author introduces a theoretical framework that covers Business-to-Business sales and marketing including Business-to-Business buyer behaviour and buying decision-making models, three key media types: paid, owned, and earned media, and their use, importance, and benefits for Business-to-Business and small businesses. The fifth chapter presents the research aim, chosen research method, and a description of interviewees. Selected data collection and analysis methods and reliability and validity of the research are also introduced in the fifth chapter. The author presents

and discusses results of the research in the sixth chapter. Conclusions and suggestions based on the research findings are presented at the end of the thesis.

2 Case company A – a small B2B video production company

This chapter introduces a case company A. The author discusses its current marketing situation and explains how the idea for this research came up.

The commissioning company A is a B2B video production company which was set up by a professional video producer. The commissioner worked at a small production company for 5 to 6 years before starting his own company. As a sole entrepreneur, the commissioner has had a lot of projects with Finnish companies and produced various kinds of videos such as live shows, company introduction videos, and promotional videos as well as tutorial videos. The commissioner has mainly produced interview videos during his career, but there has not been a specific type of video he focuses on. (The case company A 16 February 2021.)

The commissioner has personal LinkedIn, Facebook, and Instagram accounts as well as a business Instagram profile. He has a website for the company where his contact information can be found. (The case company A 16 February 2021.)

Although the commissioner has a personal LinkedIn page and Instagram account, he has not built social media presence as a company and the company's website is not up to date, despite a successful career as a video producer. He had considered taking time to work on marketing to build his brand as a video production company when the company started, but unfortunately, he could not find time for it. He has taken projects so far by receiving calls from his clients through his counterparts' and acquaintances' recommendations. His company and professional work are well-known among professionals in his networks by word of mouth, but not amongst people outside of the networks. (The case company A 16 February 2021.)

The commissioner would like to get new clients in a new target segment to start focusing on a different type of video production, however, he might be missing out opportunities to make professionals and influencers be aware of his company and service and make them consider him as a potential supplier who could work with them for their video projects. (The case company A 16 February 2021.)

The author considered this as a great opportunity to bring ideas on marketing activities and base her thesis on it in cooperation with the commissioner when she heard his current situation. Firstly, the author thought about making a marketing plan for the commissioner which provides a strategy and tactics for his marketing activities on chosen

channels, Facebook, Instagram, and his website by determining his potential clients and analyzing his online presence as a company and his competitor's marketing activities. However, the author came to realization that the marketing plan will not provide valuable insights and benefits to the commissioner due to resources and time constraints.

After discussion with the commissioner, the author decided to conduct research that investigates the buying decision-making process of companies that outsource video production in order to understand their decision-making process and as a result of the study, give insights and thoughts on the commissioner's marketing activities.

3 Business-to-Business sales and marketing

This chapter covers business-to-business sales and marketing. The author presents characteristics of business-to-business markets, business-to-business buyer behavior, and buying decision-making process models.

3.1 Business-to-business marketing

Business-to-business (referred to below as B-to-B) business is a company that focuses its operation on making services and products for other companies and purchasing the services and products from other companies to use them for production of those of their own. It includes a wide range of businesses from service design, marketing to retail companies as companies can be categorized as business-to-business as long as their target customers are companies. It is often used in comparison with the term business-to-consumer (hereinafter called B-to-C) business. B-to-C business offers services or products directly to consumers while B-to-B business sells goods and services which will be essential for other companies' production and sales generation. (Uzialko 2021; Vitale, Giglierano & Pfoertsch 2011, 3.)

Kotler & Armstrong (2018, 188-190) state that B-to-B markets have major characteristics which differ itself from B-to-C markets. These characteristics include:

- Purchases from fewer but larger buyers
- Low probability of changes in prices but changing demand
- Deprived demand which originates from the demand in the B-to-C markets
- More decision-makers and a more skilled and trained purchasing effort in the purchase process
- More formalized, complicated, and longer purchasing decisions

Firstly, there are fewer but much larger buyers in the B-to-B markets. B-to-B companies sell their goods and services to several buyers that make most purchases, unlike B-to-C companies which offer products to a large number of individual customers. Demand for most goods in the B-to-B markets are less likely to be affected by changes in prices particularly in the short term and demand for the services and goods are prone to change more rapidly. Demand in the B-to-B markets may go up substantially if there is a small rise in the B-to-C market demand. Also, the business demand comes from the consumer demand. Demand for materials and equipment used for the production of the consumer goods, for example tires, increases if the demand for those consumer goods, for example automobiles, increases. Thus, B-to-B marketing professionals occasionally advertise their products straight to consumers to create and raise the business demand. (Kotler & Armstrong 2018, 188-189.)

Secondly, more decision-makers and more effort are more likely to be involved and taken in purchases of the goods and products in the B-to-B markets. Professionals from different departments such as marketers, technicians, supply directors take part in buying negotiations and companies need to be well prepared to face these professional buyers. (Kotler & Armstrong 2018, 189.)

Lastly but not least, purchasing decisions in the B-to-B markets tend to be more complicated and longer with the involvement of a large amount of money, communications among various decision-makers, and economical and technical deliberation. (Kotler & Armstrong 2018, 189-190.)

Lessard (29 July 2018) describes B-to-B marketing as marketing activities for services or products which are targeted towards other organizations or businesses. Simply put, it is the trade between supplying and purchasing businesses (Ellis 2011, 7).

B-to-B marketing originates from marketing studies in an industrial setting in 1960s to 1970s and it was cited as “industrial marketing” (Ellis 2011, 8). The term B-to-B marketing came out in 1980s to 1990s, when organizations that were specialized in providing services were not in the coverage of the word industrial. There has been a discussion that the essence of marketing can be applied to any types of businesses and organizations, from commercial, industrial, and governmental organizations. Therefore, the title “organizational marketing” emerged in 2000s and it is getting familiarized both in public and private sectors. (Ellis 2011, 8.)

B-to-B markets are larger than B-to-C markets overall even though B-to-B buying and marketing are normally taken place behind the backs of consumers. A volume of sales in the B-to-B markets goes beyond that of B-to-C markets and it has a larger influence on us. (Ellis 2011, 8; Hutt & Speh 2010, 4.)

Marketing approaches for B-to-B businesses are not the same as those for B-to-C businesses and this is why B-to-B marketing exists. B-to-B marketing aims and tailors to the challenges, needs, and interests of people who represent their businesses and make the buying decisions for their businesses, not for themselves as individuals. In contrast, B-to-C marketing aims and tailors to challenges, needs, and interests of consumers who represent themselves and make buying decisions for themselves. B-to-B marketing professionals need to provide marketing experience directly to people in the buying decision-making process in order to catch their attention and drive traffic. (Uzialko 5 April 2021; Decker 30 March 2021.)

3.2 The B-to-B buying decision-making process

B-to-B buyers tend to make purchases for long-term solutions, resulting in a longer sales cycle, longer contracts, and longer relationships with companies in contrast to B-to-C marketing which customers do not always look for long-term solutions or long-term relationships. (Decker 30 March 2021.)

Business buyer behaviour is “the buying behaviour of organizations that buy goods and services for use in the production of other products or services that are sold, rented, or supplied to others” (Kotler & Armstrong 2018, 188).

As mentioned in the subchapter 3.1, individuals make buying decisions on behalf of their businesses and B-to-B marketing professionals should make efforts to gain an understanding of how those individuals normally behave in the B-to-B markets. (Ellis 2011, 36.)

Business buyers are exposed to many factors, both internally and externally in the buying decision process. As figure 1 shows, there are a set of factors that have impacts on the buyers when making their purchasing decisions: environmental, organizational, interpersonal, and individual. B-to-B marketers and salespeople should pay attention to these factors, find out how they influence business buyers, and make strategies to create opportunities that will be beneficial for them. (Kotler & Armstrong 2018, 188 & 192-193.)

