Tampere University of Applied Sciences

XD SOLUTIONS – COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

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ABSTRACT

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XD Solutions – Communications Strategy

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This thesis was commissioned by XD Solutions which is the auxiliary business name of XD Invest Ltd. The commissioner did not have a communications strategy and they wanted to find ways to match their communications to their overall business strategy. The company commissioned this research because they wanted to understand the current state of their communications and discover new techniques to make their communications more effective.

The objective of the research was to determine the targeted audience and identify their behaviour. The research gave a comprehensive understanding of how XD Solutions and its communications are perceived. The research examined the stakeholders to find the key communications channels. The research was conducted to measure the efficiency of the company's current communications to find ways to increase brand awareness in the future.

The research was conducted using the qualitative research method. The chosen technique of the research was internet interviews in the following four categories: the management of XD Solutions, the current customers of XD Solutions, the potential customers of XD Solutions, and applicable associations. Seven persons were interviewed in total, two from each category expect the management of XD Solutions. The gathered data was analysed by using the content analysis method that consisted of two main steps: categorisation and interpretation.

Communication strategy helps the company form relevant, focused, unique, and consistent communications that help reach their objective to increase brand awareness. After the communications strategy has been implemented the communications actions should be measured regularly. To reach maximum results similar research should be replicated in the future. The commissioner should also implement a communication plan and a communication calendar. It would help the commissioner to visualise the communication guidelines and projects. The commissioner company should also consider doing research about their monetisation methods.

Key words: communications, internal communications, external communications, communications strategy, communications plan, organisational communications, strategy

CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION

Communicating is all around us every day. It can be verbal, non-verbal, or visual. Communicating is not only for individuals on their day-to-day lives but also for businesses. Businesses are constantly communicating whether they do it on purpose or not. If a business has not come up with a communications strategy, they are still in a way following one. Everyone in the company is constantly communicating something. If a company has not clearly stated their goals for communicating the result might become disastrous.

Advertising and marketing world is constantly shifting. According to Young (2010, 18) it has been estimated that television advertising is only 35% as effective as it was in 1990. Social media is the growing trend off this century. Young (2010, 18) suggests that everyday Facebook users create and upload 2.5 billion pieces of content. Websites and social media platforms offer response of the impact of the data immediately therefore, businesses can utilise the gained data and alter their marketing rapidly. According to Juholin & Rydelfelt (2020, 43) the importance of strategic communications has increased in the previous years and has even started to replace public relations.

The purpose of this bachelor thesis was to form a communications strategy for XD Solutions. XD Solutions is a defence-oriented programme management company operating in Finland. The communications strategy was further illustrated with recommendations for future. The objective of a communications strategy is to find ways to vocalise the overall strategy of the brand internally and externally.

2 THESIS PLAN

The thesis plan explains the topic, the objective and purpose of the thesis and the research questions used in the thesis process. The thesis plan guides the reader through the concepts utilised in the thesis as well as the working methods and the data collected for the thesis. The thesis plan explains the process and the structure of the thesis. By observing the thesis plan, a reader gains a general understanding about the thesis.

2.1 Thesis topic

The topic of this thesis is to develop a communications strategy for XD Solutions. The commissioner company previously identified itself as a usual business management consulting company but has since discovered that they want to rather act as a program management company that focuses on defence, and technology businesses. The communications strategy will make sure that every employee commits to the messages that the company is trying to convey.

The new communications strategy helps the commissioner connect communications to overall business strategy, reach the right audience and help the business grow in the sectors they have chosen. The communications strategy will also help the company to grow their credibility as a coordinator in projects related to advanced technologies. The new communications strategy will further act as a base for all related projects in the future such as European Defence Fund programs.

2.2 Thesis objective, purpose, and research questions

The objective of this thesis is to develop a communications strategy that will help the company convey their brand messages and improve their image and reputation both internally and externally. The commissioner does not have a prior communications strategy, and therefore the aim of the thesis is to create that.

According to Christensen (2014, 359–385) lack of communication strategies can result in increased insecurity of the future of the business; therefore, it will bring great value for XD Solutions to create a communication strategy. The objective of this thesis can be observed with the following research questions:

"How to create a communications strategy for XD Solutions?"
"Which tools the case company should utilise in their communications?"
"How should the case company use these tools?"
"What are the target groups and what kind of content the company should provide?"
"How to connect communications to overall business strategy?"

The primary question of these research questions is *"How to create a communications strategy for XD Solutions?"* and the other sub-questions are used to specify the main question. These research questions will play an important role on the thesis writing process. The specific questions chosen for this thesis will guide the writer through the most important factors of conducting a communications strategy. Because the commissioner company mainly utilises digital platforms the thesis will focus on modern way of communicating. The background of these research questions is to form a baseline for the thesis and narrow the objective. The relevancy of these questions is based on the literature that focuses on organisational communications.

2.3 Concepts

This thesis will explain the concepts related in creating a communications strategy. Defining the concepts and showing the literature will act as a base for a reliable thesis. This part consists of applicable models and theories that can be used as resources for the communications strategy. These models can be related to consumer pathways, marketing, or business development. These models have been selected for this part to help with creating versatile and precise communications strategy that takes detail in various aspects of a business.

2.3.1 Organisational Communications

The main concepts utilised in this thesis are all related to organisational communications. Chartered Management Institute (2015, 12) describes communications as the actions when one speaks, writes or non-verbally transmits a message to a receiver or multiple receivers. Clear communication is an important aspect when doing business. Chartered Management Institute (2015, 129) defines organisational communications as the actions that spread information that happen within a company or outside the company towards external stakeholders. Academic circles have identified two different major models of communications according to Hallahan, Holtzhausen, van Ruler, Verčič, and Sriramesh (2007, 3-35): transmission model of communication and interactive model of communication. Hallahan, et al. (2007, 3-35) explain the difference by pointing out that transmission model focuses on one-way communications whereas the interactive model, as its name suggests, creates communications that exchange activities.

The history of communications strategies is quite new. According to Young (2010, 32) businesses previously utilised full-service agencies that created everything from creativity and media. The goal for businesses was to deliver creative messages efficiently and effectively. According to Young (2010, 32) the shift to communications strategies began when media agencies started to split. Independent media agencies started forming in the mid 1990s and the focus of creating communications planning intensified into 2000s. When the marketing field evolved communications planning became increasingly important in the advertising development process.

Organisational communications are often divided into two main categories: internal and external communications. The differences and similarities between the two are quite simple. According to Chartered Management Institute (2015, 129) internal communications means exchanging, and passing information and messages within a company, between managers and staff, and through roles and divisions, while external communications is a way for companies to connect and engage directly with their clients, consumers, and public audiences. The communications strategy will create guidelines for both sectors.

According to Kotler, Keller, Brady, Goodman, and Hansen (2012, 782) an effective communications strategy consists of eight important steps that are shown below in Figure 1. These steps will act as a baseline for the communication strategy in Chapter 5.

