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Social Media Marketing Strategy:

Fast Manta Co. Ltd



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Abstract

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The main purpose of this thesis was to create an efficient social media marketing strategy for Fast Manta Co. Ltd, a dive resort located in Southern Thailand. The strategy focuses on two social media platforms: Facebook and Instagram, which are the main marketing platforms used by the company. Done strategically, social media marketing is an efficient way of gaining visibility and attracting the target group and possible customers. Social media marketing can be implemented in an affordable way and one of its benefits is also the easiness of using different platforms.

The thesis consists of theory on tourism marketing and social media marketing, as well as qualitative research in the form of interviewing the company owner and a social media marketing professional. The theoretical sources of this thesis consist of books and e-books on the topic of social media marketing, most of which are publications from less than five years ago, because social media platforms evolve continuously and information on them expires rapidly. After the interviews, the social media marketing actions of Fast Manta were analyzed through a SWOT analysis.

The thesis is practice-based, and the final product is a social media marketing strategy for the client. The strategy also includes an editorial calendar which is attached to the thesis as an appendix.

Tiivistelmä

Tekijä: Rautio Katariina

Työn nimi: Sosiaalisen Median Markkinoinnin Strategia: Fast Manta Co. Ltd

Tutkintonimike: Restonomi (AMK), Matkailun koulutusohjelma

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Tämän opinnäytetyön päätavoitteena oli luoda sosiaalisen median markkinoinnin strategia Fast Manta Co. Ltd:lle, joka on etelä-Thaimaassa sijaitseva sukelluskeskus. Strategia keskittyy markkinointiin Facebookissa ja Instagramissa, jotka ovat yrityksen kaksi tärkeintä markkinointikanavaa. Strategisesti tehtynä, sosiaalisen median markkinointi on tehokas tapa saavuttaa näkyvyyttä ja houkutella kohderyhmää. Sosiaalisen median markkinointia voidaan tehdä edullisesti ja yksi sen vahvuuksista on eri kanavien käytön helppous.

Opinnäytetyö koostuu matkailumarkkinoinnin ja sosiaalisen median markkinoinnin teoriasta sekä laadullisesta tutkimuksesta, jossa haastateltiin yrityksen omistajaa ja sosiaalisen median markkinoinnin asiantuntijaa. Opinnäytetyössä käytetyt teorialähteet koostuvat sosiaalisen median markkinointia käsittelevistä kirjoista ja e-kirjoista, joista suurin osa on julkaistu enintään viisi vuotta sitten, sillä sosiaalisen median kanavat kehittyvät jatkuvasti ja niihin liittyvä tieto vanhenee nopeasti. Haastattelujen jälkeen Fast Mantan sosiaalisen median markkinointia tarkasteltiin SWOT analyysin kautta.

Tämä opinnäytetyö on toiminnallinen ja sen tuloksena syntyi sosiaalisen median markkinoinnin strategia toimeksiantaja yritykselle. Strategia sisältää myös julkaisukalenterin, joka löytyy opinnäytetyön liitteistä.

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1 Introduction

The outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic has increased the consumption of social media world-wide. More than 70 percent of respondents on a survey conducted in North America agreed that they use social media more than before the pandemic. The most used platform was Instagram, with 44 percent of respondents using it. (Wold, 2020). Additionally, all the largest social media platforms have reported an increase in engagement with content (Williamson, 2020). The same trend of increasing social media consumption can be seen in statistics from Europe (Statista, 2021). Travel and tourism companies are amongst the industries suffering most from the pandemic, and due to the unexpected crisis, many of them have postponed their marketing actions (Bračko, 2020). However, with people spending more time than ever on social media, it is crucial for companies to be present in social media platforms and implement a strategic approach to marketing.

This thesis' aim was to create a social media marketing strategy for Fast Manta Co. Ltd, a Padi dive resort in southern Thailand. Fast Manta is a new company, established in 2020 immediately before the outbreak of Covid-19. Therefore, the company is still considering their best practices and is open to new ways of thinking and operating. The strategy includes theory on the efficient use of Instagram and Facebook in marketing, content marketing, branding through social media, use of hashtags, and a proposal of an editorial calendar for the company.

I wanted to do my thesis for a small company, preferably focusing on program services because that is one of the tourism segments that interest me the most. Also, marketing, especially on social media, fascinates me, and I wanted to gain more knowledge of it. It was interesting to do this in practice for the benefit of a real company. I have taken additional free-choice courses on marketing during my studies. Besides writing the thesis, I also completed two marketing courses.

The client choice is also justified by my location while writing the thesis. I spent the spring semester in Bangkok, Thailand, while working on the thesis. Picking a local company motivated me more to work on the thesis. I found my thesis client accidentally in a Bangkok expat group on Facebook, while quarantining in Thailand before my exchange semester. This was my second exchange semester in Thailand, so I had already gained some knowledge related to tourism in Thailand prior to the thesis and I felt that I could benefit from it in the process.

2 Purpose, research question and process

The thesis seeks answers to how social media can be used efficiently to market the program services of Fast Manta dive resort. Additionally, it examines how to implement such actions through Instagram and Facebook. The research question is: **How can Fast Manta's social media marketing actions be developed to gain more visibility and potential customers?**

The process of this thesis consisted of the theory part and the practical part. Initially, the theory of social media was researched through books, e-books and articles found on the internet. In the practical part of the thesis, two interviews were executed. The first interview was with one of the owners of Fast Manta, Kari Lehtonen. The second interviewee was a professional in the field of social media marketing, to clarify some gaps in the theory and strengthen my understanding of how to best benefit from social media in tourism marketing.

2.1 Methods

The methods used in the practical part of the thesis are qualitative research methods. Qualitative data was gathered for the purposes of this research. Qualitative data consists of observations and therefore cannot provide absolute truths but can be used for developmental purposes. Analyzing qualitative data involves multiple phases. The process starts with examining the data in detail, then analyzing it through the objectives of the research, developing a framework and finally connecting data and identifying patterns. (Bhatia, 2018).

Data analysis is one of the most critical parts of research. The method needs to be chosen carefully. The content analysis method will be used to analyze the data collected in the interviews. Content analysis is one of the most used ways of analyzing qualitative data such as texts and media (Bhatia, 2018).

2.2 Reliability, validity, and ethical issues

The quality of research can be measured with reliability and validity. Reliability means how well the research measures the phenomena it is supposed to measure. In this thesis, reliability can

only be tested after the social media marketing strategy is ready and in use, to see how well it works. However, having relevant and up-to-date sources will maximize the potential of the research. Validity, on the other hand, refers to whether the tools and analysis methods are appropriate for the chosen research question and help generate answers to it (Lawrence, 2015).

Ethical issues in qualitative research include anonymity, confidentiality, informed consent, and the impact of personal opinions, from both the researcher's and participants' perspective. (Fatemezh, Mahnaz et al., 2014). As the author it is necessary to ensure that no confidential information from the client's side is shared to outsiders without permission. Qualitative research is always affected by bias to some extent, but the author's responsibility is to stay as objective as possible.

2.3 Client

Fast Manta is a Padi dive resort located in Ao Nang, Krabi, Thailand. Krabi is one of Thailand's 77 provinces and is located on the east coast of southern Thailand. The distance to the country's capital Bangkok is about 800 kilometers. (Krabi-tourism.com, 2021). Krabi is known for its beautiful beaches and islands as well as coral reefs (Tourismthailand.org, 2021).

Fast Manta was born from the owner couple's passion for diving, creating tailored experiences for customers, and love for the ocean and the environment. These are also important values of the company. Fast Manta started operating Mid-March 2020 immediately before the covid-19 pandemic forced the company to close.

The brand is based around the owner couple as people and following their life in southern Thailand. The goal of their social media actions is to attract possible customers to Krabi and dive with Kari and Johanna, the owners.

Target group

Fast Manta's target group consists of 25–55-year-old people interested in diving. The owner couple is Finnish. Therefore, they focus a major part of their advertising on the Finnish market and usually the content posted is available both in Finnish and in English. Thailand is the most popular long-haul destination for Finns. The amount of package trips has been steadily growing in recent years, until the current pandemic. (AFTA, 2021).

The target customers are interested in activities personally tailored for them. They value personal service and instructing in small groups. One important value of the target audience is sustainability: they want to take part in giving back to the environment and the ocean as well as learning more about sustainable ways of traveling and diving.

Social media presence

Fast Manta focuses its social media marketing actions on Instagram and Facebook. They also occasionally post videos on YouTube. Besides posting on their company's pages, Fast Manta's owners are very active online, such as in different Facebook groups, which is also how the author of this thesis found the company.

The most important channel used is Instagram, where Fast Manta posts daily Instagram Stories showcasing the owners' lifestyle in Thailand. They also post two to three regular posts weekly, which are more centered on diving and the destination of Ao Nang, Krabi, Thailand. About half of the follower-base watch Fast Manta's Instagram Stories regularly. On Facebook Fast Manta posts to Stories and creates regular posts. However, the followers are not as active as on Instagram, and about a quarter of them see the Stories posted.

Products

Fast Manta offers a wide variety of diving and snorkeling trips from fun diving to freediving and open water scuba diving courses of all levels. They also organize tours in Krabi area in co-operation with a local tour provider, Krabi Spezialisten.

Fast Manta focuses on small groups, restricting group sizes to a maximum of four divers per instructor. They tailor their trips to suit the needs of each group and decide the locations based on what the group wants to see.

The specialties of Fast Manta are their coral conservation courses where participants join a coral propagation workshop and learn more about the coral reefs. The courses can be attended by divers, snorkelers and even participants wanting to stay above the surface of the water. The main point is to give back to the ocean by helping the coral reefs. These tours and courses are done with Coralyfe Krabi, which is the Ao Nang area's only coral conservation focused company.

3 Marketing tourism services

Marketing is not only about advertisements and promoting products. It also includes understanding the customers, what they want and need, as well as interacting with current and potential customers. The goal is to make lasting connections resulting in loyalty to the company. (Coles, 2017). The goal of marketing can be divided into two: attracting customers by making them aware of the value the product or service brings to their life, and then preserving those customer relationships for future business (Moore & Pareek, 2010).

There are four important dimensions of marketing. First, the customer needs must be identified. Another option is to create a new need for the customers. Second, predictions of customer behavior are made. Then the needs and motivations are transformed into demand and lastly, the product is brought to the customers. (Moore & Pareek, 2010).

The concept of tourism marketing was born during the time of industrialization when the need for holidays and travel was recognized among employees working long hours and thus needing time off and relaxation after their shifts. At the same time, mass production of goods started, and the selling skills became very important because there were big quantities of products to sell. These selling skills were then applied to the travel and tourism field as well. (Moore & Pareek, 2010).

Both in marketing and in tourism marketing, the focus is on consumer orientation and satisfaction (Moore & Pareek, 2010). However, tourism products are services and therefore have unique characteristics: intangibility, heterogeneity, inseparability, and perishability (Fyall & Garrod, 2005; Zeithaml, 1981, as cited in Goldsmith, Tsiotsou et al., 2012). Because of these characteristics, consumers are more involved in the whole service process from production to consumption. Tourism services are also impacted by seasonality, globalization, low levels of loyalty, cross elasticity demand, and complexity. Taking into consideration such attributes, tourism marketing needs a strategic approach, which has also been acknowledged in the literature. Until recently, tourism marketing focused on the destination and products offered in the destination. However, lately the importance of the consumers' needs, desires and motivations have been discussed. (Goldsmith, Tsiotsou et al., 2012). In contrast to other services, tourism products are recreational experiences and instead of the product being delivered to the customer, the customer needs to travel to the product. Travel takes significant time and money and therefore hugely impacts the buying decision. (Kannan, 2009).

