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MARKETING PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS

– CASE STUDY: Company X



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MARKETING PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS

- CASE STUDY: Company X

The purpose of this bachelor's thesis was to develop effective marketing plan recommendations for the case company within the hospitality industry. This was done by utilizing different marketing strategies by identifying the customers and offering competitive pricing and a unique user experience. By researching different marketing frameworks related to the marketing mix, SWOT, PESTEL and buyer personas and analysing data gathered this thesis provides various recommendations for the marketing plan of company X.

The theoretical framework focuses primarily on services marketing while taking into account other serviceable operations and activities concerning the case company. The current market state was analysed to identify meaningful approaches moving forward. Additionally, different segments, targets and positioning within the market were researched and two main target segments and marketing channels were found. Recommendations include the use of several booking channels, improvement of internet and social media marketing. Due to confidentiality reasons, parts of this research are not made public.

Keywords:

Marketing plan, Marketing mix, Marketing communication, Marketing analysis, Services marketing, Hotel

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1 Introduction

The author of this thesis worked for the case company from the 3rd of August 2020 to the 1st of August 2021. The author of this thesis will be an objective author to avoid any bias in the conduction of the study and results gained. The author's tasks in the case company ranged from managing daily operations, service design, sales, and marketing. This thesis will provide marketing plan recommendations based on the case study conducted on behalf of company X.

To start with a brief overview the company was formed to purchase and manage a large property in Finland. The premises is located in the more rural part of Finland next to a lake system. The property includes 12 buildings of various sizes. The buildings have been built over several decades. The use and purpose of the property has changed and requires redesigning to serve as a resort hotel. The case company started hotel operations in June 2021.

As the purpose of these buildings has changed and there is a need for marketing plan recommendations to push the new business model forward. The property has a new marketing name that aims to reflect the types of services and operations that are currently operational and planned for the property. It will be primarily marketed as a hotel resort and this is the main focus of the case study.

However, there are other avenues to the business such as providing rental space for other operators within the premises. In addition, the company provides short-term rentals for different types of meetings, gatherings, and events. These elements are accounted for while the primary focus is targeted towards the resort hotel operations. The case company offers services for both business to business (B2B) and business to customer (B2C). The company offers rentals of premises space for B2B customers, but the focus of this study is on providing hotel resort accommodations but also takes into consideration services available such as events, cafe, bar and shop services, restaurant with much more planned for the near future. These are some of the few various considerations for the marketing plan recommendations targeted at the

hospitality industry customers. Due to confidentiality reasons, parts of this research are not made public.

1.1 Background

As company X is a newly formed company there have been very few marketing efforts to date. The case company's resort is a sizable new endeavour that is multifaceted on many operational fronts. Current operations include rental of business premises, water distribution, providing hotel accommodation and event organisations such as musical events and orientation competitions. The current operational services include 22 rooms for accommodation, a cafe, bar and shop, a restaurant, two outdoor terraces, two outdoor barbeque huts, four saunas, four meeting rooms and an indoor sports hall. The upcoming services include 22 rooms more for accommodation, a gym facility, spa services and an indoor swimming pool. As such, a holistic marketing plan is required that considers the operation and various side operations. These side operations are a vital part of forming the bigger picture of what case company's resort aims to become in the future. Due to the scope of the project, this research will focus on providing recommendations on the resort hotel operations.

The property was formerly owned by a foundation. The case company's project goal is to repurpose the premises into a hotel resort with services around it that form a working symbiosis between the different operations targeting the hospitality industry. This is still an ongoing project for the company. As mentioned, these services are aimed to support one another to form a larger service centre in a rural area of Finland.

Before going into the marketing plan background, it is valuable to have a brief sense of what the now called company X's resort holds within premises as many of these points will give a better understanding of the marketing plan. In addition, it is important to understand a brief history of the property. The personnel category of the establishment was originally built to serve a 100 to 249 employee staff. However, the foundation fell under harsh financial times as

the main operators of the premises moved their services. Following this event, many of the buildings were now found unused and neglected for years and are in bad shape. Various renovations have taken place and more are still required before certain buildings, operations, and functions can be taken back into use or redesigned.

1.2 Property buildings and facilities

The property consists of seven main buildings out of which two are serving as accommodations for hotel space. Company X is aiming at providing different levels of accommodation ranging from hostel to hotel. Within company X premises there are seven larger buildings are interconnected by an underground tunnel network.

The main building number seven currently operates the lobby bar, café, shop, and info centre. Additionally, a rental operator works on two floors of the building. The third floor is an executive hotel space with 22 hotel rooms. These rooms are not yet operational as they are waiting on legal permits. Building number six is the administration building featuring office spaces on the first floor and kitchen premises on the second floor. Building number five is a therapy building with features a sports hall, gym, swimming pool two saunas for men and women as well as several office rooms. Currently, the gym and swimming pool are not operational requiring maintenance work.

