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What do bloggers think about Iittala and how does the company want to be visible in social media  
Commissioned by Iittala Group Oy Ab



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What do bloggers think about Iittala and how does the company want to be visible in social media

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This thesis was commissioned by Iittala Group Oy Ab and the author did their work placement for the company as well. Iittala belongs to Fiskars (the oldest company in Finland) and they are mainly producing kitchenware and decoration items.

The aim of the thesis was to find out what is said about Iittala in blogs and is there anything to improve. Social media is growing fast but Finnish businesses are not well aware of its advantages. Advertising is likely to shift to Internet and the company needs to be active where their customers are.

The actual research consisted of three different parts; observation, questionnaire and company interview. The observation was done with mostly Finnish decoration oriented blogs in order to find out how is Iittala visible. Questionnaire's idea was to get deeper information about the bloggers opinions, the questions were related to advantages of blogging and company image. Three company members took part to the interview, two of them were done via e-mail and one was phone interview. The outcomes of the interview were compared to the results of the questionnaire and observation.

The theory of the thesis introduces different types of blogs, the advantages and disadvantages of blogging and business blogging. Theory was also used to make suggestions for the company. It helps to understand the opportunities of blogging, technical issues which need to be taken care and the general idea of blogger bribing.

The results turned out to be positive and there are loyal customers who are interested in following the company in social media.

Keywords social media, advertising, blogging

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Opinnäytetyö on tehty toimeksiantona Iittala Group Oy Ab:lle jossa kirjoittaja teki myös työharjoittelunsa. Iittala kuuluu nykyään Fiskarsille joka on Suomen vanhin yhtiö. Iittala valmistaa pääasiassa astioita ja sisustusesineitä.

Opinnäytetyön tarkoituksena oli selvittää mitä bloggaajat ajattelevat Iittalasta ja sen tuotteista. Sosiaalinen media kasvaa jatkuvasti mutta suomalaiset yhtiöt eivät vielä osaa käyttää sitä täysin hyväkseen. Yhtiöt mainostavat yhä enemmän Internetissä koska on tärkeää olla aktiivinen siellä missä asiakkaat ovat.

Tutkimusosuus koostuu kolmesta eri osasta, jotka ovat havainnointi, kysely ja haastattelu. Havainnointiosuus kohdistui pääasiassa suomalaisiin sisustusblogeihin. Kyselyn ideana oli saada selville tarkempaa tietoa bloggaajien mielipiteistä Iittalasta.

Haastatteluun osallistui kolme yhtiön työntekijää, kaksi niistä tehtiin sähköpostitse ja yksi puhelimitse. Haastattelun vastauksia verrattiin kyselyn ja havainnoinnin tuloksiin. Teoria osuudessa esitellään erilaisia blogeja, niiden hyötyjä ja haittoja sekä yhtiö bloggaaminen. Teoria auttaa ymmärtämään yhtiö bloggami-enedut, bloggaamiseen liittyvä tekniset asiat ja blogilahjonnan tarkoituksen.

Tutkimus tulokset osoittautuivat positiivisiksi ja yhtiöllä on paljon lojaaleja asiakkaita, jotka ovat kiinnostuneita seuraamaan Iittalaa myös sosiaalisessa mediassa.

Avainsanat sosiaalinen media, mainostaminen ja bloggaaminen

Sivut 39 s. + liitteet 3 s.

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Appendix 1 Blogger questionnaire in Finnish

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Appendix 4 Interview with the Iittala marketing manager in Finnish and English

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Background information about the topic

The thesis was commissioned by Iittala Group Oy Ab, for which the author has been working for over a year. It seemed natural to ask for a topic from somewhat familiar company. During the time the author has been working for the company, she has received quite good picture of the company products and values. More importantly, she has received important information in her job: customer feedback. The topic is marketing related, which the author studied as her minor but ended up taking more marketing related studies than planned. She was suggested to concentrate on social media, which seemed as a very suitable option.

The introduction part explains the reasons of social media growth, introduction of the company, importance of the topic and the methods used for making the thesis. The research consists of blog observation, blogger questionnaire and company interview. The idea was to find consumers opinions about Iittala, its products and marketing. The recommendations are based on the results of the research.

Today Iittala is a part of Fiskars Home alongside with Röstrand, Hackman, Fiskars, Höganäs Keramik and Arabia.

## 1.2 Background information about Social media

Because of the creation of Internet in 1990's, social media has become one of the most powerful tools in marketing especially in 21th century when Internet's web world improved a lot. It gives unlimited chance for an entrepreneur or a company to advertise and find new customers. According to Kari Hintikka (2007) Social media was originally based on community (People who have something in common found each other on internet). Because of this, different kinds of forums were created. Organization's role is to be an enabler (Kari Hintikka, 2007.), which provides the platform for online users to publish their own text. Today Social media is not only forum, but it is also used for commercial purposes.

Social media is a place where everyone can share their opinions, ideas and interests for others. For individuals it is an easy way of communicating, but more importantly for a company it is an easy way of advertising. Establishing a webpage, Facebook-, Twitter- or YouTube account or a blog is completely free (apart from some blogs) and therefore an advantage. The disadvantages are that anyone can write anything, even wrong or misleading information and it takes time to build and update the information (relevant, when it comes to company's webpage).

When it comes to marketing, company has to pay attention to language, emphasizing product/service attractiveness and positive company image. Webpage has to provide relevant information and the design has to be interesting and stylish. Although Social media is very modern and useful way to market, it has to be remembered that it can only reach certain segment, as Internet is relatively new innovation; there is a specific age

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group, which can be found online. At the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century when Karl Marx created Capitalism, some of his followers started to talk about mass society, which meant the era when newspapers, radio and television manipulated people to become consumers (Elliot & Lemmert 2009, 39-40. Seppo Kangaspunta (toim.) Yksilöllinen yhteisöllisyys.)

In 16<sup>th</sup> century, people were born in communities. There was hardly any way to communicate with people outside the group one belonged to. Nowadays religion is one of the biggest factors to determine where people belong to (Matikainen Janne, 2008, sosiaalinen media-millaista sosiaalisuutta? Tiedotustutkimus.)

### 1.3 The current situation in social media advertising

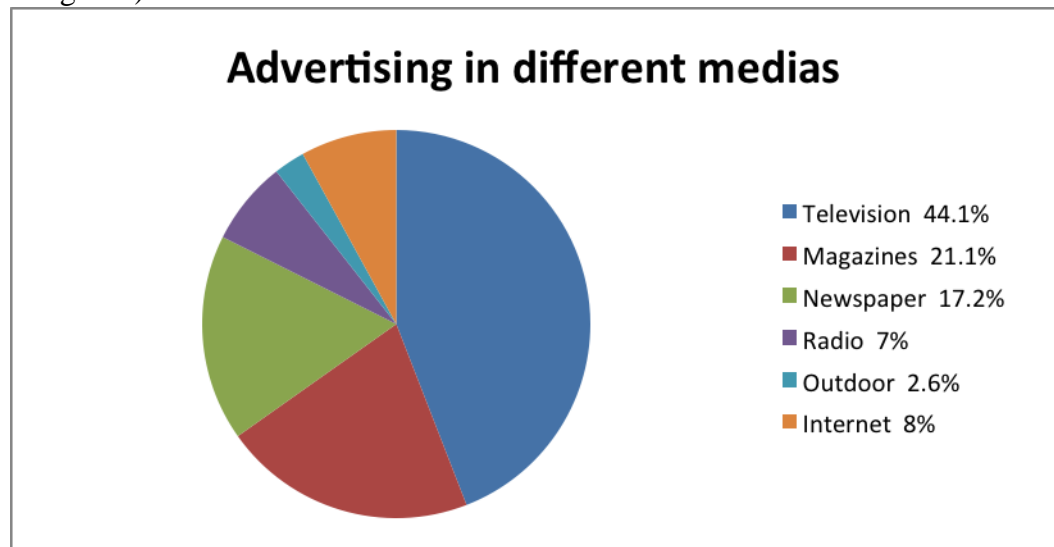
According to the survey made by Tracy L. Tuten Internet advertising is about 70% of all advertising in United States, EU, Japan and North America. The biggest advertising tool is still television with more than 98% reaching even the elder consumers. The author of the book also states that mass media consist of television, newspapers, magazines and radio. Only the biggest sites on Internet can reach masses of people. The author mentions Google as one of them. Customers can be reached either via e-mail (so-called targeted advertising, which is permission based) or then as a display advertisement on some well-known webpage. It has to be said that reaching masses should not be the main driver when advertising online. Online advertising brings up more conversation and opportunities for people to share their ideas and opinions, whereas traditional advertising is mostly seen as disturbing consumers' lives. One proof of online advertising effectiveness is the survey called The State of the Media Democracy made by Deloitte & Touche. The result of it was that 40% of the users create some kind of outcome like sharing videos, publishing pictures and writing blogs, these efforts are noticed by 51 % of the Internet users. More likely user generated contents, where users can publish writings, videos and photos grab youngsters' attention (according to the same source even 71% of young people read advertisements published in user generated contents).

Consumers' respond to social media marketing has created new phenomena, like crowdsourcing, digital dialogue, citizen marketing and brand democratization. Especially the last one has become important tool in brand advertising (such as Iittala, Marimekko and Aarikka). The phenomenon is called brand engagement, being also an outcome of brand democratization it has developed into modern way of advertising via consumers. In order to get consumer brand loyal advertisers, these brands have to encourage them to subconsciously share and use the brand in their own publications. The author calls brand engagement an invitation to share and experience the brand and bringing it closer to consumers' everyday lives. She uses Converse advertising campaign as an example of brand engagement, the motto of the brand being "People own this brand, not Converse" (John Butler). Bringing it closer to consumers, Converse encouraged people to make videos saying something about the brand and finally published the best videos on television and their own webpage. Making customers part of the marketing process is also related

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to an old method called relationship market concept. Tracy L.Tuten states that relationship market concept was not definitely any kind of relationship, since consumers were mostly forced to join by following certain rules set by the company or seller. Internet gives consumers more freedom and usually they get involved, because of their own interest, since Internet is usually used for searching, reading, watching and writing. As a conclusion, the Internet being part of the technological revolution enabled a more diverse way of advertising.

Online advertising started in 1990's when there was only couple of advertising sites. The graph below shows the percentage division between different Medias (research made by American company TNS Media Intelligence).



Using television commercials is the most effective way with over 44% of all advertising. Internet advertising might seem relatively low as compared to other Medias, but it has been growing very fast and it is very likely going to continue growing. In order to proof the information correct, E-marketer (leading online market research company) has listed facts about marketing related issues. According to it even if the economy goes down, it most likely just shifts the advertising from Medias like radio and magazines to Internet. The second reason is that Internet provides more accurate advertising compared to other Medias. Since it was earlier explained brand marketing online has become popular, related to this companies are willing to shift their marketing on online video advertising.

Since Internet's share is third lowest of all the Media advertising, there are other advantages, which make it attractive. Internet enables measurements, for example advertising effectiveness, amount of time spend on a site, how often the site is used and even the conversations related to the site. Modern technology provides lots of valuable information about the customer behavior. It is not only possible to count the amount of visitors, but also their age, sex, income level, location and education. This information is very valuable, because it can save time and money. It shows what segments can be reached online and is this segment even interested in the company or its products and services. The third advantage, called



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Technology -Driven Engagement Opportunities increases the effectiveness of Internet sites. Because of getting information about the consumer behavior and the effectiveness of Internet advertising, it has been helpful in creating advertisements that are more efficient. The author uses Google as an example of effective website, because it can connect websites and advertisements.