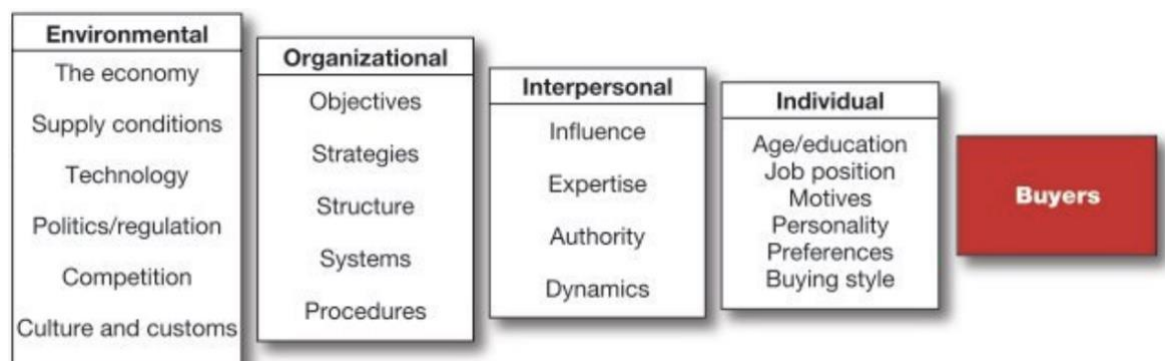


Figure 1. A Model of Business Buyer Behavior (Kotler & Armstrong 2018, 193)

Some marketing professionals believe that economic factors have the biggest influence on buyers. They assume buyers prefer to choose sellers who have the most affordable prices or the most satisfying goods or services and they focus on giving economic

advantages to the buyers. Economic situations such as volumes of demand and economic prospects have huge impacts on business buyers. (Kotler & Armstrong 2018, 192-193.)

It has been considered by B-to-B marketers that customers' buying decisions are not affected by emotions, but they are based on logic and reason. However, they have realized that business buyers respond to both logical and emotional factors and the buyers are influenced greatly by personal factors. Nowadays, B-to-B marketing professionals understand that emotion is crucial in business purchasing decisions and make use of it in advertising. (Kotler & Armstrong 2018, 193; Taylor 2018, 16.)

Factors such as politics, competition in the markets and advancement of technologies also have influences on business buyers. Besides these factors, culture and customs can greatly affect how buyers respond to attitudes and approaches of marketers and salespeople particularly in international markets. (Kotler & Armstrong 2018, 193.)

Organizational and interpersonal factors should not be overlooked. Marketing professionals need to keep in their mind that businesses have their own goals, arrangements, strategies, and methods. People in the buying process interact with each other, hence interpersonal factors must be also taken into consideration. However, it is not easy to determine the interpersonal factors as there are various reasons for buying decisions to be affected, for example skills, positions in the company and group or team dynamics. (Kotler & Armstrong 2018, 193.)

Individual factors such as interests, opinions, and preferences are affected by personal attributes such as earnings, age, occupation, education and risk-taking attitudes affect those factors. In addition, business buyers have not only one but various purchasing approaches. Some take time for assessing situations thoroughly before selecting which goods or services to buy while others are skilled at making sellers compete against each other. (Kotler & Armstrong 2018, 195.)

There are numerous B-to-B buying decision-making process models that are introduced by different researchers and marketers and that have a similar structure, for example one of the generally acknowledged business buyer behavior models called "Buygrid framework" which was developed by Robinson, Faris, and Wind (1967). In this chapter, the author will refer to the business buyer decision process introduced by Kotler and Armstrong (2018, 195) and a buyer journey presented by Hall (2020, 34-35) in the book of B2B Digital Marketing Strategy: How to Use New Frameworks and Models to Achieve Growth.

The model of the business buyer decision process introduced by Kotler and Armstrong (2018, 195) has 8 stages business buyers undergo when purchasing a product or service: problem recognition, general need description, product specification, supplier search, proposal solicitation, supplier selection, order-routine specification, and performance review. Buyers do not always go through all eight steps depending on their situations, especially in the case of ordering products or services they have bought before. (Kotler and Armstrong 2018, 195.)

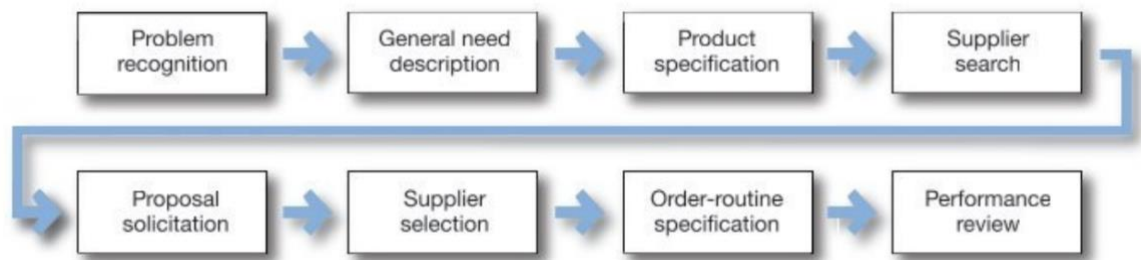


Figure 2. Stages of the Business Buyer Decision Process (Kotler & Armstrong 2018, 195)

The first stage of the process, problem recognition, occurs when employees in the organization acknowledge a need or problem that may be caused by external or internal stimuli and that can be solved by obtaining a particular service or product. Some problems or needs arise inside of the company. For instance, a company develops a product that needs different materials and equipment. There may be cases that a sourcing manager is not satisfied with the quality and cost of services or products offered by current distributors. They can gain insights from outward to inward when a webpage or advertisement comes into their sight or a salesperson gives them a better offer by call. (Kotler and Armstrong 2018, 195.)

After acknowledging a problem or need, they outline the features and volume of the item they need. They may discuss with some experts such as designers, controllers, and users in order to draw an outline of the item depending on types of the item. They also clarify what comes on top of a list of the item's desired characteristics, for example durability, cost, and reliability. A role of B-to-B marketing professionals in this stage is to assist the buyers to describe their needs and give information about benefits of the product or service. (Kotler & Armstrong 2018, 196.)

Next, buyers define technical characteristics of the item with the assistance of specialists who investigate and analyse how the value of the item can be improved or standardized

for the purpose of reducing the cost of production. In the next stage in the buying decision process, the buyers carry out a search to find the most suitable suppliers. A classic approach is making a list of certified vendors by checking trade registry and contacting companies for their recommendations. However, search on the internet is becoming more common and it has increased opportunities for suppliers to be found and chosen. B-to-B marketers and salespeople must ensure that a name of their company can be found and heard in the registry, online and by word of mouth. (Kotler & Armstrong 2018, 196.)

After conducting a supplier search, buyers contact certified suppliers to hand over their proposals. Following the proposals, suppliers provide some materials with their detailed contact information or give a call to the buyers. Buyers normally request suppliers to give a formal presentation or proposal in cases the needed item is costly or complex. B-to-B marketing professionals should be adept and prepared to present appealing and convincing proposals or presentations. (Kotler & Armstrong 2018, 196.)

In the next stage of the process, buyers go through all the proposals and choose suppliers. They usually list up characteristics of suppliers and their significance, for example their rank and credibility in the market, speed of delivery, ethical corporate governance, and quality and prices of their service or product. They will assess these elements and decide on the most promising and appealing suppliers. Negotiations between buyers and suppliers before selection can lead the buyers to better deals. Buyers have a tendency to choose more than one supplier to prevent them from becoming dependent on a specific supplier and to make it easier to review performance and prices of suppliers. (Kotler & Armstrong 2018, 197.)

Order-routine specification comes after thorough selection of suppliers. Buyers prepare to order from selected suppliers with a list including volume of the product or service needed, warranty, technical requirements, return policies and expected delivery date. Buyers may outsource inventory and order duties to the suppliers and they keep track of inventories by using information provided by buyers. (Kotler & Armstrong 2018, 197.)

Finally, buyers evaluate suppliers' efficiency and fulfilment to their needs and requirements and then decide if they keep, make changes to or cut out the arrangement. A role of suppliers here is to pay close attention to factors that have influences on the buyers and ensure they meet suppliers' needs and requirements. (Kotler & Armstrong 2018, 197.)

