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# International Marketing Plan – Case Company Perspective



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This thesis was conducted as a part of Bachelor of Business Administration degree in Kajaani University of Applied Sciences. The aim of the research was to create an international marketing plan for a 6-month-old Sotkamo-based company. The client company performs in the tourism field and offers a unique and luxurious glass igloo accommodation option in Sotkamo. The goal of the international marketing plan is to attract international customers, especially from Germany, the Netherlands, and the USA. The marketing plan includes tools for short- and long-term marketing goals and solutions for attracting international customers.

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## 1 Introduction

As marketing, and especially marketing through social media are major interests of mine, my plans of conducting a thesis related to marketing were clear from the beginning of the whole process. After the general field of the topic was chosen, more precise consideration of the thesis topic was started.

My plan for the thesis was to conduct a marketing plan for a company, and therefore I started to research small companies which could possibly need help with marketing. In addition to the aspect of a company needing help, another criterion was the possibility of the company needing my expertise in the future. Quite quickly a local company was realised as an option.

As the client company is a new establishment, founded in December 2020, a marketing plan could be crucial, especially when international customers are hoped to be attracted. The client company also has a unique selling point in terms of location, since it is the only company in Kainuu that offers accommodation in a glass igloo. In addition, accommodating in a glass igloo during the COVID-19 pandemic is safe, which is also an important aspect of a marketing plan. As the COVID-19 pandemic can increase the difficulty of attracting new customers, brand building and customer loyalty building strategies can help the company. The thesis will offer the client company fresh perspectives related to marketing to domestic and international customers.

In this thesis, a detailed marketing plan for the client company will be developed. The marketing plan will be focusing on attracting international target markets. The client company has selected solo tourists, innovative and initiative travelers aged 20-50 as its desired customer base. The thesis will include an analysis of the company's current state, the company's goals, visions, and values, research of main social media channels which will be utilised, SWOT-analysis, competitor analysis, target market analysis, different stages of the marketing plan application, regular functions and monitoring.

Theoretical background related to marketing theories and marketing plan creation will be utilised in the thesis. The information from academic texts will be adapted for the client company's needs. The aim of developing a marketing plan for the client company is to provide a fundamental and detailed written plan to utilise in the future. The marketing plan will be helpful for the company

in terms of everyday social media content publishing as well as in achieving long-term marketing goals. The marketing plan will be developed for the client company, and therefore it will be suitable for a small, relatively new company. It is possible that the client company does not have its brand image ready, and that aspect will be considered in the marketing plan.

When the marketing plan development began, the client company has been active for about 5 months. It has an active social media account on Facebook and Instagram, and it has had an occupancy rate of 89-94%. The client company is interested to expand its marketing to the international market. It has selected solo tourists, innovative and initiative travellers aged 20-50 as desired target customers, and the marketing plan will be conducted based on that. The project consists of 4 components: thesis plan preparation, theoretical research and adaptation, marketing plan creation, and finalisation.

The ultimate goal of this thesis is to be useful for a fairly new Sotkamo-based company. My personal plan is to conduct the project in a manner that genuinely benefits the client company's plans regarding attracting international customers and building a brand. This thesis will not be directly linked to any earlier projects related to Vuokatin Lasi-iglut, but numerous marketing plan studies will be studied in order to create the most suitable marketing plan for the client company.

Researching marketing theories and data related to target markets and adapting them to the situation of the client company is the method utilised in the thesis. The experts, which in this situation are the thesis supervisors will also be evaluating the quality of my thesis. Before I will provide the thesis for the client company, I will modify it in such a way that I will be satisfied with the quality of work.

**The thesis will answer the following questions:**

What is marketing and why it is necessary? How can a company segment markets and select target markets? What different marketing channels exist and how are they utilised? How to reach the desired target markets? How Vuokatin Lasi-iglut can increase brand loyalty and attract international customers?

**Reliability and validity**

This thesis and the included research are relatively reliable since different marketing aspects can be indeterminate, depending on various facts, and might also be affected by opinions. Therefore,

the research based on various theories, data and my personal ideas and suggestions is relatively reliable from the client company's perspective. The research and the final output of the thesis can be determined as valid since the thesis answers comprehensively in the client company's commission. The thesis questions claimed to be answered are answered through the thesis.

It is possible that the research result reliability would increase if more data would be available. As the company was established only 7 months ago, the amount of data related to marketing especially can be defined as low. The data of customers can also be utilised in marketing, and a larger amount of data could be beneficial. In addition to the fact related to a low amount of data, a different researcher could conduct different research. Since the research results in terms of marketing plan are partially based on personal beliefs and opinions, another researcher could offer the company different results. Although the personal opinions and beliefs affect the final result, the international marketing plan is mostly based on data and theories rather than opinions.

This thesis includes chapters on theoretical background, the client company's perspective of marketing theories and aspects of the client company are a part of marketing research for the client company. Finally, the international marketing plan-chapter includes a marketing plan for the client company.

## 2 Theoretical background

Theory on marketing, which will be necessary to conduct the marketing plan, will be presented in this chapter. There is general information on marketing, customer needs, wants and theory of the hierarchy of needs, market offerings, customer value, target markets and the theory of SWOT-analysis. In addition, marketing channels and content planning, the international aspect of marketing, and buyer personas are introduced in this chapter.

### 2.1 Marketing in general

In order to research marketing-related aspects, the definition of marketing should be understood. Marketing can be seen as a process in which companies create value for customers, and simultaneously build strong relationships with customers. In Kotler's, Bowen's, Makens' and Baloglu's (2017) definition companies create value to receive value from customers. In order to marketing processes to be effective and create value for customers, a company must understand the target customers' needs. A successful marketing process enables the customers' value creation, which can be concretised as sales, profits, loyalty and long-term customer relationships. (Kotler et al. 2017, 30-31).

In order to a company to achieve effective marketing principles, customer needs, wants and demands need to be comprehended. After customer needs, wants and demands are familiar, it is time to determine the market offerings (whether the company has tangible products, experiences and/or services to offer). Once the offerings are understood, the aspects of value and satisfaction are considered. Exchanges and the relationships between customers and the company must be comprehended in order to understand how the marketing functions should be concluded. Finally, markets should affect the marketing principles as well. (Kotler et al. 2017, 31). In the following paragraph, the five core concepts will be explained further.

