

**The perspective of potential corporate
customers on marketing content of an
Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP)
system**

Case: Company X

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Abstract <p>As the world is continuously shifting onwards in technological context, companies have to update their operations constantly. Content marketing is no exception. Companies are required to provide captivating marketing content for target audiences in order to reach competitive advantage.</p> <p>The objective of the research was to gain insights about what marketing content potential customers perceive interesting in Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) systems, and to provide those insights for the assigning company with the intention of improving their marketing content. The research approach was quantitative, and the primary data was collected through phone calls and an online survey. The research was conducted in B2B environment. In total there were 91 respondents from different demographics, which in this context are three company industries, company sizes in terms of annual revenue, and respondents age groups.</p> <p>The results revealed that user friendliness and an overall usability of the product is important and should be highlighted in marketing content. Informed by the findings, the author created multiple content marketing suggestions for the case company. Furthermore, minor differences were discovered between the company industries.</p> <p>Recommendations for improving marketing content based on the results of the research were provided for the case company, along with suggestions for further research and development of the topic. These include conducting an in-depth qualitative study in order to develop a complete understanding of attractive marketing content about Enterprise Resource Planning systems.</p>		
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<p>Tiivistelmä</p> <p>Teknologian kasvun myötä yritysten on päivitettävä toimintaansa jatkuvasti. Tämä vaikuttaa myös sisältömarkkinointiin. Yritysten on tarjottava kiinnostavaa markkinoinnin sisältöä kohdeyleisöille saavuttaakseen mahdollisen etumatkan kilpailijoihin.</p> <p>Tutkimuksen tavoitteena oli selvittää potentiaalisten yritysasiakkaiden näkökulmia liittyen toiminnanohjausjärjestelmien markkinoinnin kiinnostavuuteen. Näitä näkökulmia tarjottiin toimeksiantajalle markkinoinnin sisällön parantamiseksi. Vastauksia lähdettiin etsimään kvantitatiivisen tutkimuksen avulla puheluiden sekä internetkyselyn muodossa. Vastaajina oli 91 eri väestöryhmän edustajaa, jotka tämän tutkimuksen kontekstissa ovat yritysten kolme eri alaa, yritysten eri koot vuotuisen liikevaihdon perusteella, sekä vastaajien ikäryhmät.</p> <p>Tulokset paljastivat, että toiminnanohjausjärjestelmän käyttäjäystävällisyys sekä yleinen käytettävyys ovat tärkeässä roolissa ja niitä tulisi korostaa markkinoinnin sisällössä. Havaintojen perusteella luotiin useita ehdotuksia toimeksiantajalle liittyen sisältömarkkinointiin. Lisäksi pieniä eroja toimialojen välillä ilmaantui tuloksia tarkastellessa.</p> <p>Johtopäätöksenä toimeksiantajalle esitettiin suosituksia markkinoinnin sisällön parantamiseksi tutkimuksen tulosten perusteella, samoin kuin ehdotuksia vastaavan aiheen jatko-tutkimuksiin ja kehittämiseen. Tulevat tutkimukset aiheesta voisivat keskittyä kokonaisvaltaiseen ja syvälliseen laadulliseen tutkimukseen, jotta saadaan kattava käsitys potentiaalisten yritysasiakkaiden näkökulmista toiminnanohjausjärjestelmien markkinoinnin parantamiseen.</p>		
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1 Introduction

1.1 Background

The world is moving onwards in the digital context day by day, and there are countless numbers of content available online for audiences to consume. However, the internet is not only a platform for entertainment and information, but also a viable platform for businesses to operate, interact and communicate. In consequence, it is hard to think of a large-scale company that is not utilizing the multidimensionality of digital marketing. According to Jackson and Ahuja (2016), people spend considerably more time online nowadays than they used to, which fortifies the fact that companies must use the benefits online platforms provide. There are countless numbers of advantages when companies utilize business possibilities online, but to name a few, companies are globally accessible 24 hours daily and 7 days a week, client service is improved dramatically, and not to mention financial savings (Benefits of doing business online, 2010). Digital marketing is one of the most pivotal matters modern companies have to consider in their strategy, and its significance is ascending continuously.

Since content is one of the corner stones in digital marketing, businesses have to create captivating content in order to differentiate from competition. Content marketing as such has existed for years, as companies have created and distributed content for many years in order to retain existing customers while attracting new ones. How content differs from traditional means of marketing, is explained by Lieb (2012), that the usage of content for selling is described as advertising, whereas content marketing is more of a pull strategy, where the customer seeks out the business. Lieb also found, that when customers and prospects decide to reach out to a company or a business by themselves, that creates a pool of advantages. Moreover, Lieb explains that clients are involved and receptive towards the service, experience or a range of products.

The assignor of this thesis was a Finnish company, who requested not to be mentioned by name over the course of this study, hereafter referred to as 'company X'. The company X is a domestic supplier of an Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system and automation. Their ERP system is aimed at companies in the industry of building technology, industrial, and construction, which will be explained further in this study. The company has a good national visibility and clientele in Finland, however their intention is to improve the marketing content their customers and prospects perceive. Therefore, the marketing representatives decided to take action towards improvement. The aim of this thesis was to gather data from the company's potential customers about their preferences of interesting marketing content of ERP-systems, in order to produce captivating content for prospects.

Since company X operates in B2B (business-to-business) context, this thesis focuses more on the nature of B2B business environment and the challenges regarding. B2B companies are defined as companies who acquire equipment or products, which are then used for creating equipment or products to sell to consumers (Kotler et al., 2017). Moreover, B2B companies acquire from, or sell to other companies.

This research was implemented with the purpose of collecting and examining data acquired from the respondents of the survey introduced later in this study. The data was gathered so that that the author will get a better understanding of what content the potential customers of company X finds interesting. The company X will utilize the information acquired from this study to enhance their content marketing.

1.2 Motivation for the research

The motivation for the topic got its initiative from the marketing department of the company X. Although they are active in terms of marketing, the representatives saw the need for improvement, since their potential customer base is relatively large, and not all prospects are reached with the desired outcome. The marketing representatives have been reflecting on which digital activities would work for them the best, and what content would the majority consider interesting. For example, the

company would like to learn, which social media platform would reach the most prospects, and how to create captivating social media content for companies of different caliber in terms of annual revenue. In conclusion, they have realized that in order to distinguish themselves from the competition and acquire more customers, the importance of content marketing shall not be overseen.

As for the author, the topic of this research is on the verge of his competences and interests in the professional environment. The opportunity to improve and influence B2B company's marketing behavior was greatly appreciated by the author, in terms of what he already knows and what will be learned throughout the process. B2B aspect of the study enhanced the curiosity of the author towards the project, and motivated to understand more about the possibilities B2B companies have in the opportunistic environment created by digitalization. Not to mention the multidimensionality of marketing, the company X granted the author with relatively large frame when conducting the study and questionnaire, excluding a number of questions they requested to be involved, and the method the data would be collected.

1.3 Research approach and structure of the thesis

In this study, the research problem is stated in the following way: "Improving marketing content for an Enterprise Resource Planning system". The thesis is completed to better understand the assigning company's potential customers perceptions in ERP system's marketing content. This research is conducted in B2B context, which means that the surveyed customers are companies from three different industries with different annual turnovers. The industries are building technology, industrial and construction and they are from six different size groups. Based on the research results the assigning company is able to improve their marketing content. This research aims to answer to the following research question:

- What marketing content potential customers perceive interesting in Enterprise Resource Planning systems?

The research objective is to understand better what content potential customers of the assigning company perceive interesting in order to generate more leads. The assigning company has requested to stay anonymous in this research, which is why the official name is not mentioned.

The research approach is conducted by quantitative methods. According to Kothari (2004), quantitative research is based on the measurement of quantity or amount. Kothari adds that it is applicable to phenomena that can be expressed in terms of quantity. The primary data will be collected by creating an internet survey. The potential customers are mainly surveyed via phone calls and additionally the link to the survey is send to their email addresses incase not reached by phone calls. The individuals to whom the survey is addressed to, are company CEOs and entrepreneurs. The survey will be fulfilled during the discussion by the interviewee. The assigning company's vision of reaching potential customers more efficiently by phone calls is the main reason this data collection method is used.

Structure of the thesis

The thesis contains five chapters. First is introduction, which includes background, motivation for the research, research approach and structure of the thesis. Second chapter is literature review, which includes important concepts concerning the theoretical aspects of the study. Third chapter of the thesis is methodology, which introduces the research approach, research context, data collection and analysis methods of the research. Eventually, methodology chapter comprises verification of results. The fourth chapter consists of the research results collected for the study. Finally, the last and fifth chapter of the thesis is discussion, where the findings are discussed with the intention of defining the answer to the research question.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Enterprise Resource Planning systems

Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) systems are software devices utilized to administer enterprise data (Sumner, 2005). As operating systems for businesses, they support the essential business functions extending from sales to accounting, buying over production, cost management and human resource management, however the systems are not capable of covering the whole information technology environment and satisfy every requirement by individuals (Themistocleous et al., 2005). An ERP system provides a database for the company to enter, monitor, process and report transactions (Sumner, 2005). The purpose of ERP systems is to enhance the effectiveness of a company in functional and financial means, and a common database enables information transparency through the organization, since all functions utilize the same up-to-date information (Toiminnanohjausjärjestelmä [Enterprise Resource Planning system], 2020).

Implementing an Enterprise Resource Planning system can bring multiple direct and indirect advantages, as seen from figure 1. The direct advantages consist of improved productivity, information incorporation for improved decision making and quicker response time to customer inquiries. The indirect benefits include an improved corporate image, customer goodwill and customer satisfaction among other things. (Parthasarathy, 2007) According to Sumner (2005), an important feature in ERP systems is information integration throughout the supply chain, resulting cost and inventory reductions and improved operating performance. Also ERP systems offer advantages in terms of flexibility within the business functions. ERP systems can cover different languages, currencies and accounting standards, as well as utilization of the latest improvements in Information Technology (Parthasarathy, 2007).