Although online marketing is clearly growing, there are challenges it might face. Media context can affect online users; second thing is that consumers might have certain kind of perceptions about online marketing. Online marketing took place for the very first time in 1994 and started slowly increasing; today's biggest sites such as Yahoo!, Amazon and EBay were established in 1995 and Google was created in 1998. Little by little they have continued their growth alongside with many other websites, helping companies to advert and reach their customers.

#### 1.4 The situation with the company in the past

Company called Iittala was established in 1881 by a Swedish glassblower P.M. Abrahamsson in a small village of Iittala. The company was sold to A.Ahlström, the owner of Karhula glassworks and the two glassworks were merged. The combined company worked until 1950's. From the late 1940's to 1970's Iittala was doing well, but as a result of 1970's oil crisis the company had to be sold to Wärtsilä Ltd. in 1987 which also owned Nuutajärvi (glassworks located in Urjala) and the two were merged. Quite soon, already in 1990 Iittala changed its ownership again, being part of Hackman (Kitchenware producer). It belonged to Hackman until 2003 and after that was operating as Iittala for one year. In 2004 a company called ABN AMRO Capital bought Iittala and ever since 2007 it has been part of Fiskars plc (owning about 97% of Iittala). Nowadays Fiskars plc owns domestic and foreign companies and its operations are divided in home, garden and outdoor sections (Iittala being part of the home section).

Iittala aims to be the leading Scandinavian designing company and it has focused its production in cooking, eating, decorating and drinking. The key words of Iittala's production are long-lasting design, sustainability and high quality. Changes in ownership and products are all attempts to develop. The products were designed to be easily combined and timeless, which have kept them desirable for years. Iittala aims to get loyal customer relationships, which would continue for a lifetime. It wants to offer its customers amazing experiences and therefore their aim is continuous development. Iittala does not only concentrate on product development, but also brand management is an important part of their success. In order to maintain the success, they need to learn more about the colors, materials and forms (Iittala Group 26.11.2008, Haaga-Helia University of applied sciences). Nowadays Iittala does not employ any of its own designers, but all of them are freelance designers. Together with professional glassblowers, they create and develop Iittala's products. Before a new product is launched, a workshop is arranged in order to test does the design meet reality. The company gets its raw materials from agent and the aim is to find the cheapest, but still qualified raw materials.

Iittala does not concentrate its advertising on traditional media (radio, and television), but most of the brands attraction is based on concept stores. Iittala believes that this is the best way to give the consumers an experience of timeless, yet still modern Scandinavian design. All of the concept stores were built carefully in order to emphasize the products, their design and origin.

The main distribution channels are online stores, wholesale and retail stores, the biggest being wholesale with 75% of the net sales.

In 2006 Iittala celebrated its 125<sup>th</sup> birthday, the same year Aalto vase (one of the most desired products of Iittala) turned 70 years and I-label (sticker, which is still used in every 1<sup>st</sup> quality product, as a guarantee of good quality) 50 years. The company managed to grow its net sales by 13 % as compared to previous year and operating profit was €17 MIL. The biggest operating areas for Iittala were Finland, Sweden and Norway. Their aim was to make profit by new outlet stores and brand departments all around the world, especially Amsterdam's outlet store turned out to be very successful. In 2006 there were 46 Iittala departments in 14 different countries. The company decided to improve its results by making a clear focus. The new strategy had three key words, which were design, production and brand management. Over the years, Iittala has had one of the best designers in the world, who have designed long-lasting, functional forms. In the same year, the company wanted to make their production more efficient and improve their material knowledge. Brand management was to become solid. Iittala has production plants in Norway and Sweden as well, which made value chain management more effective. Iittala wanted to sift from wholesale to a retail concentrated company and it was part of their future strategy. In 2006 the most important Iittala departments were located in Japan and U.S. Apart from the aims to become more retail oriented, Iittala aimed to make it value chain management more effective, remaining the leadership in domestic markets and concentrate even more on international markets. Market leadership was planned to increase growth and enable future investments. The results of the year showed that 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary and its marketing made Iittala more visible in media. Iittala had some customer loyalty campaigns, which turned out to be successful as well. Arabia online store was also launched in 2006. Part of the improvement value-chain management was to concentrate on demand-driven sales, which increased product availability. Online store managed to reach many consumers. After all, most of the Iittala stores were successful and managed to increase the brand visibility worldwide. In 2006, Iittala was among the 10 best Finnish brands, which helped them to build stronger brand image. Brand sales increased by 23% and it were partly because some of the most timeless products were taken back to production. Among the company owned stores, franchising helped Iittala to grow and the contract were made in long-term basis. Iittala's good brand image, seasonal products and desirable product display attracted consumers. Iittala does studies about consumers before launching a new product and they learned that traditional media does not reach consumers as well as store concepts, which gives consumers shopping experience. Their study also cleared that customers were more demanding and individual and they like to combine timeless simple looking brands with the latest trends. Although the brand is also somehow fa-

vored by men, 8/10 of all the consumers were women. Iittala calls itself a new luxury brand (meaning a luxury item, which almost everyone can afford. It is seen as a long-term investment, because it guarantees good quality and it can be combined with easily affordable goods).

In 2007 Iittala managed to gain 7% (turnover being 142.1 MEUR) growth as compared to previous year due to the change of the ownership and restructuring in United States. In 2007, Iittala had 30 stores operating all around Europe. The main advantage of the acquisition of Iittala was that it had a chance to operate together with 9 highly appreciated brands such as Arabia, Hackman, Röstrand, Boda Nova, Höganäs Keramik, Fiskars, Raadvad and Hoyang-Polaris. Since Fiskars is doing very well and growing internationally, it also enabled Iittala to grow and made it financially possible to execute their visions. The strong financial position of Fiskars enabled Iittala to continue its growth and make its future investments true. In 2007 Taika series was launched and its sales turned out to be very positive surprise.

In 2008 Iittala continued its growth and planned to make the brand image even stronger. Idea is to change from traditional industrial to consumer based Retail Company. Iittala's visibility had grown and they were sold in more than 50 countries around the world. Their first official online store Iittala home shopping was created in 2007 and it had become profitable. They had already 6 producing plants in Sweden and Finland. The main key competences for Iittala were knowhow, flexible production, cooperation with designers, reaction to changes in demand.

The year 2009 was challenging because of the financial crisis which the whole world was facing. Therefore Fiskars home segment turnover reduced 5% as compared to the previous year being then €300 M. The unsecure situation in the markets lead to unemployment and estimation that there will be no growth in 2010 and it is only positive if the company can get into same results. Fiskars had made a long-term strategy for its home segment and the key words are focus, efficiency and growth. The main improvement in 2009 was to make the company more integrated by establishing a new concern structure, combining the shares and starting a new integration program. These actions were meant to be taken into actions between 2010 and 2012 by making independent brand strategies, improving the commercial thinking and innovation and continues development. The following graph introduces the strategy and the main ideas behind the key words.



Fiskars started a new HR Strategy program for their employees, which aimed for better results, higher employee satisfaction and better understanding of the integrated operating model. Apart from that they added code of conduct education program, which is compulsory for all the Fiskars employees; it creates better understanding of the company values, ethical responsibility and regulations. Although the Fiskars home segment suffered -5%, but their MyIittala (loyalty club, which offers discounts, invitations, news and access to MyIittala webpage information provided by Iittala.com) club was a success and reached more than 20 000 members. In 2009, there were 75 Iittala outlets and stores all around the world and two more stores were opened in Japan.

In 2010 the new improved strategy, turned out to be successful especially in home segment which turnover increased to €309M meaning 4%. The main growth happened in Finland and Sweden. The reasons to cause the positive change were in efficiency strategy, which made the organizational structure simpler and reduced irrelevant costs. The strategy created in 2008 was started by concentrating on focus and efficiency and since those two factors started to show some results Fiskars decided to concentrate on growth. The company believed that the amount of design oriented consumers is growing and putting effort on special brands, consumers would get what they want the company would gain better profit. By improving and offering new products, they guarantee loyal customers relationships, new customers and partnerships. More coherent selection would help in growth, because it can reach bigger market shares and increase the demand. Fiskars home continued its expansion in decorating by bringing new Vitriini-series to markets. According to the annual report 2010, the main values are innovation, cooperation, responsibility and rectitude. Altogether there were 3,600 employees working for Fiskars and about 1560 working for Fiskars home in 20 countries. The company started the 360 integration program, which was about to determine how to control the labels and selection and how to arrange selling and marketing. Since the simpler structure was found good, the company started an investment program in their EMEA area (consists the markets in European, Middle East, Asian and Pacific Ocean areas) as well. The program was estimated to make results in five years and the main aim was to improve growth. The idea was to invest in common IT programs such as ERP.

In 2011 Iittala had followed the same strategy for 4 years (established in 2007, when Iittala Group was bought by Fiskars). The turnover of the home segment (which Iittala is a part of) decreased by 1%. Iittala had become more interesting among retailers, because the higher prices gave them better profits. The key things related to its strategy were still focus, efficiency and growth. In 2012, a successful break into South-Korea, China and Japan was made. The company continued their growth in department stores and outlets; one new department was opened in KaDeWe and one shop-in-shop in Norway. In 2011 Iittala was also followed in social media and it brought the company some positive reputation. Fiskars established a new decoration blog online, which was very successful. The most liked items were Aalto vase, Kivi candleholder, Vitriini and Kaj Franck's Kartio.

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As a conclusion Fiskars aims to continue Iittala's long term strategy by focus, effective production, establishing and maintaining departments, stores and outlets around the world and improving the brand image, materials, maintaining the timeless design and launching new well designed items (Iittala/Fiskars annual reports 2006-2011).

## 1.5 Importance of the issue

As mentioned previously social media and its importance is growing fast. Consumers have a chance to publish writings, pictures and videos about it and other can read, watch and comment them. Internet also gives a possibility to interact with people, who are not part of their everyday life (Mark Granovetter 1973). Andreas Wittel (2001 Yksilöllinen yhteisöllisyys) has introduced network sociality. The following sentence is quoting him "Network enables to follow the movements of people, thoughts, services and money". Since social media is relatively new and it's developing continuously, it can offer companies valuable information and feedback about their products and services. Often when there is a questionnaire arranged, it is expensive, time consuming and the information is not necessarily reliable. Creating relevant questions is also problematic and examining the results can be even harder (it might be hard to decide how many people have to answer in the same way in order to find the results relevant). There are challenges especially when the results are negative and the company has to think about development. People are more likely to comment or share their opinions, when they are not pushed. Usually people end up commenting videos or pictures on Internet, because they have an opinion or the publications arouse some feelings. In those kinds of situations, people are more likely to tell their honest thoughts.

The amount of internet users increases constantly, it has been growing since the mid 1990's. Internet brings together people with something in common; Second Life, Facebook and fashion blogs are examples of internet communities.

When it comes to blogging, their readers (fans) want to be part of it and they get influenced of their posts. This same phenomenon is called double agents has helped brands to improve their image. Example of this is a beer brand called Pabst Blue Ribbon, they never used to promote themselves, but because of their fan communities, it became one of the most sold beers in U.S. The downside double agent phenomenon is that they can also create negative brand image. This has happened for example for British company called Burberry, in the beginning of 21<sup>st</sup> century teenagers were using Burberry fake scarves. It gave wrong kind of image for the Burberry, which was generally known as a luxury brand. Another issue, which can give bad image to brands, is called plundering. Plunderers can steal the brand and create it into something negative.