The recent outbreak of Covid-19 has shaped tourism in many ways. Regarding tourism marketing, service providers need to pay additional attention to promoting hygiene and safety in their operations. Focus should be on domestic and leisure travelers, because at this time business travel and international trips have been minimized due to restrictions around the world. Even when potential customers cannot travel, they are online, dreaming of and searching for their next destinations, which makes this an important time to focus on social media marketing for tourism companies. (Revfine, 2021).

According to Papinoja, the main requirement is to rethink the purpose of marketing actions during the pandemic. People do not need cheap trips, but they are still interested in what happens at their travel destinations: how the employees are doing and how the surroundings look at this time. Companies need to forget about the instant return of investment in marketing actions for the time being and be careful not to promote travel too early and sound irresponsible. However, maintaining a positive attitude and reminding customers that the destination is waiting for them to return is important. (Papinoja, personal interview, April 22, 2021).

4 Social media marketing

Social media platforms started as a way to stay in touch with one's personal and professional connections. However, they have become excellent channels for brands to engage with their audience. (Marketo, 2019). The use of social media has changed tourists' behavior towards wanting to actively participate in business operations (Campos, Mendes, Valle, & Scott, 2015 as cited in Sotiriadis & Gursoy, 2016, p.86). Social media offers platforms to tourists for storing their experiences and sharing and discussing them with their personal network, which then affects tourism trends (Sotiriadis & Gursoy, 2016). 76% of people on holiday, upload photos of their travels to social media (Beohar, 2016).

Almost half of the world's population uses social media (Statista, 2020), which makes social media marketing an effective way to reach customers world-wide. Especially among the younger generation social media use is common, and more than 90% of millennials use some social media platform. (Emarketer, 2019). Compared to other methods of marketing, social media platforms are an inexpensive and effective way of reaching target customers. (Coles, 2017). Word-of-mouth marketing is proven to be 30 times more effective than traditional media marketing, so engaging social networks is very beneficial in marketing (Mahoney & Tang, 2016). Social media marketing can be done organically benefiting from how each platform's algorithms work. It can also be boosted with paid advertising. (Marketo, 2019). This thesis focuses mainly on organic social media marketing.

There is an increasing number of different social media platforms to choose from, which is why understanding each platform's features is important. (Coles, 2017). When implemented strategically, social media marketing reaches a huge potential audience as well as assists in engaging with customers in real time and in receiving valuable feedback. (Coles, 2017). The networks a company uses should be chosen by focusing on the personality of the customer and on the goals of their social media presence. Knowing where the customers are is important. This can be evaluated by comparing each social media platform's demographic to the company's ideal customer. Focusing on a few platforms allows the company to make impact on those channels, so they should not try to be everywhere. (Larter & McColl, 2016).

Marketing efforts in social media may be time-consuming, which is why deciding on specific resources for them is important. Setting aside a certain amount of time for daily networking, and planning when and what to post, is the key. (Larter & McColl, 2016). The most important thing in

time management of social media marketing is consistency, not the amount of time spent on it (Papinoja, personal interview, April 22, 2021).

An important question when sharing content is to ask, “What’s in it for them?”, what value can the posted content add to the potential customer & how it serves and supports them. The posted content needs to match the strategy of the company. Such marketing is also called relationship marketing because it deepens the connection between the customer and the company. It can be done either by creating good content that is useful for potential customers, or by getting to know the people in the audience. (Larter & McColl, 2016).

Social media marketing is typically used as one component of the whole marketing mix used by a brand and it serves best as a part of an omnichannel strategy (Marketo, 2019).

4.1 Instagram

Instagram is a photo-sharing social media application with more than a billion monthly users. It is widely used for marketing purposes. Nearly half of active Instagram users say that they use the platform to research products. (Marketo, 2019). In 2019, in the U.S. only, it is estimated that the revenue of advertising on Instagram was about 9.45 billion dollars (Statista, 2020). On average, 95 million new photos are shared every day in Instagram and more than 90% of the world’s top brands are active on the platform (Robertson, 2018). Instagram is a platform best suited for sharing visual content, which is essential in a brand’s marketing strategy. One of the platform’s strengths also include the possibility of storytelling (Robertson, 2018), which will be further discussed in chapter 5.1. Instagram is used a lot for travel planning, so it is a good channel for promoting tourism services (Papinoja, personal interview, April 22, 2021).

A good post on Instagram leaves a lasting impression on the audience. To achieve that, new posts need to work with the previously posted content. To stand out, a brand needs to have its own visual character. Good start to do that is to answer questions such as “What makes my content different from my competitors’ content?” and “Which details make the audience identify the photo with my company?”. (Robertson, 2018). To achieve the most engagement possible, one should include both location tags and hashtags in their posts (Marketo, 2019). The use of hashtags will be covered in more detail in chapter 5.3.

The algorithm on Instagram favors users who post consistently and engage with the audience. This means that their posts will more likely show up on the timeline. Because Instagram's goal is to make the users spend as much time as possible on the platform, they prioritize accounts that help users stay longer. Staying on the platform longer means that the users see more advertisements from which Instagram acquires revenues (Napoleao, 2020). The algorithm favors use of new features. Therefore, at this time, the use of Reels (further explained on page 14) will make a profile more visible to other users (Papinoja, personal interview, April 22, 2021).

Concerning posting frequency, regular posts should be done no more than once a day. Instagram Stories can be posted more often, three to seven posts per day. (Marketo, 2019). The posting times for most engagement on Instagram, are on Tuesday between 11 a.m. and 2 p.m. as well as Monday through Friday at 11 a.m. The worst day for posting is Sunday, which is when people are less active on the platform. (Arens, 2021).

Instagram strategy

To succeed on Instagram, planning is the key. First identify the goals of being on the platform, what is wanted to be achieved by marketing on Instagram. When the goals are clear, they should be turned into action steps that are easy to follow. The most crucial step is the content itself. When posting, there are a few things to take into consideration. (Robertson, 2018 & Marketo, 2019).

The posts should have a theme or a set of themes they are related to. This way it is easier for the consumer to know what to expect from the company's posts. Secondly, create your own voice and identity by making sure that the company's objectives are visible to the audience: what is the mission and vision of the company. Because the main purpose on Instagram is to showcase the visuals, it is important to make sure to post high-quality photos and use filters and photo editing to create a unique look for the brand. Image captions should be kept short, and hashtags used adequately. Captions are also a good place to ask questions from the followers. When to post matters too, so keep track of when the content gets the most engagement and use that information to boost the posts. The followers love to see behind-the-scenes content because it makes them feel like insiders and therefore creates a stronger emotional connection to the company. Make the potential customers and existing customers feel like part of the brand by giving them a little extra insight to the company's daily life. Avoid posting too promotional content. Lastly, add locations and use tagging to gain more visibility. (Robertson, 2018 & Marketo, 2019).

Instagram Insights

Instagram Insights tool can be used to track the audience of one's posts. It has information about the demographics of the followers, most liked posts and more. It is a convenient tool for figuring out when the audience is online and what kind of posts they engage with the most. On the downside, the tool only allows one to see the last week of engagement on the posts. (Napoleao, 2020).

Instagram Live

Instagram Live allows real-time video sharing. Users can switch on notifications from a certain channel to know when the channel goes live. However, even without notifications on, the users on Live mode will pop up as the first ones when opening Instagram and seeing the Stories bar at the top. Live videos are automatically saved as recordings and can be shared through regular Instagram Stories. (Pompeo, 2019). However, they can also be posted through IGTV and saved on the device to use on other platforms. Viewers can type comments and reactions to a Live video. (West, 2021).

Using the Live feature will increase the engagement. It will allow the audience to interact with the brand real-time, which also makes the brand seem more authentic. Because Instagram places Live in front of other Stories, using them will give the brand more visibility. Some ways to use Live are promoting a product in the form of a tutorial or demo, live announcement of a limited time offer or creating a Q&A. (Pompeo, 2019). To succeed with Live, the brand should make sure to have a purpose for each live stream, promote it in advance and have them last for longer than 10 minutes, which allows a bigger part of the audience to participate. (West, 2021).

Instagram Reels

Reels is a new feature of Instagram, allowing users to post videos of up to 15 seconds with effects and music. It has been called the Instagram's TikTok because of its similar features to the popular video sharing application. (Mediatool, 2020). Reels are shown to other users through the Explore tab on Instagram and they can be discovered four ways. The Reels of people the user follows will show on their feed, but also clicking on hashtags used in the Reel, or looking for the audio used on it, will allow finding it. Trending and popular Reels will be shown to users on the Explore tab. Using Reels in marketing creates a bigger audience reach, especially to the younger generations and increases brand awareness. (Bizadmark, 2021).

4.2 Facebook

Facebook is the bigger networking company behind social media platforms such as Instagram, Whatsapp, Messenger, and their core product, Facebook. In total all these platforms have more than 3.3 billion monthly users world-wide. (Tankovska, 2021). Facebook itself has nearly two billion users globally, half of which log onto the platform daily. (Coles, 2017, p.31). More than a third of Facebook's active users use it to research products and services they are interested in. (Marketo, 2019).

The Facebook algorithm favors certain posts which means that what shows up on the front page when opening the app is not a coincidence. There are a few factors that determine whether the company's posts show up on the front page or not. First, the popularity of past posts: high amount of likes and comments on previously posted content will increase the likeliness of the post's visibility. Also, the popularity of the post among the first viewers affects whether it will show to more people. In other words, if the first viewers engage with the post, it will be shown to more users on the site. Third, the post will more likely show to people who have engaged with the company before. Lastly, the same type of posts the user likes on a regular basis will be shown to them. (Smith, 2016).

Facebook is a good platform for sharing articles and blogposts because its users are more likely to click on the links leading them away from the platform than for example users on Instagram. As regards to regular posts, making them go viral has become more difficult compared to a few years ago. Therefore, it is a good idea to save advertising money for content shared on Facebook. (Papinoja, personal interview, April 22, 2021).

To get the most engagement, it also matters how often and at what time the posts are published. According to a study by Set Up a Blog Today, the best time for posting on Facebook is between one and four o'clock in the afternoon, specifically on Wednesdays at three o'clock, when users are statistically most likely to click on a link. The least engagement is reached on weekends before eight in the morning and after eight in the evening. (Smith, 2016). It is good not to overwhelm the audience with content, a maximum of two posts per day is a good rule for Facebook (Marketo, 2019).

The key for engaging one's audience on Facebook and other social media platforms, is to ask them questions. By keeping them simple "when", "who", "how many" and "which one", people are

more likely to answer. Questions like “why” can take too much thought and the audience will not reply. (Smith, 2016).

Facebook Tools

Facebook has many built-in tools that can be used in marketing. It is important that the brand knows the features most suitable for them.

Facebook Ads are an excellent way of generating leads consistently. However, compared to more traditional advertising, such as in Google, Facebook advertisements are very dependent on the visuality, so to succeed, they require a lot of creativity and strategic thinking. The images on Facebook advertisements are most important because according to Facebook rules, only 20 percent of the image can be covered by text. Also, the profile photo of the page posting the ad will be visible in each post, so making sure that it represents the brand well is important. Secondly, the text attached to the photo should be thought through and checked multiple times for spelling mistakes. The ad should also include a call to action leading the customer onwards. This can be as simple as “click the link to learn more” but the important thing is for the customer to have a simple action to complete to move through the sales funnel. Lastly, a big part of the potential customers will be scrolling through Facebook on their mobile phones. Therefore, one should make sure that the ads are optimized for mobile devices as well. (Smith, 2016).

There are three layers to using Facebook Ads as a tool for creating sales: content marketing, conversion marketing and closing marketing. Most clicks and engagement are received in the first layer, content marketing. These ads include important and interesting content, that will attract possible customers to click, and they also create trust towards the company. The goal in the first layer is to generate the widest audience possible. The second layer, conversion marketing, will transform clicks into leads. These ads attach to landing pages and lead magnets, meaning the customer will end up on the company’s website or offer page. They often include an e-book, a guide, or a video to download. Third layer, closing marketing, will make the potential customers turn into customers. It changes the dreams into action. Good Facebook advertising consists of these three kinds of ads, but it is most important to know who to target with the ads. (Smith, 2016).

