

**THE POSSIBILITIES OF A DIGITAL MARKETING PLAN FOR FREELANCE
WRITERS' ONLINE VISIBILITY**



Bachelor's thesis

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TIIVISTELMÄ

Tämä opinnäytetyö on toiminnallinen opinnäytetyö, jossa pyritään kartoittamaan digitaalisen markkinointisuunnitelman käyttöä ja tietämystä aiheesta freelance-kirjoittajien keskuudessa. Työn taustalla on kirjoittajan oma kiinnostus freelance-kirjoittamista kohtaan omaan työllistymiseen liittyen. Tavoitteena on tutkia kokevatko vastaajat, että digitaalinen markkinointisuunnitelma voisi lisätä verkkonäkyvyyttä ja työllistymismahdollisuuksia.

Toiminnallisessa osuudessa toteutettiin verkkokysely freelance-kirjoittajille Facebook-ryhmissä tietojen keräämiseksi.

Tuloksista selvisi uutta tietoa freelance-kirjoittajien suhtautumisesta digitaalisen markkinointisuunnitelman käyttöön. Tavoitetuista vastaajista enemmistö koki, että voisi käyttää digitaalista markkinointisuunnitelmaa.

Kyselyn vastauksia käytettiin tukemaan kirjoittajan omaa ammatillista kehittymistä. Tuloksena oli kirjoittajan ammatillisten taitojen kehitys.

Avainsanat Digitaalinen markkinointisuunnitelma, verkkonäkyvyys, freelance kirjoittaja

Sivut 30 sivua, joista liitteitä 1 sivu

ABSTRACT

This thesis is a practical-based thesis which examines the usage and knowledge of digital marketing plans among freelance writers. The thesis is based on the author's own interest in freelance writing in connection with her own employment. The aim for this thesis is to study whether the respondents feel that a digital marketing plan could increase their online visibility, as well as employment opportunities.

In the functional part of the thesis, an online survey was conducted for freelance writers in Facebook groups to collect data.

The results revealed new insights into the attitudes of freelance writers towards the use of digital marketing plan. The majority of respondents reached felt that they could use a digital marketing plan.

The responses to the online questionnaire were used to support the author's own professional development. The result was the development of the author's professional skills.

Keywords Digital marketing plan, online visibility, freelance writer

Pages 30 pages and 1 appendice

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Appendix 1 Survey for freelance writers

1 INTRODUCTION

Freelancers are reliant on the work opportunities offered by online platforms. Due to the global pandemic, Covid-19, the demand and the competition is a growing in the labor markets online. This affects freelance writers as well. It has become even more crucial to differentiate from other self-employers in the markets and to be visible to commissioning companies.

It can be challenging to market yourself online, to have online visibility. The visibility online includes all social networks and platforms, such as LinkedIn, Instagram and blogs. Freelance writers are dependent on online visibility, more specifically the visibility of their portfolio, which is directly linked with their work opportunities. To obtain online visibility, a digital marketing plan can come in handy.

Digital marketing plans can help to assist one with their direction, but also to classify their niche in freelance writing. These all add to the job opportunities.

A digital marketing plan includes short-, medium- and long-term business goals, and planning, implementing and measuring. It also includes digital marketing channels, e.g., social media channels such as Instagram. (We Are Marketing, 2019)

1.1 Main purpose of thesis

The main purpose for this thesis is to examine the knowledge and usage of digital marketing channels and tools among freelance writers. Thus, is it connected to the possibilities of employment through online visibility.

An explorative study has been chosen because the area of research is little-known, and it offers a better understanding of the topic. Explorative studies don't claim to generalize the results or give solution to the problem.

Explorative studies are neutral studies of the chosen topic without much previous information or study. (Dudovskiy, n.d.)

This is a practical-based thesis to improve the author's own knowledge and understanding about the profession of freelance writer. More specifically, the aim is to find out how self-employed freelance writers might think about digital marketing plan.

The author has executed an online survey for the thesis, which will be shown later. The survey helps to familiarize with the topic and helps the author to understand the phenomenon.

1.2 The problem

It can be challenging for a self-employed writer to gain visibility online. With numerous highly skilled and experienced writers in platforms intended for writers, the best way to succeed is to learn how to market oneself. Without any proper information and guidance about marketing, it can be challenging for a new writer aiming to find a first writing job. Since new writers might not have proper portfolios or reviews concerning their work, marketing is the best way to start. Marketing plan helps to map out strengths and weaknesses, and therefore creates a better image of the current situation as well. Marketing plans usually include numerous amount of tools to help for example creating visibility online, especially if its' a digital marketing tool like search engine optimization.

Freelance writers might not have enough knowledge about marketing themselves, so it might be difficult to start. With a proper marketing plan and following the guidelines, they can succeed. Since freelance writers are dependent on access to internet and online platforms, digital marketing plan is the best way to start marketing their content.

1.3 Research questions

The main research questions chosen helps to examine the usage of digital marketing plans among freelance writers and how useful they consider it to be when looking to become employed. This helps studying the possibilities of a digital marketing plan for a freelance writer. The research questions were also decided by their nature to understand the phenomenon between online visibility and digital marketing plans.

The chosen research questions also help to understand better the motives of freelance writers, and whether to use or not to use digital marketing tools.

The research questions for this thesis are the following:

- Are freelance writers using digital marketing plan to gain more employment opportunities?
- How important do they consider a digital marketing plan to be in relation to online visibility and employment?

1.4 Structure

Chapter one covers the theoretical background of the thesis. It includes information gathered from books, e-books, publications and journals. The research questions are decided based on the theory gathered.

Chapter three of the thesis is the research itself. The data collection took place through an online survey, for freelance writers. Respondents are in the same Facebook group as the author, and it is mainly for writers globally. The online questionnaire was sent to a total of 2 Facebook groups. The author also presents the questionnaire results.

In chapter four, the author analyzes the data from the research and theory, based on the answers of the questionnaire. After the analysis is done, there are some reflections and conclusion.

2 DIGITAL MARKETING TOOLS

2.1 A freelance writer and online visibility

The term freelancer means an employee without a permanent employment contract. Freelancers usually work temporarily, and they can be employed by several employers at the same time. Freelancers offer their services to multiple clients, or employers. This means that they usually work with projects and short-term contracts.

Freelancers are usually working in the cultural sector, for example as a writer, musician or as a reporter. The services and work they offer are usually also related to culture and arts. (Karppinen, 2019)

Online visibility is also on the focus in this thesis.