According to Svend Brinkman (2008 yksilöllinen yhteisöllisyys), people used to be a part of industrialization in which they were forced to think and behave in the same way. In the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, a new term called Consumer Society (meaning a society, where irrelevant consumption has increased highly) was born and it gave consumers more variety and free-

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dom to differentiate. He also states that consumers make purchases in order to get the satisfying experiences that can also be a reason why companies concentrate on giving favorable atmosphere by store designing, placement of the products and customer service. Understanding human behavior and psychology helps in advertising and possible creating an emotional link between consumers and products.

## 1.6 Research question

The research question for the thesis is *“What do bloggers think about Iittala and how does the company want to be visible in social media?”*

The internal (company’s point of view) part of the thesis consists of an interview with Iittala marketing manager, Customer Loyalty and Web Development manager and head of marketing & PR. The purpose of the interview was to find out more about Iittala’s visibility in social media and how are they planning to improve it. The results of the interview were compared to the second part, which is an observation.

The external (being observation) part was consists of blogger questionnaire, which was sent altogether to 22 bloggers. The questions were related to brand image and Iittala’s visibility in social media. The second part’s aim was to find out what do consumers (in this case bloggers think about Iittala as a brand). Observation was used as a method and it was done completely based on blogs. The amount of blogs was 112 and most of them are Finnish blogs and they were found with the help of the most known blog searching tools (introduced in chapter 8.3). The results were therefore based on the bloggers posts and the possible comments from other bloggers and readers.

### 1.6.1 Methods

The method used for blog research was is observation and the questionnaire was send to bloggers via e-mail. Twenty-two e-mails were sent in Finnish and the rest three in English. The questionnaire can be seen below

“Hello,

I am doing an observation for my final thesis (commissioner Iittala). The observation is about what consumers think about the brand and its products.

I came across your blog and noticed that you have written about Iittala. I would like to ask you couple of questions.

1. What do you think about Iittala and its visibility on social media?
2. What kind of improvements do you want?
3. Is blogging an effective way to advertise a brand/product?

I would appreciate if you could even somehow answer to these questions! Thank you in advance!”

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## 1.6.2 Objectives

The main objective for the research were to find out the current situation and company expectations and based on the observation the consumer feedback (in this case indirect feedback from the blogs and their comments). The aim was to get improvement suggestion and find out do the consumer opinions meet the consumer expectations.

## 2 THEORY ABOUT BLOGGING

### 2.1 What is a blog-content

Blog can be seen as an internet diary, in which the author publishes text (and usually pictures) for internet users to see and mostly even comment. Blog can be statement, which aims to gain readers who agree or just one's past time about their dear hobby, personal interest or everyday life. One thing all blogs have in common is that they aim to get readers and according to Sami Salmenkivi and Niko Nyman (Yhteisöllinen media ja muuttuva markkinointi 2.0) every blogger want to know how many people read their blogs. Wordpress.org has written an introduction to blogging, which shows the typical characteristics of a blog.

1. The order is usually chronological and shows the latest post first. Most of the blogs also include so called key categories, which help the readers to get into post, which is related to the key post (e.g. exercising).
2. There is a list of older post or articles in chronological order.
3. Most of the bloggers offer their readers possibility to comment and ask questions, which can lead into conversation between the blogger and the readers
4. There can be links to other blogs, related websites or YouTube videos. Those links also work as advertising for companies and brands. Some blogs cooperate with companies in order to advertise them.
5. Most of them include feeds, which lead the feed readers to access it automatically (according to the author they can even be RDF, Atoms or RDS)

In order to keep the readers interested in the blog, it has to be updated often. There are both individual blogs and blogs with multiple writers. Most of the blogs can be commented by the readers or other bloggers. There is also a possibility for other bloggers to comment without visiting the blog at all.

Blogs are officially called CMS (Content management system), which enable the writers to make and maintain publications on internet easily. What the CMS does is it takes care of the technological issues so that the writer can concentrate on publishing posts. There are other blogging software's but CMS is the most advantaged. Blog maintaining is not just about publishing new posts, but the writer has to be aware of its other features as well. After writing a blog for couple of years, it might be a little difficult to find the older posts, so

there are various options to make it easier. Archives, which contain the posts can be organized alphabetically, chronologically or based on category (for example food). Most of the blogs usually have so called blogroll, which a list of other blogs or sites which the writer follows or finds interesting. As mentioned, bloggers are usually interested in comments and most of the blogs provide the readers a possibility to comment, link to other posts and recommend.

The commenting features are called trackbacks and pingbacks. Trackbacks are created when a blogger wants to comment another blog, but wants their readers to see the comment in their own blog too, so basically the person who wants to comment sends a link of their own post to the other blogger (known as trackback). When the other blogger opens it they can see it as a normal comment including a link. Trackbacks can create two possible problems; they can be used as teasers for the other blogger and their readers, meaning that they only show small amount of the conversations in order to make other to visit the other blog. There is also a possibility for the trackback receiver to edit it, which makes the text narrow or even misleading. Pingbacks are very similar to trackbacks, the only differences are that they use different communication technologies and pingbacks do not send content. Pingbacks is like an advantaged version of trackbacks, which aims to solve some of its technological problems. Both of the systems aim to verify that the authors show their real identity.

The bloggers are also able to control their comments, which mean that they can either delete or publish a comment written by readers. This application gives the bloggers possibility to control the conversation and avoid spams (unwanted advertising messages, which are usually sent to email). Another problem, which is rather related to blogs, is called comment spam. Comment spam is a link, which unlike the spam is not even wished to be opened at all. Comment spams are targeted to search engines, mainly to Google. It all started when Google released pagerank, a technique which helped to find out how popular each web page is. Pagerank ranks the websites from 0-10 based on how many websites one has in Google its directory. The ranks or points are counted by how many links are there which lead to the website. Since the main aim of comment spams is to get better rankings, which is not related to the blog and not even meant to be read they could be seen unwanted. Permalinks are the permanent URLs (the specific location of a picture, text or video) to the blog. Permalinks can be used as refers or send via email by the blogger. Unlike links, the permalinks are meant to be permanent, meaning that they will always lead to the original content. Better permalinks are called pretty permalinks and they aim to give as clear description of the location as possible. The best permalinks are the ones, which can be changed afterwards, in order to navigate the reader to another location.

The advanced blogging tools provide even a possibility to make posts via email, without visiting the blog at all.

Blogging tool might provide excerpts, which vary between different blogging tools. They are used to summarize the post, either by using



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the first sentences in the beginning or some other freely chosen sentences somewhere else in the post.

## 2.2 Technicalities

The appearance matters a lot and attractive layout can bring more readers. There are plenty of blogging services and some of them are free, the biggest services are Blogger, Typepad and Wordpress. The main things of blogging are divided in three categories, which are content, marketing and technicalities. The content of the blog is quite the same as the strategy for the blog (introduced in paragraph 4.5.2).

The marketing part of the blog has to be done carefully, it is important especially in the beginning to increase the awareness. All the publications should include some key word, which helps the readers to find the blog. If there are enthusiastic readers, who like to comment the blog, it is good to provide some samples or free trials (related to bribing, which can lead to advertisement in the readers blogs). It is good to be active, write comments and help the readers to use RSS feeds.

When it comes to technicalities, the blog keeper has to take care of some basic things; the blog writings have to be easy to link, RSS feeds should show the whole content of the post, the software should support trackbacks and the blog has to delete junk mail automatically.

## 2.3 Style of the blog

Blogs should always be somehow subjective. No matter what the blog is based on, it is good to give it a personal touch and it is allowed to share personal opinions. Although bloggers can freely share and publish everything it is important to remember that not everything should be published. Therefore the limits has to be remembered and as well as the basics of good behavior. Bloggers usually want to become a part of bigger blogging community by commenting, linking and being open-minded.

## 2.4 How to categorize blogs

There are several ways to categorize blogs. Jere Majava says that the main division is between link blogs and diary blogs, which was done already when the blogs were born. As mentioned link blogs were just lists of links to interesting web pages. Diary blogs were web diaries, which obviously were dealing with the writers personal lives. This division is highly related to the history of blogging.

According to Ari Heinonen and David Domingo blogs can be categorized based on the author. They have divided blogs in four main categories, which are civilian blogs (written by any individual internet user), public blogs (the templates are provided by organizations), journalist blogs (written by professionals) and media blogs (controlled theme blogs).

Blogilista.fi online service categorizes blogs based on their topics; the list includes topics such as design, music, IT, family and studying. The list has altogether 24 different categories.

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Anja Alasilta thinks that blogs are categorized into private blogs (written by individuals) and business blogs. These business blogs can be divided into 6 different categories which are; business-, city-, office-, organization-, congregation- and other blogs. The main division is based on the web service; most common options are; public web service, intranet, ekstranet or other external service provider. The author has also determined the other factors, which can affect on the theme or category of the blog. When it comes to business blogging, the most common writers are; manager, PR person, specialist, HR representative, customer or owner. Apart from that she has listed blogs based on their objectives, few examples are; management, strategy improvement, social communication improvement, testing new products and services, adding feedback possibilities and discussion about company related news.

## 2.5 History of blogging

Internet itself was born in Pentagon United States in 1969 by ministry of defense. It was originally called ARPAnet and the connection was build with a rented cable. Approximately twenty years later ARPAnet had been divided into two parts, the other one was mainly used by military and the other one by civilians. The name was changed to Internet since it started to its fast growth between civilians.

The invention of e-mail happened in 1972, e-mail was the first official way to have online conversations and therefore it has also been seen as a predecessor of blogs. The technology started to improve in 1989 when Tim Berners-Lee started to build new system, which little by little grew into World Wide Web.

Nowadays blogs are part of the phenomenon called Web 2.0. Despite of that blogs were launched before than web 2.0. Blogs were originally invented in 1990's and named before the 21th century. Originally known as Weblog one of the first blogs was established by John Barger in 1997, it was called Robot Wisdom. Back then, blogs were called wee-blogs, but the readers fast changed the term as blog. As the word weblog refers, the first blogs were very different from today's blogs, they were just web pages full of links to interesting web pages. In 1999, Para Labs released Blogger and within couple of years the success grew so much, that Google bought it in 2003. The service provided free tool to publish blogs. These days blogs are not there only for individuals' web diaries but also businesses can use them. Blogs can bring their writers new job opportunities, fame and money.

## 2.6 Web 2.0.

Web 2.0 (also known as social web) was invented somewhere in 2004 (it is hard to say the exact year because the launching had been going on for longer time). Web 2.0 is simply called as a new wave of internet. There are different dimensions for web 2.0, according to Kari A. Hintikka it is a combination of old and new, which are not even necessarily related to each other. Leif Åberg calls it breakpoint in which most of the available information is provided by individuals instead of organizations. In gen-

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eral it can be said that the main change is that it has become communication channels where everyone can produce content. The following list includes some basic elements of web 2.0, which are; blogs, wikis, feeds, podcasts, search engines, virtual services and mashups.

## 2.7 The current situation of blogging

Different sources give rather different numbers about the popularity of blogging and the amount of users and readers. There are various ways to measure it, for example, time used reading blogs, how many writers are there or often are they read. The following statistics is completely based on the results of Tilastokeskus ([www.tilastokeskus.fi](http://www.tilastokeskus.fi)) and the researches they have made during the years 2009-2011.

The results of the social media research in 2009 show that approximately 39% of all the internet users read blogs. Most of the readers were between 15-24 years old. Another similar research, which was done in the same year, shows the usage of internet between men and women. The results show that 39% of the readers were men and 38% of them were women, which gives the average of 39%. Blog reading was in the space 8 and the most common usage for internet was information searching. Although the amount of readers was almost 40% according to the statistics, only 5% of the internet users were bloggers themselves.