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┌─────────────────────────────┐
│   Identify target audience  │
└─────────────────────────────┘
              ⬇
┌─────────────────────────────┐
│    Determine objectives     │
└─────────────────────────────┘
              ⬇
┌─────────────────────────────┐
│    Design communications    │
└─────────────────────────────┘
              ⬇
┌─────────────────────────────┐
│       Select channels       │
└─────────────────────────────┘
              ⬇
┌─────────────────────────────┐
│      Establish budget       │
└─────────────────────────────┘
              ⬇
┌─────────────────────────────┐
│     Decide on media mix     │
└─────────────────────────────┘
              ⬇
┌─────────────────────────────┐
│       Measure results       │
└─────────────────────────────┘
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┌─────────────────────────────┐
│    Manage intergrated       │
│  marketing communications   │
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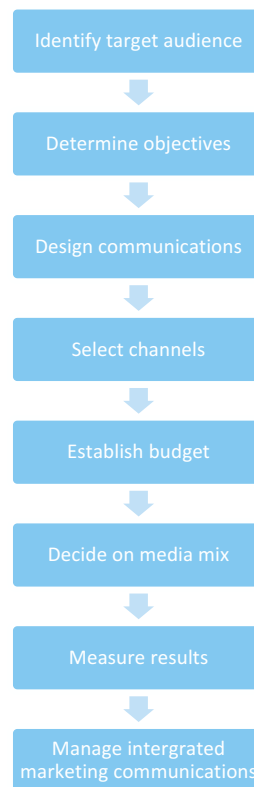
Figure 1 Communication strategy steps (Kotler et. al 2012, 782)

The process of conducting a communications strategy starts by identifying the target audience for the company. The targeted audience will guide the following steps and therefore, determining the audience comes first. By determining the objectives for the communications, a company sets goals for their communications.

The second step to succeed in communications according to Kotler et. al (2012, 783) is determining the communications goals. Businesses often choose multiple goals they want to achieve in their communications. According to Kotler. et al (2012, 783) there has been identified four different categories of communications objectives. The four categories according to (Kotler, et al., 2012, 783) are: category need, brand awareness, brand attitude and brand purchase intention.

Browsing these categories will help a company to define their main challenges with communications.

The third step for successful communications according to Kotler et. al (2012, 783) is designing the communications. This part essentially introduces message strategy, creative strategy and message sources which are important parts of communications strategies. Designing the communications will help a company to gather a general picture of their brand identity and helps transmitting it to stakeholders.

The fourth step according to Kotler et. al (2012, 789) is selecting the communications channels. This step has become increasing challenging due to digitalisation because there are a lot more channels to choose from. The fifth step is to establish a budget for communications. Communicating can become expensive. There are multiple different ways of deciding a communications budget. According to Kotler et. al (2012, 794) these are: affordable method, percentage-of-sales, competitive parity, objective-and-task, modelling, payback period and profit optimisation models.

The last three steps to successful communications according to Kotler. et al (2012, 782) are: deciding media mix, measure results and manage integrated marketing communications. The last steps of successful communications often happen after the communications strategy is established as monitoring steps and therefore, are not explained deeply in this thesis.

The marketing communication mix can be useful when conducting a new communications strategy. The key is to decide what models are the most useful for a specific need. There are wide differences between the costs and advantages of each model. Kotler et. al (2012, 804) outline marketing communication mix with the following models: advertising, sales, promotion, public relations and publicity, events and experiences, direct marketing, interactive marketing, word-of-moth marketing, and personal selling. By deciding a suitable marketing communication mix a company can make sure that their communications are effective in various points of business.

According to Young (2010, 38) the root of communications problems is that businesses often move to solutions too soon. Businesses seem to think that creating marketing campaigns is the best approach for conducting meaningful communications. However, it is crucial to remember that planning is often the most important step in good communications. A company that understands where and how to communicate will more likely succeed in their communications than a company that only knows what to say.

Businesses often find themselves realising that their marketing is not effective. This is the reason why it is so important to set clear communication goals. The communication goals should be easy to measure, create commercial value and be actionable. It is important for businesses to create involvements and relevance and not just awareness. Customers need to relate to their businesses content and feel involvement. According to Young (2010, 35) getting an impression of the customers emotional responses can be the most challenging part when developing a communications plan. After the business has decided what their communications goals are it is easier to generate a communication strategy. Different goals need different methods of communications.

The communications objectives should define what the company wants to achieve and who they are going to target the communications for. Kostelijk and Alsem (2020, 185) stressed the importance of finding the right target group. They suggested that it can be easier if the company first investigates segmentation and then divides the possible market groups into specific groups of customers. When a company has identified the right segmentation, they can focus on a more specific target group that they have chosen. When company understands the needs of their target group, they can form their brand identity and brand image. When company uses their brand identity and brand image to create brand positioning, they can form efficient communications.

Brand and brand image are important concepts related in organisational communications. Kotler et al. (2012, 965) define brand as the name, sign or symbol that can be related to a company or a combination of them all. The logos, terms and designs of company that are used to identify a product or a service are considered as brand. According to Kotler et. al (2012, 965) branding will allow

companies to differentiate from others. Kotler et. al (2012, 965) define brand image as the perceptions and beliefs that circle around a specific brand, these beliefs form an image in the minds of consumers when they encounter a specific brand.

Companies can affect the minds of customers. By building a strong brand image companies can ensure that a specific image will form on the minds of customers every time they hear a specific brand name. It is up to companies how that image will form. It can become either positive or negative. By creating a strong positive brand image company forms brand equity (Kostelijk & Alsem, 2020, 72). Positive brand equity enforces the sales when a consumer associates a product with a brand and creates the purchasing decision based on the positive feeling they get when identifying the specific brand (Kotler, et al., 2012, 72). The four aspects of a strong brand according to Kostelijk and Alsem (2020, 8) are: relevant, focus, unique and consistent.

After forming a strong brand identity and personality a company should know how to communicate these to customers. Communications strategy and a communications plan will help a company to reach their full potential. By generating unique selling points (USP) and unique buying reasons (UBR) a company in an essence is building its value proposition. USPs are the main points that differentiate your product or service from the competitors, whereas the UBRs focuses on the motivations of the customer (Kostelijk & Alsem, 2020, 19). When conducting the communications strategy, the main question about the customers, according to Kostelijk and Alsem (2020, 19) is: "Why does the customer want to purchase their needs from that company over another, what is the unique value the customer gets?" This core question helps in identifying the unique selling points and unique buying reasons. USPs and UBRs will help the company in forming their key messages in their communications.

2.3.2 Virtual Communications

XD Solutions is a modern business that operates mainly on digital platforms. It can be stated that the virtual team is in the core of XD Solutions. Because of the

operating field, the business transactions of XD Solutions require deep commitment of trust and security. These matters are highlighted in a virtual world.

According to Lee (2014, 61) it is critical to create an effective communications plan to make sure that members of teams have the needed information to conduct successful projects. The communications plan should include the scope and the purpose of the communication, the frequency, and how and what type of communicating is needed. When considering the right platform for internal communications it is crucial to find a platform that is accessible for everyone. When a company decides to use communication technology such as email or videoconferences it is important to remember that proper training about those technologies is in place.

Different communications platforms offer different types of solutions. Sometimes an email is not the best option for internal communications. Businesses must carefully decide what tools of communications are proper for their situation. Confidential information, privacy and sensitive news are often not suited for emails. When using a written communications platform, there is always their chance of misunderstanding. Internal communications plan is in order went its own style language and etiquettes are being defined.