Figure 1. Functions of ERP Systems (Parthasarathy, 2007)

However, despite the several advantages ERP systems offer, they come with limitations. Their extent is usually restricted to a single enterprise, their usability in terms of speed can vary, and they often are transaction-based rather than intelligence-based, which means they fail to encapsulate the complexity needed in cases where various courses of action are accessible (Parthasarathy, 2007). ERP systems require long implementation periods, which is not ideal in evolving business environments, and they do not provide business insights into potential, forthcoming courses of action (Azevedo et al., 2012). According to Parthasarathy (2007), ERP systems are inflexible in a sense, that they are incapable of redesigning and reorganizing complex and sophisticated workflows as business challenges and opportunities arise. ERP systems projects include significant amount of time and cost, and it might require time to realize the benefits of the system (Sumner 2005). Additionally, according to Azevedo et al. (2012), ERP systems are criticized due to its hierarchical rigidity and centralizing control. The authors add that Enterprise Resource Planning systems presume that information should be administered centrally and that organizations have well specified hierarchical structures.

2.2 Digital marketing

Digital marketing can simply be defined as reaching marketing objectives by utilizing data, technology and digital media (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019). According to Todor (2016), alternative terms for digital marketing are frequently online marketing, internet marketing or web marketing. Practically, digital marketing aims to manage different forms of online presence of a company, such as websites, mobile apps and social media, which are integrated with online communication methods, such as search engine marketing, email marketing, online advertisement and social media marketing (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019). The main target of digital marketing is to stimulate brands, form and shape preference, and increase sales through digital marketing techniques (Todor, 2016). Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2019) points out, that digital marketing includes a great variety of audience interactions, not simply websites. They believe there are five Ds outlining the opportunities for interactions between businesses and customers, which are:

- *Digital devices*, which includes audiences interacting with businesses utilizing multiple devices, for example smartphones, laptops and gaming tools;
- *Digital platforms*, such as Facebook, Instagram and Google among other major platforms and online services;
- *Digital media*, which incorporates communication channels for audience engagement, e.g., advertising, email and messaging, search engines and social networks;
- *Digital data* is all the information collected from user profiles and their communications with businesses; and
- *Digital technology*, which is used for businesses to generate captivating experiences in several entities varying from mobile apps and websites to email campaigns and texts. (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019)

Digital marketing creates more dimensions for reaching and targeting audiences compared to traditional marketing. Digital marketing provides a foundation for the marketer to reach clientele regardless of the location, gender, age and so on. Additionally, reaching audiences globally is cost efficient with the help of internet, not to mention the share feature, which allows users to communicate messages by themselves. (Cave, 2016) Digital marketing helps to convert buyers into loyal fans, who will consume more and often due to their relationship with the supplier (Henneberry, 2019). Moreover, the digital environment enables an interactive platform with audiences and companies to communicate with the help of social media networks. Digital marketing methods also facilitate recording data and results, which allows creating more personalized content for audiences and monitor what is working efficiently and what is not. (Cave, 2016)

B2B Digital marketing

Business to business (B2B) marketing slightly differs from traditional business to customer (B2C) marketing. According to Charlesworth (2014), there are two significant matters in B2B marketing; the way B2B customers act in a decision-making process and the actual purchase scenario which differs from B2C, as well as the range of products is different, since the variety of products purchased by a company creates an environment for the marketer to prepare and adapt their online selling to match various product lines. The advantages of B2B commerce are mainly about pinpointing products in electronic sources and catalogues from a large supplier selection, choosing the most suitable option and then by electronic means controlling matters concerning administration and workflow (Chaffey & Smith, 2008). Kingsnorth (2019) states, that in B2B environment companies are often seen as suppliers rather than brands from the customers point of view, which has its influences on the relationship. He believes that the aim of B2B marketing should be directed to customer relationship management, content and interaction rather than traditional marketing and advertising. Nevertheless, it is important for customers to find information and online presence of a company (Kingsnorth, 2019). According to Karjaluoto et al., (2015), information sharing online has caused consumers to trust other consumers

more than organizations, which has created challenges for marketing professionals to overcome.

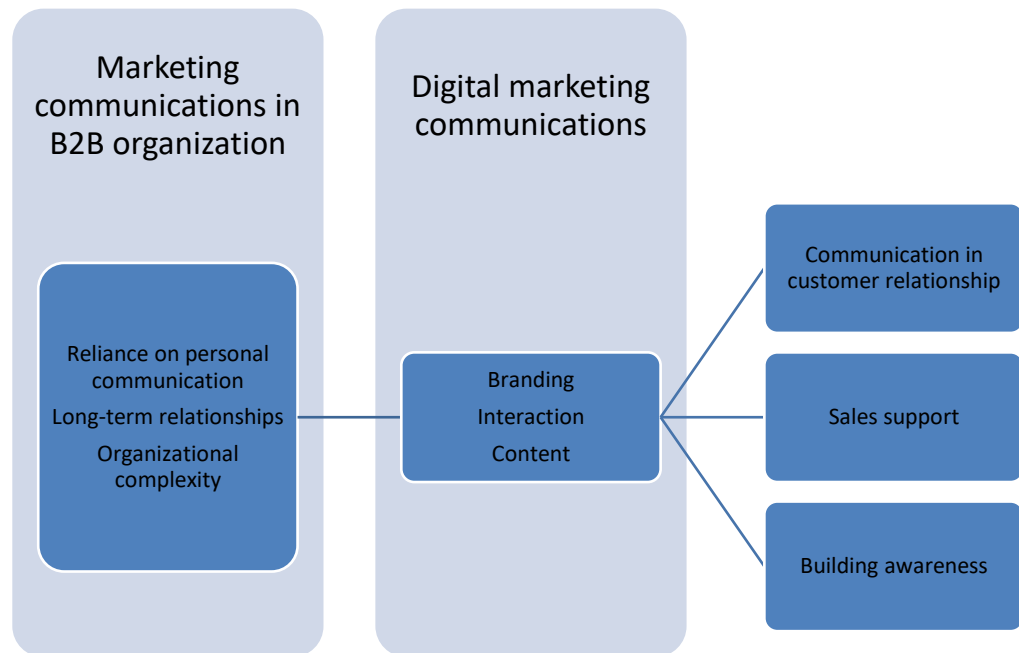


Figure 2. Digital marketing communications in B2B marketing context (Karjaluoto et al., 2015)

2.3 Content marketing

The traditional means of marketing communication, such as large email campaigns and cold calling to unexpected customers have started to lose their standing. Instead, companies aim to create content where the needs of customers who search information and experiences through various social media channels and search engines are met. Content marketing is a marketing method, which creates and delivers content for selected target audience through different marketing channels (Steimle, 2014). The trend where companies succeed to create such online content which persuades the customer to reach out to the company is called inbound marketing. Inbound marketing encourages brands to maintain customers as the main priority before launching a purchase setup and also provokes greater levels of trust from customers who are seeking it out (Holliman & Rowley, 2014).

In order for inbound marketing being effective, a cautious targeting of the audience and excellent communication with it is essential (Patruti-Baltes, 2016). According to Holliman and Rowley (2014), content portrays a crucial role in inbound marketing, hence it is important to understand how content can be utilized in marketing and engaging customers when developing an efficient inbound marketing strategy. They also found that it is more important to meet the expectations of the wanted customer, rather than focusing completely on comprehensive product information.

According to Wang et al., (2017), Holliman and Rowley (2014) agree that B2B content marketing can be defined as producing, distributing and sharing relevant, captivating and timely content to involve customers at the suitable stage in their buying processes in such way that it inspires them to convert to development of businesses. Studies have shown, that especially B2B marketing professionals are focusing on creating content affiliated to the buying process, however many businesses fail to fulfill every cycle of the buying process in terms of establishing content (What is content marketing? 2019). According to Shewan (2020), B2B content marketing should be in balance in three different fields, which are useful, engaging and high quality. B2B marketers have determined three main objectives of content marketing: brand awareness, lead generation and thought leadership (Content Marketing: Ready for Prime Time, 2012). For example, videos and digital presentation materials are able to contribute distinctly to successful sales tasks by visually displaying and simplifying complicated B2B products, which results from efficient digital content in support of achieving sales objectives (Karjaluo et al., 2015).

Additionally, when marketing professionals create content for individuals to view, brands may have established a tone of voice of their content. The term is commercially explained to refer to the different styles of language which a company uses to express their values, and it can be the differentiating factor against competitors (Delin, 2007). Tone of voice defines how brands interact with customers and consumers, influencing how the messaging is perceived (Verbina, 2019). Cook (2002) agrees, that difference in tone of voice enhances the word perception of a message. Tone of voice represents how a brand wants to interact their personality and values to audiences, by organizing and arranging the wording accordingly. However, tone of voice

may vary occasionally, depending on the audience being communicated with, the channels used for delivering the message, and the goal pursued and communicated. (Verbina, 2019) Delin (2007) concludes, that tone of voice intends to engage audiences with various messages.

2.4 Business buyer behavior

Business buyers often encounter more complicated purchasing decisions than consumer buyers. Business acquisitions often involve considerable amounts of money, complex technical and economic concerns, and interactions with people at many levels of the buyer's organization. (Kotler et al., 2017) According to Leake et al. (2012), business decisions in the B2B environment are typically made by small-to-medium-sized groups, rather than by a solo decider, which is often considered more B2C centric. They add that the size of these groups can vary, although the average is from six to seven people. They also found that the decision-making committee consist of people who know how to use the product and those who will from seldom to never interact with it. The users and the nonusers usually have equal weight in the outcome, but in some cases the users with less interaction with the product actually are the decision makers (Leake et al., 2012).

Inside the organization, buying activity comprises of two key parts: the buying centre, which consists of the people involved in the buying decision making mentioned above, and the buying decision process. The figure 3. below indicates that the buying centre and the buying decision process are inspired by core organization, interpersonal and individual aspects along with external environmental issues. (Kotler et al., 2017) Representatives of the buying center are driven by a complicated interaction of individual and organizational objectives, and their collective relationship involve all the difficulties of interpersonal interactions (Webster & Wind, 1972).