In 2010 the amount had increased by 1% meaning altogether 40%, from which 40 were men and 41 women. Another more specific research was done in the same year, which concerned how often do internet users read blogs. Although almost 4/10 of the Finnish population publishes online, but when it comes to commenting blogs the amount decreases. The numbers are based on the graph, which shows how many percent of the 15-74 year old internet write in blogs during three months. It gives the average of 42%. According to the same graph altogether 12% had commented others blogs and only 3% belong to the group of active blog writing. Young people (between the ages of 16-35) are the most active writers online.

The same research was repeated in 2011 showing that the amount of blog readers had reduced to 35%, as compared to that 79% of the internet users read their e-mails during three months time.

## 2.8 The advantages of blogging in individual level

According to research, which Helsingin Sanomat made in 2006, blogs reached more readers than the most famous blogs in the Unites States; the amount is approximately 1/6 of the whole population. In the same year similar research was made in Finland and there were about 1.5 million blog readers. It is good to be aware that this amount is not be realistic, because part of the established blogs are not used at all, some of them were created but never updated and there are even blogs which have not been active in long time (Wired 2006). According to Perseus (company which makes researches), only 33% of the Finnish blogs were used (Perseus 2007). The dimension of a blog is very wide, meaning that at times it's hard to determine what fills the criteria of a blog. Blogilista (one of

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the best blog searching tools) finds altogether 46 782 (information from blogilista.fi 26.9.2012). In 2009 Blogilista found 20 000 blogs, which means that during the past three years the amount is more than twice bigger. Also the amount of blog readers is increasing all the time very fast. One reason to their attractiveness is also the fact that blogs have filled the so called media gap (the term was originally introduced by Neuman in 1991 as a part of his media gap theory). Media gap means the time between sending and receiving information. Especially when it comes to newspaper articles or letter, the time can vary from couple of hours to even couple of days. In blogs, the information is available in seconds. There is another listing made of the advantages of individual blogging by Scoble and Israel in 2006, it can be seen below

1. Possibility to post and for everyone and everywhere
2. They are very visible and easy to find
3. Blogs can increase sociality, because of the ability to share and ideas and comments.
4. Information in blogs spreads faster than in news
5. RSS feeds enable the readers to find out when blog have been updated, instead of constant checking
6. Blogs give possibility to send links

## 2.9 The most common blog searching tools

Yhteisöllinen media ja muuttuva markkinointi 2.0 has listed some of the most common tools, which has listed logs in certain categories. Below there is a list and explanation of these searching tools.

1. Technorati is following more than 70 million blogs and enables video and picture searching as well. It ranks the blogs based on their popularity, including a list of top fallers and risers.
2. Google blog search categorizes the blogs based on the launching date and topical topic.
3. Blogilista.fi has a list of only Finnish blogs
4. Blogstreet neighborhood categorizes blogs based on their topics
5. Myelin Ecosystems ranks the blogs by their popularity (how many times they have been linked)
6. Blogosphere.us. deals with the rises and falls of the blogs
7. Wink social search engine helps to find information about individuals. The service finds information from blogs and other web services.

## 2.10 The advantages and disadvantages of blogging in company level

Although blogs are read in Finland and they reach many people, the blogs written for companies by their employees. In general, Finland is behind in using internet as an effective marketing tool and it's mostly because the full power of it has not been realized. Internet can be effective in marketing, PR, advertising, selling, recruiting, and communication and as a feedback and search tool. Since blogs are usually written by individuals, they aim for consumers' advantage. If something goes wrong with some brand's products, services or advertising bloggers are the first ones to find out and publish the information. The worst thing is that everything

is said honestly and there is no hesitation to say negative things, this obviously creates pressure for the companies. Positive comments can also be found in blogs, internet users are more likely to find customer support and product information from discussion forums or blogs than from the original website of the company. Blogs enable the spreading of complaints, compliments and comments very fast. Comments are not only shared on blogs comment forums, but there are also specific websites where to compare products, prices and services. Most of those websites have a discussion about the cheapest holiday package or the comparison between the prices of gas in different cities in Finland.

Although internet is an effective tool for advertising the downside is the same than Television has. The internet adverts are very easy and possible to skip, approximately 80% of them are skipped which means that there is still a lot to improve. As mentioned in the paragraph 4.1. blogs are likely to be linked among bloggers and that is why they can be one of the first hits in Google search. Yhteisöllinen media ja muuttuva markkinointi 2.0 tells an example of Nokia N95 phone, if the name of the product is written on Google search the first five examples are blog writings. Apart from blogs, there are other tools, which can be effective in advertising. One example is Flickr, (explanation) many companies use it and it has been used for example by Artek to improve their online visibility. As already mentioned blogs are effective in company level as well, below are the main advantages and disadvantages listed, starting from the advantages.

1. Company blog is effective and fast way to share information with customers, partners and employees. The main advantage though is that it is mostly completely free and of all the existing channels it is the fastest way to reach readers.
2. Since the amount of information on Internet is increasing all the time, it might be hard to find it. Since blogs are likely to be linked, the most read blogs can be easily found.
3. The best and most reliable way to find information is provided by the company on its webpage, but as already mentioned searching engines are not likely to find the official websites first, but the first options are blogs. Therefore if the company has a blog of its own, consumers are more likely to find it than their webpage or any other blog written by some individual user. If the consumers can be directed to companies own blogs, they can control their brand management better.
4. Dialog and communication with customers makes the brand visibility and good image stronger
5. Blogs create discussion, which can contain relevant customer feedback. More discussion there is more likely consumers are to prefer that company.
6. As a result of communication, the comments which consumers write give valuable information, direct and straight feedback about services, new ideas and products. It is the cheapest way to gain feedback

especially when compared to expensive researches which might even provide false information.

7. If the blog is good and informative it is likely to attract opinion leaders. Opinion leaders are not easy to find, but if the blog is visible and arouses communication, has better chances to reach opinion leaders.
8. It can provide improvements in customer service
9. It is relatively easy to maintain the blog and reach more readers
10. Blogs can be used for improving PR actions, although the main aim is to reach consumers it can also be used for improving internal communication. Therefore, employees can also share their ideas and get motivated to join projects.
11. At least in 2007 blogging was not that common in company level, which enabled forerunners position for those companies who were blogging.

Another additional advantage is that they are about to challenge other communication channels and the main advantage of blogs are the RSS feeds. Although blogs have generally been found effective marketing tools it is important to know that not everyone can be a good blog writer. The attractiveness of advertising in blogs is based on the amount of readers. In order to gain readers the blog has to be able to reach consumers via bigger channels, this phenomenon is called virtual affect. Below there is a list of all the disadvantages of blogging for a company.

1. When it comes to these so called company blogs, which are written by employees the cost-advantage relationship might be hard to find. It takes a lot of time and effort to make a blog popular and once it is done it has to be maintained or even improved in order to keep consumers interested and gain more readers. In working life, time is money and the employees need to be paid for the time they have used for maintaining the blog.
2. When it comes to business blogs, it is a challenge not to share too much of information and yet keep the blog interesting and informative.
3. Apart from starting and updating, it is very hard to keep the blog interesting and find the right segments to read and comment.
4. Although the main aim is marketing, blog will not gain many readers if the blog is written just to create positive image. The information should always be based on facts, no matter whether they are positive or negative from the company's point of view.
5. Once people start to comment the blog, the writer has the responsibility to control the conversation. Although the blog owner does not have to publish all the comments, they need to comment the posts and be very specific especially if there are some negative comments about the company.

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6. Since blogging actually takes a lot time and effort it might be difficult to motivate employees to take the responsibility.
7. Unfortunately motivated writer might not be enough for the blogs success, from business point of view it would be a good thing to have an observer who is aware what is published and takes care that the blog writer won't put too much effort and forget their other work tasks.

Good example of unsuccessful blog was created by Wal-Mart; the biggest reason for the failure was that they tried to control the conversation too much by deleting all the comments and videos before they were published. Their aim was to avoid all the negative comments, but that on the other hand did not let the readers the freedom to share their honest opinions, which is the basic idea of blogging.

This example comes to the fact that the most challenging part is to control the conversation, if the company makes any kind of mistake internet users will let everyone know immediately. The four main reasons for the increased amount of power are the collective intelligence which happens when there are many people working together. Internet is the place where masses meet. The second reason is that consumers create a lot of information concerning product prices, quality and features. There is huge amount of information provided by consumers, which companies cannot even control. Consumers do not only control comments, they control the whole channel. They can decide which websites to visit, which advertisements to skip and they have to possibility to order products from all around the world.

## 2.11 Business blogs

Back in 1990's the main thing for companies was just to be visible on the internet, things like online stores seemed to be irrelevant. Nowadays the questions are that is it meaningless to write company blog and are the advantages bigger than the effort used for blogging. Brand marketing, product- and service launching and product information can be done online especially in a blog very easily and it is also cheap. Yhteisöllinen media ja muuttuva markkinointi gives two examples of marketing blogs, trendwatching.com is an example of a company which does its marketing mostly in its blog. Although blogs can reach readers, when it comes to companies it is not likely that the results can be seen very fast. Nokia is another example of a company who has a blog; they have managed to reach users for their higher priced items because of the positive feedback in the blog. Blogs which are written for company's advantage differ from the ones which are written by private users and the main reason is that their aim is different. Companies' main aim is marketing, but the blog should not sound too artificial, therefore they should not be full of advertising and selling. Although the blog should be interesting and informative, the writer has to be careful so that they will not tell too much about the company itself, so that consumers and competitors will not find out.

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One positive side of the business blog is that consumers prefer them because they provide specific information and facts about the products, their features and advantages, unlike other consumers who might base their opinions on own experiences (which can be negative due to lack of knowledge).

When it comes to launching a blog, it has to be decided what the aim of the blog is. Does the company want to improve its brand image, concentrate on advertising some special products or find out what kind of new products would consumers prefer. Companies hardly ever expect their sales to neither increase nor gain more customers; the main purpose is to effective communication, which can reach even more segments. Unlike in traditional marketing, when it comes to blogging consumers are more interested in knowing how the products were created, what kind of people work for the company and which factors effect on the prices. Honest information and facts are the key words, which make consumers read these kinds of blogs.

### 2.11.1 B-to-B Blogging

Blogging can be used for b-to-b purposes as well, according to the research made by Forrester the biggest challenges in marketing were how to reach decision makers and how to measure the results marketing. In 2006 Knowledgestorm and Universal McCann made a research for 4500 decision makers about blogging and the results proved that about 80% of them read blogs and 51% at least once a week. More importantly about 70% of them told they would share or link the blogs and most of them said that the information affected on their decision-making (Marketing VOX, 2006). Surprisingly the situation was almost as good in Finland, people who worked in higher positions were better aware of blogs and their advantages, this means that blogs were best known among over 35 year old people (Dagmar). Although people were aware of blogs, only 55% of them read blogs actively (Digikko, 2006). In general blog reading is found time consuming especially since most of the people are not familiar with RSS feed reader. Most common problems might be that the name of the blog is difficult to remember or it is frustrating to check for latest updates.