It is important to consider that currently in the field of tourism customer is global and should be treated as the most important aspect of the whole business process. Customers can enhance or

damage the business through choices related to purchases and public feedback. (Kotler et al. 2017, 27). This phenomenon can even be elevated in the current tourism field since social media can be highly utilised in terms of sharing information related to accommodation and aspects of similar type. Marketing in the current climate is not only a business function among others; it can be a philosophy, a convenient way to reach customers or a way of structuring the business. It is crucial for, especially a new business to understand that the purpose of marketing is to provide real value for the customer, motivate customers towards a purchasing decision and at the same time fulfill customer needs. (Kotler et al. 2017, 27). In the Vuokatin Lasi-Iglut situation, marketing can be used as an effective brand enhancement and creation tool.

If marketing and other business functions are presented to the customer in a convenient, pleasant and memorable way, there is a possibility that a customer not only returns but in addition leaves a great review. In a financial sense, it is wise to aim at satisfied customers since the costs of retaining a loyal customer are only 20 percent of the costs of attracting new ones. (Kotler et al. 2017, 28).

A call to action (CTA) is a tool a marketer can utilise which helps the customer to proceed in the buying or familiarising process. A CTA can be a suggestion to buy the product, subscribe to the newsletter, watch pictures or read more about the subject. In terms of effectiveness, the CTA should be located immediately after the marketing message. The nature of a CTA should be determined based on the message and the brand image; the marketer has the option to include a harder a "Buy now!" CTA or a softer "Learn more.". (Kenton 2020).

Market offerings which can be tangible products, services and experiences can be used in fulfilling a customer need or want. The word "product" should not be always associated with a tangible object, but in the tourism industry, a product can consist from an experience and service. From the customers' point of view every detail, tangible or intangible contributes to the final product. The client company's product can be defined as a service rather than an item, and therefore aspects such as customer service, cleanliness of the igloo, and convenience of the service contribute to the final product. (Kotler et al. 2017, 33).



## 2.2 Customer value

The difference between the benefits that the customer gains from experiencing a product and the cost of obtaining the service equals customer value. The time spent obtaining the experience is also considered a cost, and therefore costs are not necessarily strictly monetary. With that said, customers' time which is spent obtaining a service is considered a cost and it directly affects the customer value. A company should therefore consider their customer journey accordingly. The less customers' need to spend time obtaining or reserving a service, the better customer value can be achieved. However, time is not the only aspect which affects the customer value. The benefits a customer gains from the experience contributes to the end result. Therefore, a company must strive for understanding the customer as comprehensively as possible. Once the target customers' needs and wants are comprehended, the process of customer value creation is simpler. (Kotler et al. 2017, 33).

Customer expectations, however, are based on past experiences, the customers' surroundings and the information available in the market. A company has to consider its marketing as such that customer expectations will not be failed. If a company raises the expectations high with its marketing, there is a possibility to achieve the interest of a larger group of prospects, but there is a risk of disappointing their expectations. On the other hand, with lower expectations, customers will be satisfied with a higher probability, but a lower amount of customers might be interested. (Kotler et al. 2017, 33). There is a possibility for an accommodation service provider to make the mistake of setting the expectations unnecessarily high since a customer cannot judge the product reliably before actually experiencing it. Because of that reason, it is important to publish real pictures and actual facts about the accommodation premises. (Kotler et al. 2017, 34).

## 2.3 Target markets

It is important for a company, and especially a small company to select its target market. The resources allocated to marketing will not therefore be thoughtlessly spent, because a company cannot possibly serve everyone everywhere. In order to a company to choose its target market, it must define the market's segments. Companies and people of different ages can be different segments. After the segmentation is conducted, the company can select which segment is its

target market. In addition to the target market selection, a company should define its value proposition. The value proposition indicates how a company will serve the targeted customers, how differentiation and positioning will be concluded. The company should try to answer the question “Why a customer would buy our product rather than the competitor’s?”. (Kotler et al. 2017, 35).

#### 2.4 The theory of SWOT analysis

SWOT analysis is an effective tool for comprehending the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of a company. It is a framework that can be utilised to evaluate a company’s competitive position. In addition to including current potential, future potential can also be included in the SWOT analysis. A SWOT analysis is in the most effective form when it is realistic, and therefore the analysis should be honest. Identifying the company’s strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats enable a fact-based analysis where the creation of new development ideas is possible. (Kenton 2021).

Strengths indicate the company’s core assets which possibly separate it from the competition. The strength part of the analysis answers the question “what are you good at?” Strength can be a strong brand, a unique selling point, or a loyal customer base. After the company’s strengths are stated, there can be a possibility of striving to enhance the assets even further.

Weaknesses of a company can be disabling the company from performing at an optimal level. The weaknesses need to be improved in order to a company to become competitive or sustain competitiveness. A weak brand image and an unsatisfied customer base are examples of weaknesses a company might encounter. Strengths and weaknesses are internal factors.

Whereas strengths and weaknesses are internal factors, opportunities and threats are external factors. A company can consider its opportunities by analysing whether there are events or trends which are favorable. Opportunities refer to external factors which might offer the company a competitive advantage. Threats are external occurrences that have potential to harm the company and therefore possibly harm the company’s competitiveness. (Kenton 2021).

## 2.5 Marketing channels and content planning

According to Facebook for Business (2021), Facebook has 1,7 billion daily and 2,7 monthly users. Facebook's algorithm is developed in a manner that the advertisements reach the most potential future customers. In addition to the regular algorithm utilisation a marketer can target the advertisements with three different tools. The tools enable the marketer to target the key target groups, modified groups or groups based on similarity. The users on the key target groups can be identified by age, interests, education or location. The second possible tool is modified groups, which include users who have already engaged with the company. The third target group based on similarity is enabling reaching new users who are similar to the marketers' best customers. (Facebook for Business 2021). The client company should notice that currently Facebook has a trend of older people since the largest growing demographic of Facebook will be people over 55-years-old (Sweney 2018). The most optimal publishing frequency on Facebook is between 2-5 posts a week. The return of investment and clicks decrease if more posts are published. (Marmer 2021).

90% of Instagram users are following a company and 66,6% of users feel that Instagram helps to engage with brands. (Facebook for Business 2021). From the client company's perspective, followers on Instagram can possibly contribute to brand engagement. In terms of advertisement, according to Instagram for Business (2021) 50% of users believe that their interest in the brand is increased if they detect the brand's advertisements in their feed. Considering that, advertisements on Instagram could be beneficial. In Instagram, a marketer can determine a goal, a target group and a budget. (Facebook for Business 2021). This is a beneficial factor for the client company since the adjustments can possibly help the marketer to attract the desired customers. The largest user group of Instagram is 25-34-year-olds, and the second largest group consists of 18-24-year-olds (Sehl 2021). Therefore, the client company's Instagram feed should be planned correspondently.