The term online visibility includes all your social media channels, and how likely they are visible to possible buyers, or for a freelancer, commissioning companies looking for a writer for a project or a work.

Online visibility can be for example the number of people your post on Instagram reaches, so how visible are you for the audience, and how likely you are found. (Wpamplify, n.d.)

Search engine optimization and content marketing are few of the many ways to increase online visibility. Both are explained later in this thesis.

For a freelance writer, online visibility is crucial in terms of landing a job, since most of the work opportunities are online. Online visibility for a freelance writer can be a post in LinkedIn, marketing their portfolio. It can also be using keywords on their blog or web page, in a way that when a target customer searches those keywords from google, the blog or web page comes up first. (Wpamplify, n.d.)

2.2 Digital marketing

Digital marketing is a form of marketing, where there is technology, media and social media added to achieve the marketing goals. It can be divided into several different channels and techniques, which will be presented later. Digital marketing includes managing all the content and online presence the company has and requires the knowledge of internet and technology. Since internet is continuously changing, it creates a challenge for anyone using online platforms, especially if the goal is to have successful marketing. Digital marketing is also a tool to track down the users and visitors, their online habits and whether the chosen digital channel is effective in relation to the digital marketing goals. (Chaffey et al., 2015 p. 11-14)

Knowing which channels to use and which not, help to define the marketing strategy. Digital marketing strategy is created to define the objectives of the company and to help providing direction with marketing. It should also support company's goals. (Chaffey et al., 2015 p. 178)

In the following chapters, the author will explain some of the key tools of digital marketing to help better understanding it.

Table below introduces the concept of digital marketing and what it includes nowadays.

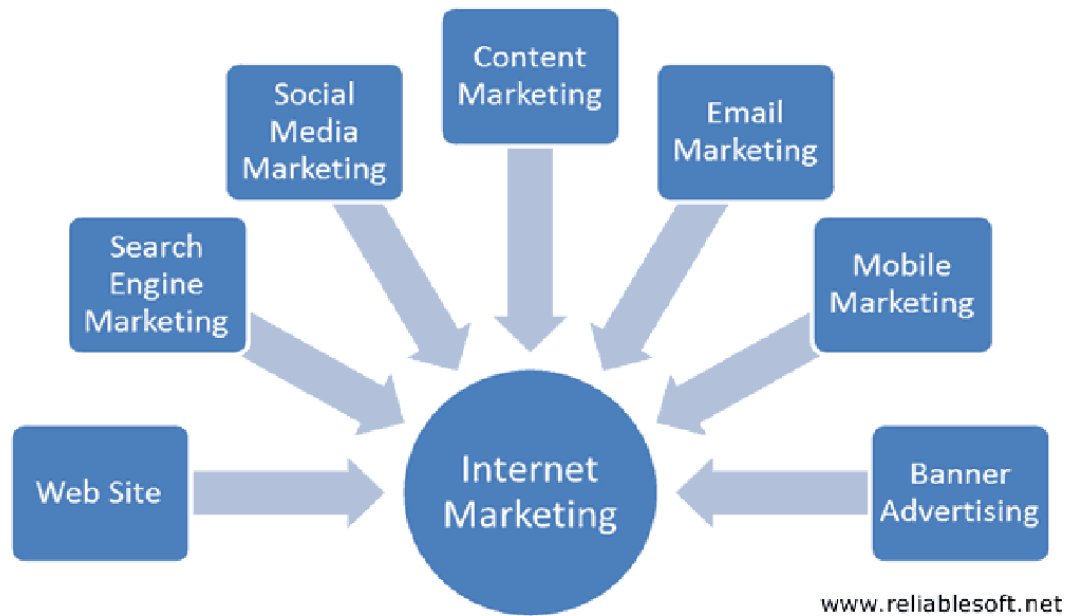


Figure 1. Main areas of online marketing in the structure of digital marketing
(Semantic scholar, 2018)

2.2.1 Search engine optimization

To create an efficient and operational digital marketing plan for a freelance writer, it is crucial to include SEO in it. SEO is seen as one of the most important tools in digital marketing. SEO, search engine optimization, means setting up your professional website in a way that it is more search engine friendly. This can be achieved by using relevant terms, to make sure your page appears easily when those specific terms are being searched for example in Google or another search engine. It increases one's target market. (Chaffey et al., 2017 p. 368- 370)

Thus, the page appears more easily when searching for specific words in for example Google. This way, a freelance writer's page ranks highly, creates more visibility online and increases the revenue. However, nowadays the algorithms have become more complicated, which has led to the increase in the demand of SEO specialists.

In the figure below, the SEO process is shown step by step.

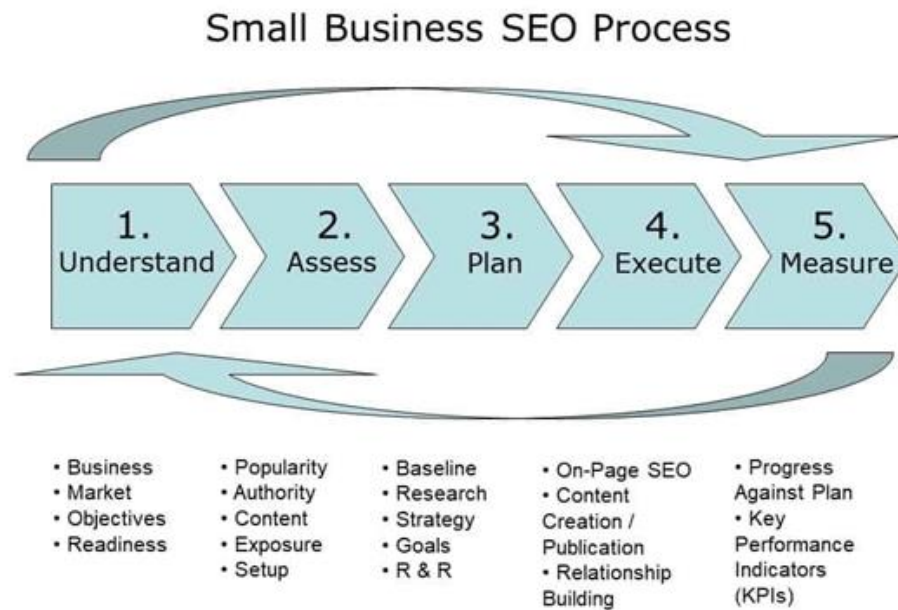


Figure 2. Small Business SEO Process. (Duncan, 2014)