Virtuality can act as a baseline for a company and their marketing and communications. According to Young (2010, 8) Google has moulded marketing significantly by creating and establishing an advertisement programme that connects advertisers to their targeting demographics. Google has been able to create a system that reduces marketing wastage. Google adverts are also coast effective. By generating relevant content, a business can utilise search terms that connect to the specific content, Google will then use the search terms and offer content for consumers that matches those keywords.

Search engine optimization is the biggest asset while creating a website. Pay per click is coast effective way to advertise. Because virtual platforms have grown widely as marketing platforms businesses can benefit from investing into SEO or pay per click marketing. By utilising the platforms that possess the biggest amount of engagement businesses can reach a bigger audience for their

communications than before. Virtuality leads to more possibilities when deciding the platforms for communications. This has been noticed already, according to Young (2010, 36) there is a growing need for channel planning as a part of communications strategies and marketing strategies.

2.3.3 Consumer Decision Journey

Consumer Decision Journey can be used when deciding applicable communications goals. This thesis will utilise Consumer Decision Journey in the communication strategy as a guideline. A company can utilise the Consumer Decision Journey to determine what types of communications and platforms they should use. By examining the Consumer Decision Journey, a company can find the frequent customer behaviours and match their communications with them. This model can also be utilised in B2B businesses as the individual decision makers behave in the same manner as consumers (Kotler, et al., 2012).
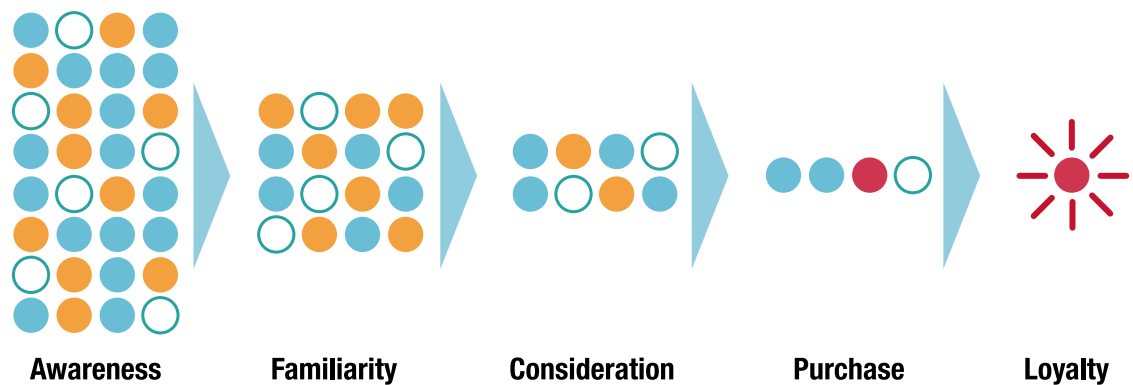

Figure 2 Traditional Consumer Decision Journey (Court, Elzinga, Mulder, Vetvik 2009)

Awareness is the first stage of the customer purchasing process. Awareness is the stage where customer discovers the product, or a service and they realise that this specific product might be useful for them in solving their problems. This is a stage where a company should focus on improving their external communications in multiple different platforms. However, awareness alone does not necessarily create sales. Awareness often circles around creating visibility and recognition that often means spending money.

Familiarity is considered the second stage of customer purchasing process. This stage implies that a customer has become more involved with the business because they have gained more information about the brand. This is the stage where the customer can be persuaded. This is also the stage where the customer seeks information about the product, therefore business should offer the needed information. Reviews are also viewed at this point. This stage provides an opportunity for businesses to rethink their communications and examine whether their key messages and core values are easy to find and understand.

Consideration is the third stage. The customer has become engaged by now, and they want to know more. This stage is where the customer actively thinks whether your product is better that your competitors. In this stage a business should assess their communications to create memorable messages that stand out from others. Purchase is the fourth stage. This is the ground-breaking stage where the customer decides to buy a specific product but has not yet paid for it. It can be considered the point of commitment.

After the purchasing decision the consumer decides whether the purchase was worth it or not. If a company succeeds with fulfilling the consumer's expectations the company should seek to better their relationship building. This is the stage where a business will attempt to bond with the customer to make them stay their customers. Understanding the promise and offering it to the customer is important. When the company has succeeded in building a good relationship with their customer, they will become loyal to the brand, and they will speak out about your business. This is word-of-moth communicating and recommendations. (Young, 2010, 141) Creating a strong bond with a customer can help a business to grow their credibility and brand image. These aspects will play an important part for the company.

The funnel mechanism as a describer for Consumer Decision Journey is outdated according to Court et. al (2009). They claim that technology and digitality has moulded the Customer Decision Journey in a way that requires a more deep and complicated system. They do, however, recognise that the traditional Consumer Decision Journey can be utilised when company is deciding their marketing or communication actions, but they do recommend familiarising the new model as

well since it can give even more benefit for companies. (Court, et al., 2009) The new model (see Figure 3) showcases the customer loyalty loop which is important because creating meaningful communications can act as a trigger point.
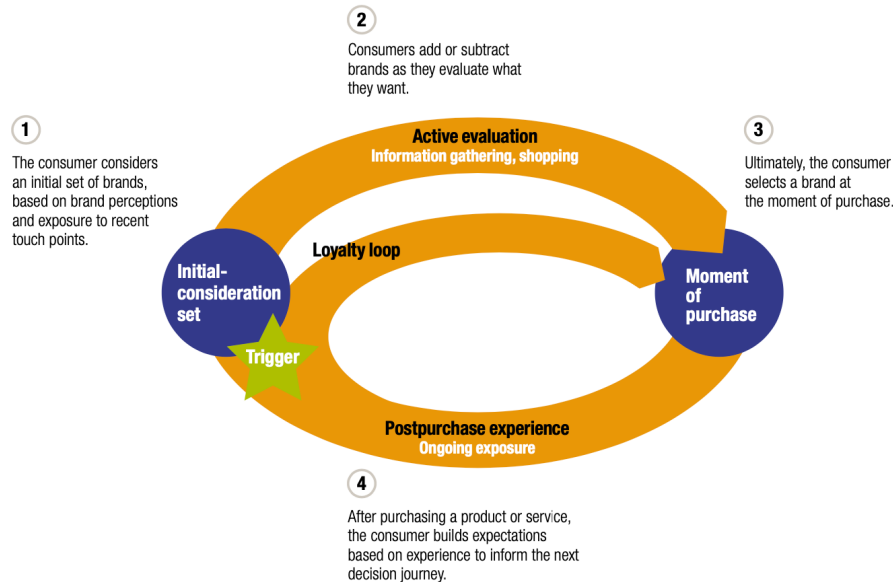

Figure 3 Circular Journey (Court, Elzinga, Mulder, Vetvik 2009)

2.4   Working methods and data

The main aspect of developing a communications strategy is to find out the target audience and track down their behaviour. To design an effective communications strategy, there must be a lot of information about the target audience. How does the targeted audience find the company? Do they access their webpage or social media? If they do access them, what are they doing there? What kind of content is the targeted audience interested in? These are the questions that the thesis must look for. To find the answers research is in order.

This thesis uses qualitative research method. Qualitative research is an umbrella term used in describing research methods that are conducted with social and not numeric manner. According to Saldana (2011,8) qualitative research is often used in fields such as communication and business, and therefore is suitable for this thesis. Because qualitative research is an umbrella term there are quite a few different genres of research.