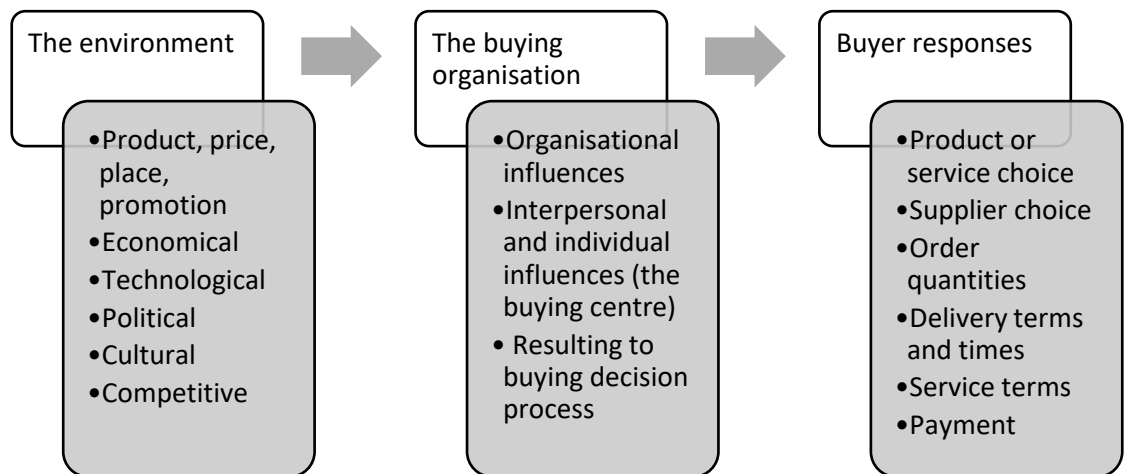


Figure 3. A model of business buying behavior (Kotler et al., 2017)

2.5 Business buying decision making process

The buying process in B2B environment differs extremely from B2C transactions (Charlesworth, 2014). Organizational buying is a decision-making activity carried out by individuals, in collaboration with additional individuals in the context of official organization (Webster & Wind, 1972). Organizational factors affect individual decision-makers to act in a different way in relation to functioning alone or in another organization (Diba et al., 2019). The buying process begins when a problem or a need is identified within a company that could be met by obtaining a particular product or service (Kotler et al., 2017). As a result of the characteristics of business products and services, some parts of the purchase process turn out to be more complicated, important or different compared to purchasing goods (Van der Valk & Rozemeijer, 2009). Therefore, the buying process and its related tasks within B2B organization are influenced and conducted in a different manner compared to purchasing goods (Diba et al., 2019). Services are difficult to assess prior to the purchase, which complicates selecting the right provider. Services are hard to quantify in terms of cost and thus challenging to price, thereby making it difficult to realize the value gained from

the acquisition in relation to the purchasing price. From the supplier's standpoint, a detailed insight of the customer's business processes is required in order to be able to recommend the correct service solution. (Van der Valk & Rozemeijer, 2009) Diba et al. (2019) argue that there are three main elements shaping the business buying decision process, which are the specific tasks at every phase of the process, the roles of the individuals participating in the process, and finally the type of decision-making implemented by these individuals within their organizations.

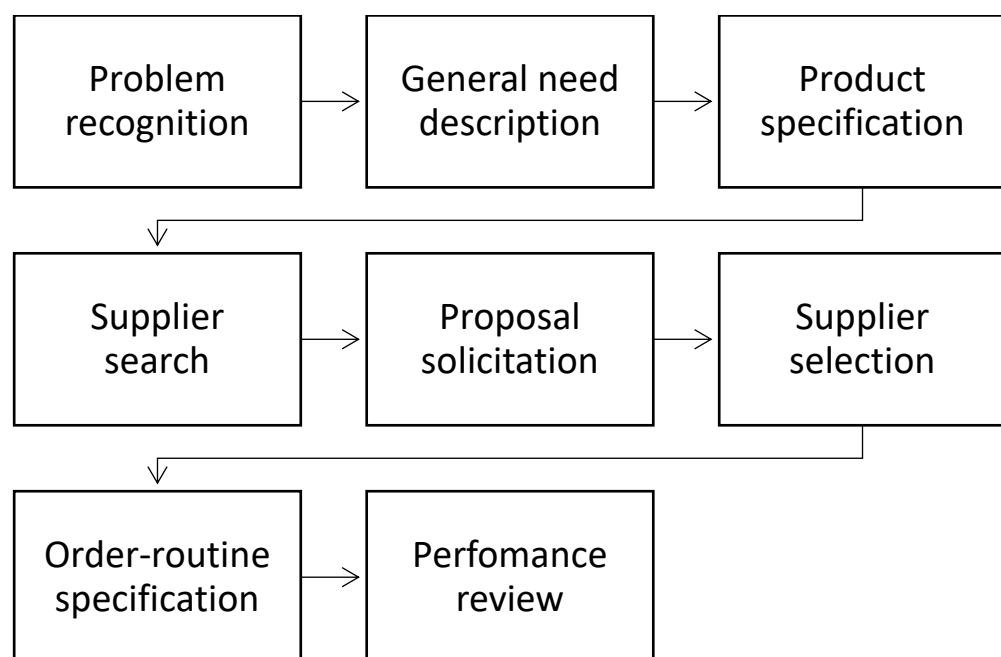


Figure 4. The business buying process (Kotler et al., 2017)

The first stage of the process displayed in the figure. 4 above, is problem recognition. Problem recognition can result from an internal or external incentive. Whether the incentive is recognized internally, the company has made the decision to start the buying process. Externally, the incentive comes from outside the company. According to Kotler et al. (2017), the second step is preparing a general need description, which describes the qualities and amount of the item required. Having the general need description prepared, the next stage is to conduct a product value analysis, which is

used to minimize the costs by studying components etc. in order to see whether they can be made for instance less costly methods. Supplier search is conducted with the intention of finding the most suitable supplier. The proposal solicitation is the phase of the business buying process where all the qualified suppliers are compared and invited to showcase offers. Supplier selection is made when the most suitable supplier is discovered and selected. (Kotler et al., 2017) However, according to Holliman and Rowley (2014), Adamson et al. (2012) have stated that B2B customers have usually completed 60% of a purchase decision prior to any conversation with the supplier. Second to last, order-routine specification is the stage of the buying process where the details are discussed with the chosen supplier. Finally, performance review is where the buyer evaluates the performance of the supplier. (Kotler et al., 2017)

3 Methodology

Methodology chapter contains more in depth and detailed information about the research, and what will be done in order to answer the research question. The objective of the research is to better understand what content potential customers of the assigning company perceive interesting in order to generate more leads. The research question for this study is *“What marketing content potential customers perceive interesting in Enterprise Resource Planning systems?”*

3.1 Research approach

There are two main fields of research frequently observed in the literature, which are quantitative research and qualitative research (Adams et al., 2014). This thesis is implemented using quantitative methods. The terms quantitative and qualitative are used extensively in business and management research to distinguish both data collection techniques and data analysis methods. One way of differentiating between the two is the focus on numeric such as numbers, or non-numeric, such as words. Quantitative is primarily used as a synonym for any data collection technique (for instance questionnaire) or data analysis procedure (such as graphs or statistics) that

generates or uses numerical data (Saunders et al., 2008). Quantitative data is usually represented by a set of numbers whilst qualitative data is represented in words, ideas, and thoughts (Clippinger, 2018). According to Clippinger (2018), both qualitative and quantitative should be interpreted logically by understanding two basic rules of logic: induction for qualitative studies and deduction for quantitative. The direction is from theory to practice (deduction) when in qualitative studies it is from practice to theory (induction), which aims to understand a phenomenon (Kananen, 2010).

Starting points of the research between the two methods are different, because quantitative research requires theory and preliminary understanding of the phenomenon. The factors or variables of the phenomenon and the relationships between them must be known in order to be measured with quantitative methods (Kananen, 2010). According to Kothari (2004), quantitative approach involves the generation of data in quantitative structure which can be analyzed in a formal and rigid fashion whereas qualitative approach focuses assessing attitudes, opinions and behavior.

Quantitative approach is set to answer research questions: What? How much? and qualitative approach answers questions: How? Why? (Kananen, 2010). This defines the nature of this study as quantitative, since the research question is *“What marketing content potential customers perceive interesting in Enterprise Resource Planning systems?”*. Quantitative approach should answer to What? – type or research question. Figure 5. below displays the processes of quantitative research.

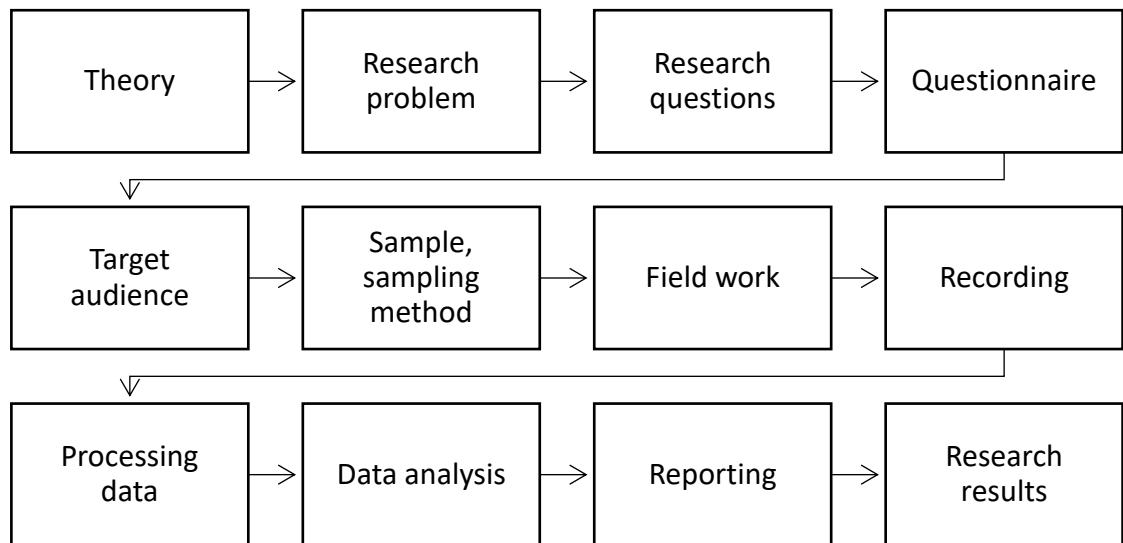


Figure 5. Processes of quantitative research (Kananen, 2010)

3.2 Research context

The context for this study was granted by a company that hopes to remain anonymous in this study. The company in question is referred as company X within this study. The company X has an Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system developed for the needs of building technology, industrial, and construction companies operating in business to business (B2B) context. Building technology implies to the technical processes and methods used in constructing buildings (Designing buildings, 2021), the industrial line of business refers to companies producing capital goods used in construction and manufacturing (Investopedia, 2020) and construction companies are building the end products.