First it is important to understand the current situation of the business and market, as well as competitors. This step is crucial, because it helps to learn about the business and market. Next, assessing the content of the webpage, the popularity of it and everything that primarily needs to be fixed. After the first steps, comes planning and scheduling the needed actions. For example, to decide which keywords to use for customers to find the webpage, keyword and competitive research can be done. After the planning is done and goals are set, the plan can be executed for example by publishing content on the webpage. Lastly, analyzing and measuring how well the current plan is working, and make needed adjustments, for example if a competitor brings a new challenge. (Duncan, 2014)

2.2.2 Social media marketing

SMM, Social media marketing, is a modern way of marketing. For freelancers, it may also be the most important marketing channel. The usage of social

media is on the rise, and even around 57% of the world's population uses the internet. Of those who use internet, 45% uses at least one social media channel. This means about 3,5 billion people. This gives perspective of what possibilities social media offers for marketing. (Tuten T, 2020, p. 4)

The social media channel to use for marketing purposes should be chosen carefully. It is recommended to use more than one channel, but some channels are better than others. For example, Tiktok has been popular social media for few years now, and it is a good place to market, depending on the product or services. Some small companies make Tiktoks about their products and sometimes answer questions about them, asked by the people who watch their Tiktoks. It is also possible to buy some marketing space on Tiktok. This means that your marketing video, usually a short one, under one minute, will pop up on the user's main page for a few seconds.

Tuten divides social media the following way:



Figure 3. Social media zones and exemplar vehicles. (Tuten, 2020)

Social media marketing has been seen to have a positive impact when looking through sales, relationship with the consumers, marketing and overall performance. (Chaffey et al., 2017 p. 237-242)

Besides operating as a marketing platform, it also offers a way to differentiate and gives a personality to the seller. This way, it is easier for potential buyers and customers to approach the company, or in this case, the freelance writer. Creating connections is one of the greatest advantages of social media, and it helps to create conversations between the seller and the buyer. (Chaffey et al., 2017 p. 237-242)

To do social media planning, six core social media activities should be taken into consideration. Firstly, listen and manage reputation. This section seeks to observe own, own audiences', competitors and online publishers' social media behavior. This will serve as the basis for the next activity, which is transforming the brand through social media. In this part, you evaluate your own brand, and for example use benchmarking to compare the current situation to the wanted, future situation. (Chaffey et al., 2017 p. 237-242)

Acquiring new customers and increasing sales to existing customers is mostly about engaging with the customers through social media. This is also strongly connected to the fifth core activity, enhancing customer service through social media marketing. (Chaffey et al., 2017 p. 237-242)

Last activity is optimizing social media, which reviews the platform used and whether it could be used in a more effective way for promotion and interactions between the buyer and the seller. (Chaffey et al., 2017 p. 237-242)

2.3 Digital marketing plan

Digital marketing plans are generally used by many self-employed, since it is less time consuming, cost-effective and inexpensive. When marketing your

own work, you want to reach a greater audience, because it is directly linked with your employment opportunities and therefore, revenue. (Guven Business Group, n.d.)

Digital marketing plan includes short-, medium- and long-term business goals. Planning, implementing and measuring. It also includes digital marketing channels, e.g., social media channels such as Instagram. (We Are Marketing, 2019)

To start defining the digital marketing strategy and planning, see the following figure.



Figure 4. Four-Step Strategy and Planning Process (Dodson, 2016)

In the digital marketing planning process, the first objective is to create an overall look on the current situation, a situational analysis, and create a framework for the plan. It presents the current situation of the company or the self-employed person. This can include the structure, budgeting, scheduling and personnel. It is important to have a clear picture of the now also to gain knowledge of what is it that is lacking. (Dodson, 2016, p. 331-337)

Secondly, analyzing the audience using 3i's. Initiate means to focus on the customer and their interests and online habits. Iterate means performing tests and trying different things, in order to see what works best for the potential audience. Integrating seeks to use different digital channels for the best results. (Dodson, 2016, p. 337-344)

The third part of the strategy includes finally activities such as defining and highlighting the value proposition, establishing goals and setting objectives. There is no use for a marketing plan without clear goals to achieve. These goals can vary from gaining online visibility to increasing sales. For example, deciding on the revenue goal for each month. (Dodson, 2016, p. 337-344)

It could be useful to use the SMART goal setting, which includes the following parts: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Time-Bound.

Specific means that the goal should be clear, for example a specific number of people who want to be reached by posting online. The goal should also be measurable, to measure the progress by having some criteria to follow it.

Goal should be attainable. This means that it is achievable and that there are resources and capabilities to reach the goal. It should also be relevant. This means that the goal is enough realistic to still be achieved.

Lastly, the goal needs to be time-bound. There should be a time frame and a deadline for the goal. This helps with motivation and therefore, achieving the goal. (CFI, n.d.)

In the fourth and final stage, the analysis can be done using different tools.

For example, to examine how often an audience visits the web site and how engaged they are, Google Analytics is a great tool for.

The analysis can also be done of single social media channel, e.g., Instagram.

Observing which type of posts receive most likes, what topics are most talked about, and which posts gain more followers, can all help to identify what needs to be changed in order to maximize the benefits. (Dodson, 2016, p. 345-355)

2.3.1 SWOT

SWOT analysis can be used in multiple situations. It is a basic marketing tool. The purpose of SWOT analysis is to create a comprehensive overview of the company's or the entrepreneur's situation by defining its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. This way, it is possible to understand the current situation. After analyzing the starting point, an operation plan can be done. (Vuorinen, 2013)

Swot analysis should be factual and updated regularly, in order to gain knowledge from it. It should only include realistic data, which can be used a guideline to learn from.

Like mentioned, there are four main keys to the analysis. The analysis should be done in serious matters, and its objective should be to go deeper to understand the current situation of the company, or the freelance writer. Strengths define the skills and knowledge that are the main competitive advantage. Weaknesses help to see what are the areas that need developing. Opportunities outline the external factors creating possibilities, and threats outline the ones creating issues and possible crises. (Vuorinen, 2013)

For example, for a freelancer, the SWOT analysis can be done the following way:

- Strengths: Skills and natural advantages, for example diverse writing skills which help to find more writing works
- Weaknesses: Traits that need improvement, for example too narrow knowledge and only one niche
- Opportunities: Possible growing in the industry
- Threats: The possible competition in the industry

Besides SWOT analysis, there can be found also TOWS analysis, which is a variant of the SWOT. TOWS matrix focuses on external factors and helps to look on the opportunities that can be used. It also helps to decide on the strategies that are going to be used. It focuses, as said, on external opportunities and threats, and internal strengths and weaknesses. This helps

to compare these mentioned aspects to create optimal strategies. (Mindtools, n.d.)