Social media influencer marketing can be defined as a form of relationship-building that enables expanding the audience, and with factors such as trust and authenticity developing the relationship between the customers and the company. Integrity, reputation, shared values, benevolence, consistency and expertise are contributing to the trust factor of an influencer. (Scott 2018).

TripAdvisor is the world's largest travel website which has 463 million users on a monthly basis. The website has 859 million reviews of 8,6 million companies. (TripAdvisor 2021). The TripAdvisor-website includes 11 representations of local companies which offer accommodation in Sotkamo and Vuokatti (TripAdvisor 2021). Currently the client company does not have a TripAdvisor profile.

The content planning is a crucial part of successful social media management. Content plan should include every aspect of media marketing. The content plan can include different themes or holiday specialties (Coles 2014). Valentine's Day can be an opportunity to market for couples. Midsummer or Juhannus-time can also attract customers. Content a company can publish can for example be videos, articles, questions, everyday workday documenting or workforce introductions (Coles 2014).

## 2.6 International aspect of marketing

As one goal of Vuokatin Lasi-iglut is to strive to attract international customers in the future by marketing internationally, the fundamentals of international marketing are important to be comprehended.

Lifestyle changes and demographic adjustments have transformed mass marketing and brand loyalty. Individual customers have the possibility to affect a company's reputation which has caused more personalised marketing to become popular. As the monitoring of customers' preferences and purchases has become more affordable pursuing personalised marketing can be a reasonable choice. (Das et al. 2014, 4).

In order for a company to excel at international marketing, the prospects' and customers' needs and wants should be understood. Differences among people from all over the world can be divided in two categories: cultural universals and cultural differences. (Das et al. 2014).

To pursue international marketing in an effective manner, the client company should research differences in terms of cultural values and opportunities for advertising (Gilligan & Hird 2012). The marketing communications must comprehend cultural structures, and not only as casual

influences (Powell 2013). Hofstede's country comparison tool can be used to research the cultural differences between Finland and target countries.

## 2.7 Buyer personas

Buyer personas represent semi-fictional descriptions of ideal customers based on data and research. Buyer personas are created in order for a company to comprehend how the marketing could attract the ideal customer. The content creation, the communication between the company and stakeholders and product development can be concluded in an effective manner while understanding the buyer personas. The buyer personas enable personalised marketing, in terms of newsletters and messaging. The buyer persona creation is enabled with researching contact databases and customer feedback. After the information is researched and comprehended, the basic demographic information can be included. (Vaughan 2021).

It is also an option to create the buyer persona as the aspired persona, which enables the company to understand the target customers' possible needs and wants. The persona can also include the identifiers, challenges and goals of a target persona (Vaughan 2021).

### 3 The client company's perspective of marketing theories

The definition of marketing can be elaborated as a process in which companies create value for customers, and simultaneously strive to build strong relationships with customers. In Kotler's, Bowen's, Makens' and Baloglu's (2017) definition companies create value to receive value from customers. (Kotler et al. 2017). In the digital era of marketing a massive power shift occurred, since the consumers have a major amount of power in terms of how a brand is viewed. The purpose of marketing has evolved simultaneously in such a way that instead of pressuring purchasing decisions, marketers offer customers bite-sized content they are wishing for. (Weber 2019, 71).

Therefore, in the client company's situation, strong customer-company relationship building is important as well as offering the customers content they wish for rather than pursuing to sell constantly. Answering customer's comments and questions and liking, commenting and sharing their content regarding the company can be effective relationship-building actions for the client company. Researching what kind of content customers yearn for can enable the content publishing which interests customers. (Weber 2019).

#### 3.1 Segmentation and target markets

For a company as small and recently established as the client company, a target market selection is crucial. The resources reserved for marketing can therefore be allocated in a way that the marketing is as effective as possible. (Kotler et al. 2017, 35). The client company has selected solo tourists and innovative, initiative travelers aged 20-50, all genders, as its target markets. The emphasis is on international customers since attracting international customers is the goal of the client company.

However, before the target markets could be selected, the markets have to be segmented first (Kotler et al. 2017). The purpose of segmentation is to assemble prospects into groups who respond to comparable marketing processes. Different segment principles can be identified by homogeneity, distinction or reaction. In segments of homogeneity the members have common needs and in the distinction-based segment the members are unique from other groups. In the reaction-based segment the members have similar response in the market. However, the

markets can be segmented also geographically, demographically, psychographically or behaviourally. (Tarver 2021).

In the client company's situation, the relevant target markets are segmented by homogeneity; the customers are seeking for innovative accommodation options. In a geographical sense, the company is interested in prospects in Germany, Netherlands and the US. The demographic market segment the client company is interested is people aged 20-50 and in a psychographical sense the prospects who have the resources to travel abroad are the most relevant. The target market cannot be divided so effortlessly in terms of behaviour since the prospects are not likely traveling for the same reason. However, the connecting factor is the willingness to stay in a unique accommodation type.

### 3.1.1 Germany

Although there are no major cultural differences between Finland and Germany, there is a slight contrast in terms of masculinity and long-term orientation. As the culture in Germany has more characteristics of masculinity, the fundamental idea regarding motivation is slightly different: in masculine cultures, it is important to strive to be the best, whereas in feminine culture the most motivation arises from enjoying what you are and what you are doing. As German culture has features of long-term orientation, the preparation for the future is important in terms of finances and education. (Hofstede Insights 2021).

In Germany, Finland is categorised as a "green" destination with other Nordic countries and Canada. The similarities between green destinations is the climate, family-friendliness, they are suitable for tourists who enjoy nature and to wealthy customers. The difficulties Finnish destinations encounter in terms of German tourists are the lack of awareness and the major competitiveness of the field. German tourists are typically interested in high-quality cottages, husky safaris, the possibility to hike and special accommodation opportunities. (Business Finland 2021). Therefore, Vuokatti is a destination that offers each service a typical German tourist is searching for, and ideally the special accommodation opportunity is the product the client company is offering. However, one difficulty in Finnish tourism is the balance between price and quality in especially restaurants, which does not always match the expectations of Germans. Because of that, the fact

that a restaurant offers dishes with local ingredients is an advantage. (Business Finland 2021). One of the largest difficulties of Vuokatti as a destination is the fact that there are no direct flights from Germany to Kajaani, and in addition to that Kajaani is a 30-minute drive away from Vuokatti. There is a possibility that tourists will select another destination instead of attending to two flights and a 30-minute drive.