Facebook Live is a great tool to use in events. It is a feature to use when wanting to create more casual content, which makes it a great way for companies based around a person or group of people to show their personality. In this way, it is easier for the audience to connect and relate

to the brand. The Live video can be also then turned into a video later available on the site as well as into a YouTube video. (Coles, 2017).

In Facebook Stories users can share visual content that will be available to their followers for the next 24 hours. For brands, Facebook Stories is a good tool for posting timely content, such as videos from a certain event. (Marketo, 2019).

5 Digital marketing strategy

Digital marketing strategy refers to an action plan used to meet one's goals of using social media and other digital platforms. To create a digital marketing strategy, the company needs to know their own goals clearly, know their target customers and how to attract them, as well as have a method for measuring the efficiency of their strategy. (Kingsnorth, 2019). The digital marketing strategy's goal can be creating brand awareness, getting direct sales, or both. The plan of action should be created depending on the goal. (Papinoja, personal interview, April 22, 2021).

Before planning the details of the strategy, the company should understand their current and potential customers. To succeed in it, they can create personas representing people in their audience. If there is data available from other marketing channels, it can be used to build the personas. Developing the personas should be done in detail including information about each persona's background, goals, source of information, preferred content topics, marketing messages, objections, product interests, role in purchase process and quotes (See table 1). Usually, personas are built based on customer demographics and behaviors and the company's idea about their motivations (Marketo, 2019).

Background	What company they work in? What are their main tasks? What do they like and dislike in their job? How is their team structure?
Goals	What are their goals? How can your products help them achieve those goals?
Source of information	What channels do they use to consume content?
Preferred content topics	What content topics are they most interested in?
Marketing message	What type of marketing messages resonate with them?
Objections	What objections to anticipate from them in the sales process?
Product interests	Which products are they most interested in?
Role in purchase process	What is their influence in the decision-making process?
Quotes	Any key quotes they have said in interviews/ interactions

Table 1. (Questions to ask when building your customer personas, Marketo, 2019).

Understanding and humanizing the buyers will help the company to create relevant content. The personas will determine the tone, style, and strategies for delivering the content and understand the most important topics that should be covered. Creating the personas will also tell the company what the best platforms are for posting the content. (Marketo, 2019).

The analytics of an existing audience can be used to identify the target. These can be found on social media channels' built-in features. Successful competitors' audiences are also one guideline to finding the company's own target market. Additionally, the profile of a typical tourist traveling to a certain destination can usually be found on the tourism authority's website. (Papinoja, personal interview, April 22, 2021).

The process of making a social media marketing strategy starts with making clear goals. Then answering three questions to further clarify: "What is my purpose in using social media?", "What am I hoping to achieve?" and "What is my desired outcome?". (Coles, 2017).

In addition to the social media plan, one should consider making a SWOT analysis regarding the social media marketing actions of their company, which assists in finding the strengths and things to improve on internally as well as in comparison to the company's competition. (Coles, 2017). Through analyzing the market and the internal environment, tourism companies can find the focus strategy. They also need to take into consideration the available resources and skills as well as what kind of knowledge they need to develop the strategy. (Goldsmith, Tsiotsou et al., 2012).

The most common pitfalls to avoid in social media actions include not planning and strategizing the actions, just trying to sell (irritating the audience with endless promotion), trying to be on every platform all the time, and not measuring the success. One can avoid these by making clear objectives and goals, having varying content, and measuring the engagement of different type of posts published at different times. Also, choosing the platforms carefully, and then staying consistent and engaging actively on those platforms, will help the company. (Marketo, 2019). One should make sure to respond to customer feedback, reviews, and comments. It makes the customers feel valued as well as ensures their future interaction with the brand. (Hospitalitynet, 2021). The social media marketing actions should be thought of as being at a cocktail party, success is generated by interacting with others while promoting the brand (Papinoja, personal interview, April 22, 2021).

As part of the social media marketing strategy, one can create an editorial calendar. It is a content publishing schedule and can help save time and make sharing content clearer. When creating the schedule, one should take into consideration national holidays, company events and relevant

news. They can serve as an inspiration and be noted in the posts, making the brand seem more interesting and up to date. (Malan, 2021).

5.1 Target marketing

The realization that consumers have varying behaviors, needs, and wants changed marketing from mass marketing to target marketing. Target marketing refers to marketing actions that have the goal of creating value for a certain group of target customers. The process consists of three steps: segmentation, targeting and positioning. (Kotler & Armstrong, 2008 as cited in Goldsmith, Tsiotsou et al., 2012, p. 44).

The first step in target marketing is market segmentation, which means identifying the different groups of consumers that the marketing focuses on, so that products and promotions can be made for them specifically. This makes the marketing actions more effective. Demographic, geographic, behavioral, and psychographic criteria is often used as a tool for segmentation. (Kotler, 2000 as cited in Goldsmith, Tsiotsou et al., 2012). The main objectives of segmentation are developing new markets for new products, differentiating the product from competitors to match the needs of a certain segment, minimizing costs of marketing while maximizing the effects, and developing marketing and budgets based on the characteristics of specific segments. (Moore & Pareek, 2010). Tourism companies frequently apply international market segmentation, where they can target a specific country. (Kotler & Armstrong, 2008 as cited in Goldsmith, Tsiotsou et al., 2012). Other information that might help to segment tourism markets includes travel trends, expenditure data, surveys on motivations and attitudes towards travel, influence of travel agencies and tour operators on destination choice of the traveler, and correlations between expenditure and the travelled distance. (Moore & Pareek, 2010).

After segmentation, the next step of target marketing is market targeting. This refers to the action of selecting the segments to focus on. To do that, the company needs to take into consideration the size of the segment, growth, and structural attractiveness (e.g., competitors and suppliers) as well as its own resources and goals. There are different options: undifferentiated marketing (one offer for whole market), differentiated marketing (different offers for different customer groups), niche marketing (focus on one or few smaller segments) and micromarketing (creating offers to individuals or consumers in certain location). Generally, tourism companies mostly use differentiated marketing. (Goldsmith, Tsiotsou et al., 2012).

The final step of target marketing is positioning. In short, it refers to differentiating the company from competitors in a way that brings value to the customers, not only by product differentiation (Porter, 2001 & Smith, 1995 as cited in Goldsmith, Tsiotsou et al., 2012). Positioning strategy can be done concentrating on attributes, user, benefits, price, competitiveness, or other factors. However, even if the initial positioning is successful, the company might have to reposition itself when the market changes. (Kotler, 1997 as cited in Goldsmith, Tsiotsou et al., 2012).

5.2 Consumer behavior in social media

To reach potential customers through social media, one must understand their behavior. The way we communicate has been transformed in the era of social media. Whereas marketing used to be linear, the marketer sends out a message, it is now transactional between the marketer and the consumer. This means that the consumer responds to the marketing message and takes part by giving feedback. Before the 1970s, the focus was on mass media messages and the product itself. However, since then, marketers started to research the human behavior and found that selling ideas and lifestyles was much more effective than selling the product. To do that, one must know the customers and their ideal lifestyle and use them to target marketing messages to individuals. Allowing participation by asking questions is a great way of engaging potential customers as well as getting to know them better. (Mahoney & Tang, 2016).

One of the keys to gaining the customers' trust is transparency, regarding both the brand and the products. Consumers are interested in the values of the company: for example, what kind of social issues the company want to solve and whether the products are environmentally friendly or not. If the customers share the company's values, it will create a stronger emotional bond between them. The mission statement of the company should be visible to the consumer. (Mahoney & Tang, 2016).

There is more than only one way to creating an effective mission statement (Papulova, 2014 as cited in Rudawska, 2018). However, many publications on the field suggest that there are nine factors included in a good mission statement: Target customers and markets, principal products/services, geographic location (i.e., the area where the company's competition is located), the most important technology used, employees and their importance, commitment to profitability, survival and growth, company philosophy (values, beliefs and so on), the company's view

of itself and the desired public image. (Cochran, David, & Gibson, 2008; David & David, 2003; Pearce & David, 1987; Rajasekar, 2013 as cited in Rudawska, 2018, p. 204).

Another important aspect to understand about consumer behavior is that we seek community. Naturally, we look for other people to relate to and look up to. Humans learn through copying the behavior of those closest to us. Social media marketers should send out marketing messages that match with the target customer's life experience and create emotional connection towards the company. In action this can be done by creating an imaginative criterion for the members joining the company's social media, encouraging the members or followers to engage by asking questions and promoting active members. (Mahoney & Tang, 2016).

There are four attributes that make people share a piece of content and those are important to know because social media success is based on engagement. The first reason for sharing is social currency which means that people like to share content that makes them look good for example by portraying them as wise, funny, and up to date. Second, associations between the brand and a certain moment, item or day might make the audience share the content. One should consider what makes people think about a certain product or company. For example, a pizza restaurant might associate themselves with Saturday night as the time for having pizza. Third, emotions are an important factor in what people share. The more intense emotions (be it sadness, anger, or happiness) the audience feels when seeing the posts, the more likely they are to share it. Also, practical value, such as how to complete a certain task, will make the audience more engaged. If they find it useful, they will want their network to also know about it. (Coles, 2017).

5.3 Sustainable marketing

If tourism services are managed properly, tourism can support sustainable development in destinations. Most countries in the world are impacted by tourism. (Morgan & Ranchhod, 2009). Tourism has been accused of being harmful to the environment, people, and cultures of destinations. However, in the 1970s, when environmental issues started to be emphasized more and the focus was on conceptualizing marketing, it was noted that marketing is a social system which includes both environmental and social aspects. (Rudawska, 2018). Also, more and more tourism stakeholders find sustainability an important value in their operations (Sotiriadis, 2018) and recognize the need to develop sustainable strategies to achieve financial goals (Macedo, Pinho, & Silva, 2016 as cited in Rudawska, 2018, p. 207).

Marketing has the power of impacting people's opinions and attitudes towards sustainability and environmental choices. The most valuable brands and companies of the future are global, well-adapted to digitalization and have a defined plan for preventing climate change. (Lillberg & Mattila, 2020). Their success will highly depend on their perception towards ethical, environmental, and social issues (Kotler, Kartajaya, & Setiwan, 2010 as cited in Rudawska, 2018, p. 68). Ideally, sustainability is included in the mission, goals, structure, and operations of the companies as well as in their values, norms, and beliefs. (Rudawska, 2018).

Future service providers must provide information of the environmental impacts of their services to the customer (Suvanto as cited in Lillberg & Mattila, 2020, p. 39). To be a sustainable marketer, companies need to think of answers to these questions: What is our company's climate change strategy? How does climate change impact our brand? What is the carbon footprint of our brand's marketing? What is the carbon handprint of our brand's marketing? Carbon handprint refers to impacting the customers' choices and values. (Lillberg & Mattila, 2020).

Some of the pitfalls in sustainable marketing are that climate change is seen as a separate problem not related to the bigger picture, there is only little research about sustainable communication and its impacts, and talking about climate change is based on facts, not creativity. In other words, companies are not sure whether sustainable marketing works or not and they might not see the connection between climate change and their own operations. Also, marketing is generally based on creativity, and it can be hard to deliver information about serious issues such as climate change in creative ways. (Lillberg & Mattila, 2020).

There are many approaches to becoming excellent at sustainable marketing, four of which are the most effective. First, the company needs to publicly declare that their sustainable ways of working do not concern only the company but also the stakeholders. Second approach is that the company must have a standpoint to the society's values and how to improve them. Taking part in the public conversation is a strong marketing technique that will make the connection stronger to potential customers with similar values. Thirdly, activating the audience for a cause, such as decreasing plastic pollution with a social media campaign, is a proven method in sustainable marketing. The downside is that the audience might see this as fishing for likes or just pure greenwashing, which is why the campaign needs to be well thought through. Last, but possibly the most important approach to sustainable marketing is empathy. The marketing operations leave room for conversation, opinions and worries of the audience. In the era of artificial intelligence, empathy is considered one of the most important aspects of brand strategies. (Lillberg & Mattila, 2020).