TOWS matrix for freelance writer could be done the following way:

External threats (T): A freelance writer who is a competition, that sells more and has a large established buyer base

External opportunities (O): Growth in niche in which the writer is specified in

Internal weaknesses (W): Limited service availability, meaning that freelance writer can't provide for many commissioning companies at the same time

Internal strengths (S): Diverse writing skills

After defining mentioned aspects, there are strategies that can be used. With these strategies, it is possible to gain from the opportunities and also minimize the impact of weaknesses, as well as the existing threats.

SO strategy is used by companies who use strengths to maximize opportunities. ST strategy means using strengths to minimize threats. WO means minimizing weaknesses by utilizing the opportunities. WT strategy stands for minimizing weaknesses and avoiding threats. (Mindtools, n.d.)

Some questions might help to start off with. For example, in SO, what are your strengths that you could use to take advantage of the available opportunities? In ST strategy it could be helpful to ask, how do you use your strengths to avoid threats, internal and external? In WO, how do you utilize the opportunities to overcome the existing weaknesses? In WT strategy, it is easy to just think how to minimize weaknesses and avoid potential threats? (Mindtools, n.d.)

2.3.2 Marketing mix

Marketing mix, or the 4 P's of marketing, or the 7 P's of marketing, is a marketing model which divides marketing tools the following way: Product (or service), Price, Place and Promotion.

In the product aspect, the selling product or service is analyzed and defined based on the demand of customers. The product can also be developed, based on the feedback of customers. Because of online platforms, it is easier to collect feedback and do market research. Based on the results, the product can be modified. (Chaffey et al., 2015 p. 255-284)

Next, the pricing model is defined, and the price is set for the product. The pricing strategy should consider that on online it is easier for customers to compare prices of same products offered by different suppliers. This is called price transparency, which has a direct impact on pricing of product. (Chaffey et al., 2015 p. 255-284)

After the product and price are set, the place to sell the product is decided. Distribution of the product is strongly connected to promotion nowadays. To some products, 'the place' means promoting the product in tv-shows and movies, whereas the place to sell the product can be web page. Promotion means what marketing communication channels are used and how the customers are informed about the product. This can include previously mentioned advertising channels tv-shows and movies, but also many others, such as public relations, sales promotions and sponsorships. Communication tools have developed with social media. One of popular trends nowadays is affiliate marketing, where a third-party publisher promotes commissioning company's product or services and gets paid for it. (Chaffey et al., 2015 p. 255-284)

These tools are utilized by users in such a way that it helps them to create a successful product, when it is put in the right sales platform. This means examining and utilizing these areas in a way that a buyer will prefer your services or products. For a freelance writer, marketing mix helps to illustrate where they should sell their work, what pricing they should be using and lastly, where they should promote their services. (Baker et al., 2007)

Below the figure 4 represents the elements of marketing mix.

Using the internet to vary the marketing mix						
Product <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality • Image • Branding • Features • Variants • Mix • Support • Customer service • Use occasion • Availability • Warranties 	Promotion <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marketing communications • Personal promotion • Sales promotion • PR • Branding • Direct marketing 	Price <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positioning • List • Discounts • Credit • Payment methods • Free or value-added elements 	Place <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trade channels • Sales support • Channel number • Segmented channels 	People <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individuals on marketing activities • Individuals on customer contact • Recruitment • Culture/image • Training and skills • Remuneration 	Process <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customer focus • Business-led • IT-supported • Design features • Research and development 	Physical evidence <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sales/staff contact experience of brand • Product packaging • Online experience

Figure 5. The elements of the marketing mix. (Chaffey et al., 2015)

As freelance writer's product is the writing services and skills they have, their place to sell it could for example be Fiverr. Fiverr is a popular web page where freelance writers can find paid writing assignments, or the commissioning companies can find writers, and send the task or project request for a certain amount of money. Price depends usually on the number of words, and what kind of text content is in question, but there is a big competition and prices can be rather low for commissions. (Fiverr, 2021)

2.4 Content marketing

Content marketing is a digital marketing technique, that uses digital channels to create and publish to the target group content such as tips, media stories, blogs, videos, surveys and podcasts. The goal for content marketing is to bind the existing customers and obtain new ones by creating content that benefits all. Content marketing engages customers and starts conversations, thus creates connections. (Brafton, n.d.)

In the table below, the benefits of content marketing are explained.



Figure 6. The benefits of content marketing. (Movou, 2021)

The benefits, as listed, are brand awareness, website traffic, client engagement, leads and conversions, media visibility, competitive advantage and brand awareness. For a freelance writer, the most important ones could be website traffic, client engagement, media visibility and competitive advantage. Content marketing can be seen creating online visibility as well.

Companies need to have a content strategy to begin with content marketing. Content strategy should always be based on the existing marketing strategy. Successful content strategy helps the target customers to buy, commit and recommend. Good content is required to make this possible. Because there is a lot of content on the internet, the target audience needs to make interested in the company online. In order to produce good content, it is necessary to understand people's information-seeking behavior and how meaningful and important they perceive the content. (Keronen et al, 2013, p. 24-25)

To create meaningful content, there should be analysis of marketing strategy goals and how they are executed in the content.

Content should also be easily accessible for anyone to find it, and easily understandable. If new information is found, the content should be updated. (Usability.gov, n.d.)

Content strategy involves following the content lifecycle. The content lifecycle describes different phases that the content goes through.

Content lifecycle always includes at least these phases: planning, creating and managing. In the planning stage, the existing content is analyzed. How will it support the marketing strategy and goals? Also, people and right channels to publish the content are decided in the planning stage.

In the creating part, the actual content is created and reviewed.

Managing phase is the most complex. It includes uploading and sharing the content, administration of the published content and controlling the usage of the content. (Roe, 2020)

E.g., freelance writer could benefit from the content lifecycle, by launching a web site where they could upload content such as their portfolio and knowledge about a certain topic, niche.

3 THE METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research method and group

This practice-based thesis uses an explorative approach and maps the use and knowledge of a digital marketing plan among freelance writers on two online platforms.

Methodology chosen for this thesis includes gathering main theory to have an understanding about the topic. Next, the author executes research with an online questionnaire, aiming to answer the main research questions. After gathering the data from the questionnaire, the author analyses the results, and the reliability, validity and ethicality of the questionnaire. Lastly, the author presents recommendations and conclusions.

This method gives insights into how some self-employed writers might use online tools to gain more visibility online.