Considering the cultural features of Germany as a separate aspect and as opposed to Finnish culture, certain elements of marketing for Germans could be adopted. As a typically masculine culture, (Hofstede Insights 2021) Germans might appreciate the luxury and uniqueness factor of a glass igloo accommodation. The characteristics related to luxury, uniqueness and experience of an igloo could be emphasised in the marketing content for Germans. The client company should include the possibility of breakfast with local ingredients for marketing in Germany, as well as the number of restaurants with local ingredients in the Vuokatti area. The fact that a husky safari and hiking trails are near the accommodation should also be mentioned.

### 3.1.2 The Netherlands

The main differences between the cultures of Netherlands and Finland are regarding individualism and long-term orientation. The high rate of individualism in the Netherlands can be explained by whether a culture tends to care for each other as a community or only caring about immediate family. In highly individualistic cultures only immediate family is typically a person's responsibility. Similarly, as in German culture, the long-term orientation of the culture of the Netherlands is higher than in Finnish culture and therefore the preparation regarding the future is more important. (Hofstede's Insights 2021).

Finland has achieved a strong position in terms of tourism destination in the Netherlands. The winter season in Finland interests the tourists in the Netherlands; on summer the tourists prefer Norway or Sweden. One of the main strengths of Norway and Sweden compared to Finland are the affordable transportation methods. The largest portion (2/3) of the travels made by Dutch tourists are focused on May-September. The Dutch tourists are mainly interested in countryside and activity holidays. The Dutch tourists use social media and internet as a tool to finding the perfect accommodation and activities. (Business Finland 2021). The Dutch tourists prefer using



their own car during holidays, (Business Finland 2021) which can be a major obstacle in attracting Dutch tourists to Vuokatti. In terms of Finnish service providers, the most interesting target groups are couples without children, single travelers or friend groups (Business Finland 2021) which is correlating to the client's target groups. A subgroup within the mentioned customer group exists which appreciate activities on their holiday, such as hiking and running (Business Finland 2021).

Acknowledging the long-term oriented features of the culture of the Netherlands, the ecological attributes of a glass igloo could be important. The countryside aspect of Vuokatti should be highlighted in marketing for Dutch target groups. The amount of snow and possibility of northern lights can also be attracting prospects. The hiking and running trails near the client's accommodation offerings can be valuable information for Dutch prospects.

### 3.1.3 The U.S.

The major differences between Finnish culture and the United States culture are in terms of individualism and masculinity. Similarly, with the culture of the Netherlands, the U.S. culture emphasises the responsibility of just the immediate family rather than the community. In a highly masculine culture being best is the most important source of motivation. (Hofstede's Insights 2021).

American tourists are especially interested in the high quality, unique accommodation options (Business Finland 2021) which is beneficial from the perspective of the client company. It is expected that after the pandemic tourists from the U.S. will travel especially in Nordic countries because they are identified as safe and responsible destinations. A typical tourist from the U.S. is ready to spend money on a holiday and appreciates Nordic design, cuisine and lifestyle among unique experiences. The most important areas in the U.S. are Chicago, California, Texas and Florida. In order for attract typical tourists from the U.S. the marketing must concluded in a manner that supports the expectations regarding Finland. (Business Finland 2021). Business Finland markets Finland as a destination with slogans such as "Finnish Luxury – Space and time" and "sustainable and safe travel experiences" (2021).

The marketing in the U.S. should underline the luxury and uniqueness of the client company's product. In addition to the luxury, factors such as safety, purity of nature, freedom, space, sauna,

cuisine, northern lights and Nordic design and lifestyle are especially important to include in the marketing process.

## 4 Aspects of the client company

This section of the thesis includes information about the client company and its product. The various features of the company and product will be researched further by defining unique selling points, buyer personas and marketing channels and in addition concluding a SWOT and a competitor analysis. The comprehension of this information is necessary in order to conclude an effective marketing plan, and therefore these multiple aspects regarding the company and its product are the foundation to the final international marketing plan creation.

### 4.1 The client company and the product

The client company is based in Sotkamo, Kainuu. One area in Sotkamo is Vuokatti which offers several activities which are popular among tourists. This is a beneficial factor in marketing and functioning of the company. The service the client company is offering is accommodation in glass igloo. There are three igloos in the same area, and they are themed and inspired by Finnish nature: the igloo with black interior is called Kaamos, the igloo with the copper interior is Ruska and the igloo with white interior is Lumi. Each of the igloos has an outdoor hot tub in the terrace. The hot tubs are designed and manufactured in Finland.

The igloos are designed and manufactured in Finland and the interior is Finnish design. The igloos are almost completely made of tinted glass; the view from the inside of the igloo is normal but from outside the view is tinted. This was a wise decision since the three igloos are relatively close to one another. However, it is worth to notice that the area where the igloos are located is peaceful and in authentic Finnish nature, on a shore. A local designer has created a unique artwork wall for each of the igloos. The inspirations of the artworks are the local nature and words of a local poet. The fundamental idea of the igloos is to utilise local and Finnish products as much as possible; as an example, the client company collaborated with a local knitting company that designed wool beanies for each of the igloo themes. The welcome snacks in the igloo are also partially local and completely Finnish manufacturing.

The client company is the only service provider in Sotkamo which offers accommodation in a glass igloo. It is a unique experience in the area in terms of the premises, location and the aspect of

utilising local products and accessories. The goal of the client company is to attract international customers through marketing. The client company has decided that the target customer groups are solo tourists and innovative, initiative (couples) travelers aged 20-50 from Germany, the Netherlands and the U.S. The goal is to attract target groups by marketing through various channels which will be elaborated further later.

#### 4.1.1 Buyer personas

Three conceptual buyer personas for the client company are presented in this chapter. Based on each of the target markets (Germany, the Netherlands & the U.S.) a conceptual buyer persona is created for the client company. The buyer personas can help the client company to understand the identifiers, goals, frustrations and solutions regarding target customers. The buyer personas can also enhance social media content planning especially in terms of targeted marketing. The conceptual personas are not actual individuals, but instead a possible representation of a larger target group. The data utilised for the buyer personas is gathered from Business Finland (2021).