Qualitative research is the most suitable research method for purpose of this thesis because the data most likely is not numerical since the company is quite small. The data is collected with interviews. Interviews are the most used qualitative research method according to Saldana (2011, 32). Interviewing is an efficient way to gather information that contains emotions, opinions, and values. (Saldana 2011, 32) Therefore, interviewing in this thesis will provide useful data and even unexpected answers.

2.5 Thesis process

The structure of the thesis is straightforward. The first chapter introduces the thesis topic. Second chapter is the thesis plan, where the reader is guided through the objectives and purposes of the thesis and the applicable theories, literature, and methods. Third chapter of the thesis will introduce the case company in more detail, and it will focus on the reasons why the communications strategy is needed. Fourth chapter goes more in detail about the research method and explains how the collected data is analysed. The data collected from the interviews will be used in chapter five which will focus on the main objective of this thesis, the communications strategy. Chapter six includes the conclusion and recommendations.

3   THE CASE COMPANY

3.1   XD Invest Ltd

XD Invest Ltd is the company that operates all the business functions related to XD Solutions which is the auxiliary business name of XD Invest Ltd. (Finder, 2021) XD Invest Ltd is a private equity company that operates in national and international markets. XD Invest Ltd seeks active ownership role in their portfolio companies. (XD Invest Ltd, 2021)

3.2   XD Solutions

XD Solutions is a programme management company that has a wide expertise on technologies needed in complex defence systems. The main operation fields of XD Solutions are defence and technology. (XD Solutions, 2020) The business approach of XD Solutions is to support its customers to manage complex programmes and technologies. XD Solutions has comprehensive knowledge in both defence and systems engineering. XD Solutions helps its customers to create customer value in demanding business environments. XD Solutions currently employees 10 personnel.

The main services of XD Solutions are Programme Management, Systems Engineering, Integrated Logistics Support, and Contract and Public Procurement law. (XD Solutions, 2020) XD Solutions has expertise on following technology areas: Autonomous navigation, Positioning and navigation, Sensor and data fusion, Artificial Intelligence, C4ISTAR, Mobility platforms, and Weapon systems and ammunition.

XD Solutions has shifted their target market and their niche to a more dynamic style and is now mainly targeting the fields of defence, and technology. Previously XD Solutions targeted their services for all types of companies that wanted to renew their business management style. The company previously identified as a usual business management consulting company but has since discovered that

they want to rather act as a program management company. The new communications strategy will help the commissioner connect communication to overall business strategy, reach the right audience and help the business grow in the sectors they have chosen. Also, the company will grow their credibility as a coordinator for indirect industrial participation in projects related to cyber, encryption, AI, and autonomous systems technologies.

4   THE DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

4.1   Research objectives

The main objective of conducting a communications plan is to find out the target audience and track down their behaviour. The objective is to determine the targeted audience and identify their behaviour. The goal of the research is to observe the main stakeholders of the company to find ways to create valuable and meaningful communications. The main objective of the research is to find the needed data for conducting the communications strategy.

The objective of this research is to find a comprehensive understanding of how the main stakeholders perceive XD Solutions and its communications. The research will help determine the impressiveness of the company's communications to find out the current state of brand awareness and brand attitude. By observing the current state of the communications of XD Solutions the research can find suggestions for improvements. The research will also observe the preferred behaviours of the stakeholders: where they usually tend to seek information and what channels of communication they prefer. In addition, one of the research objectives is to find the methods that help creating the most efficient way of communications and find improvement projects for the company based on the feedback that might arise from the interviews.

4.2   Qualitative research design

The data will be collected by utilising qualitative research method. Qualitative research is the most suitable research method because the data most likely is not numerical since the company is quite small. The data will be collected with interviews. The interviews will be sorted into four categories. The first category will be the management of XD Solutions. The second category will be the current customers of XD Solutions. The third category will be applicable associations. The fourth and final category of interview is a non-active customer or a potential future customer of XD Solutions. The first two categories are the most important

ones. To create an efficient communications strategy, it is important understand the company's business strategy. By interviewing the management of the company loads of important information will appear. Same goes for the second category. Understanding customer needs and preferences will act an important role. The communications tools are easier to define when the customer needs have been mapped out. The chosen people for the interviews will be selected and contacted by the commissioner.

4.3 Internet interviews

The chosen method of research was to conduct internet interviews. Interviews as a data collection method are seemingly straightforward. The researcher will firstly schedule the interviews with the participants, secondly the researcher will establish common ground rules for the interviews and lastly the researcher hosts the interviews. Due to the digital nature of XD Solutions, and the current events of the global pandemic, it was more than a suitable decision to execute the interviews online. As a result of fast paced development of Internet technology traditional face-to-face meetings can now be held just as easily in online platforms. The growing variety of online video teleconferencing software, there is no longer a need for face-to-face meetings. Researcher can now collect the needed data by holding online interviews (Gubrium, et al., 2012, 188).

By utilising a suitable platform, an internet interview can easily mirror a face-to-face interview (Gubrium, et al., 2012, 179). The chosen business communication platform for the interviews is Microsoft Teams. According to Gubrium, et al. (2012,180) one of the downsides of an internet interviews is that some of the participants of the interview can fall behind from the conversation due to the fast paced nature of an internet interview. This can however be avoided by hosting one-by-one meetings with the participants. Another advantage of an one-by-one meeting is that the real time nature of a conference meeting can result into spontanious interaction between the researcher and the participant which can lead to unique results. (Gubrium, et al., 2012, 179)

4.4 Validity, reliability, and limitations

The interviews were executed in Finnish and the data collected as well as the interview questions were liberally translated into English. The language decision was simply because both the researcher and all the interview participants are Finnish. It is also important for online research interviews that the participants feel safe and non-threatened and according to Gubrium, et al. (2012,186) having the participant speak a language that they are not native in could jeopardise that.

Informed consent is important when conducting any research. To ensure transparency in the research the researcher explained to each participant how the data was collected and how it will be analysed. The researcher also explained how the identities of the participants will be protected and what information can be disclosed in the research. Each of the participants were contacted before the interviews to make sure there were suitable negotiations regarding the anonymity of each participant.

To ensure the reliability of this thesis it must be declared that the author of the thesis is a member of the bord of XD Invest Ltd. The author took further precautions on remaining objective and unbiased towards anything that is proposed in the thesis.

4.5 Sampling

A sample is a sub-set of a larger population. The sample represents or reflects the characteristics of the topic. Sampling is the process of selecting a sample from a population. The sampling method chosen will follow the guidelines set by the research questions and research strategy. According to Gubrium, et al. (2012, 244) researchers have different opinions on what is an ideal sampling size. The number range everywhere from 2 to 25 participants.

For this thesis, the date collections strategy chosen is individual interviews. That strategy is also the most commonly used qualitative research method according to Nunkoosing (2005). That method will narrow down the amount of participants

of the research. The individuals are chosen from a population that have the needed knowledge to provide useful perspectives for the research. Typically qualitative researchers seek a small number of participants that can represent the researched topic and the participants are intentionally chosen by the researcher. This however, might result in a case of selection bias which is a form of usual sampling error. (Thompson, 2012,191) In qualitative research, triangulation is often utilised to ensure credibility. Due to the small sample size, the researcher has chosen individuals from four categories to guarantee the reliability of the research. (Gubrium, et al., 2012, 244)

4.6 Analysis

Before analysing the data collected from the interviews the interviews had to be transformed into text from voice data. The process of transforming data into text is called transcription. (Kaiku, 2021) Each interview was transcript separately. The transcription was precise, and each filler word was documented. However, during the analysis stage the transcript data was further unravelled, and key words were highlighted.