The study does not aim at generalizing the results and does not use statistical methods the way quantitative research does. It provides a small explorative overview of the 9 respondents replies to the questionnaire in Appendix 1.

As the method, the author chose online questionnaire due to its fast response rate and efficiency. Online questionnaire was possible because freelance writers mainly depend on access to the internet, and they would be more reachable as well. Online questionnaire is a proper research method to examine different subjects and phenomena, and questions are usually drawn from the existing knowledge. (Ojasalo, Moilanen, Ritalahti, 2014, p. 122)

The main objectives for the questionnaire were to execute the awareness and usage of digital marketing among freelance writers, and how useful could a digital marketing plan be in relation to gaining visibility online.

Questionnaire was a structured questionnaire, with overall 9 questions. Two questions were open ended questions. The author chose to include two open ended questions, because the group of respondents are known to be active and editorialized in writing, as the respondents are freelance writers. The author also wanted more in-depth answers about the topic, which would not be possible without open ended questions.

Population of the research was freelance writers in the two Facebook groups to where the questionnaire was sent to. Analyzing the size of Facebook groups, and the number of the members, it can be stated that up to 100 people could have seen the questionnaire and respond to it.

The questionnaire got in total 9 answers. Many factors affect the response rate, such as the activity of respondents and the length of the questionnaire. External factors also affect it. Response rate is nowadays also affected by tiredness of response. This is a result from high increase in the number of online questionnaires. It was not possible to calculate the exact response

rate. It was more important to explore how the respondents thought about the phenomenon.

(Ojasalo, Moilanen, Ritalahti, 2014, p. 129)

3.2 Implementation

Firstly, the questionnaire was tested by sending it to two of author's friends, who gave feedback for example about sentence structure.

After needed corrections, the questionnaire was implemented in May 2021 and sent to a total of two Facebook groups. The Facebook groups were private groups, meant for freelance writers globally. The request to post the questionnaire to the Facebook groups was sent to the moderators, and after acceptance, it was posted. Answer time given was one week. The research questions were formed around the topic and decided from the theory part of the thesis, which will be shown later. The answers were first collected in Google Forms, from which they were transferred to Excel, where the tabulation for the answers was done.

3.3 Reliability, validity and ethicality

To measure the quality of the research, there are three main tools: reliability, validity and ethicality.

Reliability seeks to measure the accuracy of instruments and are the results reliable. Errors are strongly connected to reliability. These errors may be for example that in a research questionnaire, the question is worded in a way that the respondent does not understand it. Therefore, the respondent guesses the answer. (Muijs, 2010, p. 67)

The questions in the questionnaire were formed with intelligible language and examples were added to questions to further illustrate the point.

Statistical methods were not applied. The survey provides an overview of the responses concerning those who did reply. The response rate could not be calculated as the exact population size was not known.

In the questionnaire the questions were numbered from one to nine. When the questions are numbered instead of using letters, it improves the reliability of the questionnaire and reduces errors that might occur when the data is saved. (Ojasalo, Moilanen, Ritalahti, 2014, p. 132)

Validity in research seeks to define whether the research is measuring what it is supposed to measure. This means that is the research going in the right direction; are the research questions logical and related to what the research aims to measure? (Muijs, 2010, p. 62-63)

Ethicality is also a feature of scientific research. Ethical research adheres to norms and high morals. The target group of the study should know what the researcher is doing, what are the goals, how the responses will be collected, processed, stored, and when they will be destroyed.

The researcher must be honest and diligent, ensure the ethicality of the chosen research method of obtaining information, and ensure that the information remains confidential. (Ojasalo, Moilanen, Ritalahti, 2014, p. 48-49.)

In the beginning of the questionnaire, it was stated that the answers will be used for a thesis, and the answers will be treated confidentially and anonymously. It was also stated that the answers will be stored in the authors computer until the thesis is approved, after which they will be destroyed.

3.4 Preparation of online study

Questionnaire included 9 questions, none of which were mandatory. The author wanted to keep the answers as voluntarily as possible.

Questions one and two were for background information relating to freelance writing, how long have the respondents been freelance writers and what area of writing they specify in, if any.

Questions three and four involved social media, where the respondents were asked about their usage of social media in marketing purposes. Question four was multiple choice, where respondents could pick social media channels they used to market themselves, or if they did not use any at all.

Appendix 1 shows that questions from five to nine were about online visibility and digital marketing plan. Questions five and seven focused on online visibility, seven was a rating scale question. Question six was an open-ended question, where the respondents were asked what they think a digital marketing plan is. This gives insight to how it is really viewed among freelance writers.

Last questions, eight and nine, were closed-ended questions, and their nature was to find out whether the respondents could consider using a digital marketing plan. The questions were formed with the help of examples, so they would be easier to understand. This helps to avoid the error mentioned in chapter 3.3., in which the respondent does not understand the question, and guesses the answer. This affects the reliability of the response.

There were total of 9 responses to the survey. As mentioned earlier, up to 100 could have responded to the survey, from the two Facebook groups the survey was sent to.

The first question was about how long the respondents had been freelance writers.

1. How long you have been a freelance writer?

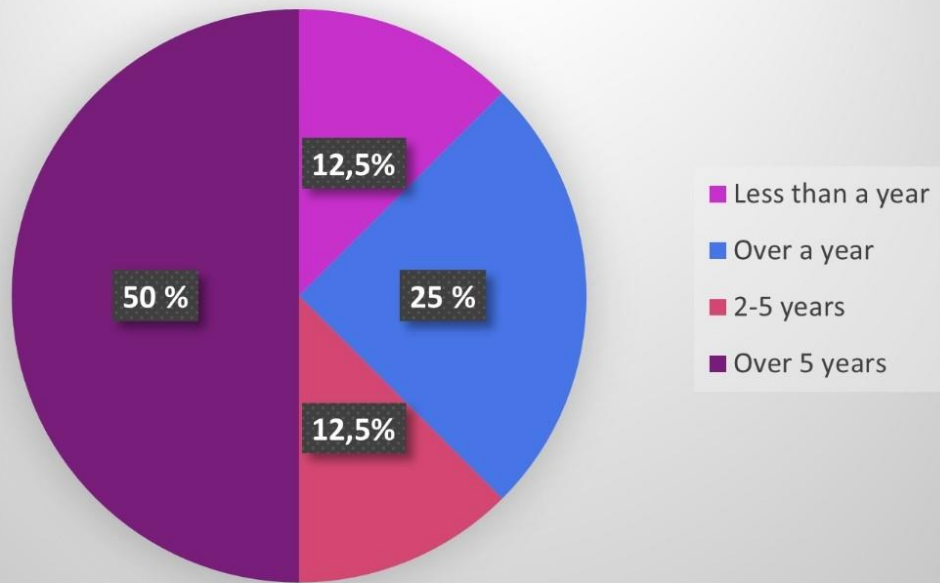


Table 1. How long has the respondent been a freelance writer?