Promoting sustainable values of the company needs to be real and authentic. Sharing the concrete results of sustainable projects will create trust. For example, regarding marine life protection, a company could share a fact that they have been able to save an octopus by supporting a certain foundation. Making the results as practical as possible is important. (Papinoja, personal interview, April 22, 2021).

6 Content marketing

Content marketing means publishing free information to gain visibility for your brand. According to Robert W. Bly, more than 8 out of 20 online shoppers search before they buy and 7 out of 10 say that detailed product content is their top reason for choosing a specific product over others. Brands that use content marketing can increase sales more than 25% compared to brands that do not use it. (Bly, 2020).

Content marketing is adding value to the customers and followers in the form of videos, audio, articles, blogposts, photos and more. Superior content comes from excellent ideas and to be an excellent content marketer does not mean all the content needs to be made by the company. Therefore, it is a good idea to gather a list of webpages that have good content on the chosen topic. The customers are most interested in the brand and company itself, but topic-related content is important too. (Coles, 2017).

Coming up with themes for the content make it clearer what to post and when. For example, one might use theme weeks or certain days of the week for a specific kind of content. To help with content ideas, one can fill in the content plan template (table 2). (Coles, 2017, p. 22).

What is the target market's biggest problem, need or desire?	Themes for the quarter
Articles to write	Useful videos
Off-message questions	Useful websites

Table 2. Content plan (Coles, 2017, p. 22.)

The content shared should be based around the target personas and their needs and desires. Therefore, each content piece should have a clear goal and the audience of each post should be intended. (Marketo, 2019).

Social media is a distribution channel but the content one shares is the sales funnel for the potential customers. The sales funnel of content marketing has six steps (see table 3). (Larter & McColl, 2016, p.85).

1. Awareness
2. Visibility
3. Engagement
4. Lead
5. Nurture
6. Sale

Table 3. Six step content sales funnel (Larter & McColl, 2016, p. 86)

The first step is to gain awareness by being present on social media, so that people know about the company's existence. Second, gaining visibility: when people repeatedly see the same advertisement, it starts to feel familiar, and they want to buy. Humans are naturally drawn to familiar things and therefore are more likely to purchase products and services that feel familiar. Visibility can be improved in three ways: organic reach by posting content, paid reach by advertising content and social reach by engaging in other people's content. All these three allow the company to stay visible. (Larter & McColl, 2016).

Third, when people see the content, the goal is to have them engage with the content by liking, commenting, and sharing it forward to gain more visibility. When all three of the first steps have succeeded, the company can lead the customer towards the business. This can be done for example by offering premium content to the customer in exchange for their email address. This extra will give the customer more information about the company. The piece of content can be a free e-book, webinar, an online event or other. The best way to approach using this technique is to learn from others that have mastered what to give to the customer to keep their interest. (Larter & McColl, 2016).

Fifth step, nurturing, means transforming the customer to a part of the community. This is a critical part, because people love buying things, but they hate to be sold to. After the premium content in the previous step, potential customers want to continue receiving value. This can be in the form of a series of emails for example. To give value, one must know their customers well: are the buyers male or female, what is their average age and so on. Also, staying consistent is crucial. If the company advertises weekly emails on Monday, they must keep doing that regardless of what happens. If all five steps succeed, the customer will likely buy from the company. (Larter & McColl, 2016).

The content shared on the company's channels should be relevant to different stages of the customer journey and help reach the goals for being on social media. The stages of the customer journey can be divided into three: early-, mid-, and late-stage messages. Early messages should be fun, educational, and entertaining. These can include relevant news, educational tips, and visual content. Mid-stage messages usually have a goal as well as build the trust between the company and customer. They also further engage the customer. Some examples include contests, newsletter subscriptions or inviting the audience to events. Late-stage messages goals are to convert potential customers to buyers. These can be click-to-purchase and special offerings for followers. (Marketo, 2019).

As mentioned earlier, the posted content does not have to be created by the company. It can be also generated by followers. In fact, the more control the company has over the message, the less likely the audience is to participate in the conversation. In other words, giving space for participation will be more efficient in changing the behavior of the potential customers. They want to be part of the change by clicking, reposting, commenting, visiting, rating, and bookmarking. The characteristics of user-generated content are its publication on a public platform or platform accessible to a selected group, and demonstration of creative effort outside a professional environment. The audience needs to feel as if they are in control of the conversation and that the company is listening to what they say. It is possible to engage the audience through polls and voting as well as by encouraging them to share videos and photos. (Mahoney & Tang, 2016).

The rule of four Rs can be used to help efficiently navigate content creating. The 4Rs stand for reorganizing, rewriting, retiring, and redesigning. To maximize the use of a content piece, it can be broken up into smaller pieces. An example of this kind of reorganizing is dividing an infographic into smaller visuals including statistics. Sometimes already existing content pieces, that might include expired information, can be rewritten and then published again. On the other side of rewriting is retiring, meaning removing outdated content. Sometimes just the visuals of a content piece seem outworn. In that case, redesigning the content can bring it back to life. (Marketo, 2019).

To define in what ratio to publish different content types, a common framework to use is the 4-1-1 rule. According to the rule, for every four educational or entertaining posts, one can share one soft-level promotion (i.e., a solution-focused asset) and one late-stage promotion (for example a demo). Using the mix will make sure that the value offered exceeds the sales promotions. (Marketo, 2019). Every post should have a purpose of educating, entertaining, or inspiring the audience, or a combination of those three. (Papinoja, personal interview, April 22, 2021).

Photos and videos are an excellent way of catching the attention of the audience. Visual content is more than 40 times more likely to be reshared on social media compared to other types of content. Content including relevant images receives 94% more views than content without them. Images are powerful because they evoke emotion, create intimacy, making the company more humane to the audience, and engage the audience (for example in photo contests). Videos can help in reaching many goals from awareness to engagement and sales. More than three quarters of consumers have been convinced to buy a product or service just after watching a video. (Marketo, 2019).

6.1 Storytelling in marketing

Storytelling in marketing is widely used in content marketing. Storytelling is an old tradition that explains the world around us by using characters, causality, plot, meaning and different points of view. In digital marketing storytelling is used in videos, which are an efficient way of grabbing our attention. Storytelling helps build brand awareness and successful storytelling makes the consumer empathetic towards the ad characters, which builds a positive image of the brand. (Coker, Flight & Baima, 2017). Storytelling is one way of making sure the company stands out and differentiates from the competitors (Mahoney & Tang, 2016, p. 53).

There is scientific proof about how stories help us remember better. Compared to simple facts, stories increase the neural activity in our brain by five times. They also make our brain generate oxytocin, which is the empathy hormone. Therefore, stories make us relate to the characters and build a deeper connection with the storyteller, in this case the brand or the company. (Snow & Lazauskas, 2018). A good story also activates mirror neurons, that make us copy or “mirror” what is happening in the story, for example, describing a certain smell will trigger our brain to create that smell for us, and the same applies to movements and emotions. (Weber, 2019).

Storytelling can be used to make a service experience more meaningful and memorable. According to Kalliomäki, the process starts with finding the company’s core story: why does the company exist, what is different in the service experience compared to competitors, what is the core of the service experience. It is essential to know the target customers well: what they want, fear and value as well as what solutions the company can provide for the customers’ problems. (Kalliomäki, 2016).

To be a good storyteller, the audience needs to connect with the story. To do this, one must tailor the story to fit the situation, know when to tell it, and prepare well but be ready to improvise partly. One must also know the audience and their own brand, believe in their story, empower the audience to act as well as give them space for telling their own stories too. (Jutkowitz, 2017).

Excellent stories have four elements. First, they are relatable to the audience. There needs to be a sense of familiarity for us to connect to the story. However, another important element is novelty: new things catch our attention. In evolution it has been important for us to pay attention to new things to understand if they are a threat to us or not. Relatability makes us emotionally more connected to the story, whereas novelty keeps us interested, so the two need to be in balance. Third, brilliant stories include tension, meaning they retain the audience's interest because it wants to know what happens next. They are a bit unpredictable. Last element for a great story is fluency: the story needs to be told in a way that fits the audience's understanding. For example, simplifying scientific text to an average reader makes it more accessible. (Snow & Lazauskas, 2018).

Having a clear company mission and working in a sustainable way will automatically move the brand closer to being a good storyteller. Showing what the company does to impact a problem will affect the audience too. It means that the company has the pieces needed for a good story: a serious problem, a part of the world (people, environment, or animals) that is harmed by the problem, solutions to the problems, people to solve the issues and positive outcome after addressing the issues. (Weber, 2019).

An important aspect is to keep the brand story going which can be done using multiple channels and forms of content. Techniques for reaching that goal include visual storytelling, carefully choosing the words in written content, making sure the content is relatable, being creative and keeping it real. Honest stories will make the audience connect more with the storyteller. (Weber, 2019).

6.2 Branding in marketing

Branding can be done through social media marketing. Branding includes making sure that the possible customers see how your approach is different compared to other brands. (Bly, 2020).

According to the American Marketing Association (AMA) branding means the name, design, symbol, or other feature that identifies and sets the company and products apart from others. This is done with six variables: physique, personality, culture, relationship, reflection, and self-image (see table 3). If they cannot be distinguished from competitors, the branding strategy is incomplete. (Kapferer, 2012, as cited in Mahoney & Tang, 2016, p.53).

Physique	What do we do?
Personality	How do we deliver?
Culture	Who are we?
Relationship	What do we have in common with customers?
Reflection	Why do we exist?
Self-image	What do customers want their use of the brand to say about them?

Table 4. Brand identity framework. (Kapferer, 2012, as cited in Mahoney & Tang, 2016, p.53)

Part of branding is creating a unique and consistent brand voice for social media. It includes the way of talking, writing, designing, posting, and interacting with the audience. The brand voice should be recognizable to the audience. To assist in creating a brand voice, the company can choose ten adjectives that describe it (see table below) and then narrow them down to five. Another way is thinking of celebrities or public figures that have similar personality with the brand and then identifying those traits. (Clarke, 2019).

Adorable, Adventurous, Appealing, Artistic, Athletic, Attractive, Bold, Breathtaking, Bright, Busy, Calm, Capable, Caring, Casual, Charming, Cheerful, Chic, Classic, Clever, Collaborative, Colorful, Comfortable, Conservative, Contemporary, Convenient, Cool, Cocky, Creative, Daring, Dashing, Dazzling, Delicate, Delightful, Detailed, Dramatic, Dry, Earthy, Easy, Eccentric, Efficient, Elegant, Elevated, Enchanting, Endearing, Energetic, Ethereal, Exciting, Exuberant, Fabulous, Familiar, Fancy, Fantastic, Fashionable, Festive, Fierce, Flirty, Formal, Fresh, Friendly, Fun, Functional, Futuristic, Glamorous, Graceful, Hip, Historic, Honorable, Impressive, Industrial, Informal, Innovative, Inspiring, Intense, Inviting, Low Maintenance, Lively, Lush, Majestic, Modern, Natural, Nautical, Nifty, Noisy, No-nonsense, Nostalgic, Novel, Old, Organic, Playful, Pleasant, Powerful, Predictable, Professional, Quaint, Quirky, Radiant, Rebellious, Relaxing, Reliable, Retro, Revolutionary, Ritzy, Romantic, Royal, Rustic, Scholarly, Savvy, Secure, Serious, Silly,

<i>Sleek, Smart, Soothing, Sophisticated, Stable, Stimulating, Striking, Strong, Stunning, Stylish, Swanky, Tasteful, Thoughtful, Tranquil, Trustworthy, Unconventional, Unique, Upbeat, Urban, Versatile, Vintage, Whimsical, Wild, Witty, Wistful, Youthful</i>

Table 5. Brand personality adjectives. (Clarke, 2019.)