### 2.12 Reasons to start business blogging

In Finland, it is very hard to make a blog profitable; blogs are likely to get more readers if they are written in English. Apart from individuals also companies have hard time making their blogs profitable (excluding some exceptions like Nokia). Reasons to establish a business blog can be very simple;

- company needs customers
- company needs new customers
- company wants to know what do customers think, want and need
- management needs to be more aware of what is going on in the company



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- vice versa the employees might need more information from the management side
- does it matter how do others (competitors as well) see the company
- is there need for improvement in internal communication

### 2.13 Difficulties in business blogging

When it comes to establishing a business blog Typepad and Wordpress are complicated but more suitable blog providers than for example Blogger. The most common issues are how to implement the blog, how to make it differentiate from a column and is it necessary to comment (and who will deal the comments and replying to them). Blog has to be written by a volunteer and in order to avoid workloads some other work task has to be left out. Language is a common challenge since the blog might seem to artificial if the text is too professional. Good thing is that company can provide the opportunity to any of its employees and it can even reveal some hidden talents (talented writers). Although blogs are not meant to be too official there are couple of things which have to be remembered; they should not be replaced by contacts with news media, journalists can also find the blog and read what is in there and there is a risk for any reader to misunderstand the text (same risk exists with any written text). Anja Alasilta has made a list of her findings related to situation of blogging in Finnish companies. The main issues are a lack of technicalities; a blogger might not be able to handle the amount of enthusiastic readers. In addition, some work tasks have to be left out to make time for blogging, language should not be too strictly checked, there should be freedom of word, blogger should be a part of the blogging world (meaning linking and commenting) and bloggers should not have too big expectations for it (hardly anyone can become an opinion leader especially not in a short time).

#### 2.13.1 Blog strategies

Business blog is a part of the company's marketing strategy although it cannot be seen from the content. Therefore everything related to it has to be well planned. Niko Nyman and Sami Salmenkivi have listed couple of the main things, which should be concerned when it comes to creating blog strategy; first of all it's important to define the aims of the blog. The blog needs to have a theme, which is partly determined by the aim. Readers find it more interesting when it has a clear structure. The blog keepers has to be chosen well, if there is nobody who is familiar with it then the potential employees must be trained to use the blog and to be aware of all the tools and features. It is only positive if there is a guidebook for blogging, which can help the blog keepers in challenging situations. The updating rate has to be decided in the strategy, it is not necessarily so that the blog has to be updated as often as possible, but if it's updated too rarely readers lose their interest easily. Experienced blogger also knows what might go wrong; therefore there should be a list of all the possible

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problems and a solution to them. There should also be a PR strategy, which supports the general PR strategy. Be aware of what is going on in the blog, including the comments. It is also recommendable to compare it to other blogs and even get some tips from them. As mentioned before one of the biggest challenges of blogging is to determine how to measure the efficiency, which means that it should be decided what are the factors which tell has the blog reached its goals. Although blogging is cheap option, there should be a budget for it (including money for marketing it). Company should be aware that business blog is a long project and it takes time before any positive outcome can be seen.

### 2.13.2 Return of investment in blogging

Since business blogging is a part of marketing, it has to be profitable. It is a real challenge to make good outcome when consumer expectations are extremely high and the marketing budgets as low as possible. Therefore one of the main things is to know the return of investment (ROI=Return of investment is used for measuring the efficiency of an investment, it can be found out by dividing the benefit by the cost of an investment.) In business blogging, the company wants to find out whether blogging creates any increase in sales. ROI is still not the best way to determine the efficiency of a blog, since it is challenging to measure its efficiency. Factors such as improved brand image and increased sales can be results of successful blogging, but there is no straight link between these factors. As mentioned ROI can compare the costs to the benefits and in blogging the most visible benefits are increased brand image, valuable consumer feedback, which can be linked to more effective selling. All the comments, links and readers increase the blog visibility, which is a lot cheaper way to gain visibility than any other. Forrester Research Company created a so called Forrester model to measure results of blogging, that model is mostly based on consumer feedback, the content of the blog and positive sales results. The model has been divided into three categories, which are benefit, meter and value. As mentioned blogs do not really create any direct value, but the amount of money what the company can save as compared to the normal marketing expenses creates the value of the blog.

### 2.13.3 Blogger bribing

Comscore (research in 2005) found couple of in common things between the bloggers. They are young, have good incomes and are quite active online shoppers. Bloggers are obviously keen on the topic which they are writing about, and therefore it can also be called a lifestyle. Apart from business blog, blogger bribing can also be effective way of marketing. When it comes to blog bribing it is important to find the right kind of opinion leaders who can affect on their readers purchases. Finding these so-called opinion leaders from the endless amount of blogs is not the only challenge, it is important to find the right way to approach them. Apart from that it has to be decided what the products which are good enough to give. One example of successful bribing happened with Nokia, when

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they were about to launch a new camera phone. First, they found bloggers who were talented photographers, and donated these camera phones to them and expected them to write about the new product in return. It turned out to work well since Nokia found the right segment to share this product in their blogs. There is similar kind of case related to Nikon campaign; they gave their D80 cameras for a trial for 50 bloggers and most of them wrote positively about the camera. Unfortunately, some of them were really not interested in cameras (although they liked to publish pictures) and therefore did not feel like publishing anything related to the camera.

### 3 OBSERVATION

#### 3.1 Introduction to observation

Observation was done using Google blog search and Blogilista as search tools. The findings were somewhat similar but there were differences too. Bloggers hardly write about the company itself but they rather discuss about their favorite products, new acquisitions and latest seasonal trends. As mentioned in the theory part there is several main things in order to make the blog attractive for readers. Those blogs which have readers and loyal fans are attractively designed (including the cover page, font, layout and quality of the pictures), often updated, technicalities are taken care of and they know how to share their blogs (Google lists pages based on the amount of times they are shared). Technical implementation is very important when it comes to first of all finding the blog, searching posts and sharing it. Simply because of the lack of awareness some of the blogs had very less followers. Since there is a possibility for almost anyone to establish a blog some of them were lacking personality and attractive appearance. Some of the bloggers are good photographers and have the talent in positioning the products in the picture in an attractive way, they call decoration their hobby and are dedicated and brand loyal collectors. As it can be seen from the findings posts with personal touch and ideas are likely to get comments, not only compliments but more importantly desire to buy the same item.

Pictures and texts which were taken from the company webpage hardly ever received any comments nor likings. When the information has originally been published somewhere else it might increase the awareness but quoted text lacks the most important things of blogging; writers' opinions and ideas how to use and combine the product with other products.

#### 3.2 Similarities between the blogs

As mentioned bloggers like to write about their favorite products and most of them are very brand loyal and have the attitude of "you can't ever own too much Iittala items". For a loyal customer price is also not an issue but they are ready to pay for admiring products. The company describes its production as timeless, simple and easy to combine with other series. Most of the consumers agree with those things.

The observation revealed that some of them wanted to collect one item in all the possible colors. Such items were Moomin dishes (new Moomin mug is released at least once a year. Some of them are seasonal and some of them have been in production for longer time), Maribowl (goblin, which was originally designed for Marimekko in 1968 and has been under Iittala's label since 1988. Now there are two different sizes and the bigger one is available in 18 colors) and Kivi candle holders (designed by Heikki Orvola in 1988, like Maribowl there are two different sizes and the bigger one is available in 20 different colors). Consumers don't really care do they look good together but its more about the idea of having them. All those three items are one of the biggest opinion dividers; consumers either hate them or love them.

Since Iittala is known for high quality, it is also known as an expensive brand. Therefore bloggers share links to seasonal discounts to for example Iittala's own online store, Stockman and Citymarket. Especially the most brand loyal consumers are aware of the discounts and therefore share them with their readers. As compared to direct mail, blog advertising is cheaper and faster option.

Most of the blogs covered for this observation had quoted the introduction of the new Sarjaton series from Iittala's webpage, apart from the text the pictures were also taken from the same source. Although the sources were clearly mentioned, most of such kind of posts did not have any comments or sharing. As mentioned in the previous heading, such quotations lack the personal touch of the writer and worst of all its direct marketing which is the opposite of what people want when they read blogs. Since the texts and pictures are used so much by others, the company should think what kind of message they give especially when it comes to new products and the company image itself. Apart from Sarjaton, bloggers had introductions about Harri Koskinen (and his unique work), Anu Penttinen, Tapio Wirkkala, Matti Klenell and even the company.

The blogs filled the criteria of a blog more or less (found using Google blog search) and especially those, which did not that much were selling Iittala items. Most of those blogs are selling all kinds of decoration items from different well-known Finnish and international brands. The results also show that some of the bloggers sell their own Iittala products online. When it comes to comments readers were very likely to comments the posts like "I love Iittala", "so lovely and cute", "I am jealous" and "I have the same one(s)".

As mentioned before consumers share their honest opinions, if the product is dysfunctional or likely to break the bloggers and their readers share that information. In Iittala's case, there were very less complaints as such and the items which were found dysfunctional are now out of production. Although there are brand loyal customers, there are also consumers who like to combine Iittala products with different brands as well (even with not so well known foreign brands). There were combinations made with Marimekko and even with Ikea, so Iittala are not only to be combined together.

### 3.3 Positive feedback

The findings were pretty much divided into positive, neutral and negative feedback. Most of the findings were positive from the company point of view. There were posts and pictures of the glass factories, glass blowing and designers working which made the readers (who commented) appreciate brand and understand the high price. The outlet store especially made consumers feel like buying everything, which means that the presentation is desirable. Also, the Esplanade store in Helsinki attracted and inspired couple of readers. Consumers described the products as simple, beautiful and clear. <http://www.signejohansen.com> who released a competition giving between the readers who published a comment on that post, the following list is taken from those comments; clean, simple, clear, bright, attractiveness of Scandinavian women, crisp, timeless, elegant, goes with Pakistani dishes and love it. One of the bloggers even mentioned that it is nice when there is a story behind the product. Apart from the three items introduced in previous heading (Moomin dishes, Maribowl and Kivi candleholder) Vitriini case was much desired especially among young bloggers. Most of them used it for jewelry and found the smaller one cute and suitable for rings and earrings. Not only the products but the designers behind the products were seen as genius and talented people and one blogger even said that Finland has the best designers and it is no wonder they are worldwide known. Consumers were likely to present their Iittala collections simple because of pure passion for the brand and most of them have been collectors for years. Those collectors claimed that they have pretty much everything and every time new series is released, they have an urge to buy it just because it looks good. Most of the collectors were very keen on Ote glass (designed by Aleksi Perälä in 2007) and wanted to get them more. Simple form and good sizes was found the best thing about the series. For most of the consumers disappointment Ote went out of production but the positive improvement from the company is that they publish a list of the items, which will go out of production approximately one year before. Since there are consumers who collect some specific series, and due to the high price are not likely to buy many at once, it is important to let them know about the series, which will go out of production. When informed beforehand, consumers have time to fill their collections before they cannot be bought anymore.

Sarjaton (being the latest series of Iittala) was not only found beautiful but the its attractiveness was also based on the fact that there is no longer need to collect the whole series since it can be combined with almost everything.

Although it was mentioned that Maribowl is an opinion divider, those who preferred it stated that it can be used for different purposes and the colors can be used according to the season (for example red and green during the Christmas time). Younger bloggers had also collected magnets (colorful with a recipe for some traditional Finnish dish) and liked them very much. Apart from that, some of them actually used them for cooking.

The products which were mostly mentioned and complimented were; Ote drinking glass, Aalto vases, Vitriini cases, Primavera dishes, Sarjaton se-

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ries, Oiva Toikka birds, Lempi, Teema, Origo, Essence glasses and simple but beautiful Kartio series.

### 3.4 Negative feedback

Although mostly dedicated fans and collectors publish posts about Iittala there are also dissatisfied consumers who comment them. Consumers were mostly disappointed with function or appearance of product(s). Although Iittala's latest series called Sarjaton received compliments, there were consumers who didn't like the way it looks like. One reader complains that it remains them of war time and the parts of the series don't look good together. In another blog there was a complaint that Iittala doesn't trust its customers can combine their own dishes. Some of the readers didn't think that they look good together and one reader even said that the series looks like Iittala ran out of ideas.