After the text was condensed, the gathered data was analysed using the content analysis method. (Gillham, 2000, 61) The answers were divided into applicable categories. The number of answers in a specific category disclosed the relevance of the answers which then gave the data which was used to create the communications strategy. According to Gillham (2000, 73) the data analysis of an interview research is twofold: categorisation and interpretation. As an example of categorisation see below for Table 1.

Table 1 Example of categorisation

If you had to describe XD Solutions with three adjectives, what would they be?						
	Alternatives					
	Professional	**Dynamic**	**Reliable Credible**	**Expensive**	**Networkable**	**Strategic Innovative**
1	X	X			X	
2	X		X	X		
3		X			X	X
4	X		X			X
5	X	X				X
6	X		X			X
Overall Score	**5**	**3**	**3**	**1**	**2**	**4**

5 THE COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

Communications strategy is often formed because a company wants to distribute information across platforms and different audiences. According to Jones (2017, 41) by thinking through with whom a company wants to communicate, what are the messages a company wants to get across, which channels are available and how to use them, a company is essentially drawing the baselines for a communications strategy. According to Young (2010, 38) communications strategy can be narrowed down to these questions: "Who are we trying to communicate to?" and "How should the communications work?" According to Kostelijk and Alsem (2020, 185) a communications strategy consists off target groups, key messages, objectives, content creation, media resources, budgeting, monitoring, and evaluating the communications outcomes.

In case of XD Solutions, the communications strategy consists of six steps that are somewhat similar to the steps that were previously showcased in Chapter 2 of this thesis. Those steps were conducted by Kotler, et al. (2012, 782). The key was to decide which steps were the most useful for the specific needs of XD Solutions. During the data analysis of this thesis, it was clear that the following six chosen steps are the most valuable: current state analysis, determining objectives, identifying the stakeholders and target audiences, selecting channels, selecting key messages, and measuring. These steps not only benefit the needs of the company but also reflect the findings of the conducted interviews.

5.1 Current state analysis

Analysing the current state of the company will give needed guidelines for the communications strategy. As one of the objectives was to tie communications strategy to overall business strategy, it is essential to observe the business operations extensively.

Pestel and SWOT analysis will map out the current state of the company and its communications as well as the matters that can influence the operations of the

company. By conducting an extensive current state analysis, the company has better groundwork for measuring the success of their communications. How can the company communicate their strengths to their stakeholders without knowing what their strengths are? Therefore, this part will analyse the business to reveal the strengths and weaknesses of the company. By understanding one's weaknesses, it is easier to communicate to the stakeholders what is the company willing to do to address their concerns.

5.1.1 PESTEL analysis

Hall (n.d.) describes Pestel analysis as a strategic management tool that helps businesses map out how external elements effect the operations of their business. The name Pestel is an acronym that incorporates the six elements that are worth examining to gain insights of what may effect the business operations of the company. Pestel analysis is a helpful tool when conducting a communications strategy because it maps out scenarios that may demand extra communications efforts from the company. It also helps illustrating the current state of the business and its operations. The findings of a Pestel analysis can also help when creating a SWOT analysis. (Oxford College of Marketing, n.d.)

Political

Political is the first stage of a Pestel analysis. The stage in short answers to the question:" How do the political decisions in Finland influence the company and its operations?". Because defence field can be highly argued area to operate in it is wise to understand that the board composition of the government can affect the field widely. Political instability can pose a huge threat to all businesses operating in the field. It is also wise to recognise the political consequences that each on-going operation may behold. International politics and the relationships between nations are factors that need to be acknowledged. Defence industry is highly regulated with policies both nationally and internationally, therefore the businesses operating in the field must take that into consideration.

Economical

Defence field is one of the fields that receive a lot of governmental funding. In 2020 the Ministry of Defence (2020) proposed the amount of 4.87 billion euros from the Finnish Government. Therefore, it is clear that deterioration of the nations economy will have a huge importance in the defence field. If the funds decrease the defence businesses may not be able to purchse external services. However, on the flipside if national employment increses that will result in to more projects.

Social

This section of the Pestel analysis focuses on how social matters effect the company. Social norms and common opinions tend to matter significantly in the defence field. It is important for the company to follow social norms. Defence industry and defence related projects have an impact on the whole society; therefore, it is important to increase security and avoid security risks in the communication on the projects that the company does.

Technological

One of the corner stones of XD Solutions is to find ways to enhance technology and innovations in Finland. Enhancing technology will also help securing national assets. How will autonomous technologies, cyber and artificial intelligence progress? Those are technologies that can create new projects for XD Solutions in the future.

Environmental

This part of the Pestel analysis focuses on the environmental impacts that can influence the company. The climate change and the new attitude effect every

company. Making sure that the operations of the company do not have negative environmental impact is important for the brand reputation of XD Solutions. It is wise to understand that the climate change can affect businesses and capitalism heavily. However, the more conscious and sustainable attitudes can result into new business opportunities and projects. Sustainability as a megatrend has already provoked new technology to arise. Energy resourcing, cleantech and power consumption systems could be potential new business opportunities for XD Solutions.

Legal

As stated, the defence field is highly regulated field. The operations and services of XD Solutions must follow the regulations strictly. Some of the projects are unforeseen which can result in juridical risks if the outcomes are not contemplated widely enough. Attention to juridical aspects is crucial. The defence field and the projects related to defence can have highly classified information. Therefore, internal communications between the participants in projects can be challenging. If the security of communications is compromised it may lead to legal actions.

5.1.2 SWOT analysis

Kenton (2021) describes SWOT analysis as a business tool that can be used to evaluete and develop a company's position by strategic planning. Just like Pestel analysis, the name of analysis comes from an acronym, that includes the following mapping steps: stregths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threaths.

Strengths

The strengths of XD Solutions are in an essence the tools that the company can utilise in their communications. XD Solutions is a relatively new business which gives them many strengths. The status of the company is independent from major players in defence industry which helps them with having no restriction towards

their operations. XD Solutions has unforeseen level of flexibility, rapidity, and agility in the defence sector. The team has a strong and extensive background on the field as well as versatile competence in different areas of the business. XD Solutions can also adapt quickly to feedback and changes.

Weaknesses

The fact that XD Solutions is a relatively new business unfortunately acts also as a weakness. Because the business is new and has yet to establish merit some opportunities might bypass. The size of the company can also be a weakness. As the company is small, they possess lower number of resources the other operators in the field do. These two weaknesses also go together, non-established and small company has the challenge that the recruiting process might be more difficult.

Opportunities

Finnish Ministry of Defence (2021) has stated that there is a growing need for industrial cooperation in the defence sector in the future. Therefore, the need for the services of XD Solutions is there. XD Solutions can create creative and unique solutions and has quality systems. Once again, the newness of the business can be an opportunity. Because XD Solutions is a new business, they do not have any prior difficulties with their brand image. The agility of XD Solutions is a great opportunity in the field. Most of the projects XD Solutions has, have opportunities to create new spin-offs and sequel projects.