Although these eight stages of the buying decision process model briefly go through B-to-B purchasing, buyers experience a much more complicated process. Every company has its own approaches for business buying and every situation is different. (Kotler & Armstrong 2018, 197.)

Hall (2020, 32) presents a customer journey in the book of B2B Digital Marketing Strategy: How to Use New Frameworks and Models to Achieve Growth and it is defined as “the sequence of steps a customer goes through fulfil a particular goal, and there can be various journeys which customers follow throughout their interactions with a vendor” (Hall 2020, 32). Customer journeys are lined up to various actions and needs that they perform in pre- and post-purchasing stages (Hall 2020, 32).

There are different types of customer journeys which place a focus for example on lead nurturing or engagement and relationships with customers. A buyer journey is one type of customer journey that describes especially the purchasing process, before, during and after purchasing a product or service and that focuses on stages that a customer undergoes up to making a purchasing decision. (Hall 2020, 33-34; Wagner 13 October 2020.) In this thesis, the author refers to the buyer journey when introducing the purchasing process.

A buyer journey introduced by Hall (2020, 34) has similar stages to the business buyer decision process model presented by Kotler and Armstrong (2018, 195). 6 stages of the buyer journey are listed as follows:

- need recognition
- need quantification
- evaluation
- comparison of alternatives
- purchase
- post-purchase

In the Hall's model (2020, 34), general need description and product specification stages in the business buyer decision process model are combined. In the evaluation phase, most buyers begin their search online with other search methods such as contacting participants of seminars and visiting trade shows followed later. Evaluation and purchase phases are not different from the Kotler and Armstrong's model (2018, 195), except that agreements on product or service orders may be long-term depending on buyers, however the performance review phase is skipped in the Hall's model (2020, 34).

The business buyer decision process model by Kotler and Armstrong (2018, 195) will be used to formulate the interview questions to investigate the buying decision-making

process of companies that outsource video production. Interview questions will be presented at the end of the thesis.

4 Three key media types

In this chapter, the author introduces three different key types of media: owned, earned and paid media and discusses their use, importance and benefits for businesses.

Every marketing information and messages, aside from eye-to-eye communication, is delivered by certain types of media. An appearance of new communication methods such as social media has shifted the way we communicate. Nowadays, media are means of carrying messages not only from companies to target groups, but back to the companies and among people in the target groups. As a consequence, new classification of media was needed and media are categorized into earned, paid and owned media. (Kolb 2016, 186; Moriarty, Mitchell and Wells 2015, 341.)

Since online promotion and social media became more and more important, marketing professionals are quickly getting used to their approaches of allocating budgets, reporting and making investments in earned, paid and owned media for reaching and interacting with their target customers (Smart Insights 2020).

While many B-to-B marketing professionals consider paid, owned and earned media as separate media types, combinations of these three media types are critical. By integrating these media, marketers can attract, engage and close prospects. (Meyer 10 January 2020; Forbes 2014a.)

A figure below describes these three types of media: paid media, owned media and earned media. (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick 2016, 12.)

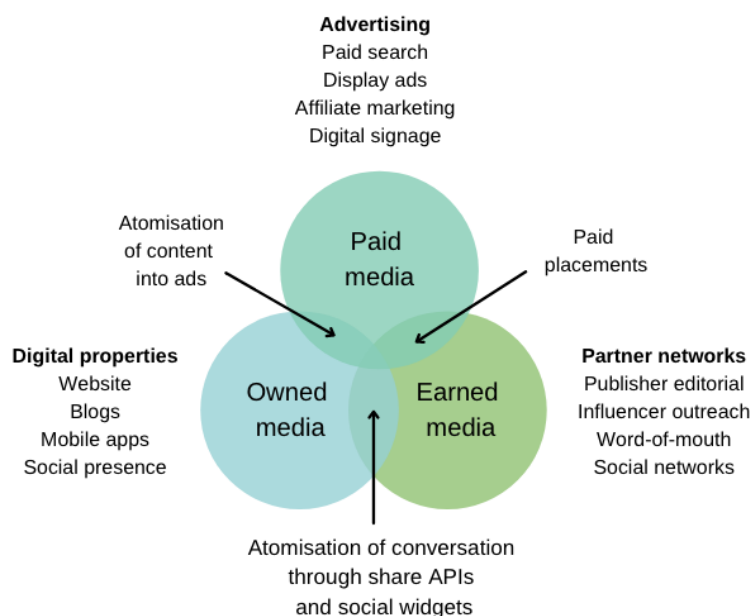


Figure 3. The intersection of three key online media types (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick 2016, 12)

4.1 Owned media

Owned media are a type of media which are owned and managed by companies and which deliver branded messages and content. They include websites, social media channels such as Facebook and LinkedIn, newsletters and blogs as well as offline channels such as booklets, catalogues and events that companies organize. (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick 2016, 11; Moriarty & al. 2015, 341.)

One of the advantages of owned media is that companies have full control over all the content they share and the message they send. Even though companies can hardly get new clients only by using owned media, they do not cost much to manage and they can drive some traffic. Although paid media is also under control of companies and earned media does not cost any, owned media are the only type of media that have both of these two benefits. (Indeed 2021; Hall 2020, 187.) Having owned media means that companies can share content and deliver messages to their audience without being dependent on channels that are not under their control, such as articles and advertisements on social media. (Entrepreneur 2020.)

Although companies invest a lot of their time for social media, the role of the websites should not be underestimated. A company's website is the most essential element of owned media as potential clients often look through it before going to any other channels. By creating a well thought-out and designed website, companies can give any information about them that potential clients or other website visitors look for. (Indeed 2021; Kolb 2016, 197.)

Whether it is B-to-C or B-to-B businesses, impressions that potential customers get from companies' websites affect their decisions if they will even contact the companies or visit their shops. No websites or strong presence on search engines such as Google and Yahoo means small businesses are losing opportunities to be recognised by potential customers. Poorly designed or structured websites work even worse for businesses as these websites provide impressions that they are unprofessional. They should make sure they have well-designed websites and they can be easily found on search engines. (Forbes 2014b.)

As stated earlier, website visitors including potential clients are influenced by how well designed and structured websites are. Entrepreneur (2010) describes 10 essential content that small businesses need to put on their websites. These 10 elements include:

- A clear description of the business
- A sensible and simple web domain name
- Site map with clear directions
- Accessible contact information
- Clients testimonials
- A clear call to action
- Application of SEO basics
- New and compelling content
- Use of a hosting platform with high security
- User/visitor-friendly design

A website needs to be structured in a way that visitors do not need to spend that much time to figure out what a company does. It should clearly tell their name and a summary of their service. A site map and links to relevant pages assist visitors to find information that they seek. As not all website visitors have time or patience to go to every section of the website to find the company's contact information, it needs to be somewhere it can be easily found. Zhuang states (2010, in Entrepreneur 2010) that the right or left corner on the top of the website is suitable for contact information and visitors can find it even more easily by placing it in the top or bottom of the website. Customer testimonials provide a sense of trustworthiness to potential clients and help them ensure the services or products that the company offers meet their expectations. Also, it can provide information about the company, its product or service that has not been mentioned on other pages of the website. A website can have a call to action that clearly tells what the company wants website visitors to do and it can be highlighted with some sort of distinctive buttons or texts to draw their attention. It is crucial to apply the basics of SEO, for example using relevant keywords and putting a range of images, videos and links to make it easier or possible for people to find the website on search engines. New content helps with SEO and valuable and compelling content provides visitors a reason to come back to the website. By including actively updated blog posts or putting social media feeds on the website, a company can try to avoid their content from getting old and boring. Zhuang states website visitors quickly look through a page to check the content and then read thoroughly and explore the website if they think it is worth spending time on reading. Zhuang recommends three key points for website content to keep visitors on the website: writing short paragraphs with headers, using bullet points and calling attention to important words by highlighting them. (Entrepreneur 2010.)