<b>Birgit Scholz</b>	<b>Identifiers</b> Interested in green destinations Appreciates active vacations with experiences
<b>Background</b> 48-years-old Lives in Hamburg Works as a doctor	<b>Goals</b> A luxurious setting combined with the possibility to hike, visit a husky safari, eat and drink well Wants the information in German
	<b>Frustrations</b> The price level and service level do not always meet No information in German
	<b>Solutions</b> Emphasise the activities near the accommodation Offer all the possible information in German (including social media content) Focus on the luxurious service level

Picture 1. Buyer persona 1 (Germany) In accordance with Vaughan's (2021) article. Data from Business Finland (2021).

<p><b>Gregor Lange</b></p>	<p><b>Identifiers</b> Interested in countryside &amp; active vacations Values experiences regarding culture and culinary</p>
<p><b>Background</b> 35-years-old Born and raised in Amsterdam Studies coding</p>	<p><b>Goals</b> Experience the exoticness of Finnish nature while staying in a luxurious setting, being able to ski and hike</p>
	<p><b>Frustrations</b> High price level Unstable weather, distances between destinations</p>
	<p><b>Solutions</b> Emphasise the countryside location with activities and beautiful Finnish nature Offering lower cost accommodation outside seasons</p>

Picture 2. Buyer persona 2 (Netherlands). In accordance with Vaughan's (2021) article. Data from Business Finland (2021).

<p><b>Sarah Davis</b></p>	<p><b>Identifiers</b> Interested in high end travel destinations Loves Nordic design and the safety of Nordic countries</p>
<p><b>Background</b> 28-years-old Born and raised in Chicago Works as a photographer and graphic designer</p>	<p><b>Goals</b> A trip in a safe and sustainable country in a unique, luxurious environment Wants to experience the nature of Finland</p>
	<p><b>Frustrations</b> Bad infrastructure The level of customer service</p>
	<p><b>Solutions</b> Enabling convenient yet luxurious trip arrangements Ensuring excellent customer service</p>

Picture 3. Buyer persona 3 (U.S.). In accordance with Vaughan's (2021) article. Data from Business Finland (2021).

## 4.2 Marketing channels

According to Chi (2021), the most important marketing channels in 2021 include podcast marketing, social media marketing, SEO marketing, influencer marketing & video marketing. All of these marketing channels are relevant and could possibly be part of the client company's marketing toolkit in the future. Podcasts are especially popular in the U.S., where 55% of the population aged 12 and above listen to podcasts. (Chi 2021). According to this data, participation in a travel-themed podcast could be beneficial in attracting travelers from the U.S. The great range of different podcast types can probably contain a suitable one for the client company. A podcast related to travel innovations would be an excellent example of suitable podcast for the client company.

Social media marketing already is, and probably will be the main marketing channel of the client company. The amount of people using social media in 2020 was 3,6 billion, and the estimate for 2025 is 4,41 billion users. This indicates that the reachable audience via social media is large. With the right marketing methods and resources, Instagram advertisements have potential to reach 928,5 million users. The great aspect of social media is the fact that prospects all around the world are reachable with social media. (Chi 2021). The client company could utilise hashtags that are unique and might increase brand awareness at the same time. A combination of common hashtags and unique hashtags could be effective. In that way, the prospects abroad could find the company's offerings from #glassigloo, #igloo and familiarise themselves with the brand by the more unique hashtags such as #experiencesotkamo or #arcticlakelandigloos.

A marketing channel possessing major potential in terms of the client company is SEO, search engine optimisation. Every second 89 144 internet users use Google search, and therefore the reason for a company to use SEO is the major number of possible customers it can help reach. (Chi 2021). Keywords such as accommodation, Vuokatti, Sotkamo, Finland, northern lights, igloo, experience, uniqueness and luxury could attract the target market in case they were researching an accommodation option in Finland or Kainuu.

Social media influencers are creators who have a large amount of followers on various social media channels. Influence marketing can be beneficial regarding brand awareness creation. (Chi 2021). Another fact worth mentioning is that since customers trust marketers less than before, influencer marketing is effective especially when a customer and the influencer share interests. (Chi 2021). The client company could utilise the services of a Finnish or international influencer

who is at the company's price range and shares the passion for traveling and unique accommodation locations.

Finally, the effectiveness of video marketing can be substantial if utilised correctly. Video is a form of marketing where sound, picture and text can be combined. The array of video content possibilities is broad: advertisement videos, educational videos and live videos. (Chi 2021). A video of the Pajuniemi mansion area where the igloos are located revealing the landscape and the exterior of the igloos could attract attention from the desired target group. A video of the igloo interior probably can interest potential customers. If there is a possibility to shoot a time-lapse video of a sunset or northern lights from the igloo, a video of that type would serve the nature-driven aspect of the brand.

#### 4.2.1 Facebook

As it is possible to utilise the Facebook marketing tool which enables the advertisements to reach a certain target group based on age, interests, education and location (Facebook for Business 2021), the client company should consider it. If the marketing resources of the client company enable it, there could be multiple different advertisements targeted for certain groups (Germans, Dutch and Americans of different ages and locations interested in travel) or just one large group of Germans, Dutch and Americans interested in travel aged 20-50. Either way, the target group marketing tool could be a beneficial option for the client company's goal of attracting international customers.

Since the largest growing demographic of Facebook will be people over 55-years-old (Sweney 2018), the content on Facebook should be planned correspondently. Therefore, in my opinion, Facebook content should be convenient, easily understandable and informative. The older people might be interested in the area's history and facts related to the company and its shareholders. In my opinion, discounts and campaigns and more detailed information such as the address and price ranges should be published and maybe even pinned on the Facebook page rather than in other platforms.

According to Marmer (2021) the most optimal publishing frequency on Facebook is between 2-5 posts a week and the clicks decrease if more posts are published. In my opinion, the client

company should publish only twice a week and focus on the content's quality. However, the client company can adjust the publishing frequency in the most convenient manner, while monitoring the engagement rates.