Question 2 was an open-ended question, where the respondents were asked what their niche in freelance writing is, if any.

In the question 3, the respondents were asked about their marketing habits.

3. Do you promote your work online? E.g. creating social media posts where you tell you work as a freelancer writer?

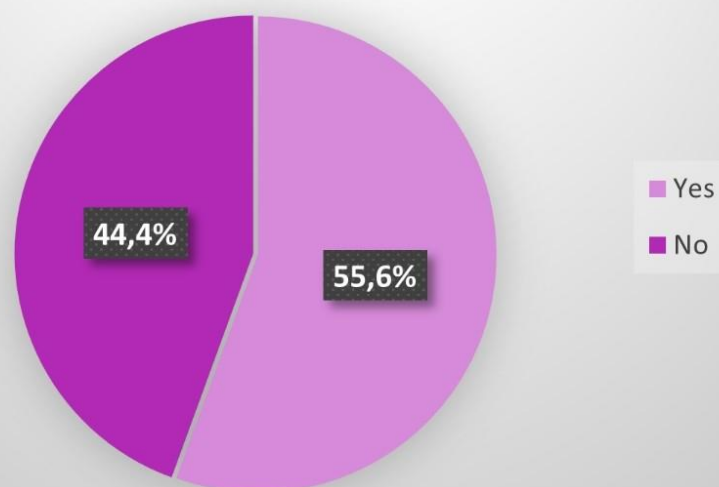


Table 3. Distribution of social media usage in promotion

In question 4, the respondents were asked their social media usage.

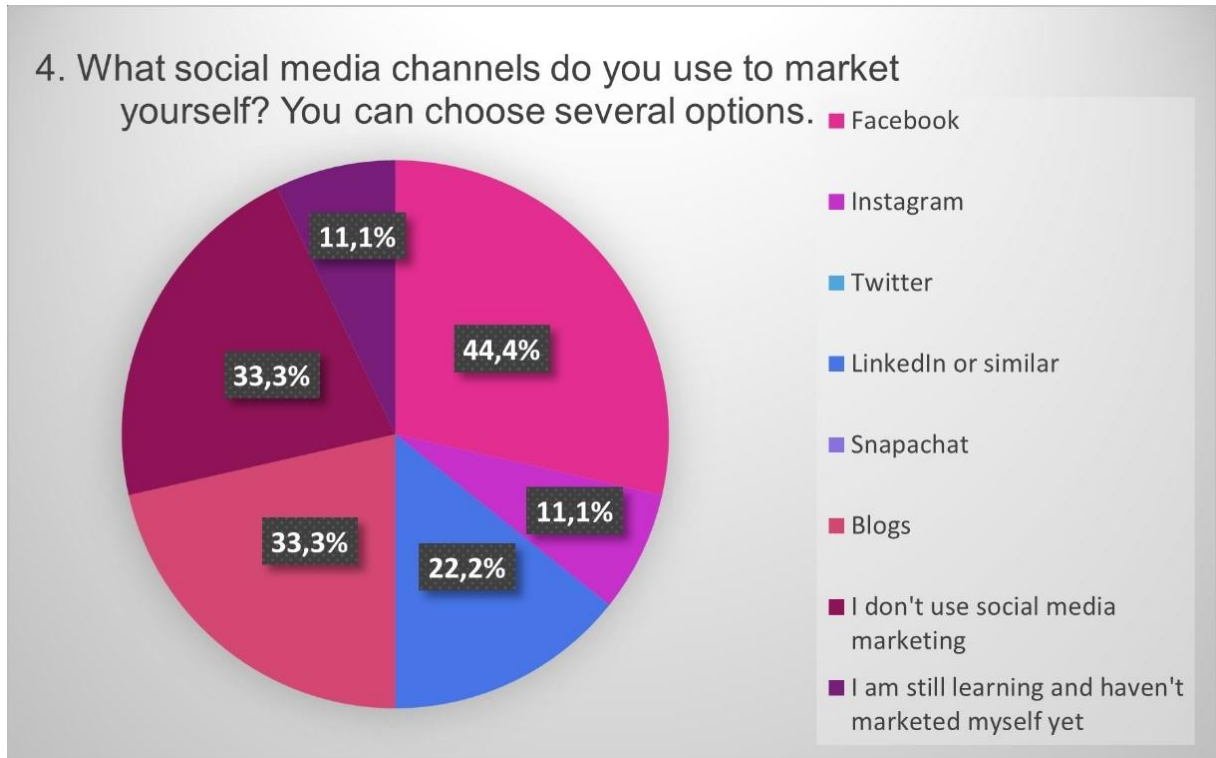


Table 4. Respondents' social media channels used for marketing.

In the question 5, the respondents were asked how difficult they view gaining online visibility.