A study conducted by Omobono which is a marketing agency located in London found out that 79% out of 115 B-to-B marketing professionals agree social media is the most

successful marketing channel and 38% of them commented they would invest on social media if there was extra budget for the coming year. (Smart Insights 2018.) According to one B-to-B content marketing survey, 89% of the 1707 B-to-B marketers use social media for distributing their content and the same survey revealed that over 80 % of B-to-B marketers have successfully reached goals of creating brand awareness and building credibility in the last 12 months. (Handley & Murton Beets 2020, 27 & 35.) In other words, active presence and content distribution on social media helps B-to-B businesses create brand awareness and build trust. (Handley & Murton Beets 2020, 35.) These statistics highlight importance of social media for B-to-B businesses.

Buffer (2021) shares a few significant benefits of social media for small businesses. The small businesses can build brand recognition at low cost on social media and platforms such as Facebook and LinkedIn make it possible to recommend and share their events along with group and event features. (Buffer 2021.)

Although this can be applied to any type and size of businesses, social media provides access to a large amount of audience including potential clients for free. Small businesses tend to consider social media as the platform only meant for large companies, but social media channels give them an opportunity to thrive and interact with niche audiences. (Forbes 2021.)

B2B businesses should place their focus on social media channels where their clients or potential clients are active. Polls carried out by Hootsuite on Twitter and LinkedIn revealed that the best channels for B2B businesses are LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. (Sehl 21 October 2021.) The B2B Content Marketing survey found that 96 percent of 1707 marketers use LinkedIn as the channel for delivering their content in the last year. (Handley & Murton Beets 2020, 28.)

A lot of B2B clients nowadays share their experience, feedback and reviews about their services or products. (Sehl 21 October 2021.) It is effective to share those feedback and reviews as well as testimonials on social media to build trust. Also, B2B businesses can share educational or insightful content, for example how-to-videos and tips with their audience as a way of proving their value and establishing credibility. (Barnhart 22 March 2021.)

In order to drive traffic to owned media, marketers need to use owned media in harmony with other media types: paid and earned media. Paid media can be used to build brand awareness and raise traffic to owned media. A main objective of owned media on social

media platforms is to obtain publicity – earned media in the forms of retweets, reposts and shares. (Indeed 2021.) “The more people are talking about your company, the more attention will be on your owned media where you can control the messaging” (Indeed 2021).

4.2 Earned media

Earned media are any publicity that companies cannot pay or commission for. They are generated by social media users, journalists, writers and bloggers and the companies can obtain it by showing and giving value to their audience. (Kingsnorth 2019, 242.)

Wasyluk (25 September 2019) shares examples of earned media:

- Word of mouth and recommendations both online and offline
- Mentions and hits on any social media channels
- Shares, likes, retweets and reposts of any information or content about companies and their products or services
- Blog posts about the companies and their services
- Newspaper and magazine articles

Earned media are considered to be the most persuasive and engaging media among three different media. However, companies have little control over earned media as they are the content that are created and shared by media users such as influencers and customers who support the companies, writers, and even detractors. (Hanlon 2019, 114; Moriarty & al. 2015, 341.)

Widespread use of social media channels such as Facebook and LinkedIn have made it easier for anyone to share their ideas, experience and opinions about certain companies and their products or services in their networks, which means that companies can easily earn their publicity. People in the networks, whether colleagues or professionals working in the same field listen to their opinions. In addition, more and more people are searching information about specific services and products and it has a big impact on their decision-making. (Wasyluk 25 September 2019.)

If B-to-B companies want to get recognized by their potential clients, influencers or professionals who could recommend their product or service, the companies can reach out to them, for example by commenting on social media posts and leaving positive feedback, endorsements or reviews when the companies have worked with them. (Marx 1 May 2020.)

Earned media rarely works without other types of media. They can be effective when it is used with a combination of owned media and paid media. By creating informative, customer-centred, and engaging content, for example infographics, photos and videos on owned media along with paid adverts, marketers can put their content where it can be seen by target clients and anyone who would like to engage with their brands. (Hall 2017, 123; Forbes 2014a.)

4.3 Paid media

Paid media involves digital media where companies make a payment for an advertisement or partnership to promote products and services, reach new target customers and increase traffic on websites, social media and any other channels. Examples of paid media are Facebook and LinkedIn advertising and search and display adverts on Google. They also include offline channels where companies pay for such as TV, radio and print ads. Companies invest on paid media in order to reach goals that they cannot do with owned media alone. (Kingsnorth 2019, 243; Hall 2017, 123; Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick 2016, 11.)

Fundamentally, the purpose of paid media is to draw attention and encourage target clients to look for more information from other channels including owned media regardless of types of channels that companies put their ads on. (Kolb 2016, 189.)

One negative aspect of paid media is that they are not considered as authentic as other types of media and they can be disregarded due to their promotional nature. Paid media such as commercials and pitches used to catch people's attention, however they place more focus on engaging and having relationships with companies that they support. (Hanlon 2019, 114; Forbes 2014a.)

Paid media is effective when companies are looking for new buyers that have not heard and recognized them yet. For instance, paid media makes it possible to reach people who are interested in the industry that companies are in and make them aware of the companies and their service. Paid media helps companies to distribute their content to a large audience while having control over who to target. (Marx 1 May 2020.)

There are a wide range and types of paid including offline advertising, but these are key types of online advertising: social media advertising, paid search advertising, native advertising and display advertising. (Braccialini 04 February 2021.)

Social media channels such as LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter have advertising features that will help companies increase their exposure. (Meyer 10 January 2020.) Social media advertising provides benefits to companies such as reaching particular audiences and various audiences on different channels by means of targeting options and making use of various ad forms that go in line with business goals. (Braccialini 04 February 2021.) The survey which has been introduced earlier in this chapter found that 80% of B2B marketers put their advertisements on LinkedIn and 67% used Facebook advertising in the last 12 months. (Handley & Murton Beets 2020, 31.)

5 Research method

This chapter presents the research aim, the chosen research method and a description of samples. Selected data collection and analysis methods and reliability and validity of the research are introduced later in this chapter.

This research investigates the buying decision-making process of companies that outsource video production to understand how those companies search and find their suppliers, how decisions on choosing the suppliers are made in the companies, what channels are used and what kind of information are found useful during the process. This research will provide insightful and valuable information on the case company's marketing activities.

5.1 Qualitative research

Research is described as “an original investigation” conducted for contribution to understanding and expertise in a specific field of study. It is an act of creating knowledge that has not been produced before. (Myers 2013, 6.)

One of the most typically used research methods is quantitative research. It is an approach used for gaining an understanding of people and their behavior by utilizing certain research methods such as group discussions, observation, in-depth interviews, biographies and content analysis. It uses “non-numeric data” such as words, video clips, images and audio recordings. (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2019, 178.) It allows researchers to acknowledge how people's behavior and experiences are formed and how decisions are made in the settings of their lives such as physical, economic, social and cultural settings. It helps them to understand and describe “why” a person behaved as they did and recognize problems from the research participants' point of view. (Hennink, Hutter & Bailey 2020, 10; Myers 2013, 5.) Qualitative research is designed in a way that researchers can understand thoughts, reasons and motivations of people thoroughly and explain their behavior by talking to them or studying what they have put in writing. (Myers 2013, 6.) Although qualitative research is useful in various fields, it is often used for complex problems to give a thorough understanding of the research issues and explanations for people's behavior and beliefs. (Hennink & al. 2020, 11.) Therefore, this research will use a quantitative research method to understand the buying decision-making process of companies that outsource video production and identify channels they use in the process.

Another commonly used research method is quantitative research. It investigates “relationships between variables” that can be measured with numbers. (Saunders & al. 2019, 178.) Quantitative researchers place their focus on numerical data and use statistical and graphical tools and methods to analyse their data. In general, it is considered as a useful research method when a sample size is big and researchers aim to generalize a large number of people. (Myers 2013, 8.) In quantitative research, questions are set in a clear manner to make sure data is collected in a structured way for its reliability and validity. (Saunders & al. 2019, 178.) Table 1 presents major differences of qualitative and quantitative research by their objectives, purpose, data, study population and data collection methods, analyses and outcomes.