It is important to make sure that even if the social media channels would be adminned by multiple employees, the brand voice stays the same regardless of who posts the content. (Clarke, 2019).

6.3 Using hashtags efficiently

On Instagram, posts that contain a minimum of one hashtag receive at least 12.6% more engagement than posts without any hashtags. Hashtags are a way of grouping posts and identifying images and texts by their content. It is important for the brand to create their own hashtags that will be associated with them. (Robertson, 2018). According to Papinoja, a company should have one main brand hashtag which is highly visible to their followers. This will allow them to use the hashtag and that way increase the visibility of the brand when they post about their own experiences. The hashtag should be simple enough, so that even if the customers do not know it, they might accidentally use the right hashtag. (Papinoja, personal interview, April 22, 2021). This Hashtag can be the brand name, a slogan, or a product line for example. (Robertson, 2018).

Hashtags are a way to make sure that the target customers of the company find them. The hashtags should be quite specific because with generic hashtags the posts might get lost among the endless posts. Since 2018, Instagram has allowed users to follow specific hashtags which makes them even more important in marketing. (Napoleao, 2020).

Concerning the number of hashtags to be used, and how to use them, Papinoja advises to make a list of hashtags suitable for the brand. Hashtags on the list should be categorized into three groups: big, medium, and small hashtags. Big hashtags are hashtags with millions of posts under them. Medium hashtags can have anywhere between ten thousand to hundreds of thousands of posts tagged with them. Small hashtags are the brand hashtags or otherwise more specific ones with less posts. When posting, one should pick an equal number of hashtags from different groups. Contrary to what many people believe, the number of hashtags per post is not important and can vary. Papinoja encourages to use as many as are relevant to the post and change which ones to use on each post. (Papinoja, personal interview, April 22, 2021).

7 Suggested development in social media marketing for Fast Manta

To gain knowledge about the client's current social media marketing actions, I conducted a research interview. Interviews differ in their structure based on what the goal of the interview is. The amount of control coming from the interviewer is determined by the style of the interview. (Gillham, 2000). Because I knew what I wanted to discover, the interview was of a more structured form, where the interviewee was given direct questions to answer. Prior to the interview, I devised the questions, which were then sorted under three different themes and put into a logical order. The questions were open-ended to find out as much as possible about the current situation.

I interviewed the owner of Fast Manta, Kari Lehtonen, through Microsoft Teams. The original plan was to go and visit the company in Krabi, do the interview in person and see the company in action. Kari Lehtonen also suggested for me to do a takeover on their Instagram Stories as a tourist in Krabi, Thailand while being there, which I was very excited about. However, due to a sudden increase in covid-cases in Thailand, I could not travel to Krabi, and the interview was moved online through a videocall on Teams.

7.1 SWOT

The findings of the interview will be analyzed through a SWOT-analysis in this part, using the theory as the framework. SWOT stands for strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. It is a widely used tool in analyzing different aspects of business operations and finding areas for development. (Pestleanalysis.com, 2015).

Strengths

One of Fast Manta's biggest strengths on social media is how active they are. They post content frequently and engage with others by replying to comments and joining discussions on Facebook groups. Their active engagement on Facebook groups, is also how the author of this thesis found Fast Manta.

Fast Manta's owners show their lifestyle through Instagram Stories that include photos and videos of their everyday life. This is one way of differentiating the brand, especially from big dive resorts. It also brings them closer to the target audience, making them seem humane and easier to approach.

Fast Manta has understood the importance of cooperation with other companies in the area and they frequently promote stakeholders such as restaurants and other services in Krabi. When done in a reciprocal way, this increases the visibility of the company and allows new people to find out about them. Cooperation with stakeholders is also a big part of sustainable operations.

Weaknesses

Something that was repeatedly mentioned in the theory of this thesis, was the importance of an existing mission statement, which gives direction to all the marketing operations. Currently Fast Manta does not have a mission statement. Therefore, it was recommended that they start thinking about one, and include the nine factors suggested in a good mission statement: Target customers and markets, principal products/services, geographic location (i.e., the area where the company's competition is located), the most important technology used, employees and their importance, commitment to profitability, survival and growth, company philosophy (values, beliefs and so on), the company's view of itself and the desired public image. (Cochran, David, & Gibson, 2008; David & David, 2003; Pearce & David, 1987; Rajasekar, 2013 as cited in Rudawska, 2018, p. 204).

Opportunities

One of the most important values for Fast Manta is sustainability, especially in the form of protecting the ocean by arranging beach cleanups and coral conservation courses. Although these are visible on their social media, I think they should be highlighted more because this is one way of differentiating the dive resort from its competitors. Differentiation is an important part of positioning the company (Porter, 2001 & Smith, 1995 as cited in Goldsmith, Tsiotsou et al., 2012). Sustainability is also a growing trend, with more and more people becoming aware of their choices and wanting to choose more sustainable options.

Fast Manta is active both on Instagram and Facebook. However, the engagement on Facebook is much smaller than on Instagram, for example regarding Stories. Also, the demographic of Facebook users shows that most of them are older than the average users on Instagram. In my interview with Papinoja, she mentioned that Facebook is excellent for sharing articles and other links.

(Papinoja, personal interview, April 22, 2021). Therefore, Fast Manta could keep Instagram as the channel for sharing everyday life and entertaining, motivational content, whereas Facebook could serve more as an educational platform. They could share for example articles related to coral conservation and sustainable travel. I have seen that Fast Manta shares tips and the latest information related to travel restrictions on Facebook, which is very good for travelers planning to visit Krabi. Providing the information needed for traveling to Thailand and making it as easy as possible will lower the barrier of booking a trip.

When tourism in Thailand increases again and the company acquires more customers, Fast Manta should focus on encouraging customers to share their experience on social media. User-generated content is a powerful way of increasing visibility. According to Papinoja, the company should place their brand hashtag in a visible spot on their social media. This will increase the likeliness of customers using it. (Papinoja, personal interview, April 22, 2021). Thus it is suggested that Fast Manta adds #fastmanta on their bio on Instagram as well as on the info box at the top of their Facebook page. In the future Fast Manta can host photo or video contests which will give them new content from the customer's perspective. Best content could be rewarded for example with a snorkelling trip.

Engaging with the audience is one of the most important parts of social media marketing. One way of doing that is asking questions. Papinoja says that the simpler the questions are, the more likely the audience is to reply. On Instagram Stories Fast Manta could use the "This or that"- feature, which offers the audience two options to choose from. Also using the question box available for Stories will increase engagement. (Papinoja, personal interview, April 22, 2021).

When creating content, it is important to be aware of the target market. Fast Manta knows their target groups very well. However, as suggested by Marketo, the company can make them clearer by creating customer personas that can be used when posting content. This will ensure that there is a target group for each post and activity on their social media. (Marketo, 2019). I have created some example personas based on the information I have, but Fast Manta can further edit and/or create more of them.

As regards the features of social media platforms, I would encourage Fast Manta to try and use them even more broadly. As Papinoja mentioned, using any new features of a platform will increase the visibility of the user. Currently, on Instagram, the use of Reels videos is one example of this. (Papinoja, personal interview, April 22, 2021). Therefore, Fast Manta could create Reels about the underwater life. Another feature I suggest adding to the marketing mix is the Live

feature, both on Instagram and Facebook. Using Live will increase visibility and allow them to engage with the audience real-time. It also makes communication with the audience more authentic (Pompeo, 2019). Fast Manta could use Live for example for having a Q&A about traveling to Thailand or for broadcasting an event happening in Krabi.

As explained in the theory, storytelling is a powerful tool in content marketing, and it allows the audience to connect emotionally with the brand (Coker, Flight & Baima, 2017). This can be done in many ways. However, I know that the owners of Fast Manta have a lot of experience with diving. Therefore, I think it could be interesting for their audience to hear diving stories, any unusual or memorable ones. It could be done in the form of a series, such as posting on a certain weekday on Instagram with a story on the photo description and a related photo.

Threats

The biggest threat for Fast Manta is the currently uncertain future of tourism in Thailand. The travel restrictions continue and the number of covid-19 cases in Thailand have been fluctuating, with a new wave of covid-19 cases starting from mid-April 2021. The government has been planning ways of starting tourism again by creating a travel bubble to Phuket (often referred to as the Phuket sandbox), where foreign tourists could travel without the mandatory hotel quarantine. Later, the bubble would be extended to the Krabi area. (Bangkok Post, April 5, 2021). However, plans of reopening have been discussed considerably, and the plans have changed many times, so it is impossible to know what happens and when. Until tourists start to arrive again, Fast Manta can only concentrate on making the best out of the situation and finetuning their strategies.

Krabi and its surrounding areas have many dive resorts, some of which have been operating for years and are highly recognized as brands. There are some Finnish owned dive resorts too, which could pose a threat for Fast Manta. However, with the clear differentiation of the brand, I believe that Fast Manta will find its place.

7.2 Social media strategy

This chapter presents the development ideas that arose from this thesis for Fast Manta's social media channels, and content ideas for each social media platform. These suggestions can be used as a reference for creating content and modified when necessary.

7.2.1 The goal of Fast Manta's social media marketing actions

The main goal for Fast Manta's social media marketing actions is to gain visibility. Because Fast Manta is a new company, it is important to attract potential customers and make them aware of the existence of the company and its products. These goals are reached through sharing content on different social media platforms. In addition to sharing value in the form of content, one important aspect is interacting with the audience and encouraging them to share content and engage with the company.

An additional goal is strengthening the brand image, and it will be done through social media by portraying the company values and characteristics in the content and in all social media actions.

7.2.2 Social media channels and their focus

Fast Manta's social media channels in order of importance are Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube.

Instagram serves as the main channel and it is used for posting **entertaining and inspirational content**, such as showcasing the life in Ao Nang with daily or semi-daily Instagram Stories, and posting photos and videos. The features used on Instagram include Posts, Stories, and IGTV. Reels and Live could be added to the mix.

The secondary platform is Facebook which focuses on **educational and informative content** such as sharing information related to traveling to Thailand, articles on sustainability, and product testimonials. On Facebook, Fast Manta uses Posts, Ads and Stories. The Live feature could be used occasionally too. Facebook is also used for interacting with stakeholders and potential customers, for example through Facebook groups.

Thirdly Fast Manta posts videos to YouTube. The videos show **the character of Fast Manta and their products**. These videos can be further shared through Facebook.

7.2.3 Brand identity and values

The core of Fast Manta consists of superior & personalized customer service, taking care of the environment and caring for the employees & stakeholders. Fast Manta can be described by brand adjectives such as **adventurous, caring, collaborative, energetic, and inspiring**. The brand character is taken into consideration when posting and interacting with others on any of the social media platforms.

One of the most important values for Fast Manta is sustainability in all three aspects: economic, socio-cultural, and environmental. The actions related to sustainability should be highlighted more on Fast Manta's social media, especially showing concrete results. For example, showing before and after photos of coral planting will give the customers an idea of how they help the environment when joining the coral conservation courses, and it will motivate them to participate. In addition to the "Coral planting" Highlights on Instagram, Fast Manta should add another Highlight including other aspects of sustainability.

The importance of a defined mission statement was mentioned many times in the theory of social media marketing. Therefore, it would be to Fast Manta's advantage to make the time to create one. A mission statement will guide the direction of the company's marketing actions.

Because Fast Manta is a personal brand, the owners (and other employees in the future) should be very visible in the shared content, this increases trust and relatability.

7.2.4 Assessment of marketing actions

The social media marketing actions will be evaluated through following the statistics of the shared content. Instagram Insights and Facebook Analytics are enough for this currently. The details of posts with the most engagement, likes, and comments should be written down. Details about posting time, topics, hashtags, and other characteristics will help to create successful content in the future. In the long run, follower numbers can also be followed. At the time of writing this thesis Fast Manta has 888 followers on Instagram, 449 on Facebook (416 likes on the page) and 12 subscribers on YouTube.