Their processes revolve around the ERP system, and the aim of the ERP system is to reduce the amount of routine work using automatism and to help businesses focus on productive work while staying up to date on business finances. The company X's ERP system is browser based, which integrates company operations and financial

management seamlessly. The overall system therefore covers everything from offer calculation to accounting and from worksite or production to office.

Company X wanted to improve the marketing of their ERP system in order to generate more leads and gain more clients. This research was conducted for potential customers in Finland in all three above mentioned industries the company had in their database. The company X approached the author with the research problem and the research question was agreed upon together with the author and the representatives of the case company.

3.3 Data collection

Like in every research, quantitative study requires a research problem, and research questions derived from the research problem (Kananen, 2010). This research is implemented using quantitative methods, because that way the research question will be better answered. The data is collected by creating an internet survey. In quantitative studies, data collection methods are primary data collection and secondary data collection. Secondary data collection includes reanalyzing data previously used for some other purpose, whereas primary data is new for a specific purpose. (Saunders et al., 2008) Primary data is used in this study.

Surveys are extremely useful when obtaining information, and they give us precise estimates of important population factors. Surveys let us to collect information swiftly and with low financial costs (Weathington et al., 2012). Because each person (respondent) is requested to respond to the same set of questions, it provides an effective way of collecting responses from a large sample (Saunders et al., 2008). For this study, the survey was created using Webropol as a tool. As it was assumed in advance that for this research an appropriate sample size is hard to obtain by email only, the assigning company desired that most of the data would be gathered via phone calls in order to reach an appropriate sample size in a reasonable time period. However, an email will be sent for those whose email is in the list the company X provided the author with. For those to whom the survey will be sent via email, won't

be reached by phone in order to avoid double answers. According to Kananen (2010), method abundance does not guarantee good results if the methods are not justified. In this study, both of the methods used for data collection are necessary.

The company provided the author with 606 contacts in total and 314 had their email addresses available. There was relatively similar number of contacts in every industry covered in this study, which are building technology, industrial and construction. An email with a cover letter and a link to the survey was sent to all the email addresses available, which generated 40 answers. While the survey link was open for answering, the author contacted remaining contacts via phone calls. If reached, the author surveyed the respondent via phone and filled the survey form based on the answers gotten. Answers via phone calls were gathered in total of 51.

The company this study was aimed for, operates in Finnish markets which is the reason the survey was conducted in Finnish. The survey is constructed mainly from closed-response questions. However, at the request of the company there is a few open-ended questions in order for the respondents to use their own words. Closed-response question requires the respondent to select a predetermined response whereas open-ended question is for the respondent to create the answer by themselves. According to Weathington et al. (2012) open-ended questions allow complex and useful data collection that close-response format is incapable of doing. However, they add that the problem with open-ended questions is that respondents tend to provide short or vague answers and written responses might be challenging to assess objectively.

The author of the thesis was exclusively responsible of collecting the data by phone interviews. Thus, the structure of the survey remained the same for every respondent. The author used the exact same survey form for all the respondents interviewed via phone and the respondents who answered through email. The purpose of the research is made clear both in email cover letter and in phone interviews. At the beginning of the survey, the author used closed-response questions to determine the respondents company size and field, and to map out whom of the respondents are ERP

users and who aren't. Open-ended questions were used in more complex questions in the survey that required respondents' own words.

3.4 Data analysis

Quantitative data in a raw form needs to be processed and transformed into information before it becomes valuable. Quantitative analysis methods for example charts, graphs and statistics are helpful in this (Saunders et al., 2008). According to Kananen (2010), the research results of a quantitative study are often presented in different tables, such as frequency distribution and cross tabulation, and statistics. Frequency distribution represents one variable of a questionnaire at a time while in cross tabulation, two or more variables are described at once (Malhotra, 2013).

Open-ended questions had to be processed and translated to English from the Finnish language which was used in the questionnaire due to target group constituting from Finnish nationalities. Open-ended questions were processed both in Webropol 3.0 text mining – tool and in Microsoft Excel, which was used to create themes, tables and collect repetitive responses.

3.5 Verification of results

One of the key elements of a quantitative research is estimating the credibility of the study. Two different indicators are reviewed which are reliability and validity. Once the validity of a research is in order, measuring the correct factors becomes plausible. When the reliability of a study is in order, the research results are stable, and if the same study would be implemented multiple times to the same audience the results would be nearly similar. (Kananen, 2010) The correct way of presenting and formulating the questions so that they cannot be misunderstood, increases the success of the study and the questionnaire.

In order to ensure the validity of the questionnaire, all the questions are reviewed multiple times in order to create questions not subject to interpretation. Reliability is

taken into consideration in question positioning within the questionnaire. However, according to Weathington et al. (2012) no research is flawlessly reliable, because of a measurement error. They add that measurement error is a random variable that changes whenever we use the test associated to the testing method, participant, researcher or environment.

The reliability of the research suffers by the fact that data is collected by email and phone calls due to the difficulty of reaching respondents. Respondents may have less time answering when interviewed via phone calls which may affect to the quality of their answers.

4 Research results

This chapter aims to answer the research question of the thesis “What marketing content potential customers perceive interesting in Enterprise Resource Planning systems?”. The survey is part of a quantitative research and it was implemented using the program Webropol. The survey was conducted in Finnish. The case company provided the author with a list of potential customers in every industry. The industries are different sizes in terms of their annual turnover. The companies within the industries are placed in different size classes by the company X. In total there were 606 contacts of which 314 had email addresses available. The survey link was sent to the email addresses available, and it generated 40 answers. Rest of the answers, 51, were collected by phone calls. The research had total of 91 respondents.

4.1 Demographics of the respondents

The sample consisted of three different industries; building technology, industrial, and construction. 37% of the total of respondents are companies in building technology (33 respondents), 34% of the total of respondents are companies from industrial field (30 respondents) and 29% of the total of respondents are companies from construction (26 respondents), as the figure 6. demonstrates below. The percentage of

respondents from different industries is well distributed, which adds to the reliability of the research.

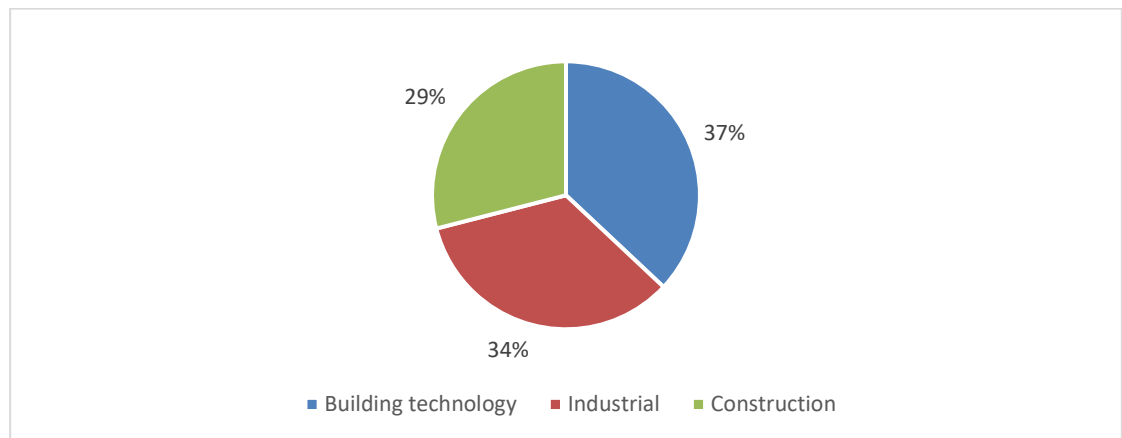


Figure 6. Industry distribution of respondents

Table 1. Industry distribution of respondents

Industry	n	%
Building technology	33	37 %
Industrial	30	34 %
Construction	26	29 %

The sample consisted of six different company sizes divided by their annual turnover in millions. The sizes are mass (0-0,3M€), lite (0,3-0,7M€), small (0,7-1,5M€), average (1,5-5M€), bigger (5-15M€) and big (15-50M€). The division of the companies is conducted by the case company of this study. 14% of the total of respondents are size mass, 19% of the total of respondents are size lite, 18% of the total of respondents are size small, 18% of the total of respondents are size average, 14% of the total of respondents are size bigger, and 17% of the total of respondents are size big, as figure 7. and table 3. below showcases.