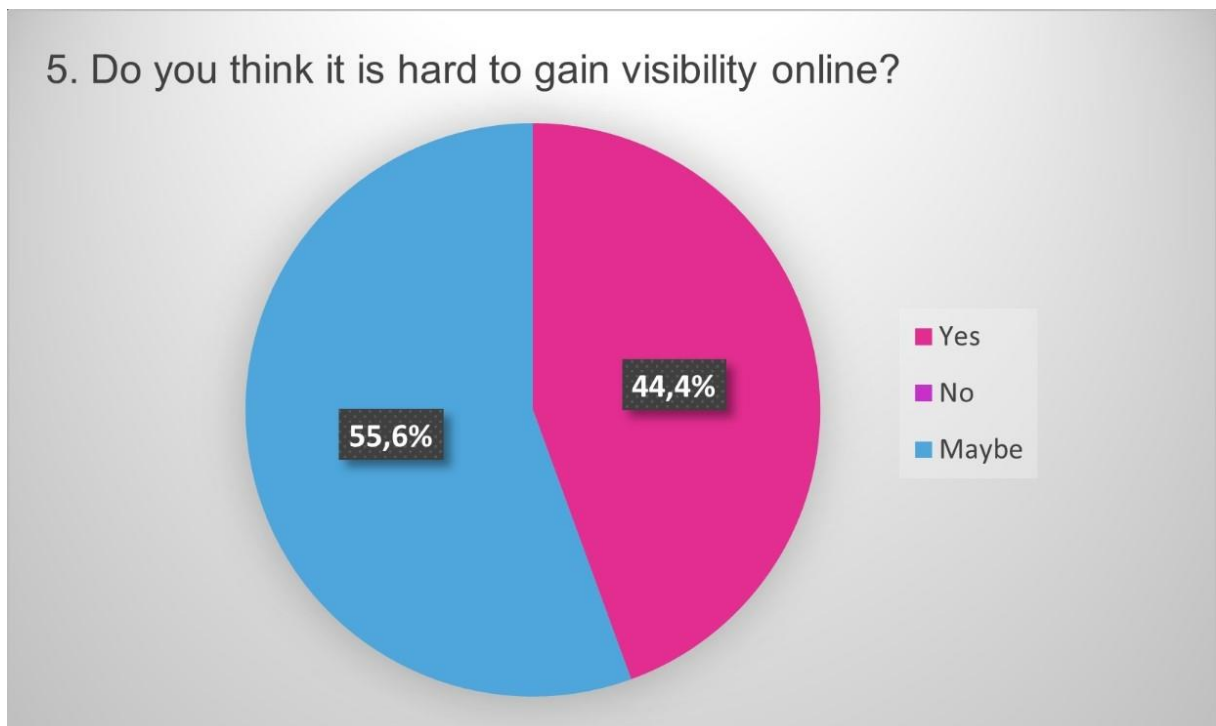


Table 5. Difficulty of gaining online visibility

Question 6 was open-ended question of what do the respondents think a digital marketing plan is.

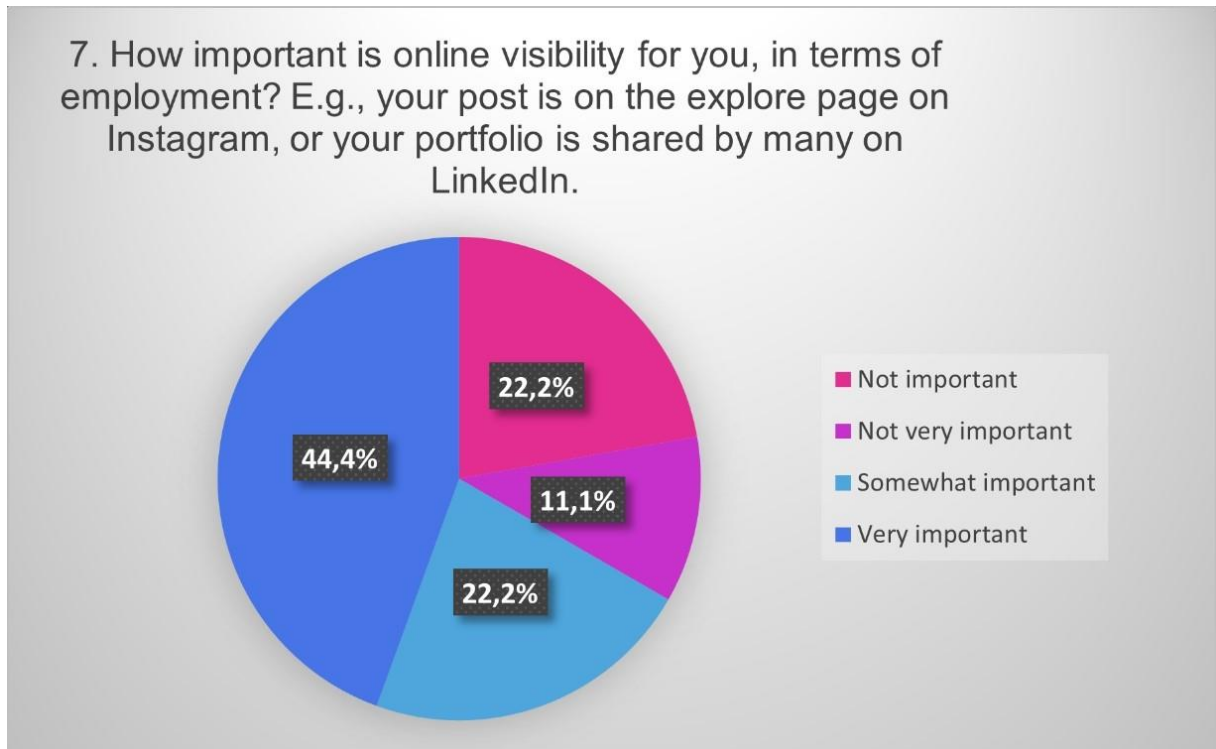


Table 7. Importance of online visibility



Table 8. Consideration of using a marketing tool.

The question 9 was formed with the qualities of SWOT -analysis to help illustrate further.



Table 9. Consideration of using digital marketing plan.

4 RESULTS OF THE ONLINE STUDY

4.1 Analysis of the results

The purpose of the research was to find out how freelance writers view online visibility and digital marketing, and their connection. Due to low response rate and issues with sentence forming, the results from the survey can not be seen as truthful. However, the responses help the author with her career planning and future. For the most part, the respondents agreed on with their responses. In some questions, for example in question 6 where the respondents were asked what they think a digital marketing plan is, the responses varied greatly.

As shown in the table 1, half of the respondents have been freelance writers over 5 years. Two have been a freelance writer over a year. One 2-5 years and other one less than a year.

In the question 2, responses differed greatly, none of the respondents had same area they specify in. Niches varied from career services and resume writing to travel and current affairs.

It is positive to have a wide variety of respondents to the survey. Even though the results can't be generalized, the author gains more authentic picture of the phenomenon.

In the question 3, five respondents promote their work online, and four do not. Respondents were given an example to clarify, see table 3.

From the respondents who do promote, four use Facebook as their main social media channel for marketing purposes, as seen in the table 4. Three do not use social media marketing and three use blogs. Two use LinkedIn or similar. None of the respondents used Snapchat as their marketing channel. Responses varied greatly and give an insight to the social media behavior of respondents.

In the question 5, four of the respondents felt that gaining visibility online is hard, and five felt that it might be hard or were unsure. None of the respondents thought that it was not hard.

Few similar factors were highlighted in the answers for question 6, for example that a digital marketing plan includes strategy, social media marketing and a plan to gain more online visibility.

In the question 7, four of the respondents considered online visibility very important in terms of employment. Two thought that it is somewhat important. The rest of the respondents did not consider online visibility important.