7.2.5 Time management and posting times

Time should be put aside for social media marketing actions, on one hand to make it consistent and on the other hand, not to spend unnecessarily too much time on it. I recommend for Fast Manta to put aside one hour in the morning and one hour in the afternoon for social media actions.

As for the content, I recommend Fast Manta use a calendar showing each platform and the planned content with details to keep track of when and what they will be posting. I have made a proposal of an editorial calendar. The original template I edited to fit Fast Manta, is made by Gracia Kleijnen at Google Sheets Geeks. (Kleijnen, 2020). The calendar is a google sheets file which I privately shared to Fast Manta. The calendar covers the rest of the year 2021 but I have filled in only September 2021, to serve as an example of how it works. I chose September, because I believe that by then, tourism in Thailand will be slowly recovering and hopefully the Phuket sandbox (see 7.1) will already have been extended to Krabi. In the editorial calendar I have marked any relevant holidays/celebrations that could be acknowledged in the content.

Posting times in social media can make a big difference to the amount of engagement a post gets. Therefore, Fast Manta should keep track of which posting times work best for them. As a guideline, the rule of most engagement when posting on Facebook is between one and four o'clock in the afternoon, specifically on Wednesdays at three o'clock, and on weekends between eight in the morning and eight in the evening (see 4.2). Because Fast Manta is in Thailand, but its target group consists of different nationalities, the local times must be taken into consideration.

7.2.6 Customer personas

Four customer personas that represent different people in Fast Manta's social media audience and potential customers, were created. These personas can be used when creating content to make sure there is a target group for it.

Buyer Personas	Julia, 27 FIN	Wilhelm, 32 SWE	Pekka, 55 FIN	Melinda, 48 GER
Background	Recently graduated from university Single	Online marketer working remotely Has a girlfriend	Early pensioner Wife & grown-up son	Biology teacher Husband + three kids aged 7,9,16 years old
Goals	Planning to travel in Southeast Asia, looking for unique once-in-a-lifetime experiences	Wants to accomplish a dive course Living sustainably	Spends a few months in Thailand every year Want to connect with people in the destination Values customer service in Finnish	Going to spend a long Christmas holiday in Krabi Looking for family activities & tours
Source of information	1. Instagram	1. Instagram 2. Facebook 3. Youtube	1. Facebook 4. Youtube	1. Facebook 5. Instagram
Preferred content topics	Lifestyle in Krabi Activities in the destination	Products offered by the company Sustainable diving	Things to see and do in Krabi How things are going in Thailand when he is not there	Sustainable travel Requirements for traveling to Thailand
Marketing message	Inspiring & entertaining content	Content that shows expertise	Entertaining photos and videos Content that shows the owners personality	Educating content on marine life Good photos from the destination to
Objections	In planning phase, has not decided what activities to do in SE Asia in each destination Calculated budget	Always traveling and looking for new destinations but has not decided to specifically travel to Krabi	Always comparing different service providers	Activities need to suit the whole family
(Product) interests	Likes snorkeling Has never done scuba diving, but would like to try Animal lover	Experienced diver looking for challenges and new certifications Eco-friendly living & minimalism Extreme sports	Fun diving (has done some diving before)	Snorkeling Coral conservation Tours in Ao Nang

7.2.7 Hashtags

The brand hashtag **#fastmanta** should be visible on all social media channels. On Instagram it should be added to the bio, where the followers can easily find it and use it when sharing content.

On Instagram posts, relevant hashtags should be picked from all three different categories: big hashtags (tagged in more than a million posts), medium hashtags (More than ten thousand tagged photos) and small hashtags which are more specific to the brand and its collaborators. See the table under for examples of hashtags that can be used. The list can be completed later. Up to 10 hashtags can be picked from each category.

Big hashtags (1M+ posts)

[#thailand](#) [#thailandtravel](#) [#scubadiving](#) [#snorkeling](#) [#freediving](#) [#underwaterworld](#) [#underwaterphotography](#) [#diving](#) [#divingthailand](#) [#krabi](#) [#sea](#) [#sun](#) [#turtle](#) [#phiphiisland](#) [#padi](#) [#beachlife](#) [#vitaminsea](#) [#oceanlife](#) [#amazingthailand](#) [#marinelife](#) [#islandlife](#) [#paddleboarding](#) [#sustainability](#) [#uwphotography](#) [#loma](#) [#sealife](#) [#coral](#) [#coralreef](#)

Medium hashtags (10K+ posts)

[#divingthailand](#) [#diving_photography](#) [#krabithailand](#) [#aonang](#) [#underwaterlife](#) [#andamansea](#) [#speedboat](#) [#longtailboat](#) [#turtletuesday](#) [#padiinstructor](#) [#diveinstructor](#) [#thailandnature](#) [#reefs](#) [#diveresort](#) [#kohlanta](#) [#thailandvibes](#) [#thailandgram](#) [#divetime](#) [#padi tv](#) [#visitthailand](#) [#vacayvibes](#) [#discoverscubadiving](#) [#thaimaa](#) [#thailandlovers](#) [#scubalove](#) [#sukellus](#) [#krabitown](#) [#snorkelingday](#) [#sustainabletravel](#)

Small hashtags (brand specific, collaborators etc.)

[#reexplorekrabi](#) [#rediscoverkrabi](#) [#skalkrabi](#) [#rediscoverthailand](#) [#coralconservation](#) [#thaimaanystävät](#) [#minnethaimaassa](#) [#amazingkrabi](#) [#explorekrabi](#) [#kohhaa](#) [#fastmantatravel](#) [#scubaholiday](#) [#padidiveresort](#) [#thailanddiving](#) [#koralli](#) [#sustainablediving](#)

7.2.8 Development and post ideas for each platform

Instagram

Development:

- Kari and Johanna more often visible in the content
- Logo and company name visible in photos and videos (in equipment, written, or as a watermark)
- Add brand hashtag #fastmanta to Bio
- Asking simple questions from followers utilizing this or that, question box etc.

Post ideas:

- Reels: underwater videos of different sea creatures
- Live:
 - Q&A about life in Krabi / Phuket Sandbox
 - Videos from local events and happenings in Krabi
 - Interview stakeholders
- Highlights:
 - Sustainability
 - Snorkeling
 - Favorite travel spots in Krabi
- Stories:
 - Day in the life of a dive instructor
- Behind the scenes material from getting ready for dives / office hours
- Diving stories

Facebook

Development:

- Add #fastmanta to the info box on top of the page
- Write a more describing introduction of Fast Manta to the info box
- Using the 4-1-1 formula for content (for every four educational or entertaining posts, one can share one soft-level promotion and one late-stage promotion (see chapter 6).
- Facebook Ads: using the three layers of marketing (see 4.1)

Post ideas:

- Links:
 - YouTube videos
 - Embassy's announcements
 - Articles on sustainable travel / corals /
- Travel tips
- Diving tips

YouTube

Development:

- Fast Manta watermark to videos
- More storyline to videos (using the characteristics of storytelling (see 6.1))
- More active, consistently (for example weekly or bi-weekly video)

Video ideas:

- Day in the life of Fast Manta
- Fast Manta's story
- Introducing the owners of Fast Manta
- Short promotional videos
- Product testimonials
- Attractions in/near Ao Nang

8 Conclusion

The process of this thesis started in late December 2020, when I accidentally came across the owner of Fast Manta, Kari Lehtonen, in a Bangkok Expats Facebook group. I had commented on a post by a Finnish exchange student in Thailand and Kari Lehtonen replied to my comment. For the past few months before that, I had been thinking about my thesis topic, but had not made any decisions or contacted any companies. Therefore, after discovering that Kari owned a dive resort in Southern Thailand, I decided to try my luck and I sent him a short message explaining my thesis idea and asked if Fast Manta would like to serve as my client. Shortly after, we had an agreement and I started writing the thesis plan.

The thesis plan was presented in the beginning of February, after which I started working on the theory part of the thesis. I read a lot of books and deepened my understanding of tourism marketing and social media. At the end of April, I interviewed Kari Lehtonen through Microsoft Teams videocall. The original plan was to visit Fast Manta in Krabi during the process, get some practical experience by taking over their social media, and to conduct the interview in person. However, due to the increase of covid-19 cases in Thailand, plans changed, and the interview was moved online. I also contacted Veera Papinoja to ask her for an interview. Due to her busy schedule, the interview was conducted through Whatsapp. I sent her the questions in text form and Papinoja replied through voice messages which I transcribed.

After the interviews, I completed the theory part with excerpts from Papinoja's interview and started applying my learnings to Fast Manta's case. I performed a SWOT analysis and created a social media strategy for Fast Manta. In addition, I made an editorial calendar for Fast Manta to keep track of their content.

As the saying goes, well begun is half done. Before starting the thesis, I had a very clear and defined idea of what I wanted to do. Collaborating with Fast Manta allowed me to combine many of my interests in the thesis. One of the keys to this whole process has been time management. I made a very detailed schedule while working on the thesis plan. In the schedule I listed the topics and tasks I needed to finish each week until presenting the thesis at the end of the spring semester 2021. Knowing what to do next made it easy to follow the plan.

Another important aspect has been the support from family, friends, teachers, and the client, Fast Manta. On exchange with me in Thailand has been my classmate Duong Vo with whom we have

spent a lot of time working on our theses. Agreeing on times to work on the thesis, staying accountable, and motivating each other has made a big difference. From the beginning, on behalf of Fast Manta, Kari Lehtonen told me that if there are any questions or problems, he is there to help. The support means a lot, even though most of the time my working style was very independent. The work I did felt valued by the company and from the beginning I was welcomed to the team. I am very happy about working with Fast Manta and hope to do so on some level in the future too.

The challenges in the thesis process have been mostly related to keeping the topic delineated. The more I have learned about social media marketing, the more topics have emerged that I would like to research and learn about. However, with a specific plan I managed to limit the research, so it did not expand too much.

If I had more time, I would have wanted to learn about email list building because it allows brands to target their marketing even more. Lengthy email lists also increase the value of the company. I considered looking into the topic but felt like it would be a little bit too separate from the topic of this thesis.

8.1 Reliability, validity, and ethical issues

The reliability of this thesis is tied to the sources used in the theory part. Most of the chosen books and ebooks on social media marketing were published less than five years ago to make sure they are relevant. However, social media platforms and their algorithms change continuously. Therefore, there is no guarantee that the theory will still be valid a few years from now. The validity of the research is built by making sure the theory and the interview questions seek answers to the research question.

As mentioned in chapter 2, ethical issues in qualitative research are related to anonymity, confidentiality, informed consent, and the impact of personal opinions. The interviews conducted for the thesis were transcribed to written form and sent to the interviewees for approval, to make sure all information corresponded with what they had said. Qualitative research is always impacted by personal opinions, in this case of the interviewees, and of the author. However, I trust the professionalism and experience of my chosen interviewee on social media marketing. The client's name was kept a secret during the interview with Papinoja, to ensure objectivity.

8.2 Feedback from Fast Manta

Message from Fast Manta's owner Kari Lehtonen (June 3, 2021):

"It has been a pleasure to work with Katariina. Her passion and motivation have inspired us to do our job better. All messages, calls, and video chats have been very professional with Katariina, and we are looking forward to co-operating with her also in the future. We have got a lot of new ideas how to create our social media marketing much better and how important it is that we keep our own style and schedule & plan our duties even better than we have done. Thank you."

8.3 Limitations of the study and future steps

Because this thesis was written at a very unusual time for tourism industry, when not many people were able to travel, the success of the thesis is hard to measure. The social media marketing actions done at this time do not affect the sales easily because there are almost no travelers. However, the social media follower numbers, engagement and likes can still be measured. When the situation normalizes, Fast Manta will be able to better evaluate its marketing actions.