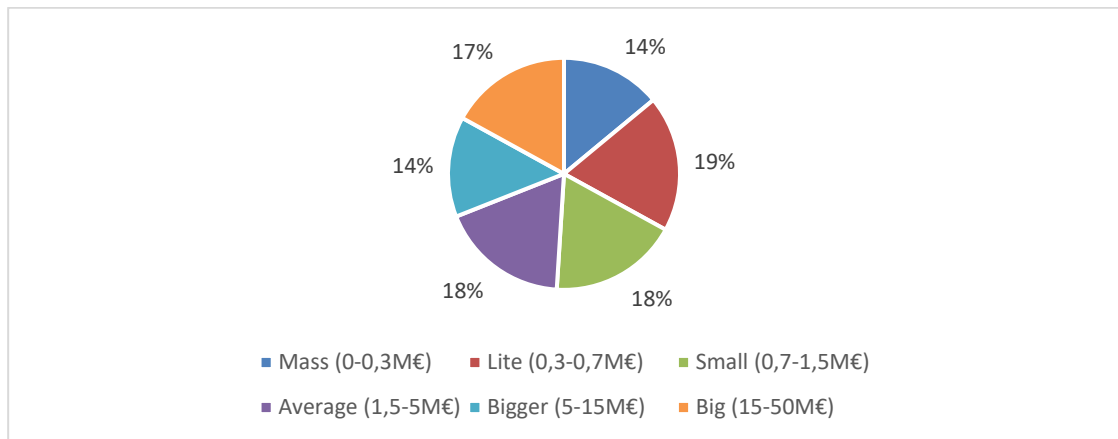


Figure 7. Company size distribution

Table 2. Company size distribution of respondents

Company size	n	%
Mass (0-0,3M€)	13	14 %
Lite (0,3-0,7M€)	17	19 %
Small (0,7-1,5M€)	16	18 %
Average (1,5-5M€)	16	18 %
Bigger (5-15M€)	13	14 %
Big (15-50M€)	15	17 %

Next, the age distribution was researched. The sample size of the question is 91, which indicates that the age of every respondent is known. The biggest age group of the respondents is 31-50 years old. Secondly, 51 years and above 32%. Only 2% of the respondents were 30 years old or under, as seen from the Figure 8. below.

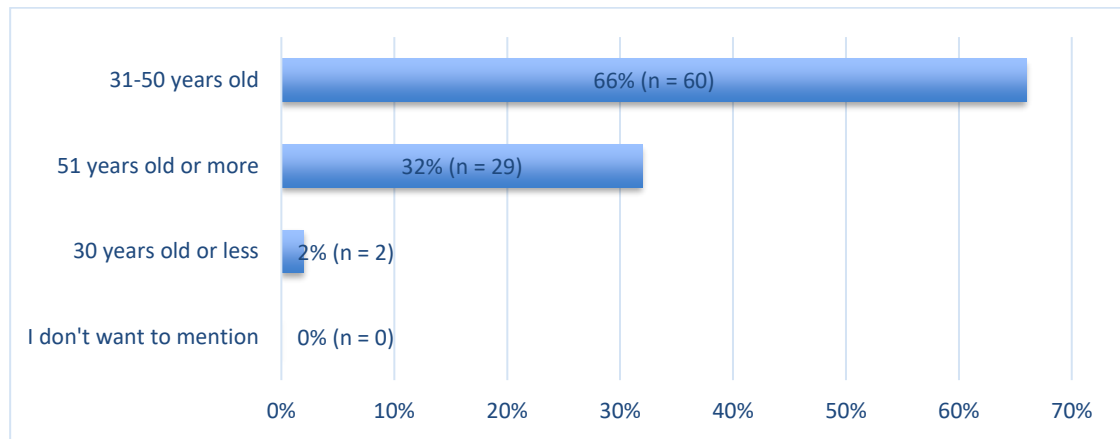


Figure 8. Age distribution of the respondents

4.2 Prior ERP usage of respondents

In the survey respondents were able to choose if their company is already using an Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system. Options given were “yes, which?” and “no”. If the respondent answered “yes”, they were asked to specify the name of the current system in an open field. If the respondent answered “no”, they were asked to proceed onwards to question number 8. Total sample size in this question was 90. 59% of the total respondents answered “no” (53 companies), and 41% answered “yes, which?” (37 companies), which means that 59% of the respondent proceeded onwards within the survey, as requested.

Table 3. Respondents whether they are using an ERP system

	n	%
No (Move to question number 9.)	53	59 %
Yes, which?	37	41 %

However, only 34 companies out of 37 companies gave the name of their current ERP system. A word cloud was created from the answers, where the frequent answers are highlighted with a bigger font. The most frequent ERP systems being used between the respondents are jydacom, lemonsoft, profio and visma.



Figure 9. Word cloud of the ERP systems

The respondents who answered “yes” to the question whether they are already using an ERP system, were asked to state their satisfaction towards it. Satisfaction was measured in order to understand how the respondents feel towards their current ERP system. 47% of the respondents were satisfied about their current system. 16% of the respondents were very satisfied. 21% of the respondents were neutral towards their system and 16% were dissatisfied towards their current ERP system. No respondents stated that they are very dissatisfied with their current system, as seen from table 5. below.

Table 4. Satisfaction towards current ERP system

	n	%
Very satisfied	6	16 %
Satisfied	18	47 %
Neutral	8	21 %
Dissatisfied	6	16 %
Very dissatisfied	0	0 %

The respondents were asked to specify what are the areas of improvement in their current ERP systems, if there are any. 29 respondents specified what they feel should be improved. The author has transcribed the open-ended answers and filtered out the blank answers. 23 responses are being displayed in the figure 10. below since some of the answers were left blank. The orange color in figure 10. indicates the most repeated words. In the open-ended question the respondents repeated certain

words. Usability and flexibility were clearly the themes majority of the respondents feel needs improvements.

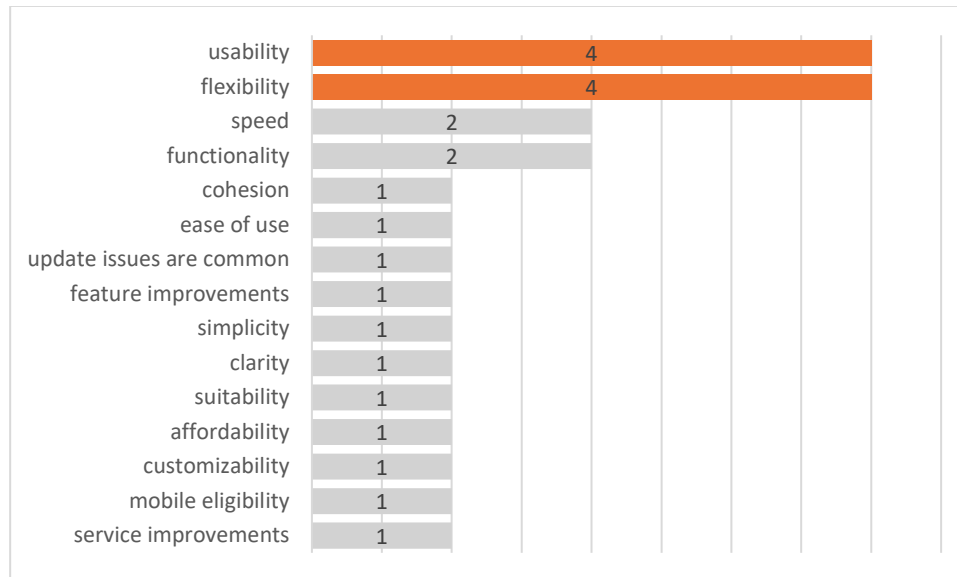


Figure 10. Repeated words the respondents feel should be improved in their current ERP systems

Figure 11. below indicates the selection process of the respondent's current ERP-system. Respondents who are currently using an ERP system, were asked how they became customers with the current system. Sample size for the question is 25 respondents. The orange color in the figure indicates the most repeated answer. According to 25 respondents, "tender out the providers" and "system has been in use for a long time" were the most common themes. Respondents who answered "system has been in use for a long time" highlighted that the ERP selection process has been made in very early stages without the respondent's input. Respondents with "self-customized" systems have created a system exclusively for their company's needs. Respondents who answered "solution made by the corporation" have received an ERP system by their corporation, thereby the decision has been made by someone else.

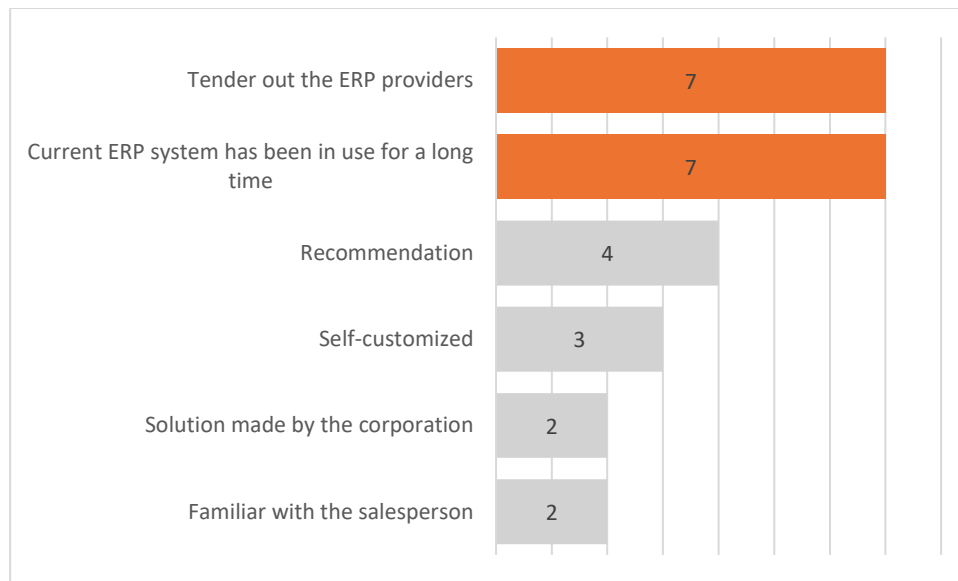


Figure 11. Respondents on how they chose their current ERP system

Respondents were then invited to state whether they have observed interesting content of other ERP systems. According to figure 12. below, 26 out of 37 respondents answered “no” and 11 out of 37 respondents answered “yes”.