**Arctic Lakeland Igloos is in Vuokatti, Finland**

15. Aug

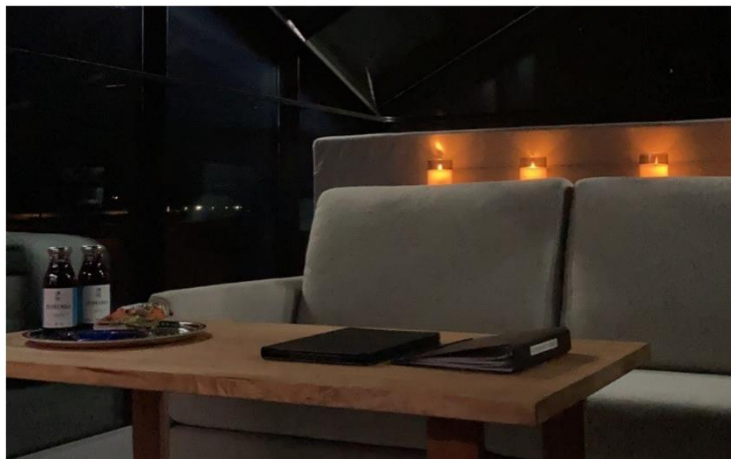
Welcome to Kaamos, a cozy glass igloo surrounded by the Finnish nature ❤️

The glass igloo can accommodate up to four people, and it includes a comprehensive set of appliances which help to make your holiday perfect.

Arrive when it's most convenient for you - we do not require you to inform us. The key code is sent to you email for the first door opening and multiple keys can be found in the igloo.

Enjoy your holiday in the pure Finnish nature! 🌿

[#arcticlakelandigloos](#) [#experiencevuokatti](#) [#travelfinland](#)  
[#glassigloo](#)



Picture 4. An example Facebook post based on Facebook for Business (2021), Sweney (2018) & own suggestions.

#### 4.2.2 Instagram

Since the brand engagement in Instagram is high (Facebook for Business 2021) marketing in Instagram could be a suitable option for the client company. Similarly, as in Facebook, in Instagram



a desired target group for advertisements can be selected. In addition to the target group selection, a goal and a budget are aspects of starting Instagram marketing. (Facebook for Business 2021). The client company can choose a target group, for example Germans, Dutch and Americans aged 20-50 and plan the content correspondently.

According to Sehl (2021), the largest user group of Instagram is 25-34-year-olds, and the second largest group consists of 18-24-year-olds which should be affecting content planning. In my opinion aesthetic, modern content which emphasises the igloos and the pure Finnish nature through beautiful and luxurious photos could be the best choice for the client company. Similarly as the Facebook content, I would suggest the client company to publish as many times as the content can be high-quality and relevant, but however two times a week could be optimal.



**vuokatiniglut** This is KAAMOS. 🇫🇮

In Kaamos you have the ability to experience Finnish nature, design and lifestyle all in one luxurious glass igloo.

So, take a glass of wine with your loved one and admire the northern skies 🌟

[#arcticlakelandigloos](#) [#experiencevuokatti](#)  
[#travelfinland](#) [#glassigloo](#)

Picture 5. An example Instagram post based on Facebook for Business (2021), Sehl (2021) & own suggestions.

#### 4.2.3 Other social media platforms

**Influencer marketing:** It is crucial for a company to select an influencer who has a loyal follower base and shares similar values with the company. Regarding the client company's goal of attracting international customers, selecting a suitable influencer is significant. The similarity of values and influencer's brand is important. In a situation where the client company uses influencer marketing, the content should be carefully decided together with the influencer. If the budget allows, the client company can utilise the services of several influencers in the target countries.

**TripAdvisor:** The client company does not have a representation on TripAdvisor yet. As travelers who consider Sotkamo and Vuokatti as a destination might use TripAdvisor to comprehend the local offerings, the company's presence in the platform is important. TripAdvisor can also be a great tool to increase brand awareness and loyalty if customers write positive reviews, and therefore a TripAdvisor profile with brand-supporting pictures and descriptions is needed as soon as possible.

**Booking.com:** The client company has exquisite reviews on Booking.com. On 30.5.2021 Booking.com, there are 18 reviews with the average of 9,6. The pictures and descriptions in the profile are comprehensive and desirable. The mention of extra effort regarding cleaning because of the pandemic is at the top of the profile page, which is a positive factor. The TripAdvisor profile could have similarities with the Booking.com profile.

**Travel Exhibition:** As the client company operates in the tourism field, a travel exhibition could be a potential marketing channel. During the pandemic the travel exhibitions have virtual elements (McAleavey 2021) which enable the client company to allocate the resources reserved for travel to other important aspects. McAleavey (2021) reported from the ITB Berlin 2021 that leisure travel will be recovering before business travel. Also during the pandemic, domestic travel is a major key until international travel recovers. McAleavey stated that conscious decisions regarding the environment and supporting local businesses were an important trend in the ITB Berlin 2021. According to World Travel Trends 2020 (ITB Berlin), Finland is among the countries which are considered safe with a low terror threat.

### 4.3 SWOT analysis

The client company's strengths are related to the uniqueness of the accommodation and the location. The glass igloos are a unique concept, especially in the Kainuu area. The igloos' material enable the visitor to see the surrounding nature in a special way, whether it is a rainy, sunny or snowy day. The possibility of seeing the sunrise or set, the northern lights or the starry sky is a definite strength in terms of accommodation. The area where the igloos are located is a peaceful mansion yard on the shore of a lake, close to nature. There is a state of privacy in the area since there are no major roads nearby and there is a hedge between the closest neighbours and the area. Although the igloos are in a peaceful area in the nature, the closest grocery store is only 1 kilometer away. The services of Vuokatti and Sotkamo are few kilometres from the area the igloos are located in. The fact that almost the entire concept of the client company is manufactured with Finnish products as well as local products and design is a strength. A private, Finnish manufactured outdoor hot tub is also a strength that increases the value of the company's offering.

Weaknesses of the client company are associated with the capacity of the accommodation. Since there are only three igloos, the maximum capacity at a time is 12 travelers, and if the travellers are accommodating in the most optimal way, only 6 travelers can stay in the igloos. However, this is not only purely a weakness, since because there are only three igloos the costs can be retained quite low and the focus is only divided between the three igloos. Another possible weakness in terms of the landscape is that the igloos are not entirely in the natural surroundings, because the road between Sotkamo and Vuokatti and the closest grocery store and gas station can be seen from the igloos. The fact that the company does not automatically serve breakfast during the igloo stay or have a 24/7 reception can be a weakness from a certain customer type's point of view. A weakness that hinders the international customer attraction is that the client company's home page is currently only in Finnish. As was stated in the article from Business Finland (2021), it is especially important for German customers to receive the information in their own language. In terms of location and the company's goal, the website should also have the option of English or Russian languages.