The focus of this thesis is on social media marketing, especially on Facebook and Instagram. However, digital marketing consists of more than that. In addition to social media channels, the company has its own website. The next step for further research for Fast Manta's digital marketing could be to find out how to best benefit from their website. Also, email marketing is often seen as a powerful tool for attracting customers. Email list building and automating it could be ways to further develop Fast Manta's marketing.

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Cover photo retrieved from fastmanta.com.

10 Appendices

10.1 Interview questions for Fast Manta's owner Kari Lehtonen

Fast Manta: values, mission, target market

- What is the story behind Fast Manta? (How everything started)

I have dreamed about my own dive center in Thailand for about 10 years. In 2013 I had a one-year break from my work in Finland and I was on a Dive Instructor course here in Ao Nang and I met my wife Johanna in Thailand on her holiday. She had been working in a dive center here in Ao Nang before also for many winters. Since then, we traveled between Finland and Thailand, staying for a few months here in Ao Nang and working remotely to Finland. Four years ago, we bought a house in Ao Nang, Krabi with the idea that someday there will be our home and dive center. About two years ago the dream took a more concrete form when I resigned from my old job in Finland. In the beginning of September 2019, we started organizing everything related to the dive center. Everything was ready by mid-March 2020 and the dive center could start working. 10 days after that Covid-19 hit and we had to close. We went back to Finland and were supposed to stay for only a while, which turned out to be 7 months. In October we were able to return to Thailand and continue organizing everything. I have earlier followed how a dive center works in Finland, so I knew what to expect coming into this, and how much work it includes.

- What are Fast Manta's core values?

Environment and preserving the nature as well as coral conservation are important to us. The focus is on the customer and small groups. We do not want to attract huge groups, or if we would have a lot of customers at the same time, they will be divided into small groups of 5-10 people per boat for each customer to get personal service and assistance. I have learned through the years here that people want to hear about the life in Thailand and ask questions and so on. There is a need for more personal service. We want to have good quality in everything we do, and we want to make sure the customers get full value for the money they put in our services. We want them to feel like they were taken care of. Another important thing is that the brand is based around us as people. The customers want to come dive with Kari, Kari and Johanna are there. We make ourselves the brand rather than making the company the brand.

- Does Fast Manta have a mission statement?

No, we do not actually have, I've been thinking about it. Good ideas are welcome.

- Who do you wish to target with your social media marketing actions? (Age, gender, nationality, values)

Thinking about our current following, the majority is Finnish. Age group 25-55. A bit more women than men, but not a big difference. We are looking for the customers who want to experience a unique day. The customer can tell us what kind of activities they want to include in the day, and we can make it happen. We might not even have a ready-made package deal, because we want to hear the customer's wishes. They let us know how many they are in the group, what kind of things they wish to include and on what day, and we can plan a day for them. We target smaller groups who are looking for more tailored options.

Platforms: Instagram & Facebook, tools used, evaluation of activities

- Which social media platforms do you currently use and why?

Instagram is number one and we have the most followers there. I have noticed that Facebook is becoming less relevant all the time. Older people use Facebook more, 40 years and older. We must adapt to the market which means Instagram is the platform to focus on. We sometimes post videos on YouTube but very little.

We post some of the Instagram material on Facebook, as well as some content only used in Facebook. Our stories material is more about our lifestyle here in Thailand whereas the regular posts are more related to this area and activities here.

Looking at the numbers of views on each post, very little part of the followers, around 20-25 percent, on Facebook see the posts but on Instagram about half of the followers see them. Also, on Facebook very few people watch the stories compared to Instagram. The reach on Instagram is much better in general.

It is interesting what kind of a post gets more engagement and views whereas another one does not get any reaction, why this happens. For example, we have a recent short video of a medusa which popped out compared to other content around it. It is difficult to generate material that interests people. It is what we need help with, to understand what people want. On the other hand, it is our style what we post, and the customers find us based on it, which is also important

because then the followers are interested in our lifestyle. They are not just numbers of followers who follow but are not interested to join us for diving etc.

- Which features do you use on each platform? (Regular posts, stories, polls, live etc.)

Stories and regular posts. I have used the live tool only a couple of times but thought that it might be something good to do. I have thought about asking on a poll what kind of topics the followers would want to include in the topics of the live.

- Do you use any tools to evaluate the engagement and/or efficiency of your social media posts?

We only use the statistics available on Facebook and Instagram in the professional version. But no additional tools.

- Do you use paid advertising on social media?

Yes, we have tried them out before. At the start of the year, we had a campaign focused on the Thai market. It got some views but did not generate any contacts or sales. As a contrast, I tried the paid advertising tool earlier with an underwater kissing photo, which got a huge amount of likes and we got a lot of new followers through it. I did not feel like paying for the advertising was worth it.

- Do you have a budget for social media marketing?

No, we do not. At the moment the market is so difficult, so we are just deciding as we go. When it starts to look like Thailand's borders open soon, we need to focus on the Finnish market. Many Finns have already bought trips to Thailand and are waiting. So, we have put some money aside to help reach the Finnish market, so they find us when they do travel here. The situation has made remote working the new normal. This allows people to stay longer when they travel again.

- How much time do you approximately use on social media actions daily?

A few hours daily, through the day we post something. Maybe 2-3 hours a day. Taking photos, picking which ones to post, what the captions are etc. as well as following others, gathering ideas for future posts and so on. In the future when we have more customers, we plan to change regularly who is posting so there are more perspectives to our operations.

Content: storytelling, branding, hashtags

- Do you plan your social media posts in advance? (Posting times, content themes)

Every now and then I make a few drafts waiting to be posted. I do not post on consecutive days, usually every second or every third day so there will be 2-3 regular posts per week. I pay attention to posting content both from above and below the surface of the water. We had a Monday Mystery competition a while back, where it was more planned what we post and when but generally we do not plan that much in detail. But yes, I always try to have at least one post ready. We are planning some special posts related to certain days (such as World Ocean Day), so they are ready when the day comes.

- How does the audience tell your content apart from others?

The brand is focused on us as people and following our lifestyle which is how we differentiate from others. Other than that, no. We have been told to concentrate more on diving in marketing, but I do not want that, because I want the content to look like us. It cannot be too polished. We want it to have a “homemade” aspect to it which makes it easier for customers to also connect with us. We concentrate on the positive side of things also related to the current situation: beautiful views, life in Thailand and so on.

- Do you have a strategized approach to the visuals of your content? (Themes, colors, objects, filters, **hashtags**)

We do not have a color theme or anything like that. Concerning hashtags, we use #krabi, #aonang, sometimes #underwaterlife or #scubalife. We are part of a travel association called Skål, and currently we are using #reexplorekrabi and #reexplorethailand. Skål then promotes the posts using these hashtags which gives us more visibility. I have also used #thaimaanystävät sometimes. [Sidenote: Thaimaan ystävät is a popular Facebook groups for Finns interested in Thailand and traveling there]

I have understood that repeating same hashtags all the time will make the algorithm block your posts. Sometimes thinking about how many hashtags and which ones to use becomes too complicated so then we just post the content with the hashtags that feel right at that moment. I tried searching for good hashtags and they did not lead anywhere, whereas some random hashtags make other posts very popular. It is very hard to stay on top of how the algorithms

work, what I should and shouldn't do. But yes, there are a few hashtags we use, generally about five. The rest depends on what the photo or video has in it. We want the hashtags to be very related to the content.

- How do you engage your audience on your social media platforms? [Apart from the Monday mystery competition]

I find it difficult, because I feel like people do not read the captions or posts at all, they just like them based on the photo. In the Monday Mystery competition, the first post got a lot of engagement whereas the following weeks it became less and less. The engagement reduced in a similar pattern week by week. So, I honestly do not know how to activate the audience.

I have noticed that videos get always more likes and engagement than photos, people will focus on them a bit longer than on photos.

- How is your content bringing value to the audience? (e.g., educating, entertaining etc.) [Apart from showing the daily life in Krabi]

The volunteer work with stray dogs is closely related to our everyday life. Part of our money goes towards helping the dogs and we want the followers to be aware of it. Conservation of the environment is important to us; on every dive we have the tools to collect garbage from the ocean while we are there. The coral conservation activities will be highlighted more because that is a very special thing we do. No one else offers something like that in the area. We also do beach clean ups. We want to give to the environment because it gives so much to us and activate and include locals as much as possible, cooperate with them.

Finally:

- What is your vision for the future of Fast Manta? (For example, five years from now)

My dream is to have our own boat, hopefully a catamaran where there is more space for the customers. We still would not take big groups, but we could extend the area in which we operate. It would be convenient especially for the coral conservation trips and would help us to tailor the trips even more. I also dream about hiring one more person for next winter and creating more jobs in the future. Also, at some point I want it to be possible for us to easily travel to Finland knowing that everything is running smoothly here all-year round. No huge dreams, we just want to be able to provide for ourselves doing this.

10.2 Interview questions for social media marketing professional Veera Papinoja

As background information, the client of my thesis is a small Padi dive resort in Krabi, Thailand. It is owned by a Finnish couple who are in the center of the brand, making customers want to dive with them personally. The dive resort started its operations last spring right before covid-19 hit. The most important values for the company are personal service for all customers (they focus on small groups and tailoring their services to fit each group) and sustainability (they do beach cleanups, coral conservation, charity work with temple dogs etc.). The social media channels used by the company are Instagram and Facebook as well as YouTube occasionally.

Strategizing social media actions

1. What are the most crucial steps of creating a digital marketing strategy?

First, think why you are creating a digital marketing strategy: what you want to get out of it, do you want to just create brand awareness or get direct sales or both. Make sure you have a clear plan of action whatever is your priority. Secondly, really focus on your target audience before you think of the channels you want to use. Many times, we think we need to be on all channels and just start with that, but instead start with who are your potential clients and then based on that, decide the channels you focus your marketing on. Also, instead of having to cover many, rather focus on one really well (of course depending on how many people you have working on your digital marketing). Already when you are planning the strategy, have a plan on how you are going to track the success. Do not just track it by social media follower numbers. Those are one measurement but not at all the most important one.

2. How does the brand recognize the target audience? (Tools, tips)

If the company already has presence on social media, I would start by checking the analytics, because in the analytics you directly see who are your audience there. It does not mean that the existing followers must be your audience, but it is currently your audience. Look at your competition: who are successful similar companies and who are their

customers. You most likely find your audience there. There are probably some other tools, but all I use is analyzing competition and the current audience. And of course, the profile of the typical Thailand tourist, which you probably find on the tourism authority's site.

3. What are the most common mistakes brands do in marketing on social media?

I think there are two major things. One thing is that they are there because they think they must be: "that's what companies do, they are on social media", which is true, but the mistake is opening a social media account just because you must and then sharing something just because you must. That will lead to nowhere and then the company wonders why they have no success on social media.

The second mistake is that we as companies often end up using social media as a place where we share our message, which also again, it is that. But one wise man once told me, called Scott Eddie, he told me this in 2015 in Bangkok, that social media is like any other cocktail party. So, instead of just being there sharing and promoting our brand, we should engage with people. How can you engage with customers on social media? How can you engage with your potential customers? Do not just spam messages. Imagine you are in a cocktail party, and you go around sharing your business card, telling everyone what you do and not listening to what they have to say. You would not be very popular at this party. If you think of social media like that, you are probably going to do it better.

I think also understanding that your customers, especially when it comes to a diving resort, they are going to have a memorable experience that will be meaningful to them, and they will be taking photos of the experience. So how can you leverage those to your use as well, is something I would keep in mind. Have a brand hashtag and make sure your customers know it. Do not just have it somewhere on your website, all the customers are not social media professionals so they might not ask you what it is. There is also a technique I have seen especially in Thailand, where a lot of restaurants and cafes have an advertising trick where you get a free ice cream or a free cocktail or 50 % discount if you share your experiences on social media. I have not seen a lot of businesses such as a diving business do that, but something to keep in mind.

4. What is the best way of managing time regarding social media actions? (How much time is spent on social media marketing, what times of the day etc.)