Another series which is an opinion divider is a series called Ote. Most of the consumers are very happy with its appearance and therefore started to collect the series. Unfortunately the quality was poor and many claimed that the glasses broke easily and now they are not even available anymore (Iittala took Ote series out of production somewhere in 2010). In general some readers were disappointed with products which have been taken out of production since it's very hard to find them anywhere (another fact is that the value of the product increases when it's no longer in production). According to Lasirakkautta.blogspot.fi there have been similar problems with Kartio Drinking glasses, the reader even says many people have complained about it (which is hard to proof based on only one comment). One of the readers even said that they don't like Iittala products since most of them are produced in China.

Since Maribowl in an opinion divider one of the reasons is that there are too many colors and the series has therefore lots its attractiveness. This opinion might be based on the fact that many collectors like to collect their bowls in the same place. There were some comments about the writers and especially Vitriini case was found lovely but too expensive.

Also the appearance of design capital city 2012 dishes was found terribly looking. Designboom (described as an online magazine but listed as a blog by Google, has 207,909 likings in Facebook) has an article about glass birds saying with introduction to designer Matti Klenell, pictures from the factory and making process. Another comment from the same article stated that in Finland the birds are preferred by elderly and they are very old fashioned.

Another reader (related to post about Harri Koskinen) claimed that they would prefer glass items if they were even made by the designer (quite many don't realize the difference between glass blowers and designers).

Since most of the bloggers who shared information about the company or their products had their text and pictures taken from the original web page, there was not that much of incorrect information. Unfortunately the ones who didn't (mostly foreign bloggers) had somewhat false information.

As mentioned bloggers like to share the information about upcoming discounts and events, some of the MyIittala (loyalty club) Finnish members

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didn't get the information about the mug decoration exhibition hold in Helsinki. For some reason some readers claimed that they had missed such events although they would be very interested in joining (they reasons can be poor advertising or then e-mail is not send to all loyalty club members).

#### 3.4.1 Dysfunctional items

Although glass is a fragile material, there were some complaints about clearly defective items. As mentioned Ote glasses were one of them (broke after washed in dishwasher) not only was the quality but also the size of the wine glass was criticized to be too small. There was a comment about Timo Sarpaneva's pot, which did not work as expected. The reader doubt there had been some product development which turned out to be hindrance for the product.

Since some of the glasses are more fragile it is important to know how to pack them in dishwasher, it's not necessarily about the quality of the glass.

Another commented that they bought one stainless steel item and it was leaking but they got two for replacement.

#### 3.5 Creative ideas

Bloggers share creative ideas in pictures and text. There are pictures of Christmas settings, decorations, ideas to use the products for multiple purposes which inspire the readers to purchase similar items. Such posts and pictures are free but valuable advertisement for the company. In Christmas time bloggers have made gift collections (for example with fab tool), most common gift ideas are Essence wine glasses, Vitriini cases, Kivi candle holders and Maribowls (they are preferred in red, clear and matt colors).

Every now and then there are blog challenges such as "make a post of all your Iittala products" or "comment my post about Iittala and win a price". Such challenges motivate people to write and comment and when published those posts spread fast. Finnish journalist Katja Presnal writes a blog called Skimbacolifestyle.com (2,577 Facebook likings) which is about decoration, cooking and travelling. She has worked in Finland and abroad with famous newspapers and TV channels. In one of her posts she shared the idea of DIY (do it yourself) project in which she made a candle tray of Iittala mugs, Aalto vases, drinking and wine glasses and candle holders. It is a good example of combination and multiple usages of the products. Another loyal collector introduces a fresh idea of making a Maribowl tower in the kitchen (in small kitchen shelf where there is space for only one bowl per shelf).

Iittala has fans around the world and since the brand and its history is not that familiar to them as it is to fins, some of the readers wish to find out more about the origin of the brand (meaning the story, seeing the factory and Iittala village).

Since there is discussion about high prices (and therefore some people can't be Iittala consumers) there are suggestions of combining Iittala with

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other brands (usually dishes are seen expensive because there has to be six to twelve items from the same series in order to create a matching setting). Iittala's production is highly admired but for example Röstrand has worked together with a fashion designer Filippa Knuttson, known for her Filippa K. brand, which Iittala has tried as well with Sarjaton.

Since there are multiple ways to use Iittala items not all of them are related to glass. Conditioner&Cook baked glass bird backings as a tribute for Oiva Toikka's 40-year-old career as a designer. Such ideas increase the brand visibility and create new ways to use the print (like kitchen towels, potholders or aprons).

The brand itself is responsible of marketing the events and discounts and pictures and opinions from previous events motivate readers to join.

## 4 QUESTIONNAIRE WITH BLOGGERS

### 4.1 Introduction to questionnaire

The bloggers who responded to the questionnaire had very clear vision what is going on in social media and therefore they were able to share their opinions and ideas well. The questions were freely asked in order to get as much out of the respondents as possible. Therefore, the questions are not put separate headings.

### 4.2 Questionnaire to volunteer blogger

Fiskars group has a dedicated volunteer fan cooperating with the brand, blog is part of indiedays (lifestyle/fashion portal which consists of 27 blogs at the moment but is about to renew soon) the portal was established in 2009 and has more than 300 000 readers weekly, which makes the most popular fashion community in Finland. The bloggers write about fashion, travelling, cooking and decoration (she was not sent the same questionnaire than other, she was asked to describe the cooperation with her own words, including advantages and disadvantage).

The blog partner is concentrated on cooking and decoration. She is a loyal Iittala customer and a volunteer cooperater (cooperation not related to blog bribing). Her posts attract fans and arouse conversation. Readers enjoy and get inspiration especially from her settings. There was discussion about the I-label stickers and (although some rip the stickers off) for consumers I-label presents domestic first quality and brings everlasting value for the products. Another advantage is that years after (when some of the series might no longer be in production) they are easy to identify and their resale value will increase. Her readers think that Iittala is everyday luxury and the consumers see and enjoy Iittala in different ways.

The author herself thinks that the cooperation (although she does not get products nor salary for it) has given so much and loves to share the beautiful items with her readers. As well as many other bloggers she shared the Iittala challenge.

Blogger herself thinks that Iittala has potential for growth in social media. As mentioned before, Finland is behind in social media marketing



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and companies don't really know how to take advantage of Facebook, Blogs and Youtube. Fab.com and Pinterest are very common tools in blogging world and although Iittala has launched a blog, they are using Pinterest and have their own webpage it seems that none of them are updated actively and there is not much for consumers to see. Iittala is exactly the kind of a company who should take advantage of such tools. There must be volunteers to share Iittala in social media and the company should appreciate that and those loyal customers and fans who have the power to help.

#### 4.2.1 Questionnaire to other bloggers

Finnish blogger (who is very enthusiastic Moomin mug collector) follows Iittala actively and wants to know how other consumers feel about their products. Apart from this, she shares news in her blog (and Twitter accounts), reads numerous blogs daily and is excited to get feedback about her own posts. Blogs have the potential to share the new products in very early stage (they are forerunners and therefore aware of the upcoming products and trends).

As many others she also found Sarjaton on a blog for the very first time and got familiar with the new series. Proper introduction with good pictures was a nice way to present it and she believes that without blogs it would have taken more time to notice the series.

As a passionate Moomin mug collector Fiskars home gave her a chance to introduce the new winter mug with special introduction text. She finds it important to tell the story behind the product and received good amount of readers with this post (there is still not a proper introduction in the official website). She thinks that the small cooperation was positive opportunity, readers found it useful and interesting. Personally she is happy with Iittala's official Facebook page and the fact that it's updated often. For an improvement there should be more pictures, information about upcoming events, discounts and a list of discontinued items. She prefers to use Facebook rather than the official webpage and thinks that the important news could be linked to Facebook as well (although she does not visit the official website she thinks it is good to be there for the ones who don't use Facebook). As a collector she is interested in the company history and the story behind the products (what inspired the designer, what kind of process was the designing, etc.)

Another respondent blogger (who mostly writes about design and decoration) is quite satisfied with Iittala's current situation in social media. She thinks that bloggers are more likely to write about Iittala than Iittala is to cooperate with the bloggers (not that much of blogger bribing going on). She thinks that the situation has positive and negative effects. Blog bribing has its own risks to turn into advertising (which definitely does not attract readers). Then on the other hand she wishes that bloggers would write more because blogging is a good way to get familiar with the latest news (which she is otherwise likely to miss). The importance of visibility in blogs is high because more and more people are using social media. She uses an example of Lion de Luxe cutlery, which she came across in a magazine, she states that she is definitely going to purchase them but

without this consequence she would have likely miss the whole series. As a conclusion she thinks that Iittala can be seen in social media but only with selected items. Personally she thinks that blogs can be good way to advertise (or at least to increase the visibility) if the blogs are well selected. The pictures and text have to be good in order to attract readers. She finds provoking blogs fake but then on the other hand they might be interesting for younger people (around their twenties). She says that her age groups (who have permanent work and more money to spend) are more attracted in personal ideas and pictures than direct marketing. At times she is surprised who many comments she can receive about one bag, piece of clothing or dish. Blogs are read the same way as magazines and readers have the possibility to ask where the items in the pictures were bought.

Another blogger and respondent says that she has not seen Iittala that much in social media but a lot in other media. When it comes to improvements she thinks that Iittala should pay attention to crowdsourcing when improving and testing the products. Personally, she does not find blogs the best way to advertise products because too direct marketing is annoying and readers are likely to avoid it. On the other hand, she sees potential in business blogs, which could give more information about company history, new products and their development. When it comes to direct marketing Facebook is better option than blogging.

For a very dedicated glass design fan Iittala is beautiful and bare. Iittala has wide range of dishes for different tastes. She is delighted that although Iittala is marketed abroad it is still known as a Finnish brand.

She thinks that Iittala is quite visible in social media and apart from that in domestic Television series as well. It is a good way to increase brand's visibility and show how widely Finnish design is preferred.

Personally she is very satisfied with the products and brand image. Iittala has successfully managed to emphasize the importance of design and produce clear and appreciated products. The design is so neutral that their items are suitable for many age groups.

Unlike the other respondents she has no experience with brand cooperation. Despite that she thinks that blogging is very topical and cooperation could attract more consumers for the company. Personally, she thinks that Internet is so full of adverts, so therefore blogging would be better way to market than for example banners. She thinks that the advantage is that bloggers and their readers talk honestly and openly about the products and their faults. She wishes that Iittala's visibility in blogs will continue in the future.

A respondent from a journal blog, which is a blog which is held by several people, says that since Iittala is one of the only still working Finnish glass works it should maintain its traditions better. The respondent is not well aware what is happening in social media but says that some of the key products (like Toikka birds and Moomin mugs) can be easily seen in social media. As an improvement, he wishes that the bloggers (who have given their e-mails to the company) would get more material from the company. Personally, he finds the picture bank too difficult to use and says that their blog has not received any material from the company.

As others have also said he believes that marketing via blogs has its own risks to get too commercial (bloggers own interest towards the company

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or product has to be seen). According to him, enthusiasm is better motivation than money. His own experience is based on journal blog in which advertisement and writings are remained separately (meaning that bloggers will not advertise anything in their posts). Although their blog does not have any cooperation with companies, he thinks that indirect marketing about exhibitions, sales or glass design related events can be done in blogs.