In the question 8, the answers varied greatly. Six respondents felt that certain marketing tool could improve the chances of employment. Two answered maybe, and one did not think that a marketing tool could improve it.

Majority of the respondents, seven respondents, would consider using a digital marketing plan.

Surprisingly, almost half of the respondents did not promote their work online. Furthermore, three don't even use social media marketing, at all. This could be that these respondents already have one or multiple companies to whom they produce text for, since half of the respondents have been freelance writer over 5 years. In that time, it is possible they have gained regular customers and therefore the need to market themselves is significantly lower. It could also be that since some of the respondents were new freelance writers, they don't know how to market themselves yet. Sentence form could have been too difficult to understand, which could have affected the responses as well, so the answers can't be considered as truthful.

From the choices of question 4, the most used social media channels for marketing purposes were Facebook, blogs and LinkedIn or similar social media platform. This was not surprising aspect, since author had herself seen many freelance writers marketing their work online in blogs, Facebook groups and similar platforms.

The author found interesting that among the respondents no one had the same niche, area they specify in writing. This creates more broader understanding of the subject.

Naturally, the respondents had somewhat different views about the definition of a digital marketing plan, and it is important to remember that digital marketing plans can look different.

Major of the respondents had a seemingly correct view about the subject and connected social media channels to digital marketing plan. Examples were also given, such as blogging and maintaining web page to market their portfolio.

Only four of the respondents found online visibility important in terms of employment. This could be because most of the respondents had been

freelance writers over 5 years and might already have commissioning companies and regular customers. In that case, online visibility might not be as important. The author expected different answers, since freelance writers usually depend on online opportunities.

Interestingly, some of the respondents seemed to connect online visibility to a digital marketing plan in their answer to question 6, when they were asked what digital marketing plan is. This could be that they assumed that that was what the question was aiming for, or they have the knowledge about the topic already.

Questions 8 and 9 had positive answers, six of the respondents felt that marketing tool could improve their chances of employment, and seven could consider using a digital marketing plan.

Sentence form in these questions could have been too difficult, and the sentences too long. This might affect the responses; the respondents might have just chosen an option quickly.

The author found that most of the respondents would be willing to try digital marketing plan, and some already used one, consciously or not.

As the majority of the respondents would be willing to use digital marketing tools to gain more visibility and to attract a larger audience, it could be that the survey was successful. However, the results from the survey are narrow and can't generalize to represent all freelance writers.

It still benefits the author with career planning and professional interests regarding freelance writing. The author felt that the research questions were answered and gained new information on the topic.

4.2 Reflection

This research was not profound, and it might have been more explicit to for example do a base for digital marketing plan for a freelance writer, in a practice-based thesis. Some of the survey questions might have been too

difficult or the sentences formed in a way that affects negatively to the responses or response rate. In total there were 9 answers, which is a small amount taking into consideration the possible amount of responses. Therefore, the answers are not as truthful they could be. On the other hand, this research benefits the author herself and her professional growth. The author would change the research questions, for example question 4 where the respondents were asked which social media channels they use to market themselves, the author could have included more online platforms for freelance writers. Also, one of growing platforms to market products and services among especially small businesses is actually TikTok. It would have been interesting to know whether the respondents use the platform themselves in marketing purposes.

Before this thesis, the author had researched about gaining online visibility among freelancers and there was already base knowledge about digital marketing plans. It was easy to connect the subjects and form the topic of the thesis, since gaining online visibility requires marketing of some form. If the author were to create a learning experience about this subject again, she would consider using a practice-based thesis, where the subjects would be researched but as a result would be the digital marketing plan for a freelance writer.

5 CONCLUSION

The thesis topic was formed around author's own professional interests concerning freelance writing and digital marketing plan. The author noticed on online platforms that freelance writers were discussing about online visibility, and its' connection to selling their services. This created the issue and research questions for thesis.

The theoretical framework was composed solely based on the background for why there was a need for this kind of research.

The theoretical framework was compiled based on the topics: online visibility and digital marketing plan. The author wanted to go in depth in theory with digital marketing plan and reflect it on freelance writers and how they could execute a marketing plan with marketing tools mentioned in theory.

From the answers of the respondents can be stated that they could try digital marketing plan and its tools, if they find it useful in relation to online visibility. With the right tools and enough knowledge and information, the respondents could market themselves more.

The author found that online visibility is a challenge for majority of the respondents, and the result for this could be future research about the topic. It could include a digital marketing plan base which the freelance writers could use and benefit from.

Some of the respondents did not consider marketing themselves online important and did not use social media marketing at all.

In conclusion, the respondents found that online visibility is hard to obtain, and they could use digital marketing tools to market themselves.

It can be difficult to start a digital marketing plan and follow through it when there is no previous experience or knowledge of the topic.

Further research could compose a digital marketing plan proposal or base for a freelance writer and offer them guidelines on how to invest in a marketing plan. Furthermore, it could examine the results of the said digital marketing plan, which could help new freelancers starting their work. To go in depth with the proposal, it could benefit a lot of new writers. By offering framework for digital marketing plan, the starting would be easier for a lot of freelance writers.

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Appendix 1: Survey for freelance writers

This survey was created for research purposes for my own thesis. The survey examines freelance writers' awareness of digital marketing plans, as well as its impact on online visibility and employment. The answers are used for the research of the thesis. All responses will be treated confidentially and anonymously. The answers will be stored on my computer until the thesis is approved, after which they will be destroyed. The response time is a couple of minutes. Thank you for your time!

1. How long have you been a freelance writer?

- Less than a year
- Over a year
- 2-5 years
- Over 5 years

2. What is your niche(s), if you have any?

Pitkä vastausteksti

3. Do you promote your work online? E.g. creating social media posts where you tell you work as a freelance writer?

Yes

No

⋮

4. What social media channels do you use to market yourself? You can choose several options.

Facebook

Instagram

Twitter

LinkedIn or similar

Snapchat

Blogs

I don't use social media marketing

Muu...

5. Do you think it is hard to gain visibility online?

Yes

No

Maybe

6. What do you think a digital marketing plan is?

Pitkä vastausteksti

7. How important is online visibility for you, in terms of employment? E.g., your post is on the explore page on Instagram, or your portfolio is shared by many on LinkedIn.

	1	2	3	4	
Not important at all	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Very important

8. Do you feel that a marketing tool that would help you find the right place to sell your skills and jobs, as well as help pricing your work correctly, could improve your chances of employment?

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

9. Could you consider using a digital marketing plan if it would help you to define your goals as a writer and reach a larger audience?

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

Lisää tekstiä napsauttamalla tätä.