Building four has previously served as a housing and office building and requires total renovation before it may be repurposed. Currently, this building is not in use. The third building is the technical department which houses a professional kitchen as well as a restaurant side. The second building's first and second floors serve as the hotel side of the operations featuring currently 22 hotel rooms. The first building is currently under renovation to be turned into more accommodation space. The underground tunnel network includes storage rooms, technical facilities.

Furthermore, the premises has a small golf field, a football field, tennis court, two barbeque huts, two outdoor terraces, a harbour as well as a fitness trail. Other facilities belonging to the company, but not in the immediate resort area include housing with four apartments, a wastewater treatment plant, a clean water facility, and a water sourcing well. These facilities provide water for the company X premises as well as nearby housing and the nearby island.

1.3 Research questions and objectives

The primary objective of this case study is to provide the company with effective marketing plan recommendations. As the scope of the project is very wide this study does not aim to cover every facet of a holistic marketing plan but rather focus on the current actionable recommendations based on the scope of this research. This research focuses on finding out the potential customer segments, their needs and the market potential in the area. It will also research the competition to answer what are the most effective marketing methods and channels to be considered. Based on the findings of the marketing mix, communication, SWOT, PESTEL, consumer market, segmentation, targeting and positioning analysis different marketing plan recommendations will be considered for the case company.

2 Theoretical framework

2.1 Marketing plan

A marketing plan contains procedures a company follows to achieve detailed goals and objectives set in a timeframe. This should take into consideration the resources available. A marketing plan begins with understanding the customers' needs and problems and how the products and services provided will benefit those needs. This in return is called a value proposition. (Sotiriadis, 2018, pp. 300-304)

The common elements in creating a marketing plan consist of market analysis and creating SMART marketing objectives in a logical sequence. SMART objectives are specific, measurable, achievable, result-focused and time-bound. This provides important performance indicators which are comparable to results. Depending on the resources available to the company a marketing plan should take into consideration factors affecting the marketplace. This can be achieved by developing a marketing mix understanding customers and competitors and making strategic decisions based on market segmentation, targeting and positioning. A marketing plan takes into consideration the development of marketing strategies, tactics, implementation, monitoring, control and evaluation of the plan. (Sotiriadis, 2018, pp. 300-304)

To provide effective marketing plan recommendations, there are several considerations to be accounted for with a project of this scale. In this case, the marketed product is the premises and the current and future operations regarding the services and activities. While the company has different operations and services already available at premises these functions support a hotel resort vision for the area. The company is looking to redesign the premises that will serve the overall vision of a service centre in a rural area. This research will focus on effective marketing strategies recommendations for the case company.

Using unique selling points available to the property will help the company stand out from the competition. Further considerations regarding the marketing plan will have to consider the rural location. By car, the property is located around a 30-minute drive away from the nearest city. The local population is small with some more activity during the summer season. The goal is to market the resort locally but also focus on a wider scale to people outside the local area.

2.2 Marketing mix

While creating strategies for marketing manufactured goods companies often consider four basic elements: product, place (or distribution), price, and promotion (or communication). These four elements are referred to as the '4 Ps' of marketing. However, these elements do not cover parts of the customer interface. Therefore, in terms of having a more holistic framework on services marketing, these traditional elements of a marketing mix have been expanded with the elements of the process, physical environment, and people. With the addition of these three elements to the marketing mix, people refer to them as the 7 Ps of services marketing. (Wirtz, et al., 2018, p. 18) The following marketing mix includes the theory and application regarding the case company. This application is done based on the empirical data gathered on the case company with observations based on the author's knowledge of the company.

2.2.1 Product

The product is a core element when it comes to marketing. If the product is poor it will not produce meaningful value for the customer. The primary aim is to create a service product targeting the consumers' needs better than competitors. Other elements include providing information, consulting, order taking, hospitality as well as handling expectations. (Wirtz, et al., 2018, p. 18)

As for the case of the resort, the products offered are both tangible and intangible. The product and services regarding the resort revolve around the

hospitality industry. In this case, it is providing accommodation with additional services. Several products include physical goods from the bar cafe and shop, or restaurant in addition to services provided by the hotel, restaurant, rentals, events, or the many activities mentioned previously within and surrounding the premises.