Threats

The threats that impact XD Solutions can be mostly solved with having successful communications actions that help XD Solutions build their brand image. The biggest threat seems to be that the big defence companies in Finland have established a significant role in the field and their opinions are valued widely.

Some of those companies have addressed belittling attitudes towards XD Solutions. The companies in the field may not have a full understanding what XD Solutions is and what is their business model. Some businesses seem not to understand what added value XD Solutions brings.

5.2   Communication objectives

The first stage in conducting a communications strategy is to identify the communication objectives. This stage will compare the current state of communication to the objectives. This stage is necessary to the communications strategy to find answers to the question "Why?" or further "Why are we creating a communications strategy?". By achieving the communications objectives, the company targets to overcome most of the threats and weaknesses they have now.

The objectives of the communications strategy were identified by interviewing the management of XD Solutions. By the management the most important objective of the communications strategy is raising the brand awareness. By identifying the main objective, the communications strategy can now seek answers to how the company can build their brand awareness and brand reputation. It is important for the company to convey their competence and operation methods by utilising the right way of communications.

The interviews also highlighted that the management of the company recognises that communications strategy should support the overall business strategy. As one of the research questions implies "How to connect communications to overall business strategy?" this thesis seeks ways to connect the new communications strategy to the existing business strategy. That can be tricky according to Young (2010, 35). Even though it is important to match communications into overall business strategy, businesses should keep in mind that business goals do not equal communication goals. Business goals are usually related in market share growth or increase in sales, but these goals are not communication goals. Often finding the communication goals means finding the creative ideas from the business strategy. In short, communications goals seek to influence people.

Currently, the company has been able to gain brand awareness. As one of the interviewed customers of the XD Solutions phrased *"If someone asks, 'What is XD Solutions?' almost everyone could answer something. Which is definitely not self-evident in this field."* This shows that XD Solutions is already headed into the direction they seek to reach in the future.

One of the questions of the interviews was "When you have received e-mails or other communications from XD Solutions, has the tone been consistent and appropriate?", which was used to map out the current state of the company's communications. All the respondents gave a positive response which indicates that XD Solutions has been able to conduct communications that have cohesive tone between each team member. This might be an indicator that the overall strategy of the company is well understood in the team.

5.3   Identifying stakeholders – To whom

After the objectives have been selected the second stage of a communications strategy is to identify stakeholders. Stakeholders are, in an essence, the people who are communicated to. After the stakeholders have been identified, the objectives are observed from each of the stakeholders' viewpoints. This stage will seek to answer the question "To whom?". The National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO), (2021) states that understanding the key stakeholders can benefit companies prioritise the most important communications actions. The stakeholders were identifyid by interviews.

The internal stakeholders of the commisioner company are owners, management, employees, and shareholders. Some of the internal stakeholders are overlapping which creates situations where there are several different communication messages aimed towards the same people in different roles. That might not cause any problems but it is something to be awere of.

Because the commisioner company focuses their services in the defence sector the main external stakeholders hold value in that sector. The first identified

external stakeholder is the Ministry of Defence, the second identified external stakeholder are the defence materiel companies in Finland, third external stakholder are the organisations and associations of the chosen sector. The company also identfied that the Ministry of Economic Affairs as one of their external stakeholders as well as third sector companies such as development corporations. By observing further the company also identifyis European Commission as their stakeholder because of their considerable role in navigating the defence strategies and defence industry as a whole in Europe.

The second sector that the company focuses is domestic high-tech industry which creates even more external stakeholders. Heavy machienery industry, automotive industry and clusters related to all of those sectors have been identified as stakeholders. The company also realises that being a rather small company means that the financing of the company may need external help to development projects from different financing companies which will also become stakeholders.

Because the list of stakeholders is long the company also identified the most important stakeholders from their list of stakeholders. The most important external stakeholders can also be seen as the target group for the key messages of the company. The company listed three external stakeholders that hold the most value to them. The three stakeholders are: Ministry of Defence, defence and aerospace ralated associations and the defence and technology industry.

5.4   Key communications methods and channels - How

When the company has identified their stakeholders and objectives of communications, it is important to find the "How?" of the communications strategy. This stage will be used to decide the means of conducting communications. This stage will map out the fundamental guidelines and development projects of the communications. This stage will determine the key communications methods and channels. In this stage it is important to reflect the key stakeholders to find the most suitable channels for each target group.

In their communications XD Solutions has utilised personal contacts the most, which includes face to face meetings, phone calls and emails. Interviews also revealed that all the respondents have also seen some of the social media and blog posts that XD Solutions has created. These are also the channels that the interviewed stakeholders prefer. The top three preferred channels according to the interviews were: webpages, more specifically introducing the team and the service area of the company, personal contacts and lastly topical news surrounding the company. The way these channels will be utilised will be explained more extensively later.

In addition to the three most important channels XD Solutions should also communicate with varying other channels. Social media is one of the trending communications channels of the 21st century. According to the answers from the interviews XD Solutions could examine webinars, workshops, and email newsletters as potential channels beside the main channels that they utilise. As the research discovered, XD Solutions has defined the organisations and associations in the field as their stakeholders, it would be beneficial for XD Solutions to utilise memberships in these organisations as communication channels. These organisations often have their own membership magazines, meetings, and platforms. Because most of the other members in these organisations are also the targeted audience for XD Solutions' communications, they have potential to be highly important communications channels. After XD Solutions has been able to create more visibility with their communication actions, XD Solutions could seek to create earned media visibility such as articles and announcements in different medias such as magazines and websites in the field.

Most of the responders were satisfied with the amount of communication they received from the company. Almost all the interviewees responded that they hope that they receive communications monthly or when needed. Status up-dates, on-going and open communications will create a secure bond between XD Solutions and their clients. Due to the close inner-circle in the defence field customer relationships and brand reputation is increasingly important. By communicating openly and maintaining good relationships with the stakeholders, XD Solutions can build and form a strong base for their brand awareness. Frequent

communications will help the company stay relevant and create a larger audience for their communications.

5.4.1 Website

Websites are the modern-day equivalent to business cards, phone books, and portfolios. Websites often include the products and services of the company and possibly something else that the potential customers value. The importance of websites cannot be undermined. All the interviewed respondents said that website is one of the most important communication channels in their opinion.

The respondents answered that it is important that website information is correct, up to date and easy to navigate when the information is needed. The website should include a page for the people of XD Solutions because the people are highly valued. This answer from one of the interviewees summarised the common theme why website is one of the most important communications tools for XD Solutions: "*Website is an important communications tool because it gives a fast insight of what the company provides and what industry is the company operating in. I would say that gaining this type of common information about the company fast is extremely significant.*"

As the research pointed out the website should include topical blog posts around the people of XD Solutions as well as the things happening in the sector. These blog posts should bring added value to the reader as well as insights on how XD Solutions views each subject. The blog posts can include topics around the on-going projects of XD Solutions but also covering topics that have current impact on the field. When asked how XD Solution's communications compare to similar organisations one of the interviewed customers of XD Solutions provided an important insight: "*The communications of similar companies are hard to compare to XD Solutions because the other companies are much larger and possess more resources than XD Solutions. The communications of the similar companies are almost like small news articles that provide added value to the reader in addition to increasing the brand awareness of those companies.*" Even if this sort of

communicating is not expected from a small business such as XD Solutions it would be beneficial for the company.