Lifestyle blogger (who mostly writes about fashion) thinks that Iittala could be more visible in media since it is a big part of Finnish design culture. She mostly runs into Iittala products in Television (as product placement in cooking and decoration series). Personally she thinks that Iittala can be seen well in Capital city area and especially in those stores which sell their items. She is happy that the company has products for different tastes and wishes to Television advertising in the future. When it comes to blogging as a marketing tool, she thinks that it's a good way to increase visibility but not necessarily to advertise some specific item. On the other hand blogs introduce wide range of different items which can encourage readers to try something new. Blogs can easily create good image about products but that doesn't mean that it could still be disappointment for some other consumer.

Blogger from one of the biggest decoration blogs in Finland says thinks that Iittala has established itself in Finnish design world and it is know to everyone. Their timeless design has attracted generations over the years but since the selling channels (international online stores) and supply have increased their position might not be guaranteed without massive marketing and new supply channels in social media. Visibility in social media is also a risk; since it can have a negative impact (company is not able to control in which content their products are seen).

Personally he they are fed up with Iittala's products, because it takes a long time to launch new products and they lack boldness. He admits that it is not easy to operate in such field but cooperating with new designers might give them opportunity to become known abroad.

Although the blog is well known and successful, despite the query for cooperation the respondent has not received reply from the company. He is surprised that the company is not willing to offer their products for such a big media what their decoration blog is. He states that the impact of blog marketing can be very big and profitable but finding right kind of blog(s) is challenging. On the other hand bloggers should be encouraged to bring out Iittala's products and get them more excited about the brand. Personally he thinks that products can be seen in a whole new way in blogs whereas catalogues and official websites might not inspire consumers. Marketing related strategic linings make such things complicated. As a conclusion he wishes more inspiring products, new experiences but yet clear linings in marketing.

### 4.3 Introduction to Pinterest

The observation proved that bloggers use Pinterest and there are at many links to Pinterest in different blogs. Since there are links to Pinterest it is important for companies to be active there.

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Pinterest is an online pin board where users can share pictures in pin board style for example planning wedding, decoration or birthday party. Pinterest was launched in 2010 and aims to connect people all around the world via beautiful pictures. Pinterest is free for everyone to use all that is required is to register to the service. The service enables to post pictures, text and comments. As in many other services Pinterest users are committed to follow the terms of policy and are not allowed to post insulting, forbidden or otherwise questionable material. Mashable has commented Pinterest with the following statement *"Expressing passion for a hobby is just as easy as browsing for your next purchase. But what's even more addictive about the site — a collection of collections — is that it's just as much about the users as it is what they've posted."*

#### 4.3.1 What can make company's Pinterest page successful

As mentioned being in social media is not enough, all the social media tools have to be constantly updated. Even two weeks break is forever in social media and consumers lost their interest very fast. Since Pinterest is more concentrated on pictures than for example Facebook or Twitter it gives the possibility for pictures to talk for the brand and only imagination is the limit.

Special education teacher Amy Larson is very familiar with Pinterest and uses it daily. According to her there are nine steps which can make individual's or company's Pinterest page interesting. She claims that there is marketing potential since the source of the pictures is always mentioned and the pictures spread rapidly (since they can be repined). The first thing when it comes to using Pinterest is to spend time for it (just being there can do more harm for the company image if it is not updated at all or rarely). It takes time for the users to get to know new brands and their products but once that limit is grossed they are more likely to spread the word on the Internet. The second thing is the appearance the CEO of wedding republic says that the Pinterest page needs to look elegant and attractive in order to interest people. She states that all the pictures contain a link to the original source which has increased the amount of visitors 75%. The third step is the connection between physical and online presence. Becca Bijoch from Creative Kidstuff says that it is important to connect the dots between location and Pinterest page. She said that in their case Pinterest has brought two direct sales within 30 days which is quite remarkable achievement (and with so easy and cheap way). The fourth step claims that the company should match Pinterest (for example Electricity Company might not be the one to use it), so basically what the company sells should match the style of Pinterest. The fifth step tells to use other social media tools for marketing Pinterest, it's the same thing with blogs if they are not advertised nobody knows about them and there will be no visitors. The sixth step can according to Sevenly bring more daily visitors and it's known as the theme of the day meaning that there should be a theme for each and every day. According to the seventh step it is important to promote not only the products but everything else what the company is known for. Giselle Gonzalez from Cakestyle (they make style suggestions for women) says that especially in their case they can

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share tips and interesting clothes from other companies. The eighth step is about following the big names in Pinterest. Usually the people you follow are likely to follow back which increases awareness and it gives good image of the company if other known companies are following it. The final step is known as selective curating (it is about differentiating the good from the bad); Presenza (custom clothing designing company) also promotes themselves with slogans like “made in USA” and “Defining confidence”. (John Brandon <http://www.inc.com/john-brandon/9-tips-boost-your-business-pinterest.html>)

#### 4.3.2 Iittala in Pinterest

As compared to big foreign companies Iittala is new in social media; their official Pinterest page has 78 pins, 0 likes and 838 followers. Lindt chocolate for comparison has 271 pins, 146 likes and 2,011 followers. Iittala is mostly sharing their new Sarjaton series on Pinterest and apart from that there is a link to Pinterest on their official web page. Although they have a pin to win competition there are only 13 pins.

#### 4.4 Fab.com

Another design oriented website which came across in observation is known as Fab.

The idea of fab is somewhat similar to Pinterest, the main difference is that it is known as e-commerce. In their own website fab is described to be every day fashion. It was launched in 2011 and has now more than 6 million users around the world. Fab shares inspiration with its visitors and also works as an online store (selling furniture, food, dishes, tea, etc.) Fab is constantly looking for business partners, designers or companies. Customers create their own accounts as in any other social media tool.

Fab also shares gift ideas for its customers and they also have seasonal sales. Fab is translated in English and German and works together with Twitter and Facebook. The product search does not find any Iittala products (meaning that they are not cooperating).

#### 4.5 Crowdsourcing

The idea of crowdsourcing was mentioned by one of the blogger questionnaire respondents. The term comes from words crowd and outsourcing. Crowdsourcing basically means content created by consumers (basically Internet users). It enables them to suggest ideas related to product development, testing or marketing. People who have taken part (or whose ideas have been used) will be rewarded with prizes. Disney is one example of successful crowdsourcing, they asked consumers to write about their best experiences in Disneyland. Winners stories were published (related their marketing) and as a reward they got visibility since their stories were published.

Company can also ask consumers to make an advert and share it on their Facebook page. This increases the amount of interaction between com-

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panies and consumers. It also shows that companies value the ideas and opinions which consumers have and usually gives very positive feeling for consumers.

Crowdsourcing has received attention in Finland and one of the most successful ideas is webpage called Avainklubi.fi. It consists of Finnish companies for whom registered users can suggest ideas. Known companies such as Nokia, Lumene, Valio and Nanso group are part of Avainklubi. All the members can see the ideas and it is suggested that anything what a person could use for their own purposes (business ideas) shouldn't be published.

Social media enables the groups to come together to share their ideas and the process consist of eight steps, starting from the problem which is then broadcasted online. After that consumers are asked to give solutions and submit them. Then the best ideas are decided and the company rewards the consumers behind those ideas. When the company owns the ideas it can profit from them.

#### 4.5.1 Disadvantages and advantages of crowdsourcing

Mirva Puurtinen introduced the basics of crowdsourcing (29.11.2010, knowledge management) and lists as well the challenges and advantages of it.

The advantages of crowdsourcing are that it can enable companies to create products which consumers desire, avoid the risks in product creation, it guarantees buyers for the products and it's cheap (consumers don't have to paid or then they will only be paid for succeeding). The outcome can be improved relationship between the company and its customers, increased company visibility and content created by consumers.

The challenges are the marketing of crowdsourcing, how to implement the wildest ideas, the cost- advantage relationship and lack of control.

## 5 COMPANY INTERVIEW

### 5.1 Introduction to the interview

Company interview was done as a comparison for the blogger questionnaire. Similar questions were asked from both sides in order to find out how well the consumer expectations meet the company values and aims. The interview was taken part by three company members who work as Iittala marketing manager, Customer Loyalty and Web Development manager and head of marketing & PR.

### 5.2 Interview with the respondents

The following questions were presented to the Iittala marketing manager;  
*Is visibility in social media important and why/why not?*

Visibility is important because social media is as valuable marketing channel than television, company webpage and store marketing. Social

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media enables the company to share so much more than traditional marketing, via social media Iittala can inform about for example upcoming events, exhibitions and activities and what is written about Iittala around the world. Social media also provides possibility to share more picture material.

*Is there a possibility to improve the visibility and how?*

Social media is mostly learning by doing, there is always something to improve but unfortunately there are no more resources at the moment. The aim is to attract more Facebook fans since there are not that many. Iittala official webpage was launched this autumn and Iittala Finland last spring (it has already more fans). The main difference is that Iittala Finland works in Finnish whereas Iittala official is for foreign fans and works in English. Iittala has own webpage also in the Netherlands and Sweden but the aim is not to launch a webpage for all the countries which sell Iittala items. Iittala is paying attention on bigger countries (meaning the countries with more customers). Apart from Facebook Iittala uses Pinterest and in the Netherlands they have Twitter account.

*Does Iittala cooperate with any blogs (is there any blog bribing)?*

Iittala is not cooperating with any blogs but Kioshed service enables bloggers to earn some money. Bloggers get paid if they share Iittala's items in their webpage and consumers end up buying something from store Iittala (the official web store). Kioshed enables bloggers to link the products in pictures directly to Iittala's web store. The service is completely free for its users.

*Could Iittala consider blog bribing in the future (question continued)?*

It is not likely to happen since it is hard to know which blogs are suitable for cooperation. On the other hand the company does not want to limit its visibility in only one blog. Iittala can get more advantage if there are many bloggers writing about them rather than only one.

*Why doesn't Iittala prefer Television advertising much?*

Iittala has had very less TV advertising since it is more suitable for daily consumer goods. Apart from this print (meaning newspapers and magazines) works better for Iittala products, it gives very high results. Print also works better in other marketing areas and the costs are lower than in Television advertising. Television advertising requires quite lot of effort in order to pay back. The lifetime of print is longer and therefore is more suitable for Iittala products. Apart from print the company does digital marketing.

*There is a business blog in MyIittala webpage, has it received popularity? (Answered by Customer Loyalty and Web Development manager)*

The website (in which the blog also operates) receives hundreds of visitors daily and the blog is one of the most famous pages monthly.

*(Question continued) is there anything to improve?*

Iittala is currently advancing their web services and there will be digital changes related to MyIittala as well. It is good to make changes since Iittala.com has also renewed. Our aim is to inspire and encourage our members to discuss and interact more.

Similar interview was hold with the head of marketing and PR;

*Do you think that visibility in social media is important and why?*

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It is important since the company has to be where the consumers are. The challenge with social media is that is renewing all the time and the resources might not be enough to change as rapidly as social media does. Another challenge is to find out how to be there and what are the ways to gain visibility for the brand

*How could visibility possibly be improved?*

At the moment it is quite unidirectional (from Iittala's side). It is important to share information about the events, exhibitions, etc. For the company is quite typical to be enabler by giving consumers create ideas and variable solutions to use the products. Iittala brings up different kind of themes and suggestions for gifts, decoration and settings from which consumers can get inspiration and possibly motivation to purchase. There are many ways to improve the interaction between the company and people in social media, there could for example be discussion between the brand and consumers.

*Could Iittala benefit from cooperation blogs?*

There is no reason why it couldn't be an option but again resources are needed. It is not easy to get into such cooperation and the biggest challenge is to avoid too artificial publications. But despite of that Iittala could consider it.