Table 1. Key differences between qualitative and quantitative research (Hennink & al. 2020, 16-17)

	Qualitative research	Quantitative research
Objective	To gain a contextualized understanding of behaviours, beliefs, motivation.	To quantify data and extrapolate results to a broader population
Purpose	To understand why? How? What is the process? What are the influences or context?	To measure, count, or quantify a problem. To answer: How much? How often? What proportion? Which variables are correlated?
Data	Data are words (called textual data)	Data are numbers (called statistical data)
Study population	Small number of participants; selected purposively (non-probability sampling)	Large sample size of representative cases
	Referred to as participants or interviewees	Referred to as respondents or subjects
Data collection methods	In-depth interviews, observation, group discussions	Population surveys, opinion polls, exit interviews
Analysis	Analysis is interpretive	Analysis is statistical
Outcome	To develop an initial understanding, to identify and explain behaviour, beliefs or actions	To identify prevalence, averages and patterns in data. To generalize to a broader population

5.2 Semi structured in-depth interviews

Interview is a deliberate and purposive conversation between interviewers and interviewees, where the interviewers ask clear and brief questions and listen intently to the interviewees. By conducting interviews, researchers can collect reliable data which are important to research objectives and questions and modify their plans and ideas where

they have not entirely framed research objectives or problems. (Saunders & al. 2019, 434-435.)

Interviews may be the most commonly used and important data collecting method in qualitative research (Bryman & Bell 2015, 479). Interviews can be categorized into three major types: structured, semi-structured and unstructured, in other words in-depth interviews and these interview types are shown in the table below. (Myers 2013, 119.)

Table 2. Types of interview (Myers 2013, 121)

Structured interviews	The use of pre-formulated questions, strictly regulated with regard to the order of the questions, and sometimes regulated with regard to the time available
Semi-structured interviews	The use of some pre-formulated questions, but no strict adherence to them. New questions might emerge during the conversation
Unstructured interviews	Few if any pre-formulated questions. In effect, interviewees have free rein to say what they want. Often no set time limit

In structured interviews, researchers use a prepared and standardized questionnaire to gather measurable data (Saunders & al. 2019, 437.) The structured interviews include closed ended questions that are very particular and have a fixed set of answers. All respondents are provided exactly the same questions in the same order whether a questionnaire is conducted verbally or in paper to minimize variability in answers and standardize the whole process. (Bryman & Bell 2015, 211 & 480.)

Semi-structured interview lies in between structured and in-depth interviews. Although researchers use a list of questions which are formulated in advance, interviewees have more flexibility in how they respond. Questions do not always need to be asked in the same order which they were outlined. Researchers may develop a topic depending on what the interviewees say and ask questions that were not prepared beforehand. However, all semi-structured interviews are consistent to a certain extent as the interviewer begins with a similar or same group of questions. (Bryman & Bell 2015, 480; Myers 2013, 122.)

“An in-depth interview is a data collection method that involves an interviewer and an interviewee discussing specific topics in depth” (Hennink & al. 2020, 116). It is designed to get a detailed understanding of specific problems and it is more conversational than structured and semi-structured interviews. (Hennink & al. 2020 116; Saunders & al. 2019, 438.) Researchers conducting in-depth interviews have some ideas and thoughts about a certain topic, event, issue or experience they plan to investigate with an interviewee, but

they do not prepare questions or themes for structuring interviews. (Saunders & al. 2019, 438-439.) Researchers play a role of asking interview questions and motivating them to bring out their stories (Hennink & al. 2020 116).

In-depth interviews tend to be conducted when researchers need information on personal stories about a particular problem. Hennink, Hutter and Bailey (2020, 117) share examples of problems or topics which are commonly identified and examined using in-depth interviews:

- How people make decisions
- People's own beliefs and perceptions
- The motivation for certain behaviors
- The meaning people attach to experiences
- People's feelings and emotions
- The personal story of a participant
- In-depth information on sensitive issues
- The context surrounding people's lives

The author uses a combination of semi-structured and in-depth interviews for this research. By integrating these two methods, the author can reduce risks of missing insights which are relevant to research problems, which tend to occur when strictly following pre-formulated questions. Also, it helps the author to avoid gaining insights which are unrelated to the research problems by letting interviewees talk openly and not getting enough insights from interviewees who talk little. (Myers 2013, 122-123.)

5.3 Data collection

Both qualitative and quantitative research require choosing a sample, however approaches of sample selection are not same in those two research.

As qualitative research is conducted to gain thorough insights into chosen phenomena, it is essential to have a small sample size and conduct sampling flexibly in order to analyse topics thoroughly and perceive diversity of the topics. Qualitative research often involves purposive sampling which researchers deliberately choose participants who are knowledgeable on the research topic. (Hennink & al. 2020, 92.)

Qualitative research places its focus on quality of data rather than quantity of data unlike quantitative research and there is no detailed consensus on what size of sample is suitable except that a large sample is not required to meet research objectives. Its sample size depends on objectives and questions of each research. However, there is a widely used principle for determining the amount of data required for the research. Using this

principle, researchers collect data until they reach a point that they gain no new or additional information from data collected. (Hennink & al. 2020, 108; Saunders & al. 2019, 315.)

It is necessary to carry out interviews with companies that have outsourced video production to achieve research objectives. The sample for this qualitative interview was marketing professionals who have had some experience in the buying decision-making process at companies that outsource video production. The interview was conducted with five marketing professionals who work or have worked in various industries and sizes of companies to understand the buying decision-making process in companies of different sizes and industries with the aim of bringing beneficial insights to the commissioner. Table 3 describes positions, company sizes and industries of the chosen five interviewees.

The first interviewee worked as a head of customer experience when he was involved in buying the decision-making process. The second interviewee is a marketing manager working at a B2B company who is mainly responsible for the buying decision-making process. The third interviewee was in charge of the buying decision-making process when he worked as a head of marketing at an event management company. The fourth interview has been involved in the buying decision-making process in various companies including the current position, as a marketing director. Lastly, the fifth interviewee has been in the process both in her current position and when she coordinated events as an event coordinator.

Table 3. A description of five interviewees (Akabae, 2021)

Interviewee	Position	Company size	Industry	Type of production
A	Head of customer experience	Small to medium	Technology	100 percent outsourced
B	Marketing manager	Small to medium	Heavy machinery	100 percent outsourced
C	Former head of marketing	Medium	Event management	Shooting – outsourced, Editing – in-house
D	Marketing director	Large	Public and commercial construction	100 percent outsourced

E	Marketing planner/Former event coordinator	Medium	Event technology/event management	100 percent outsourced
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Interview questions were formulated in a way the author can gain some insights on the B-to-B buying decision-making process for outsourced video production and use of channels in the process to achieve research objectives. The author carefully designed questions so that the questions will not affect the way interviewees answer questions and paid attention during the interview.

All five interviews were conducted from 4 to 6 May by Zoom meetings considering current situations due to coronavirus. Each interview was scheduled for an hour and it took about 50 minutes. All the interviews were recorded with two different devices to ensure data would not be lost and the recording was done with permission from interviewees. Confidentiality of each interviewee's information was discussed before and during the interviews.

5.4 Data analysis

An interviewer can decide when they make a transcript either after carrying out the first interview or after gathering all the data. However, there are several reasons interviewers can benefit from making a transcript of an interview right after conducting it. It helps the interviewer recognise important problems and topics which arose during the interview and that way, the interviewer can investigate them in coming interviews. Also, the interviewee can assess if enough amount of data is collected and quality of data is adequate. (Hennink & al. 2020, 108; Saunders & al. 2019, 216.)

Even though qualitative research often has clear distinction between data collection and analysis, data that researchers get largely depends on questions asked to participants during data collection and the way analysis is conducted will influence the data and the other way around. Researchers conducting qualitative research obtain a large amount of data during data collection. Data analysis in qualitative research allows them to omit some of the data or combine data to make it manageable, place their focus on certain data and find themes which are relevant and important to the research problems. (Myers 2013, 165-166.)