5.4.2 Personal contacting

As stated, all the interviewed stakeholders responded that they appreciate personal contacting in business communications. Defence and technology sectors in Finland have close-knit communities that tend to be hard to access if one does not have prior contact to some valued member of the field. In the interviews the participants were asked where they find the companies they work with. As one of the answers concludes: "*Mostly from our networks both from our experts as well as the common knowledge in the field*", the significance of networks is emphasized in the defence field. Most of the other interviewees answered in similar manner. One of the interviewees answered the question "What are the main factors that make a company's communications good in your opinion?" as following: "*Personal contacting is the most important. More specifically the relevancy, novelty value and conciseness of personal communications.*"

Therefore, the importance of personal contacting has extensive significance. Furthermore, as stated in Chapter 2 there is always a chance of misunderstanding when using written communications. As one of the interviewees said: "*By observing the defence field that critically requires security, the communications between people and having personal contacts as well as case-based communications is emphasized.*" The way how businesses are communicating in this field must be selected carefully. By utilising phone calls and face to face meetings these misunderstandings and security risks can be avoided. Personal contacting also allows the people to form better connections that can further develop long lasting customer relationships and ultimately form strong brand equity and brand awareness.

5.4.3 Topicality

Many of the interviewees responded that it would be beneficial to the company to utilise social media and create frequent blog posts about topical issues with the company's perspective and some added value, some respondents even addressed their concern that without frequent posts around topical issues the company might be forgotten. Staying relevant will help the company in their goal to raise brand awareness. One of the respondents summarised the significance of topicality as following: "*I think topicality is important as well as gaining an overall picture of the operations of the company. I think that the more information there is available the better. However, that also has a downside of having so much information that the most important substance disappears and that the webpages must be updated more. Therefore, I would say that topical news about the company and the overall picture are the most important things.*"

One way of boosting topicality is using social media platforms as laidback channels where topicality is in a large role. Websites can be difficult to update fast enough whereas social media is built for agility. Meaningful communications in social media may take a lot of planning, however, a business can create varying content that will still be meaningful for their stakeholders with social media posts that do not take so much time to prepare. Another perspective for the importance of topicality came from another interviewee who stated the importance this way: "*I think that XD Solutions might have a lot to say in regards of topical subjects or trends in the field. That would also stand out from massive news volume that is produced daily in this field.*" By doing so the reader would also gain an insight of the values of XD Solutions.

5.5 Key messages

One of the last stages of a communication strategy is deciding the key messages of the company. As Young (2010) declared: "Understanding where and how to communicate comes before determining what to say." Key messages will enlighten the company's values in a relevant manner that speaks to the receivers. NCVO (2021) suggests that the key messages should be created starting with the target groups that maintain the biggest priority to the company. The key messages will also support the communication objectives.

One of the key messages that XD Solutions should convey is that they are a strong defence sector and international business and programme management expert. They have a strong and valuable team that have plenty of experience and networks in the defence sector. This can be displayed by creating stories website and social media where the company showcases their projects and proficiency. Rather than building a brand for XD Solutions from ground up, they should focus on the strengths they already possess which are the extensive backgrounds of the people working in the company.

The research shows that all interviewed stakeholders appreciate the people of XD Solutions and grant them great value. Most of the interviewees also are aware that the defence industry in Finland has a tight and private inner circle which results into everyone working in the industry to have an understanding about everyone else working in the industry. This was showcased in one of the answers that an interviewee provided. The interviewee was asked "How professional and competent XD Solutions is as a programme management company, in your opinion?" and they answered: *I think I might be a wrong person to answer that question because I personally know most of the personnel working in XD Solutions which hugely affects my image of XD Solutions. The defence field in Finland has a small inner circle where basically everyone knows everyone.*" The interviewee provided more information than they thought they could. The answer summarized what most of the interviewees mentioned at some point.

To conclude the people working on defence field are often perceived separately from the companies they are working in. That can be both good and bad. It is very difficult to come to the field without any connections but also knowing everyone creates trust and fellowship that helps when establishing a new business because the people already have gained a brand image for themselves. That concludes that XD Solutions should underline the people even more than before. The people working in XD Solutions are not only employees, the people equal XD Solutions.

Another key message of XD Solutions can be summarised in one sentence: "We see opportunities within every challenge." As the SWOT analysis explained the weaknesses can be turned into strengths by maintaining a different point of view.

Utilising the weaknesses as strengths creates an impression that XD Solutions can find solutions even in the hardest situations and is willing to go an extra mile to reach wanted outcomes. This message can be displayed by creating success stories of complete projects to the company's website and social media.

5.6 Measuring

The last step in a communications strategy is measuring. Measuring the effectiveness is widely useful because the results can make the company realise, whether they have chosen the right or wrong models and platforms. (Kotler, et al., 2012) This thesis focuses only in creating the strategy and guidelines for the commissioner company thus this part only sets guidelines for measuring the communications actions. The measuring stage of a communications strategy is a continuous process which will take place when the planned communications actions are implemented.

According to STT Viestintäpalvelut (2015) on-going measuring is significant to reach reliable conclusions. To effectively measure communications, it is advised to utilise the SMART-method. SMART is an acronym and comes from the words: specific, measurable, achievable, reliable, and time bound. (STT Viestintäpalvelut, 2015) The SMART technique helps the company set measures that will stay the same over longer period of time.

It is important to realise that creating successful communications is continuous path and the communications actions should be renewed from time to time. (Kotler, et al., 2012) According to Luoma-aho & Juholin (2017) researching the past and current stage of the communications can act as a beneficial way to measure communications. Because forming effective communications is an on-going process it is advised that the company should implement similar research again in the future. That would allow the company to build long lasting results as well as strong brand awareness. By conducting similar research again in the future, the company is also able to measure the effectiveness of this communications strategy. Effective communications require agility to variables and the ability to transform and adapt.

5.7 Summary

The communications strategy identified the current state of the communications and utilised the findings in the future steps of the communications. In conclusion, the communications strategy recommends that XD Solutions should use wider network of communications channels to create valuable and consistent communications. Utilising social media as agile and stress-free platform gives the needed motivation for frequent communications.

Table 2 has been created to visualise the communications strategy. The table shows suggested frequency of communications, channels and if the target audience requires status updates. This table is, however, merely a suggestion which can and should be adjusted according to the needs of each project for example.

The format of this table is based on the interviews. Two answers to the question: "How often would you like to receive information from XD Solutions? (This includes e-mails, phone calls and other medias such as newsletters)" provide an insight how the table was formatted. The first answer being: "*At the moment I want to receive communications from companies when it is necessary. For example, when there is a specific need or concrete issue that we are working on or if there has been a significant change in the company such as a designation of personnel or a new significant project*", and the second: "*I think that regular personal contacting for example monthly would be an optimal frequency.*" The table also separates Ministry of Defence, Defence and aerospace associations and defence and technology industries from the current customers and potential customers because these are the most important stakeholders that the management of XD Solutions identified during the interview.