2.2.2 Place

The place in services marketing can refer to a physical point in addition to electronic channels. This can include visiting a physical location such as a storefront or a virtual space such as a website or other forms of distribution channels. Services can also be delivered directly to the customers or via other organizations performing sales, services, or customer contact. The method, place, or channels used should be carefully considered. (Wirtz, et al., 2018, pp. 18-19)

Correct selection of distribution services should be carefully considered when targeting various customer segments. Current booking channels are direct front desk bookings, telephone, as well as the company website and Booking.com. The case company's resort, is physically located in a rural area which may offer various challenges. However, it is also a selling point in terms of marketing as many tourists seek a more quiet and relaxing atmosphere away from the city. Small counties saw a rise in domestic tourism during the summer season of 2021 as people still felt the need to travel. With global pandemic travel restrictions, many sought to travel within the country. (Savon Sanomat, 2021) In this case, the surrounding area works as both a strength and a weakness. For the locals, it offers a point of service that is nearby and for tourists, a different type of atmosphere compared to the city. During the winter seasons, the commute between the city centre and the resort is shortened by half. This is due to the local ice road that is constructed annually and can make for a unique experience in terms of tourism. (Savon Sanomat, 2021)

2.2.3 Price

Price is an important factor when it comes to value exchange. It directly affects the income made. The pricing strategy should be dynamic and adjust over time depending on the desired customer segments, time, place, demand in addition to availability in terms of capacity. Pricing is a key component of costs generated when it comes to the customers obtaining desired benefits they seek. Marketing should set prices the customer is willing to pay, but also understand. (Wirtz, et al., 2018, p. 21)

Generally in the hospitality industry, there are high and low seasons. Pricing of accommodation will generally fluctuate depending on availability. The holiday and Summer season is often considered the high season where the pricing of services will be higher. These can differ based on location and activities found in the area such as in the case of the resort.

2.2.4 Promotion

Promotion is a set of activities required for effective communication with target customers. It should provide the required information as well as advice to increase sales and public awareness while encouraging the customer to buy the service product and to take action. Communication should be educational and especially for newer customers. It should contain the benefits of the service and how to obtain it. (Wirtz, et al., 2018, p. 22)

2.2.5 Process

The delivery of service plays an important part in how a company operates. For this reason, it is essential to also consider the design and implementation of effective methods in the creation and delivery of provided services. Factors to be included are reliable delivery, quality control, and productivity. Demand and capacity should be well balanced and in terms of services, this would mean the

customer needs to wait within the service process. (Wirtz, et al., 2018, pp. 22-23)