The author began the data analysis by making transcripts of all five interviews. Any identifiable information about the interviewees were removed to ensure confidentiality of

participants. Each interviewee was assigned a letter from A to E following the order of interviews conducted to make sure each interviewee is identifiable for data analysis. The author thoroughly looked for any differences and similarities from interviews to find common themes and classified important themes to include them as final results of this research.

5.5 Reliability and validity

Validity and reliability are often concerned with quality of data in quantitative research. The term reliability refers to the extent of how replicable and consistent the research is if conducted with the same research data collection and analysis methods. Reconcilable findings must be produced with the same research design for the research to be reliable, whether it is replicated by the same researcher or another researcher. In the qualitative research that uses in-depth or semi-structured interviews, research results are not naturally designed to be replicable as the qualitative research has flexibility in order for the researcher to investigate dynamic and complex topics and the results show situations and circumstances at a particular occasion the research is carried out and data was gathered. However, biases can be created that jeopardizes reliability of the quantitative research since the researcher, in other words an interviewer, is involved in the interviews. An interviewer can cause bias by the way they behave and talk in how an interviewee answers to a certain question. The bias can be also caused by the interviewer in how they construe the interviewees' answers. On the other hand, the interviewee may demonstrate bias in their apprehension of the interviewer and the research topic. (Hennink & al. 2020, 116; Saunders & al. 2019, 213-214 & 447-449.) In research, validity essentially refers to "the appropriateness of the measures used, accuracy of the analysis of the results and generalizability of the findings" (Saunders & al. 2019, 213-214). Validity of the qualitative research using a semi-structured or in-depth interview can be ensured by using clear questions and investigating responses of the interviewees from various directions and points of view. (Saunders & al. 2019, 451.)

In order to ensure reliability and validity in this research, the author explored the theory in order to understand the topic deeply as the interview questions are based on one of the academic models in the theoretical framework. Also, the author asked open-ended questions that were designed carefully to give flexibility and freedom in how an interviewee responds, to avoid creating bias, and to explore and understand complexity and dynamics of the research topic, but at the same time the author kept in mind to stay focused on the topic to minimize risks of missing relevant insights and to maintain consistency with the help of pre-formulated questions. The author paid close attention to

links between theories presented earlier in the thesis and collected data to avoid missing important themes, including both similarities and differences in responses of the interviewees.

6 Results

In this chapter, results of the qualitative interviews will be presented. Notable findings from the interviews are a method of searching suppliers, buying decision factors and recommendations on marketing activities for a small B2B video production company. The interviewees prefer recommendations and referrals from people in their networks as a method of supplier search regardless of sizes and industries of companies and they make decisions on choosing the suppliers for video production projects based on the quality of work. The interviewees believe that LinkedIn is one of the most important channels for small B2B businesses. Each step in the buying decision-making process and the best marketing practices will be discussed and explained in subchapters below.

6.1 The buying decision-making process for outsourcing video producers

The need for searching suppliers comes naturally from the production of video materials for all five interviewees, however the purpose of the video production varies depending on types of companies and services or products they offer. Some of the interviewees needed new video materials for their clients, for example the clients' events while the other interviewees had demands for new video materials for their own marketing activities such as promotion of their services and their social media content.

"When I was doing a director work, it would've been a client who needed a video work, but more recently in last few years, it's directly to advertise my company's product or service to showcase what we do, all that sort of thing, and to create content for social media." – Interviewee A

Most interviewees agreed that they search and contact video producers when they have the need, not the other way around. In some cases, interviewees have been approached by video production companies and their colleagues who know some video producers. Interviewee C, who worked at an event management company, has been contacted by the video production companies a lot of times as those companies know event management companies often use video production.

Some of the interviewees have already built good relationships with a number of video producers that they worked before, whether they are large agencies or freelancers, and they contact and notify those video producers when video production is needed. One of the most remarkable findings in this research is that all five interviewees, from different sizes and industries of companies agreed the first thing they do is to reach out to contacts

in their networks and ask them if they know any video producers in a situation that the video producers that they already know are not available or they need to look for different video producers for certain projects. This indicates that the interviewees prefer recommendations and referrals from their networks regardless of sizes and industries of companies they have worked. They already have connections with people that they can trust and know some potential suppliers, for example their colleagues, video producers that they have worked with before and marketers working in similar industries. Then, the contacts recommend or introduce video producers that they have worked with or their colleagues and friends who work as videos producers. One of the interviewees said that she gets a lot of requests internally and she listens to every recommendation in the company if anyone knows good video producers.

Three interviewees said that they describe an outline of projects that they have such as a type of videos they plan to produce and their budget. The information they find useful when contacting people in their networks is technical capabilities of the video producers and experience that their connections had with the video producers when they worked together.

“I have a lot of contacts on the field, so I might go to my contact, let’s say like a marketing colleague or someone working at another company or from previous workplaces. Someone that you know and you can trust, I go them, I ask them “Do you know anyone? We have this kind of project”. Then they can recommend someone... Google gives you something but then again I feel like the best partners I get are from sort of “word of mouth” type of process and research purchase.” – Interviewee B

“First, ask the network to see if there are local or more closer provider of that and of course to know about their experience. If they have used that video production company, well just was it good or not, would you recommend it or not? And yeah, that’s the starting point.” – Interviewee A

There are several reasons why interviewees reach out to their contacts first when they look for video producers, but interviewees agreed that they trust people in their network and having trust and partnerships with suppliers are important because it can affect end results of videos. They assume that video producers who come through recommendations are trustable as none of the people in their networks recommend video producers with poor performance. The interviewees can see how well they produced videos if their colleagues or friends have worked with those video producers before. In addition, the

search process does not take as long as when they look for video producers randomly and they can save time by reaching out to their contacts.

“We need to build the trust with the video producers, so for me it makes sense that if I have a good contact that already has a trusted partner or can really recommend someone that this is a talented yet very much someone who can be flexible or who has some insight of the industry, then it makes sense for me to contact them.” – Interviewee B

“Nobody who wants to get a repeat work from a client is going to recommend a friend who’s really bad. Because if you recommend a bad friend, it reflects also on you. Basically, the fact that you recommend someone or something is that you’re willing to stick out your neck for them, usually means that you’re gonna get at least the same quality.” – Interviewee C

Another interviewee was also emphasizing the importance of recommendations and referrals from their contacts.

“I trust my friends or my colleagues, so that’s just it feels maybe like an easier way to ask my connections. So I would save time and if some of my friends has a friend who does videos.” – interviewee E

Most interviewees try to find suppliers on search engines by searching video producers in specific locations in case they do not know anyone themselves or they cannot find suitable video producers through their connections. One of the interviewees conducted a lot of search on the internet when his company began producing videos in a new country and they did not have any connections there. Another interviewee pointed out that the internet gives marketers a lot of options, even video producers that would not be geographically their target suppliers and it is hard to figure out which video producers are actually suitable for them.

Three interviewees said that they search information about video producers that are recommended by their connections before contacting them. The interviewees look through their websites first to watch showreels and examples of videos that they have done for their clients, preferably for clients that are similar to companies the interviewees work for to see what kind of videos they have produced for what types of companies and if they have technical capabilities to produce a type of videos the interviewees plan to make, what kind of style they have and how they made a story in the videos. They also check social media channels such as Instagram and YouTube if they would like to watch more

videos to see relevant examples of work. For some interviewees, content on the websites, videos included, can be even a factor to decide if they will contact certain video producers. The author presents the type of content that interviewees find important later in this chapter.