The client company's opportunities are in attracting new domestic and international customers through marketing and possibly increasing the amount of the igloos. The possible future igloos would probably be located in a different area in order to avoid crowdedness. However, it is the

client company's decision whether the possible new igloo area is in Sotkamo or in another city. The client company also has opportunities to collaborate with local, domestic or international companies in terms of marketing or services and products.

As Vuokatti is a popular tourism destination, there is a major amount of competitors which can be seen as threats. Competitors which offer unique, experience-based accommodation options are the largest threats for the client company. The COVID-19 pandemic is a definite threat for a company in the tourism field since the amount of international customers is minimal for now and possibly in the future.

#### 4.4 Competitor analysis

According to Booking.com and TripAdvisor (2021), numerous hotels, motels, B&Bs and cottages are located in the Sotkamo and Vuokatti area. However, the client company has a major unique selling point in terms of offering glass igloo accommodation. The competitors however have features, the client company does not have such as 24/7 reception and a restaurant. Companies that do not offer the typical hotel experience but offer features which the client company does not have might be the most significant competitors. The client company should emphasise the uniqueness and the luxury factor of the service as much as possible as a way to differentiate from the competitors.

Lapland's companies offering similar products can also be viewed as a competitor of the client company. The client company should consider aspects that enable differentiation from popular Lapland destinations. Differentiation can be pursued in terms of a closer location from Helsinki or being a part of a beautiful town filled with lakes.

## 5 International marketing plan

An international plan conducted specifically for the client company will be presented in this chapter. It includes suggestions which might help to achieve the goal of attracting international customers. In addition to that, the plan includes tips in the weekly social media marketing. The brand enhancement tools for the company are also included.

### 5.1 Actions and functions

The client company should be active on Facebook and Instagram on a weekly basis and create a profile in TripAdvisor as soon as possible. The content the client company will post should correlate with the desired brand image. The author's suggestion regarding the brand image is to emphasise the Finnish nature, Finnish design, local products, luxury, uniqueness and environmental factors. This way, according to Business Finland (2021), it will appeal to the target groups as much as possible. Facebook and Instagram should include posts about the interiors of the igloos, the surrounding nature, the area of Sotkamo and Vuokatti and activities near the igloos and near the area such as national parks. Facebook and Instagram could include Q&A-type stories where followers can ask questions. Current weather, events in Sotkamo/Vuokatti and miscellaneous content can be published in stories. If the company strives for customer engagement, the stories and posts can include engaging questions or comments.

According to Chi (2021) videos are an important part of social media presence and therefore should be an active part of the content. The themes of the videos can correlate with the suggested post themes mentioned earlier. It is beneficial for a company to post a picture, story or video content with humans in it, whether they are customers or employees (Bakhshi, Shamma, Gilbert 2021) since the posts with faces gained more engagement. The posts with faces receives 38% more likes and 32% more comments compared to a post without a face.

The most optimal pace of content publishing is typically in the morning since the stress levels can increase during the day and therefore social media users are more "available" during the mornings. (Kanuri, Chen, Shidhar 2018). Every individual is different, and therefore the client company should decide the posting schedule based on their own resources and the followers' wishes. In

addition to researching the follower base, the optimal amount of posts in a week might be possible to be identified by the number of followers. If a person feels that there is large amount of posts from a certain company, he/she might unfollow the company's media.

The client company's website is visually pleasing, modern, informative and supports the suggested brand image of luxury and uniqueness well. The client company should pursue to maintain the website style in the future but naturally include relevant campaigns and information. According to Business Finland (2021), the website should have different language versions. German, English and Russian are the most important languages in which the website should be available.

It could also be beneficial for the company to pursue a presentation in a travel-related podcast in Finnish or in English. The podcast could serve an awareness purpose that can attract people interested in traveling. The podcasts could gain the attention of people all around the world, however, according to Chi (2021) podcasts are especially popular in U.S.

In terms of influencer marketing, the client company should research for a Finnish, German, Dutch or American social media influencer which can ensure the attention from the desired target groups. According to Scott (2018), it is crucial for the company to search for an influencer who has similar interests, ideas and who is trusted by her/his community. The budget reserved for marketing might affect the influencer selection. It is the client company's choice which kind of content will be published in cooperation with the influencer. My suggestion would be to create content where the influencer visits an igloo and posts pictures and videos with inviting texts and suitable hashtags. However, the service where a Finnish or especially German, Dutch or American travels to Vuokatti can be quite expensive, and therefore an option of sending pictures and videos for the influences should be considered.

Search engine optimisation can be a crucial tool in increasing awareness, especially if the keywords are considered carefully (Chi 2021). Possible keywords for the client company could be Sotkamo, Vuokatti, glass igloo, igloo, accommodation Sotkamo, accommodation Vuokatti, travel Sotkamo, travel Vuokatti, unique accommodation, luxury accommodation and the COVID-19 safe accommodation. The keywords enable the possible customers to gain awareness about the client company's offerings.

An appearance at a suitable travel exhibition could be beneficial for the client company. Especially during the pandemic travel exhibitions have virtual elements (McAleavey 2021) participating

could be more effortless. The virtual participation can therefore enable the client company to focus more on other aspects such as the materials. As McAleavey (2021) reported from the ITB Berlin 2021, leisure travel will be recovering before business travel which is beneficial from the client company's point of view. The client company could therefore emphasise the luxury and relaxation a glass igloo accommodation enables during a leisure vacation. The popularity of domestic travel during a pandemic was a major trend in the ITB Berlin 2021, and therefore marketing for potential customers in Finland can be crucial for the client company. McAleavey stated that conscious decisions regarding the environment and supporting local businesses were an important trend, which suits the client company's brand perfectly and should therefore be emphasised in a major way. As World Travel Trends (2020) state, Finland is among the countries which are considered safe with low terror threat. The safety of the destination is a major aspect which should be emphasised on the possible travel exhibition appearance.