Stakeholders	Frequency				Communication Channel					Status Update
	Weekly	Monthly	Quartey	When needed	Meeting	Email	Call	Website	Social Media	
Internal Stakeholders	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
Current Customers		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Potential Customers			✓					✓	✓	
Ministry of Defence			✓				✓	✓		
Defence and aerospace associations			✓			✓		✓	✓	✓
Defence and Technology industry			✓			✓		✓	✓	

Table 2 Communications Strategy Spreadsheet

6 CONCULSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As the main objective of the thesis was to seek ways how XD Solutions could improve their communications, the chosen solution was to create a communications strategy. Before conducting the research, academic books and publications were utilised to explore applicable theories which resulted in greater understanding of the chosen subject for the thesis. It also enhanced the reliability of the thesis.

The main research question of the thesis was: *"How to create a communications strategy for XD Solutions?"*. The thesis answered to the question in Chapter 5, where the chosen structure of the communication strategy was explained. To summarize, the communications strategy was created by observing the current state of the communications by interviewing the stakeholders of XD Solutions. These findings were collected and analysed to find the communications objectives. These objectives gave the needed guidelines for creating a communications strategy.

The sub-questions chosen for the thesis *"Which tools the case company should utilise in their communications?"*, *"How should the case company use these tools?"*, *"What are the target groups and what kind of content the company should provide?"* and *"How to connect communications to overall business strategy?"* were also answered to in Chapter 5. The answers to these research questions were explained in the communications strategy where the communications channels were explained, the main stakeholders and key messages were recognised, and the link between overall business strategy and communications strategy was established.

This thesis is beneficial to the commissioner company because the thesis investigated the most important stakeholders of the company and gave insight and action plan for future communications. By understanding the receivers of the company's communications, it is easier to find the right platforms and the right frequency for the company's communications. By following the communication strategy, this thesis provided, the commissioner company can create meaningful

and valuable communications that bring their stakeholders significance and can eventually create brand awareness. Communication strategy helps the company form relevant, focused, unique, and consistent communications.

After the research was conducted and the communications strategy was successfully created the author discovered some findings and recommendations that are explained in this chapter. These findings give the commissioner company clear guidelines for the future after the communications strategy is implemented.

As a first finding and a recommendation, it is advised that XD Solutions should do another research. The findings of the research on the most parts were expected, however, it would be advisable that XD Solutions should take a further notice on their pricing and their earning logic. Finnish Ministry of Defence (2021) identifies the need for industrial cooperation in the defence sector. Therefore, there could be a growing demand for services that can reinforce industrial cooperation. As one of the services that XD Solutions provides is industrial participation and cooperation, there certainly is a market for XD Solutions.

However, according to Williamson & De The Meyer (2020, 136) in spite of creating great value for customers a company can be unsuccessful on finding the right path to monetisation. Some of the interviewed stakeholders addressed their concerns about the whole business model, as the earnings logic seemed not to be logical for them to see. One of the interviewed stakeholders also pointed out that the services of XD Solutions are on the pricier side. Therefore, it is suggested that the company should investigate the monetisation models as well as the pricing policy. According to Robert J. Dolan (1995) appropriate pricing must be carefully investigated by observing multitude prospects of the business.

A second recommendation for the company is to conduct a communications plan which would further elevate the business and its goals after the communication strategy has been implemented to use. A communications plan includes a deeper investigation of the main target groups and stakeholders to ensure reliable and efficient communications. A separate communications plan would be recommended to include a communication calendar specifically an annual communication wheel. Annual wheel is an easy tool to utilise that displays all the

communication guidelines and projects. For example, it could include social media posts, media events and even marketing campaigns.

Third and final recommendation for XD Solutions is to detach from XD Invest Ltd. That would help XD Solutions establish their own brand without any confusions about the business name. The objective of XD Solutions is to build their brand awareness and unfortunately having multiple business names can make it more difficult. By detaching from XD Invest Ltd XD Solutions will have all their business operations from projects to billing under the right name.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Interview questions for management of XD Solutions

Interview questions for management of XD Solutions

1. What is your job title? What exactly do you do in your daily work? Why do you do those tasks? Why is your work important for XD Solutions?
2. What does the word strategy mean to you?
3. What has been the persistent pattern of behaviour of XD Solutions, over the past few years, that has brought XD Solutions here? What has been your contribution?
4. What are the main objectives of a communications strategy in your opinion?
5. What kinds of activities do you think needs to be done to achieve those goals?
6. Has XD Solutions identified their target groups? What are they? Which of these target groups are the most important ones?
7. What do you think needs to be communicated towards your target groups? What are the core messages?
8. What communicating platforms does XD Solutions utilise? Do you believe they work?
9. Have you considered conducting any campaigns?
10. What kind of content do you publish on your communicating platforms?
11. Have you ever measured the effectiveness of your communications actions? If yes, how? If no, why?

Appendix 2. Interview questions for the current customers of XD Solutions

Interview questions for the current customers of XD Solutions

1. If you had to describe XD Solutions with three adjectives, what would they be?
2. From where do you usually find the companies you work with?
3. How important role does the company's website experience have on your decision? How about their social media platforms?
4. When you have received e-mails or other communications from XD Solutions, has the tone been consistent and appropriate?
5. What are the main factors that make a company's communications good in your opinion? (For example, personal contact, frequent newsletters or social media posts, or printed media)
6. In a situation where you would like to work with a programme management company such as XD Solutions, what keywords would you most likely use in search engines?
7. How well do you think the company has combined its online and offline communications?
8. What kind of content do you wish to find about the company online? (For example, blog posts, social media accounts (if, which ones), updates & news about the company and its industry)
9. How often would you like to receive information from XD Solutions? (This includes e-mails, phone calls and other medias such as newsletters)

Appendix 3. Interview questions for applicable associations

Interview questions for the applicable associations

1. If you had to describe XD Solutions with three adjectives, what would they be?
2. How does XD Solutions' communications compare with similar organisations?
3. How professional and competent XD Solutions is as a programme management company, in your opinion?
4. How could XD Solutions improve their communications to enhance their brand image?
5. When you have received e-mails or other communications from XD Solutions, has the tone been consistent and appropriate?
6. What are the main factors that make a company's communications good in your opinion? (For example, personal contact, frequent newsletters or social media posts, or printed media)
7. How well do you think the company has combined its online and offline communications?
8. What kind of content do you wish to find about the company online? (For example, blog posts, social media accounts (if, which ones), updates & news about the company and its industry)
9. How often would you like to receive information from XD Solutions? (This includes e-mails, phone calls and other medias such as newsletters)

Appendix 4. Interview questions for potential customers of XD Solutions

Interview questions for potential customers of XD Solutions

1. Have you considered using XD Solutions' services?
2. Are you happy with the amount of communication from XD Solutions? If not, how often would you ideally receive information? (This includes e-mails, phone calls and other medias such as newsletters)
3. How has XD Solutions communicated with you? What channels they have utilised? Do you think all their communications has reached you?
4. What channels of XD Solutions do you follow? What channels do you usually prefer?
5. If you had to describe XD Solutions with three adjectives, what would they be?
6. How does XD Solutions' communications compare with similar organisations?
7. How professional and competent XD Solutions is as a programme management company, in your opinion?
8. How well do you think the company has combined its online and offline marketing tools and activities?