“The very big thing for me is, when you are looking for someone on the creative field, is to look through their, not even their social media profile, but when they are doing visual stuff, I wanna see overall how they look visually as a company, so I go to their website ... I want to see whom they have done the work for so maybe they don't even have to have done the work for in the exact similar industry and when I see videos they have done, if it's something that fits an idea that we have or sort of type of video that we want to do, then I know that they have this kind of skills to provide such processes for us so the website tells a lot.” – Interviewee B

“If my friend would recommend someone, I would google them and check some references and what kind of videos they have done. So definitely I would check that first before contacting that it's something professional.” – Interviewee E

In some cases, interviewees directly contact the video producers and ask them to send materials without searching their information online. One of the reasons is that marketers do not always have time to search and check information about video producers as they have various marketing projects proceeding with different parties. As stated earlier, they place trust in their contact who recommends the video producers and as a consequence, saves a lot of research that marketers need to do. In one of the interviewee's cases, information search was not necessarily required because he often needed the same types of videos for similar purposes and the amount of video producers required for certain video productions was small.

After getting some information about video producers, interviewees have online meetings to discuss further details. This step goes slightly different for each interviewee. One interviewee said that she sets up an introduction meeting to first introduce her company and the projects which videos are needed and to see if the video producers are interested in the idea that she presents and they can work together. Then, the video producers come back with an offer and they start to discuss more details such as pricing and technical capabilities.

Another interviewee sends key points of the project, such as what type of videos he is planning to produce in previous communication. During an online meeting, he asks video producers to show video materials that are relevant to what he plans to create and they

discuss technical details to see how video producers approach certain videos and construct a story in the videos. After that, he explains an outline of the project such as the purpose of video production and scope of the video. Finally, he chooses two to three video producers and demands them to send him offers that describe what and how exactly they plan to produce a video and how many people will be included as well as the cost and duration of video production. Information the interviewees find essential and useful in this step include availability of video producers, their examples of videos, type of equipment they have, pricing and their technical capabilities.

Participants of the interviews were asked about what factors make them decide to choose certain video producers. Each interviewee has several deciding factors when they choose certain video producers. The most important deciding factor for four interviewees is quality of the work. One of the important reasons is that interviewees can try to improve other factors such as pricing by negotiating with video producers, but they cannot improve quality of a video once it is shot. Also, company image could be affected if they publish videos which do not meet certain standards. Interviewee E stated that videos have to be basically good quality which are on the same quality standards that her company has so that the videos would not make the company look bad. Another interviewee said that marketers need to ensure that all the marketing assets including videos meet the quality standards that goes line with the corporate image. This is relevant to reasons why interviewees choose to contact their connections as a way of searching video producers. They contact people in their networks to ensure expected quality of videos.

“I would say still the most important thing is the quality of the videos. It's that kind of video that my event or whatever would need, so that they have the right style and right quality.” – Interviewee E

“In the end, the most important thing is the quality of the material we get. Obviously, because everything else is workable but we can't do the video again”. If we are paying for a video and comes out bad, we have already paid it, we have lost money, so that is a big risk for us so the quality of the content is the most important.” – Interviewee B

For some of the interviewees, pricing plays a role in decision making. As Interviewee D stated, marketers are in charge of other marketing activities than videos and they may need to allocate their budget to other things depending on their lists of things to do. In some cases, video producers charge more than their competitors and marketers need to think again about what they intend to do with a video and ask the video producers what specifically their justification is for charging more to see if it is actually worth paying.

“You know that at some point when you are looking at quality and price, you are saying that ok now it gets to a point that difference in quality or the expected quality is so small, that then we cannot say that it justifies such a big increase in price.” - Interviewee C

Some interviewees have the need to produce a type of video that needs special settings and it is very important to communicate effectively with video producers to avoid miscommunication and misunderstanding between the interviewees and video producers. In the case of interviewee C, the company where he worked organized 10 to 15 events that videos are produced in a year and they required a specific way of shooting, for example moments that video producers need to zoom in and out. It was essential to make sure the video producers understand what was required and the videos were for.

“If someone doesn’t understand what type of event you have and what type of video you are making in the end, what kind of shots are needed and you come back and you look through 12 hours of recordings and you just can’t find anything that you need, it’s lost.” – Interviewee C

Two interviewees agreed that personalities of video producers affect their decisions on supplier selection. One of them said that it can be even a factor to decline an offer if people are pushing and calling her a lot of times. She appreciates when video producers show passion and professionalism in the way they present themselves and their offer.

“I feel if they are too pushy or they are too salespeople, I feel that it’s almost desperate, it might be chaotic. But if they are passionate about their subject and their professionalism and the company and everything, that shows off. You can’t fake passion and that is something I love to see and I see that a lot when we have the first meeting.” – Interviewee B

A table below outlines the most and the second most important deciding factors that are chosen by each interviewee.

Table 4. An outline of key deciding factors (Akabae, 2021)

Interviewee	The first deciding factor	The second deciding factor
A	Quality of work	Personalities of suppliers
B	Quality of work	Partnerships
C	Communication	Quality of work

D	Quality of work (Technical capabilities)	Pricing
E	Quality of work	Pricing

6.2 Use of social media channels

There are important similarities among all interviewees when it comes to use of social media channels. None of the social media channels are actively used as a way of searching video producers when the interviewees look for them online. As stated earlier in this chapter, they mostly look for the video producers by googling when there do not seem to be fitting video producers through referrals of their connections. However, two interviewees said that they use channels such as Facebook and LinkedIn to see if they can find any relevant people and news in online groups that they belong to.

“I wouldn’t go scrolling through the newsfeed looking for companies. No, that wouldn’t be where I would be. Maybe if I saw an ad, I might click on that, but that doesn’t really work because I would then be aware of the company doing it, but I might not have a need right now and I might bookmark it somewhere or something and check it later but when I have the need and then I wanna google something, I would google it or reach out to my network.” – Interviewee A

“I’m also a part of marketing group let’s say LinkedIn and Facebook where I always try to also read even when I don’t have a need really, I just try to keep up with what’s going on in the field and if I see some good video production or something, I might write the name down and the partner down there so if I need something like that, I can contact them later.” – Interviewee B

Most interviewees check social media channels to watch more videos such as showreels and portfolios even though the main source of information is websites. One interesting similarity about social media use among interviewees is that they go to social media platforms that generally have visual content such as YouTube, Instagram and Vimeo. Some interviewees do not have preferences on which channels to visit as long as videos are accessible. In some situations, they go to social media channels through the websites and they directly watch videos through links that video producers send them in other situations. Other interviewees said that they go to Facebook and LinkedIn to check if those platforms are up to date and they can find any information that is not available on other platforms. None of the interviewees mentioned about Twitter.

“Social media presence in a sense that if they have YouTube channels, that’s obviously then you see a lot more videos from the video service provider or if they have Instagram, Instagram is such a visual channel as well, so they don’t have to have a lot of followers, but if we I see that they have sort of a thought behind their Instagram feed, that gives me very positive reinforcement about the company because I am looking for highly visual story tellers in a video providers because that is how in a marketing I feel videos are working best.” – Interviewee B

“I don’t have a preference, it depends on where the content is. Wherever they built the portfolio, wherever they have showreels or whatever they want us to look at. It doesn’t really matter for me if it is on Instagram or websites or YouTube, or Vimeo.” – Interviewee C

6.3 Best marketing practices

Although interviewees mostly visit websites of video producers to find showreels and examples of work to see what type of videos they have produced, some of them pay attention to how the websites visually look and what content actually is in there. They shared opinions on what content they find appealing and useful when they search information about video producers.

One of the interviewees said that she would like to see specific customer cases that give an outline of the project with videos that have been made for that customer. Another interviewee stated that video producers should put links of their social media channels on their websites to make it easier for website visitors to look for information and check their content on different channels. Interviewee E thinks that the websites should have references from their clients as well as some kind of pricing which gives a brief idea how much it costs to potential clients.

“I don’t mind if they have a webpage and it says there’s a logo that they have worked with. I’d rather see ok, there are customer cases and this is a video for that customer case or this is the visual that they did for this customer case. That tells me just a summary of the project and some visuals about the projects or videos about the project, that tells me a lot of visual capabilities.” – Interviewee B

“They should have their own website, of course and references, which clients have they worked for. Pricing is also good. Good to have some kind of pricing, like from what price do the prices start, or just to get some kind of an idea.” – Interviewee E

Two interviewees elaborated their opinions on website content. One interviewee thinks that it is not good to put cases and videos that the video producers worked on without any concept or strategy behind them as every company does not need all kinds of marketing videos. Instead, they should consider their website as their portfolio and present their cases in an organized manner to show a range of services they can provide. The interviewee shared a few examples of categorizing customer cases. The cases can be categorized based on type of videos such as training videos, interviewee videos and product videos. Another way to categorize the customer cases is to divide cases by industries and types of their clients, for instance B-to-B companies, B-to-C companies, food and beverage, information technology, and tourism.