There is no right answer for this. Let's say you have a very big channel: you need a lot of time responding to messages, responding to comments. The time you need for that will probably vary from no time to three hours per morning. The faster you respond the better, but even spending 15 minutes on social media every single day will bring you benefit. At the end of the day, a lot of companies spend just an hour a week instead of keeping it daily or consistent. Consistency is more important than the amount of time that you spend on social media. You can get some success by spending 15 minutes a day there, but you can also get great success by having a social media manager who works 5 days a week, 8 hours a day there. It is good to have a plan instead of just opening your social media here and there. When I used to work as a PR manager where I oversaw the social media, I would spend the first half an hour in the morning, half an hour after lunch and half an hour before I would end my day, on social media.

Platforms: Instagram, Facebook, tools, evaluation of activities

5. How to pick the right social media platforms to market and promote tourism products?

This varies a lot, it could be any platform, or one channel, or all of them, it depends on the target audience. With advertising we can basically reach anyone from any platform. But if I would just have to pick one, Instagram is probably the one I would recommend. Instagram is used in general a lot for travel planning, more than other channels. It is such a visual tool and quite straight forward. But if you have also older clients, Facebook might be something to consider. Facebook is good if you use advertising. If you have someone who can make cool videos, especially underwater, and you're trying to attract younger, backpacker type of clientele, there is a great opportunity of going viral on TikTok.

6. What aspects are the most important in marketing on Instagram?

Consistency. What I mean by that is, it is better to do it once a week or everyday instead of suddenly five times a day and then week of nothing, which I still see a lot of companies do. So, be active there on a consistent basis. On Instagram, it is very good to focus

on the new features, such as now, making Reels. What I would suggest, if you have someone who can do underwater content, share it on TikTok and on Instagram. But do not share it directly from TikTok to Instagram, use the same video content and share it originally on each platform, cause then the opportunity to go viral is quite high. But yes, on Instagram you have more success if you leverage the new features as they come. Of course, you want to have a nice feed with nice photos, but a lot of companies focus on that too much. Remember to do Instagram Stories, make some takeovers from people who work at the company in different roles. Also, make sure to follow and engage with a lot of companies at your destination. It can also be your rivalry, just dare to go and follow them. When you set up your profile, make sure the terms such as Thailand and diving come up clearly, so it will be easier for Instagram to categorize the company and show it where it is relevant.

7. What aspects are the most important in marketing on Facebook?

Facebook is very different to Instagram. Still a few years ago it would have made sense to share the same content on both platforms, but it does not really make sense anymore. Facebook is more for sharing articles. It is not so much for sharing a nice photo, because things on Facebook do not go viral that easily and there's not as much authentic engagement. You get more if you advertise. And that is what I would use it for. Of course, you can share content every now and then, but instead of sharing a photo a day, I would share a collection of photos from a certain day. If you have links to share: an article, a blogpost etc., do share those on Facebook, because you can get the direct link for those, and people are more likely to click away from Facebook than they are from Instagram. I would always save a little bit of advertising money for content on Facebook.

8. Should the same content be posted to many different platforms? (Or be different on each one)

Yes and no. Yes, in a sense that you save time sharing the same content on different platforms and you have a bit of a different audience on each platform. Never directly share, when you go on Instagram there is an option to directly share on Facebook,

never use that. Instead, always post it originally on each platform. You must find your own middle ground in sharing same content on different platforms.

9. What do you think are the most important tools in evaluating the success/engagement of social media posts?

Honestly, there are a lot of tools and if you need them for scheduling etc., use them. But just for tracking the success, social media platforms like Instagram have their own analytics. If you have a business account, you will find analytics in the settings and those are enough to figure out the social media success and evaluate it, so I would not use any other tools for that.

Content: Storytelling, branding, hashtags

10. How to create value to the audience through the content?

First, that is the most important thing. Always when I am sharing content, I try to think, am I educating, am I entertaining or am I inspiring. If I am not doing any of those things, my content is probably not that engaging. So, every time you share content, try to think of those three things and it will most likely make your content more successful. There are some channels who do only one of those categories and some who mix them up, both are completely fine. We often think from the perspective of the company: what we want to tell and what we want to share. Instead of that, focus on what do they want to know. If I am thinking of a diving business and trying to gain audience on social media, of course some of the audience we want to leverage into our customers: we want to give them maybe a discount to a product or a booking. But how otherwise can we strengthen our brand? By storytelling. If I were following a diving company, why would I follow it if I were not planning to go to Thailand now. I might in the future, but it is not on my list right now so, I would not follow a diving company to know about their best deals. Maybe I would follow because they are teaching me about fish, maybe they are sharing content about the marine life, information about the different jobs, about the environment of the destination and so on. So, also think of how you can get people to follow you who are interested in that field, and not just the business.

11. How to promote sustainability and other core values of the brand through social media?

It needs to be real and authentic. Especially if it is something they can do, for example marine life protection and maybe they have some organization that they are working through. Instead of just sharing “we support this organization”, share the actual results “because we have been funding this foundation, we have been able to save an octopus”. So, make it more practical if possible. But do share those values, I think they are even more and more important, more than just finding the cheapest deal. Especially in future travel, we want to find what is sustainable.

12. What are the best ways to encourage the audience to engage with the brand on social media?

It has become a lot harder than it was a few years ago. A few years ago, you could just say anything, and people would engage. People engage less because social media is busy and crowded. But it is still the simple things that can work. For example, asking “What is your dream destination?” and other questions, having a call to action instead of just sharing something pretty. If you are not asking anything, people are less likely to say anything. If you ask them something and the question is quite simple, they are more likely to engage with you. And always engage back as fast as you can. There are also a lot of companies who are now doing “this and that” on Instagram, where you are selecting if you want to have a beach holiday or a desert holiday as an example. On Instagram Stories you have the options to tap different options. You can also make the audience ask questions on Stories. Like if you do a “day in the life of a scuba instructor” and the instructor shares their day on Stories and what their job is like. At the end of the day, they can have a Q&A where the audience can ask them any questions.

13. How to make sure the content posted is coherent? (Matches with the previous posts)

This depends on the channel. On Facebook it does not matter at all. And on Instagram, I think it matters less than it did two years ago. Back in the days, I would always advice companies to think of their Instagram as an art gallery. Like if you would have to have an art exhibition of your brand, and you would get to choose nine images to showcase on the wall, you would probably think of them very carefully. First, that they match, and

they are pretty, but also that they showcase all the different aspects of the brand. That is less important now. When you have a strategy and based on the strategy you have a content plan, it does not have to be a hundred percent strict. But when you have a bit of a plan of action, it is more likely that the message is clear. However, it is more important to give value than to give something beautiful to look at, while both do matter.

14. Do you have any tips on how to use hashtags efficiently? (Amount, words used, popularity of keywords)

I would focus on them on Instagram. I would not use them on Facebook. Technically they do work there but people do not use them. On TikTok I do not really have expertise on that. So, let us focus on Instagram: you can use 30 hashtags per post. Some people advise not to use that many because “it looks desperate”, but no, you should use that many if that many are relevant. So, relevancy is what matters. If you are just going to throw a bunch of hashtags to maximize your visibility, the Instagram algorithm will be confused, does not know what is in the photo, and will not show it on any hashtag. What I do is, I think of 30 hashtags. I do not always get to 30 and that is fine. Sometimes it is five, sometimes it is nothing because I am lazy. But think of them in three categories: there are small, medium, and big hashtags. Big hashtags would be in this case #travel, #thailand, #scubadiving, and so on. They are quite big, there are probably going to be millions of posts under those hashtags. But use them because if you are lucky, the posts have a more viral opportunity. Most likely in most of the posts, you will not show up because the hashtags are so big, but if you do, you will be very successful. Secondly, you have the medium hashtags, which have a few thousand or tens of thousands of posts underneath. Sometimes even hundreds of thousands of posts, depending on the context. These could be #scubadivingthailand, a specific fish or #tourismthailand. Have ten of those. The last ten should be your small brand hashtags, it could be the name of the company, it could be the name of the specific area, #padidiving and stuff like that.

What I would suggest is keeping a list of relevant hashtags to the industry on your phone, so you do not have to always go make them up, but do not always use the exact same 30. Use this list but delete the ones that are not relevant, use the ones that are, and add a few that are more specific. Have one brand hashtag and have it on the bio of

your profile. Make it simple instead of too clever, so when customers do not know your hashtags, they are still more likely to accidentally use it.

Finally:

15. How should tourism service providers market at this time (pandemic) compared to the normal times?

The most important is to keep marketing. A lot of companies have just left it on the side because we cannot travel. Instead, again focus on what does the customer want and need. They do not need a discounted trip, but they probably want to see how things are, how the everyday life is, how the ocean is, and how the employees are doing. Also sharing inspiration and dreams. I see a lot of companies doing that well: "The world is here waiting for when you to return" and "we'll travel again". All this quite emotional, inspiring video content and images. Just trying to inspire and remind them that the world will be back again. And maybe if there is something you have done to be more sustainable than before, share that. Continue to share content, just forget the need for return of investment at this point. Now, slowly there is a point coming where we are already marketing travel and we are trying to get the customers back, and trying to tell them how safe we are, and that we are ready when they are. But be careful to not encourage people, not to set off to travel too early, so you do not sound irresponsible.

10.3 Suggestion of an editorial calendar

2021

September 2021

CW 35

M	T	W	T	F	S	S
30	31	1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	1	2	3

CW 36

M	T	W	T	F	S	S
30	31	1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	1	2	3

CW 37

M	T	W	T	F	S	S
30	31	1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	1	2	3

CW 38

M	T	W	T	F	S	S
30	31	1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	1	2	3

CW 39

M	T	W	T	F	S	S
30	31	1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	1	2	3

CW	DAY OF WEEK	Instagram	Facebook	YouTube	Holidays
35	MONDAY	30			
	TUESDAY	31	15:00: Photo of Karl&Johanna with a short introduction text of the owners of Fast Marla		
	WEDNESDAY	1		19:00: Photo collage of a recent diving trip	
	THURSDAY	2	Instagram Story: "Do you already follow us on YouTube? On Friday we will drop a video on coral conservation" with YouTube username and coral photo		
	FRIDAY	3			21:00: Product video: coral conservation course
	SATURDAY	4			
	SUNDAY	5			
36	MONDAY	6			
	TUESDAY	7	15:00: diving photo with a reminder for followers to post content with #fastmarla		
	WEDNESDAY	8		19:00: "Have you seen our newest YouTube video yet?" (Link)	
	THURSDAY	9			
	FRIDAY	10			
	SATURDAY	11	14:00: #storyaturday: photo post with a memorable diving story		
	SUNDAY	12			
37	MONDAY	13			
	TUESDAY	14	15:00: Behind the scenes photo from office hours		
	WEDNESDAY	15		19:00: Live: Q&A on Traveling to Thailand	
	THURSDAY	16			Talk like a pirate day
	FRIDAY	17	Instagram Stories: Day in the life of a dive instructor		21:00: Video: story of Fast Marla
	SATURDAY	18			
	SUNDAY	19			
38	MONDAY	20			
	TUESDAY	21	15:00: #worldgratitude: What are you grateful for today? We are grateful for the beautiful ocean (underwater photo post)		World gratitude day
	WEDNESDAY	22		19:00: #world car-free day: Which transport method are you using today? We prefer the fins (with diving photos)	World car-free day
	THURSDAY	23			
	FRIDAY	24	Instagram Stories: Introducing attractions in Ao Nang		
	SATURDAY	25			
	SUNDAY	26			
39	MONDAY	27			
	TUESDAY	28	15:00: #turtletuesday: short video of a turtle to Reels		
	WEDNESDAY	29		19:00: Link to an article on coral conservation/sustainability	
	THURSDAY	30	15:00: Beach photo from Ao Nang		
	FRIDAY	1			21:00: Short 1min underwater video with music
	SATURDAY	2			
	SUNDAY	3			