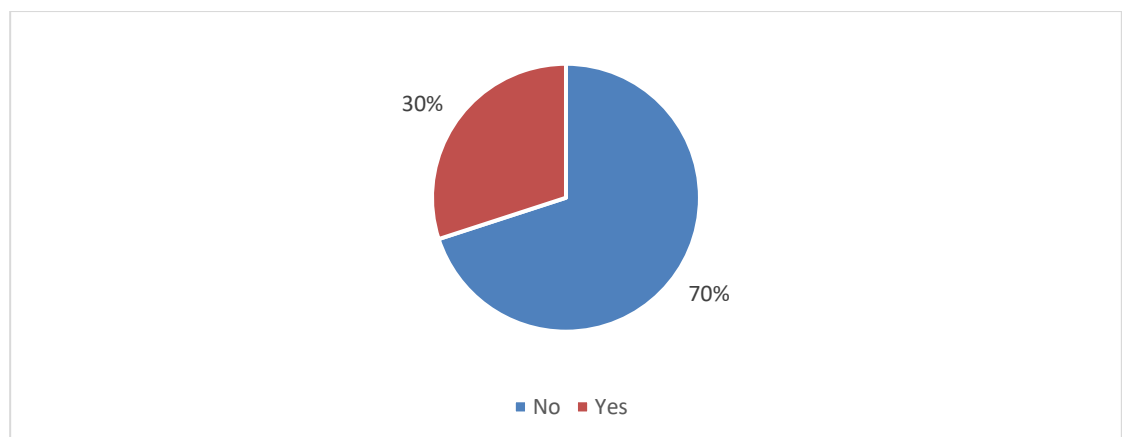


Figure 12. A breakdown of respondents who have perceived interesting content of other ERP systems

The respondents who answered “yes” to the previous question about observing interesting content of other systems, were asked to specify what content they have observed to an open field. 8 out of 11 respondents answers are summarized below. There are only five sentences visual since several respondents had similar answers;

“Lots of selection”

“Interesting visualizations”

“Marketing calls and E-mail marketing offer interesting information”

“Similarities”

“Good structures”

4.3 The attractiveness of ERP system marketing

The respondents were asked where they would start obtaining information if they were to change or to acquire a new ERP system. This was an open-ended question, so the respondents were able to describe their information retrieval path in their own words. The sample size for this question is 85 respondents. As stated in table 4. prior this study, respondents who did not have an ERP system already in use, were asked to proceed onwards in the survey to this question. The author has gathered repeated words and themes from the open-ended questions and filtered out the blank answers. A table has been created from the words, where the most repeated word is on top displayed in orange. In total there are 19 words as themes. As it is visible from figure 13. below, majority of the respondents would start their information retrieval path from Google. This is very inferential since the internet is full of information of ERP systems. However, surprisingly several respondents stated they would inquire information from colleagues or from other companies.

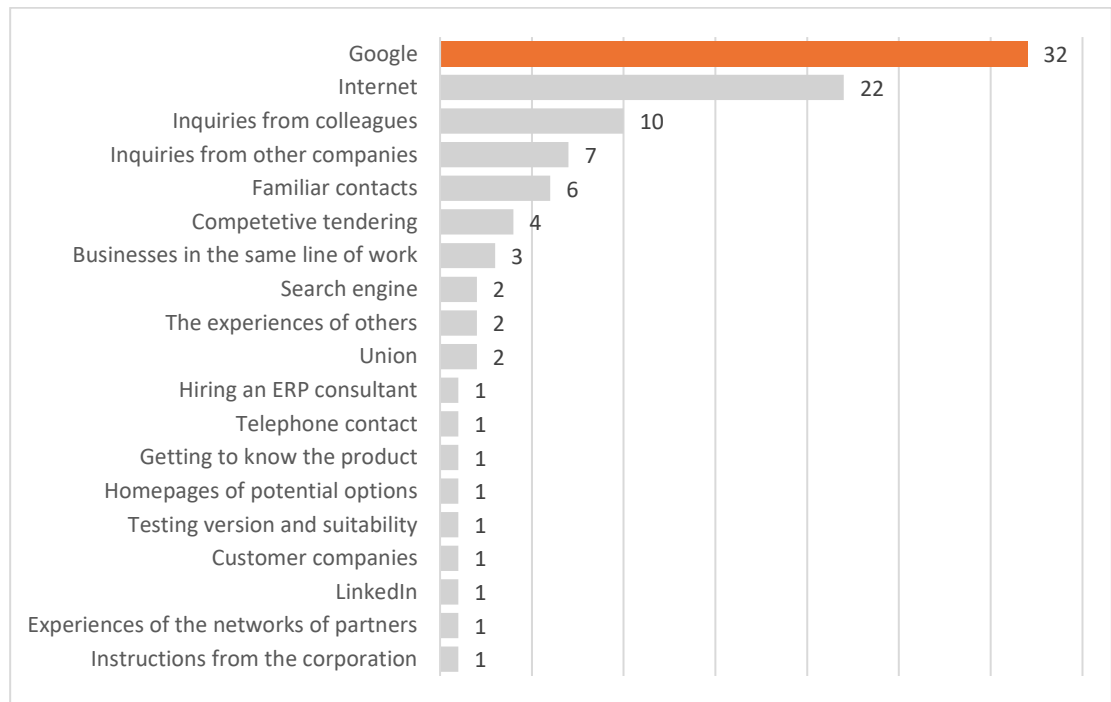


Figure 13. Most repeated words of where to obtain information about ERP systems

The survey then requested the respondents to state the keywords they would possibly use when seeking information. As it is visual from figure 14. beneath, not all respondents were able to answer. 59 respondents specified their use of keywords when searching information of the ERP systems. The author has filtered out the blank answers. As visual from the figure 14., majority of the respondents would use “Enterprise resource planning system” and an abbreviation “ERP” as their keywords when searching information of ERP systems. However, there are several other keywords respondents would use, such as “production control” and “production control system”.

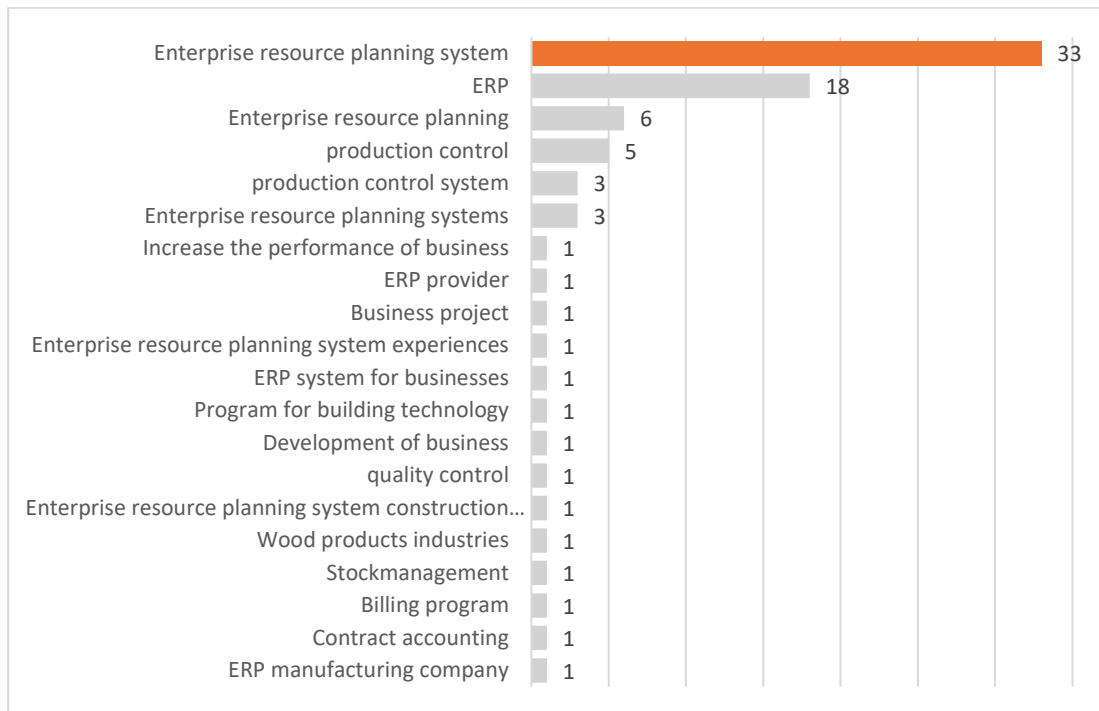


Figure 14. Most repeated keywords when obtaining information about ERP systems

Respondents were then requested to state in an open-ended question, what content they would like to see from the ERP supplier, when they are actively looking for an ERP system. 71 respondents mentioned what content they consider interesting and valuable. The figure 15. below highlights the answers given. Most repeated word is highlighted in orange, which is “user friendliness”.

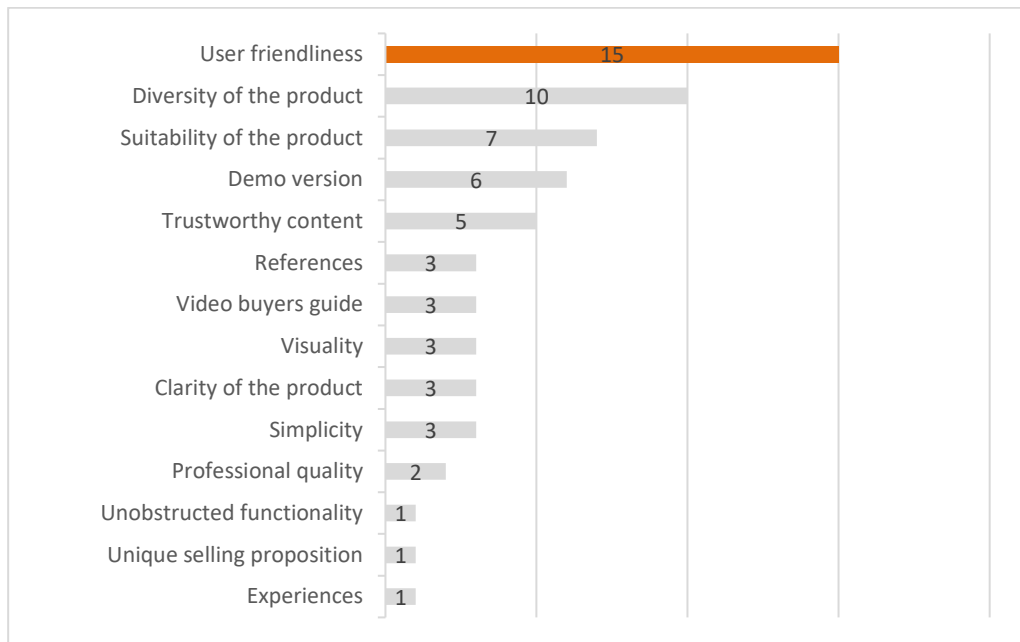


Figure 15. What content serves best when actively looking for a new ERP system

Respondents were asked which of the following key factors they perceive the most important when comparing ERP systems. Respondents were able to choose more than one option. In total, the sample size for this question was 172 from 89 respondents, since respondents could select more than one option. According to the figure 16. below, 61% of the respondents perceive customer experiences as one of the most important factors when comparing ERP systems. 52% of the respondents perceive price and services as one of the most important factors. Only 1% of respondents consider social media visibility as one of the most important factors.