“So from the service provide side, it’s good to think about this is a resume for those service providers or this is kinda like portfolio for video production companies that they are not doing like pushing everything they have done. Just think about how they are showing the best services they can offer in a way that showing an offer of their solutions for us who are searching for the services.” – Interviewee B

This way, it saves a lot of time when marketers search video producers for their projects as the interviewee said. Also, potential clients can go back to the websites whenever they need videos and check if the video producers have skills and experience to produce the type of videos they need.

“When they are divided in different topics then it helps in the search process especially when we are talking about someone is googling, not me but someone else might be googling and when they are trying to find video production companies, then dividing on this like we are doing training, so we are doing a product videos, or we are doing corporate videos. That will also help in the google search and then people will find them more easily and more likely.” - Interviewee B

Interviewees B and E pay attention to some details which show professionalism of video producers. For example, they check if the video producers put their contact information and they have gotten their own domains.

“I would also like to see the real persons behind the company, so like in the contact page or something like to get to know actually the people in the company.” – Interviewee E

When interviewees were asked to give recommendations on marketing activities for a small B2B video production company at the end of the interviews, most interviewees

agreed that LinkedIn is one of the most important platforms for small B-to-B businesses and they should try to be more active there. They recommend LinkedIn because they think it is where professionals who make decisions on choosing video producers are usually active and that is generally how B-to-B buying works. Another reason for a small B-to-B video production company to be active on LinkedIn is the nature of their work. One of the interviewees addressed that they do not necessarily need to prepare marketing materials separately as they could share videos with a permission from their clients.

“An amazing thing is the nature of the work what you do as a B2B video production company is such that it always gets posted. Because you are working for ads, you are working for YouTube videos, you are working for tutorials and everything is gonna go online and most of the time it’s probably gonna be posted on Facebook or LinkedIn or Instagram or YouTube.” – Interviewee C

Interviewees gave some examples of actions that a small B2B video production company can try on LinkedIn and these are some of the examples.

“It might be worth trying to start posting on LinkedIn, shots of your video or something like that, advice on shooting a video or some sort, that could be useful, maybe not just a video itself, maybe more like thought process and project management of shooting a video and educating marketers on how to do a video production” – Interviewee A

“Get active on LinkedIn and make sure that you tag your clients and your clients are commenting on the videos that get posted or when you client is posting a video that is the end result of the work what you have done, then you can go in and comment.” – Interviewee C

One of the interviewees stressed the importance of quality of content that video producers share online and their customer-oriented attitude regardless of size of companies and type of channels they are active.

“No one can say at this point that you can’t get your stuff online, so how they are presented online and how they are visually looking online. I would say important stuff, even big companies or big agencies or small freelancers, how they are showing what they can offer me as a service provider, that’s the main thing I would be looking into.” – Interviewee B

Overall, some of the interviewees have tendencies to pay attention to content on the websites when they search information about video producers. They find information and

content such as customer cases with videos categorized based on types of clients or videos, links to social media channels and references of clients useful. LinkedIn is considered as the one of the most important platforms for a small B-to-B business by the most interviewees.

7 Conclusions and suggestions

The aim of this study was to investigate and understand the buying decision-making process of companies that outsource video production by conducting qualitative interviews to marketers working at such companies. The research results show that interviewees prefer recommendations and referrals from people in their networks, in other words earned media than online search including Google search and social media channels when searching video producers. The recommendations and referrals are considered as the best method of supplier search because the interviewees have assumptions and expectations that video producers who are recommended and already trusted by their contacts are worth trusting. It indicates that emotional factors have influences on their buying behavior.

Although not all the interviewees go online to search information about video producers, interviewees have tendencies to check owned media, such as websites and social media channels for watching examples of videos. It helps them find out types of videos produced and determine technical capabilities of the video producers. When it comes to websites, some of the interviewees pay attention to its quality and content as it shows professionalism of video producers. They find information and content such as customer cases with videos categorized based on types of clients or videos, pricing, links to social media channels and references of clients useful and appealing. Some interviewees check social media channels such as Facebook, LinkedIn and Instagram for the purpose of checking if they are updated regularly and any additional information can be found.

Even though interviewees make decisions on choosing a video producer based on multiple factors, quality of work is considered as the most important deciding factor because it may affect their company image and quality of the video cannot be improved easily once it is shot. It highlights the importance of earned media such as recommendations and referrals as in most cases, quality of videos can be ensured or at least expected to be good by contacting networks and getting recommendations of trusted video producers.

Interviewees believe that LinkedIn is one of the most important channels for small B-to-B businesses because “potential” clients - professionals who make decisions on choosing video producers are active on the platform. LinkedIn as with other social media channels, gives an opportunity to small B-to-B businesses to engage with their clients as well as other professionals and influencers including their potential clients.

Based on the results, it can be said that it is crucial for the commissioner to have an up-to-date website and social media channels. Quality of a website and its content can be even a factor to make decisions on which video producers to contact for some marketing professionals. In addition, the commissioner can ensure that content on these channels can be shared, retweeted and reposted and that way can be seen by “potential” clients by being present and having quality content on owned media. I recommend that he would add customer cases with videos and categorize them by types of videos or companies as it helps him showcase his work and be easily found in the Google search. References from his clients and detailed contact information about his company would give a sense of trustworthiness to visitors on his website.

When having meetings with potential clients, it would be important for the commissioner to focus on the quality of his work instead of negotiating prices and to justify reasons for charging more in case prices of his services are higher than his competitors as some marketers would like to know why it is worth paying more for the service.

I strongly suggest that the commissioner would become active on LinkedIn. He could share some advice on video shooting, post some of videos that he produced for his clients and leave a comment on his clients’ posts as interviewees recommended and that way, he can make himself visible on the LinkedIn feed and his potential clients may be aware of his company and service.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Interview questions for marketing professionals

Basic/background information

- Name of the interviewee
- Name of the company
- Position in the company
- Industry of the company

Supplier search

- What kind of suppliers does your company have?
- Are they big agencies or freelancers?
- What is video production for?
- Is it for your client or your company's promotion?
- How do you find your potential suppliers?
- Do you contact suppliers first and do they contact you first?
- Where (which platform) do you find your potential suppliers? Why?
Ex. by recommendations from other companies, from social media (LinkedIn, Instagram, Facebook), from website, social media ads of suppliers?
- What kind of information do you ask or find useful when you reach out to your network?

Information search

- Do you check any information about video producers before reaching out to them?
- What do channels you use to look for information about the potential clients? Why?
Ex. By call, from social media, from website?
- If online, which platforms do you use? Why?
- How do you reach to potential suppliers? Why?
Ex. By calling, by email, by messages on social media?
- What kind of information do you find useful/appealing after reached out to your supplier, when you discuss with them?

Supplier selection

- What makes you choose certain clients and why?
- What was/have been deciding factors when choosing a client among their competitors? Why?
Ex. Is it their price, quality of service, customer service? Why?
- If it is quality of service, how do you make sure their quality of service is good?
- Where do you get that info? (References on websites, recommendations from other companies, review sites)

- What would you recommend to a small B2B video production company to do for their marketing activities?
On which platforms?
- What kind of advice or tips would you give?

Appendix 2. Questions for the commissioner

- When was the company founded?
- How many years have you worked before starting your company?
- What kind of videos do you produce?
- Who are your customers?
- What have you done so far for marketing?
- How did you find clients?
- What would you like to focus and achieve regarding marketing?
- Why would you like to focus on marketing?
- What social media channels do you have?
- What social media channels would you like to focus?