*Has Iittala tried crowdsourcing?*

Iittala has not really had any crowdsourcing in social media although there has been cooperation with for example museums. Therefore crowdsourcing is not completely new for Iittala. The main aim has been to increase the brands visibility not to increase sales. At the moment there are not enough resources for it since there will be technical renewal.

*Is Pinterest good method to market the brand and why?*

All these renewals in social media are so new for the company that it is hard to say whether it is good or not. No results can be seen yet. Although this kind of method can't really give any direct advantage at least it can increase the visibility. The good thing about Pinterest is that it is mainly about sharing pictures which is very suitable for Iittala. Apart from Pinterest there are many interesting new things in social media but in order to be active resources are needed. The challenge in them is also that they need to be actively updated. Such things in social media may work well in international markets but it is not the case in Finland.

*Is blogging related Kioshed service successful?*

Kioshed has been marketed to allocated groups not to everyone. The advantage is that the results can easily be measured since it is linked to the online store. As compared to Pinterest the results are a lot easier to find out. At this point of time it is good to try different options, some of them might work for Iittala and other won't. Although Pinterest also requires resources Iittala is going to continue with it.

### 5.3 Comparison between observation, questionnaire and interview

The observation showed that bloggers don't really discuss about Iittala's visibility, company itself or its history. The facts shared are mostly taken from sources which are provided by the company. Visibility in social media is important, because it is topical and it can reach masses of peo-



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ple. The users can increase brand visibility and even increase the sales (although there is hardly ever any direct proofs but for example Kioshed and well known bloggers posting about Iittala can make consumers purchase more). Maintaining and increasing the visibility are not easy, especially since Iittala is quite new in social media. It can also be said that it has its own challenges, for the company to take care of the visibility and for enthusiastic consumers (bloggers) to share Iittala's items without making it too fake. As the questionnaire showed direct marketing in blogs can make readers disappear. Although the company is not looking for cooperation blogs, there are bloggers (and most likely other social media users) who are willing to write about Iittala. Apart from the overall visibility, there is also a challenge to make consumers and the company to meet in order to encourage consumers to write about Iittala products. More importantly bloggers should rather give a personal touch to their posts instead of sharing writings and pictures taken from the webpage (it can even have negative impact). The company representative as well as the bloggers think that social media is a good way to inform about events, exhibitions, etc. Like the company representative said Television advertising is not suitable option for Iittala products, neither do the consumers (bloggers) ask for it.

## 6 SUGGESTIONS

The aim of the suggestions is to help the company to be more visible in social media. Suggestions consist of plan for blogger cooperation and ideas how to implement the business blog.

### 6.1 Plan for the blogger cooperation

Since there is interest in cooperation from both sides, the company and its customers should cooperate in social media. The whole process has to be done carefully and the following steps need to be followed;

1. Determine the aim and the way to measure the results (which can be to increase the company visibility in general, increase the amount of online store purchases, get more Facebook likings/fans or respect loyal customers by giving them a chance for cooperation).
2. Decide what are the demands from the blog (for example amount of readers, quality of pictures, good writing skills or technicalities)
3. Find potential blogs online, for example Indiedays, Blogilista.fi and Lily.fi list the most read blogs in Finland. After finding some good ones, it has to be decided how many cooperation partners are needed. Bloggers should be contacted personally by e-mail in order to suggest cooperation and if the blogger is interested in it then there should be a meeting related to it.

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Another alternative is to create competition on Facebook that Iittala is looking for cooperation blogs. Following things should be mentioned in the advertisement;

- When to apply (time period)
  - How to apply (send e-mail with introduction and link to the blog or post link to the blog on Facebook)
  - What are required from the blogger
  - What can the company offer to the blogger
  - How will the winner be announced (in general on Facebook and personally contacting the blogger)
4. Decide the content, whether the blogger is responsible of writing about the products (or just posting pictures), creating decoration ideas or write about upcoming events and exhibitions
  5. Create clear rules for the cooperation
    - Blogger reward (which can be money, company products or even access to company events)
    - How to measure the effectiveness (amount of readers, links to the company related websites or the amount of online purchases done via blog)
    - Who is the company contact person from whom to ask help if needed
    - How to take care of the technicalities and will the company help to make improvements
    - How much can the company affect on the style and content of the blog
    - How much or how many posts is the blogger responsible of making about the company
    - What languages are required (at least proper Finnish but English can attract foreign readers)

### 6.2 Plan for implementing the company blog

Although Finland is a little behind in business blogging, there are a couple of domestic businesses which have turned their blogs very successful. For comparison Nokia's business blog is a good example of a successful blog (it is available in four languages, there is contact information available, it is updated frequently and it is linked to Facebook, Twitter, Youtube and Bloglines).

In Iittala's case their business blog is in need of some changes. Since it is already established and MyIittala web page receives good amount of readers monthly it could be done even better. The following steps are improvement suggestions for the business blog;

1. Clear content is needed (if there is already cooperation going on with other blogger(s) the content should differ from them). Next list has some ideas about the content;
  - Decoration blog introducing Iittala's production
  - Cooking blog, introducing the advantages of Iittala's kitchen ware

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- Introduction to the company itself, its history, important designers and their designed items. It could be written by some glass expert who could even identify glass items (their production years, designers and names). It might turn out that there are some series which can be taken back to production
  - Introduction/tribute to designers, items, company or glassblowers on their anniversary
2. Technicalities are important in order to make the blog successful and attract readers. If the technicalities are taken care of the blog is a lot easier to find. The main things are listed below
- Blogs are ranked on search engines (more they are linked the better rankings they get).
  - There has to be possibility for open conversation, therefore readers have to be able to comment and read others comments (in some blogs the author can see the comments before they are published, it enables them to control the conversation)
  - The posts have to be chronological order and the older posts have to be available and easy to find.
  - There have to be links to other blogs, company website, online store and possible even their Pinterest page or anything related to Iittala itself
  - The blog should be written in Finnish and English (It could even be in Swedish)
  - Blog has to be updated frequently in order to maintain the readers interest in it
3. Active conversation, the amount of readers and links equals to success
4. Blog needs to have a strategy which goes hand in hand with the company's overall strategy. The following things need to be taken into consideration
- What is the aim of the blog
  - Who is going to write it and what is the advantage of the writer, it is important not to make too big work load for the writer
  - Where will the blog be published (under MyIittala, in its own webpage or somewhere else).
  - How to market the blog (in Facebook, other blogs, official website and even in their MyIittala newsletter)

## 7 CONCLUSION

Iittala is positively visible in more or less design oriented Finnish blogs. It is mostly seen in positive light and pictures talk for the brand. Therefore being visible in blogs is suitable for company like Iittala and there seems to be quite small risk getting negative feedback. Iittala's items are pretty much seen as timeless, easy to compare and simple but beautiful as Iittala also describes itself. As the company wants to encourage and give

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consumers chance to get inspired by their well design items bloggers seem to be doing that and inspiring their readers. On the other hand bloggers don't seem to know much about the company itself nor its history (or then it just not found interesting).

Although companies are a little behind in business blogging and cooperation with bloggers, some Finnish bloggers seem to be aware what is going on in social media, what are the latest trends and apart from that their blogs have hundreds (or even thousands) of readers. The most popular blogs receive comments and their readers admire their imagination and inspiring ideas. Apart from those facts there seems to be cooperation (or at least posts, pictures and introductions) about other Finnish and foreign brands.

Although the thesis was made based on blogging, it showed that blogs are related to many other tools in social media; bloggers can be followed in Facebook and Twitter and they get inspired in Pinterest and Fab (therefore Fab and Pinterest are also introduced in the thesis). Since social media in Finland is quite new for companies, there is a lot to try. Some of the applications which social media provides might not be suitable but every update increases visibility. Pinterest, Fab and crowdsourcing are potential but they need time and effort in order to turn out successful.

There seem to be interest from both the sides (company and bloggers) to work together for the brand but the questionnaire showed that it hasn't happened yet.

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Appendix 1

## BLOGGER QUESTIONNAIRE IN FINNISH

Hei,

Teen opinnäytetyötä sosiaalisesta mediasta (toimeksiantajani on Iittala) ja osana sitä teen tutkimusta kuluttajien mielipiteistä Iittalasta ja sen tuotteista.

Tutkimusta tehdessäni löysin blogisi ja haluaisin esittää muuttaman kysymyksen:

Mitä mieltä olet Iittalasta ja sen näkyvyydestä sosiaalisessa mediassa?

Mitä Iittala voisi tehdä paremmin?

Onko bloggaaminen mielestäsi hyvä tapa mainostaa brandia/tuotetta?

Olisin todella kiitollinen mikäli pystyt vastaamaan näihin kysymyksiin edes muutamalla sanalla, kiitos jo etukäteen!

Ystävällisin terveisin

Noora Niemistö

Appendix 2

## BLOGGER QUESTIONNAIRE IN ENGLISH

Hello,

I am doing an observation for my final thesis (commissioner Iittala). The observation is about what people think about the brand and its products.

I came across your blog and noticed that you have written about Iittala. I would like to ask you couple of questions.

1. What do you think about Iittala and its visibility on social media?
2. What kind of improvements do you want?
3. Do you think that blogging is an effective way to advertise brands/products?

I would appreciate if you could even somehow answer to these questions!

Thank you in advance!

Best regards

Noora Niemistö

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Appendix 3

INTERVIEW WITH THE HEAD OF MARKETING AND PR  
IN FINNISH

1. Onko mielestäsi näkyvyys sosiaalisessa mediassa Iittalalle tärkeää ja miksi
2. Miten sitä voisi mahdollisesti parantaa?
3. Voisiko yhteistyöblogeista olla hyötyä?
4. Onko Iittalalla ollut crowdsourcingia tai voisiko siitä olla hyötyä
5. Onko Pinterest hyvä tapa mainostaa Iittalaa ja miksi?
6. Onko Kioshed palvelu ollut suosittu?

IN ENGLISH

1. Do you think that visibility in social media is important and why?
2. How could visibility possibly be improved?
3. Could Iittala benefit from cooperation blogs?
4. Has Iittala tried crowdsourcing?
5. Is Pinterest good method to market the brand and why?
6. Is blogging related Kioshed service successful?

Appendix 4

INTERVIEW WITH THE IITTALA MARKETING MANAGER  
IN FINNISH

1. Onko näkyvyys sosiaalisessa mediassa Iittalalle tärkeää ja miksi?
2. Voisiko sitä parantaa ja miten?
3. Onko Iittalalla yhteistyö blogeja (blogilahjontaa)?  
→ Jos on onko niistä minkäänlaista hyötyä (mitä)?  
→ Jos ei, voisitteko harkita sitä jatkossa?
4. Miksi Iittalalla on todella vähän tv-mainontaa?



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IN ENGLISH

1. Is visibility in social media important and why/why not?
2. Is there a possibility to improve the visibility and how?
3. Does Iittala cooperate with any blogs (is there any blog bribing)?
4. Could Iittala consider blog bribing in the future (question continued)?
6. Why doesn't Iittala prefer Television advertising much?

Appendix 5

QUESTION ANSWERED BY THE CUSTOMER LOYALTY AND WEB DEVELOPMENT MANAGER  
IN FINNISH

1. MyIittalan sivulta löytyy Iittalan oma blogi, onko se saavuttanut suosiota?  
→ Onko siinä jotain parannettavaa?

IN ENGLISH

- There is a business blog in MyIittala webpage, has it received popularity?  
→ Is there anything to improve?

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