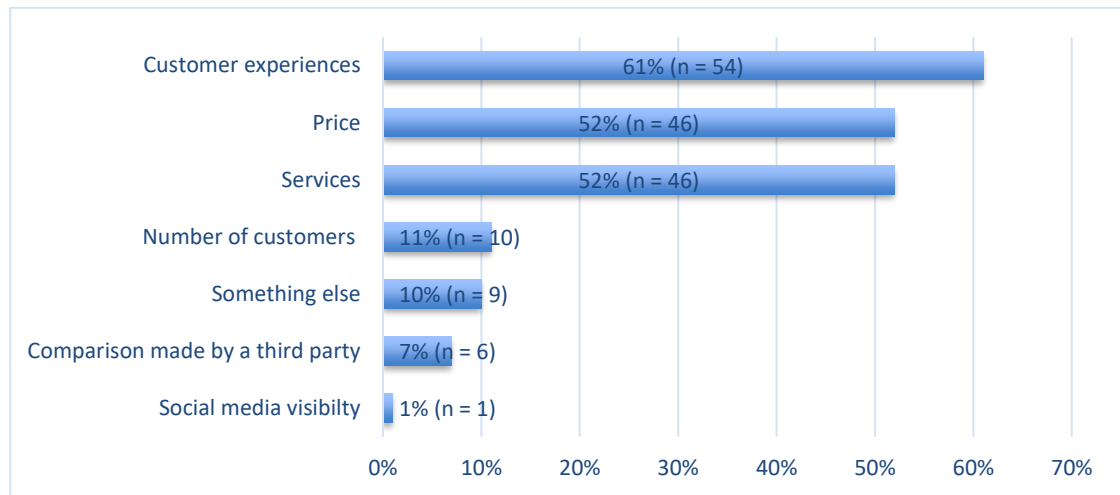


Figure 16. Important key factors when comparing ERP systems

Respondents were given a possibility to specify which they think is one of the most important factors when comparing ERP systems, if not found from the options. In the open-field question respondents repeated the word “suitability” as one of the most important factors. 9 (10%) respondents gave a specification;

“The cost of the deployment project”

“Clarity and ease of use”

“Suitability for our needs”

“Domesticity”

“Quality”

“Speed in customer service”

“Suitability for our operations”

“Usability and suitability”

“Demo version”

Respondents were asked which of the following forms of content they find appealing from the system providers, when not actively searching for new ERP systems. Respondents were able to choose more than one option. Sample size for this question is 128 answers from 85 respondents. According to the figure 17., 59% of the respondents find customer reviews appealing when not actively searching for an ERP system. 40% of the respondents consider videos appealing. Social media publications are seen appealing only from 7% of the respondents.

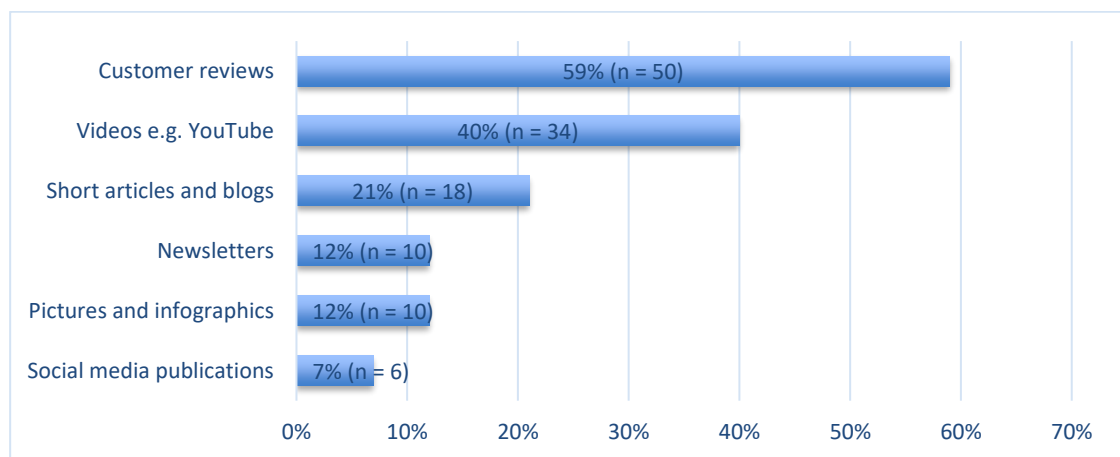


Figure 17. Content found appealing when not actively searching for new ERP systems

Secondly, the respondents were asked to decide on which tone of voice in content they prefer. Again, the respondents were able to choose more than one option. From 88 respondents the question generated 120 answers. Figure 18. beneath indicates that 84% of the respondents prefer informative tone of the voice and 27% prefer educational. ERP systems often appear technical, which explains the nature of the answers.

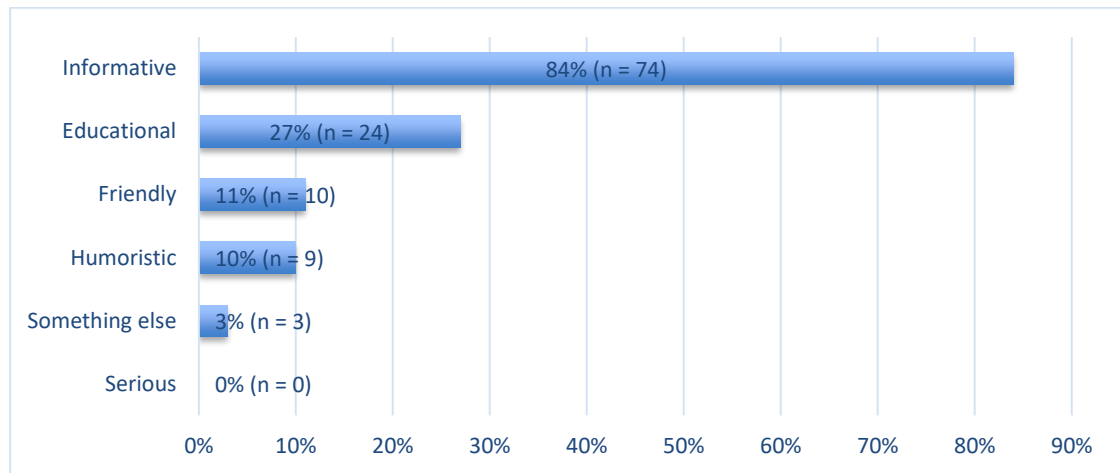


Figure 18. Tone of voice in content preferred by respondents

Respondents were given an open-field option to specify with their own words which tone of the content they perceive most appealing, if not found from the options. 3 respondents (3%) gave an open-field answer;

“technical”

“demonstrative”

“short and easy to read”

Respondents were asked which of the listed devices they use the most. Respondents were able to choose only one. The device distribution is visual in figure 19. below. From 91 respondents, 52% (47) use mobile phone the most. Secondly most used device is computer with 46% (42) of the respondents. Only 2% (2) use tablet the most.

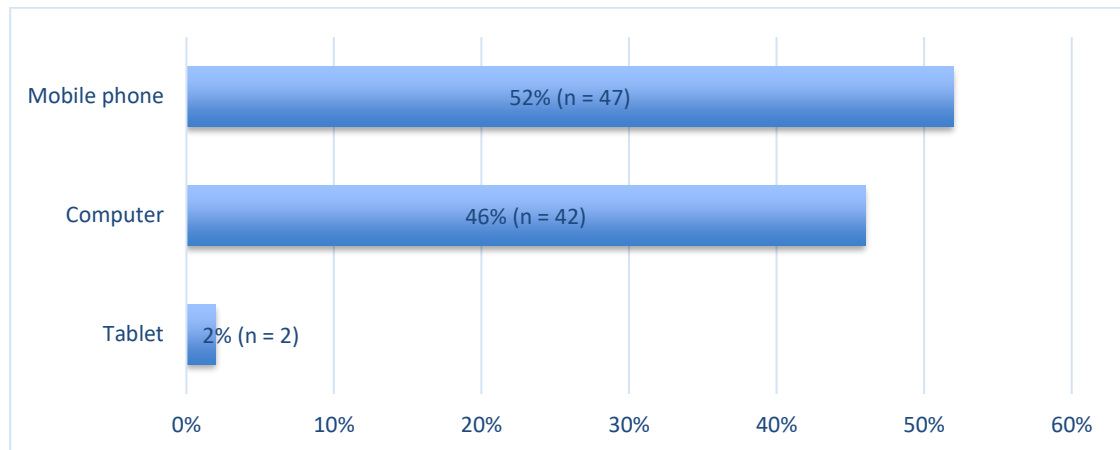


Figure 19. Device usage among the respondents

Respondents were asked which social media channels they use the most in everyday usage. Respondents were able to choose more than one option. The question generated 115 answers from 78 respondents. The most common social media channel among the respondents is Facebook with 76% of the answers. Second largest social media channel is YouTube with 26%. Snapchat and Pinterest didn't gain any answers, as figure 20. below indicates.