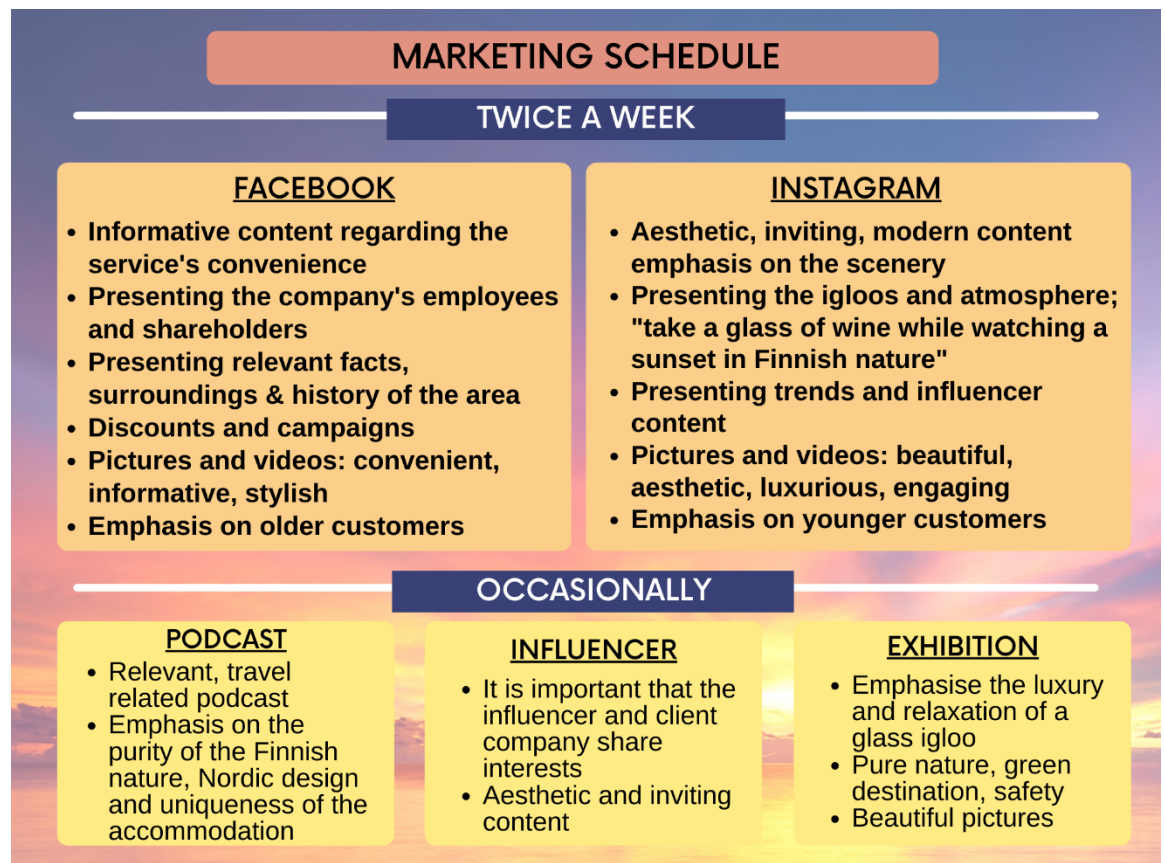
The client company could utilise CTAs quite effectively in their web page in terms of brand image. As Kenton (2020) stated, hard "Buy now!" CTAs might not be suitable for the client company's brand image, and therefore the CTAs such as "Read more" and "Learn more" are beneficial. If the client company includes an employee representation post on social media platforms, a CTA for such occasion could be "get to know us!".

### **Conclusion for the client company**

An efficient use of social media is a major part of the client company's marketing plan. Facebook and Instagram are the most suitable social media platforms for the client company in terms of publishing content regularly. In addition to Facebook and Instagram, podcasts, travel exhibitions and influencer marketing are platforms that can be utilised. Clear, functional and brand supporting website, TripAdvisor and Booking.com pages are crucial parts in attracting customers from Finland and target countries. The content in social media and websites should be translated in English, German and possibly Russian as soon as possible.

Facebook should include convenient and informative content presenting shareholders and employees. Campaigns and discounts should be included in the Facebook posts. Whereas Facebook contains informative posts, Instagram content can emphasise beauty, luxury and aesthetics. Instagram content can include beautiful photos of landscape and luxurious Nordic design. In terms of podcasts, the client company can pursue in participating in a travel related podcast in Finnish

or in English. The client company can participate in a travel exhibition, possibly virtually. For the exhibition a suitable presentation should be considered beforehand, whether to emphasise the luxury, the sustainability or other aspects. If the client company decides to cooperate with an influencer, the selection of the influencer is important – it is crucial that the influencer's and the client company's values are similar.



Picture 6. A marketing schedule for the client company. Based on data from Facebook for Business (2021), McAleavey (2021), Chi (2021) & own suggestions.

## 5.2 Measures and monitoring

The most practical way of monitoring the social media for the client company is to monitor the engagement and follows on the social media platforms. Free tools such as Facebook and Instagram Insights can be beneficial for the client company. Google Analytics is a tool that helps companies to measure advertising ROI (return of investment). All of the previously mentioned tools can be used for free. (Facebook & Instagram Insights, Google Analytics 2021). Utilising these tools



is therefore a great way for the client company to comprehend whether social media marketing is succeeding or not. The client company's resources define how much the measurement tools are utilised, however, it would be beneficial to analyse the results every week.

## 6 Conclusion

A small, new company such as the client company could benefit from social media marketing in a crucial manner. Although the pandemic will quite potentially negatively affect the goal of attracting international customers, engaging with the target groups is possible through social media. Several marketing channels were introduced and suggested for the client company in this thesis. In addition to social media marketing, travel exhibitions can also be a suitable platform for attracting international customers.

In marketing plan creation, the researcher should strive for an open-minded approach. Researching theories and texts with broad selection of topics can be a crucial part of the process. In my opinion, browsing social media content in an active manner can aid in the marketing plan creation. Similar accounts can provide the researcher with ideas for the client company. In addition to the previous aspects, discussing the different topics of the research with another person with a new perspective can help the researcher to gain new ideas. The external person does not have to necessarily be a marketing expert. A person with even a slight understanding of social media and/or marketing can offer valuable ideas.

An interesting perspective that could be researched in the future is the importance of a brand of a company based in a small city. The brand, and how the brand notoriety can be increased in a small community is an interesting matter which could be researched. The research could be especially interesting in terms of the client company because of the company's recent establishment and location.

The ultimate goal of this thesis from the author's point of view was to create a useful and beneficial international marketing plan for the client company. The plan includes suggestions for short-term and long-term functions regarding marketing. I will gladly help the company in terms of social media management in the future if there is a need for it.

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Picture 2, Buyer persona (The Netherlands), page 19.

Picture 3, Buyer persona (The U.S.), page 19.

Picture 4, An example Facebook post, page 22.

Picture 5, An example Instagram post, page 23.

Picture 6, Marketing schedule, page 30.