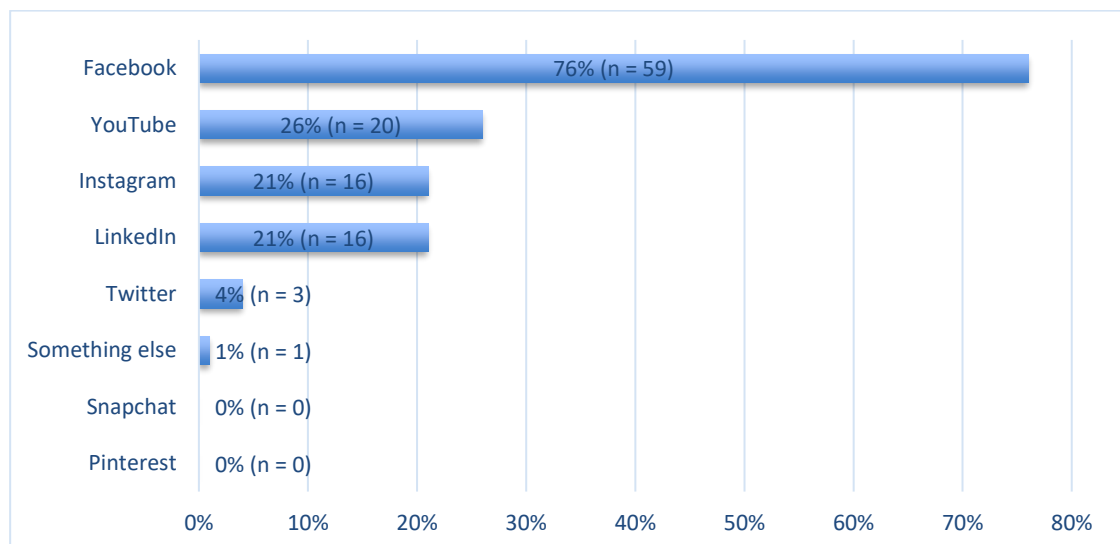


Figure 20. Most common social media channels amongst the respondents

4.4 Summary of findings

The results of this quantitative research aim to answer to the research question “What marketing content potential customers perceive interesting in Enterprise Resource Planning systems?” In order to answer the research question, the author conducted a quantitative research, where potential customers of company X were researched in order to seek out the answer. The author interviewed respondents via phone calls, and some of the data was gathered by sending the survey via email. It is visual from the research, that the sample size is well distributed in terms of respondent’s company size and field, which provides more reliable data. However, age distribution of respondents has significant differences, which in this study is not an important factor.

In the survey, respondents were asked “what content serves best when actively looking for a new ERP system?” The most common answer for the question was “user friendliness”, which highlights the fact that potential customers wants to see content, which gives the viewer an idea that the product is easy to learn and use. When respondents were asked “which of the following key factors are most important when comparing ERP systems?”, majority (61%) of the respondents agreed, that customer experiences serve an important role. It is also visual from the results, that respondents feel that customer reviews and videos are two of the most appealing forms of content. When respondents were asked, which tone of voice they prefer content is delivered, 84% of respondents agreed the tone as Informative. This makes sense, since ERP systems are very technical, thus an informative delivery of a message is the best option. Additionally, majority (76%) of the respondents consider Facebook being the most used social media channels in everyday usage.

In the analysis of the research results, it is important to recognize that not every question was completed with the same sample, since most of the questions were optional, therefore the survey did not require the respondent to answer every question. When the author analyzed the results and executed cross tabulation, the findings showed no significant differences between the demographic groups of this

research. Moreover, the sample size of 91 respondents doesn't provide statistically profound data when divided into smaller groups in order to complete cross tabulation.

However, the author of this thesis was able to find slight differences when the results were cross tabulated. Cross tabulation was completed by comparing different company fields, which are building technology, industrial and construction. The most noteworthy findings were that construction companies consider "price" as the most important factor when comparing ERP systems by 73%, whereas industrial companies by 45%, and building technology by 42%. Secondly, the results showcase that industrial companies use computers significantly more (67%), than building technology (30%) and construction (42%). Consequently, their mobile usage is significantly lower when compared.

5 Discussion

Within this chapter, the author will shortly examine the findings of this research, discuss about managerial implications for the assigning company, appoint occurred limitations of the research, and finally provide suggestions for future research regarding the topic. The objective of this study was to determine what marketing content prospects perceive interesting in ERP systems, and the answers to the research questions was properly achieved. For this research, the data was collected using quantitative methods, online survey and data collection via telephone interviews. The data gathered was then analyzed using Microsoft Excel and Webropol, where the survey was created. Analyzing the research results, the author obtained important information in order to answer the research question. The total of respondents of the research was 91, and the sample was well demographically distributed in terms of company industries and company sizes in terms of revenue, see figure 6. and 7.

5.1 Managerial implications

The findings of this study provide multiple courses of action to be taken by the company X who was the assigning company for this research. The results encourage the company X to improve their marketing content in order to create added value towards potential customers, thus improve reaching target audience. The findings of the study suggest that majority of respondents would start obtaining information about ERP systems from Google, which leads the company X into improving search engine optimization. The results also suggest key words respondents would use. Nevertheless, findings also suggests that respondents appreciate content which highlights ERP system user friendliness and usability. The results also reveal that respondents consider customer experiences and customer reviews as one of the most important factors, when it comes to providing appealing content. The findings provide the assigning company with information about where to allocate resources in terms of marketing and capturing clientele. What is more, research results showcase that majority of respondents want the content to be informative, presumably because the nature of the product is relatively technical and complicated.

When it comes to differences between the company fields, no significant differences were found. However, it is seen from the results that construction companies consider price as the most important factor when comparing ERP systems, whereas the other two fields didn't rank price as the biggest priority. Secondly, the results showcase that industrial companies use computers significantly more, than building technology and construction. Therefore, mobile usage of industrial companies is lower. Based on these differences, company X is able to centralize and personalize their marketing depending on the target audience.

Moreover, findings of this study also suggest that majority of the respondents, therefore majority of the company X's target audience, is 31-50 years old. Preferred social media channel for the sample is Facebook according to the results. Again, this evidence is beneficial for the company X in order to channel and focus marketing efforts accordingly.

To conclude, the marketing department in company X should build their marketing strategies utilizing these results found from the study. As mentioned, respondents feel that it is important to include user friendliness, and an overall suitability of the product to marketing content. In addition to that, customer-to-customer reviews and experiences perform a significant role in ERP system marketing, according to the study. If the company X is able to employ these findings from the research, customer acquisition and customer reachability are improved, and competitive advantage is achieved.

5.2 Limitations of the research

The present study has limitations regarding time period of data collection and sample size. The time period of data collection generated challenges, since the author of this thesis didn't employ any assistance in collecting data. The period of data collection was approximately four weeks, in what time the author collected total of 91 respondents, of which 51 was obtained by phone calls. This research was organized as a snapshot research as the results were gathered in four-week time period through phone interviews and an online survey. Hence, this narrow time scale is a limitation of this research because the results reflect the respondent's particular mindset at a certain moment. In addition to that, the audience to whom this research was intended for was limited by company X, which increased difficulty for collecting data.

Sample size of this research is another limitation, because it is relatively small considering the nature of this study is quantitative. When cross tabulating this sample size, the data is not necessarily scientifically relevant. Moreover, the research of this thesis was conducted using quantitative methods, hence the data gathered is not greatly into detail. The nature of this study could be implemented using qualitative methods, where sample size would be considerably smaller, and data would be thorough and comprehensive providing more in-depth analysis. Regardless, this research was intentionally concentrated in collecting data from large group of respondents, as the assigning company instructed the author to follow quantitative methods and to get as much respondents as possible from a certain contact list.

Results of this research cannot be generalized, since the sample is provided from the assigning company and there are predefined company industries and company sizes. Furthermore, the author had constrained resources conducting the research as there were no financial support for overseeing this study.

5.3 Recommendations for future research

The author of this thesis recommends, that if a similar research to this were to be conducted, the study should be qualitative by its nature in order to gain in-depth analyzes on the topic. Qualitative approach towards the research could provide results allowing a deeper understanding about interesting marketing content in ERP systems.

Another recommendation from the author is, that similar study would be conducted to completely different company industries, who has a need for an ERP system. This way the different industries could be compared, and possible differences pointed out. The author also suggests for future research, that if a similar study were to be conducted using quantitative methods, the sample size should be at least triple the size that this research has. When the sample size is large, cross tabulation can be implemented comparing company industries against each other, company sizes against each other, and a certain company industry in a certain size against another company industry in another company size.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. The survey form

The attractiveness of marketing content of Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) systems

1. The industry of your company

Building technology

Industrial

Construction

2. The size of your company

Mass (0-0,3M€)

Lite (0,3-0,7M€)

Small (0,7-1,5M€)

Average (1,5-5M€)

Bigger (5-15M€)

Big (15-50M€)

3. Does your company already utilize an ERP system?

No (Move to question number 8.)

Yes, which? _____

4. Are you satisfied with the current system?

Very satisfied

Satisfied

Neutral

Dissatisfied

Very dissatisfied

5. What would you like to have improved in your current system?

6. How did you become a customer with the current system?

7. Have you noticed interesting information about other ERP systems?

No

Yes, what? _____

8. If you were to change or acquire a new ERP system, where would you start obtaining information?

9. What possible keywords would you use?

10. When you are looking for a new ERP system, what content would you like to see from the ERP supplier?

11. Which of the following you consider the most important when comparing ERP options? You can choose multiple.

Price

Services

Customer experiences

Comparison made by a third party

Social media visibility

Number of customers

Something else, what? _____

12. If you are not actively looking for a new ERP system, which of the following would you consider interesting from the ERP supplier? You can choose multiple.

Videos e.g. YouTube

Social media publications

Customer reviews

Short articles and blogs

Newsletters

Pictures and infographics

13. Which tone of voice in content you prefer? You can choose multiple.

Informative

Friendly

Serious

Humoristic

Educational

Something else, what? _____

14. Which of the following devices you use the most? You can choose only one.

Mobile

Telephone

Tablet

15. Which of the following social media channels you use the most? You can choose multiple.

Facebook

Instagram

LinkedIn

Twitter

YouTube

Snapchat

Pinterest

Something else

16. Which of the following age groups you belong to?

30 or years old or less

31-50 years old

51 years old or more

I don't want to mention