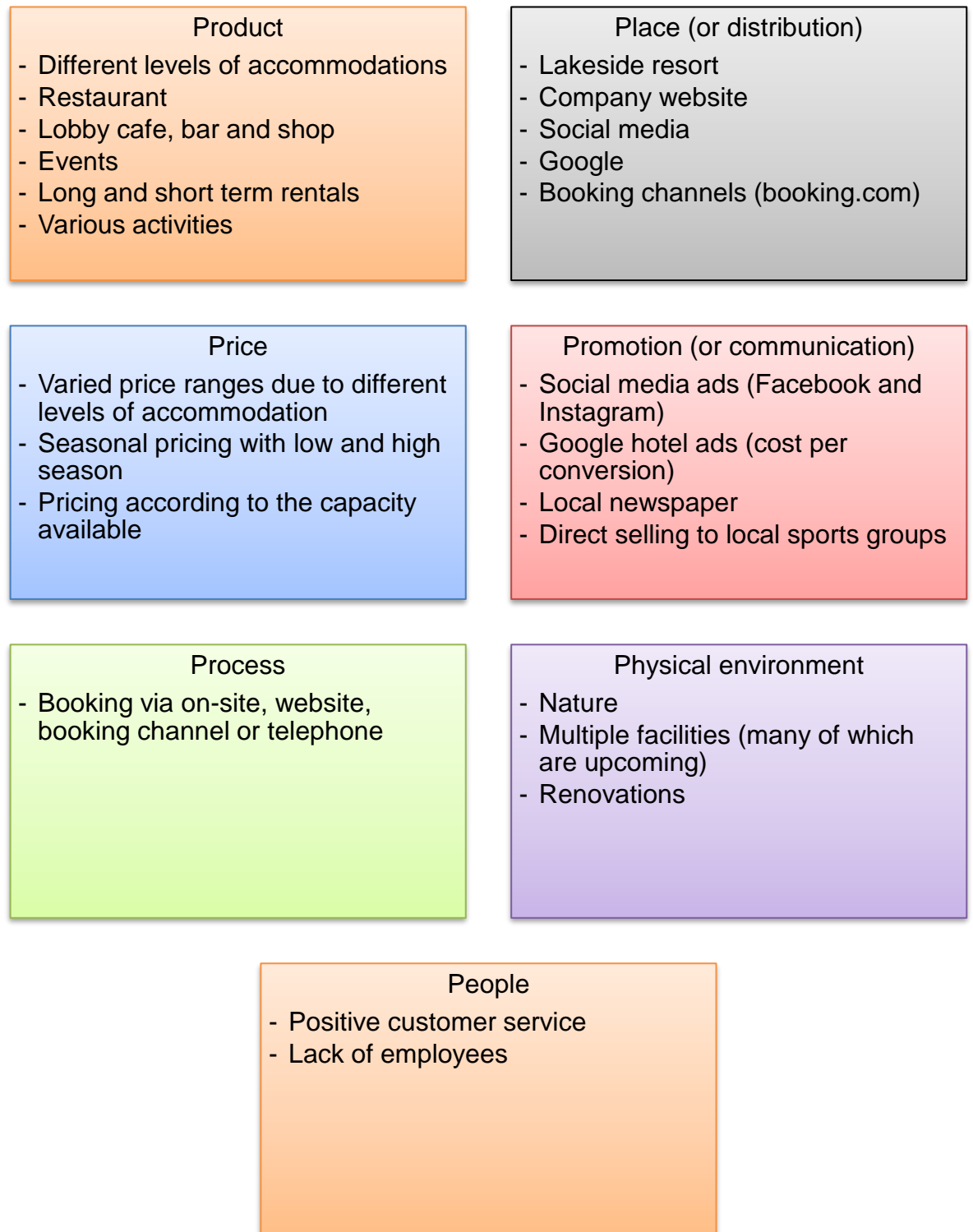
2.2.6 Physical environment

When customers enter service facilities there is also consideration towards the “servicescape”. The appearance, landscape, furnishing, equipment, and sign along with similar aspects. As for service quality, these provide a visual clue in addition to navigating clients through the service process. These elements can often have a large impression on customer satisfaction as well as service productivity. (Wirtz, et al., 2018, p. 24)

2.2.7 People

Human interaction between customer and employee plays a major role in marketing. While technology and other interfaces have advanced, many service sectors need to have direct contact. Motivation, attitude, and skills play a major role in the customer service experience. As such working closely with the human resource department is necessary to carefully select, train and obtain the technical skills required. (Wirtz, et al., 2018, p. 24)

Figure 1. Marketing Mix



The marketing mix is based on the empirical data collected regarding the case company. It highlights the key components within the different marketing mix elements. These components are based on the case company to identify important elements to make effective marketing decisions.

2.3 Marketing communication

The marketing communication mix includes five major promotion tools; advertising, public relations, personal selling, sales promotion, and direct and digital marketing elements that are incorporated within the promotion mix to engage customers. (Oxford University Press, 2021) It is used to build customer relationships and to communicate value. (Kotler & Armstrong, 2021, p. 410) The landscape of communication has rapidly changed with the emerging digital technologies. Digital, mobile and social media has given rise to a more targeted, social, and connective marketing communications model which has created a need for integrated marketing communications. (Kotler & Armstrong, 2021, pp. 408-411)

When integrating the promotion mix overall communication strategy should take into account that these promotion elements are working together. The process starts with the customer and each touchpoint should be consistent in terms of marketing content and placement. Disorganized efforts often lead to weak and confusing promotional efforts. (Kotler & Armstrong, 2021, p. 426)

Advertising aims to inform, educate and motivate by selling the brand or promoting a product. It is a form of persuasive communication created for a specific purpose and targeted at a selected audience. This form requires payment for the delivered message via an exclusive medium. (Juska, 2018, p. 3)

Sales promotion is used to persuade potential clients into making an immediate purchase of a product or service by financial incentives or additional rewards. These types of offers generally have an end date. Sales promotions are typically easier to measure as they are directly connected to a numerical result

in contrast to the customer's response to said provided offer. (Juska, 2018, pp. 4-5)

Personal selling involves the company's personnel in engaging customers, making sales, and building customer relationships through personal customer interactions. (Kotler & Armstrong, 2021, p. 411) This includes marketing that connects the business, technology, and consumers via words of mouth, opinion leaders, first contact person, salesperson, and direct sellers. (Juska, 2018, p. 8)

The objective of public relations is to engage with the customers to develop, maintain, secure and develop the brand perception. It is used to build better relations with their audience. Public relations include a variety of categories such as media-, community, government, and employee relations. (Juska, 2018, pp. 6-7)

Direct and digital marketing involve interactions with selected target individuals or communities to gain an immediate response. It is used to build lasting customer relationships. (Kotler & Armstrong, 2021, p. 411) There are many forms of direct and digital marketing such as mail, catalogues, telephone, and digital forms within online services, mobile and social media. (Kotler & Armstrong, 2021, p. 425)

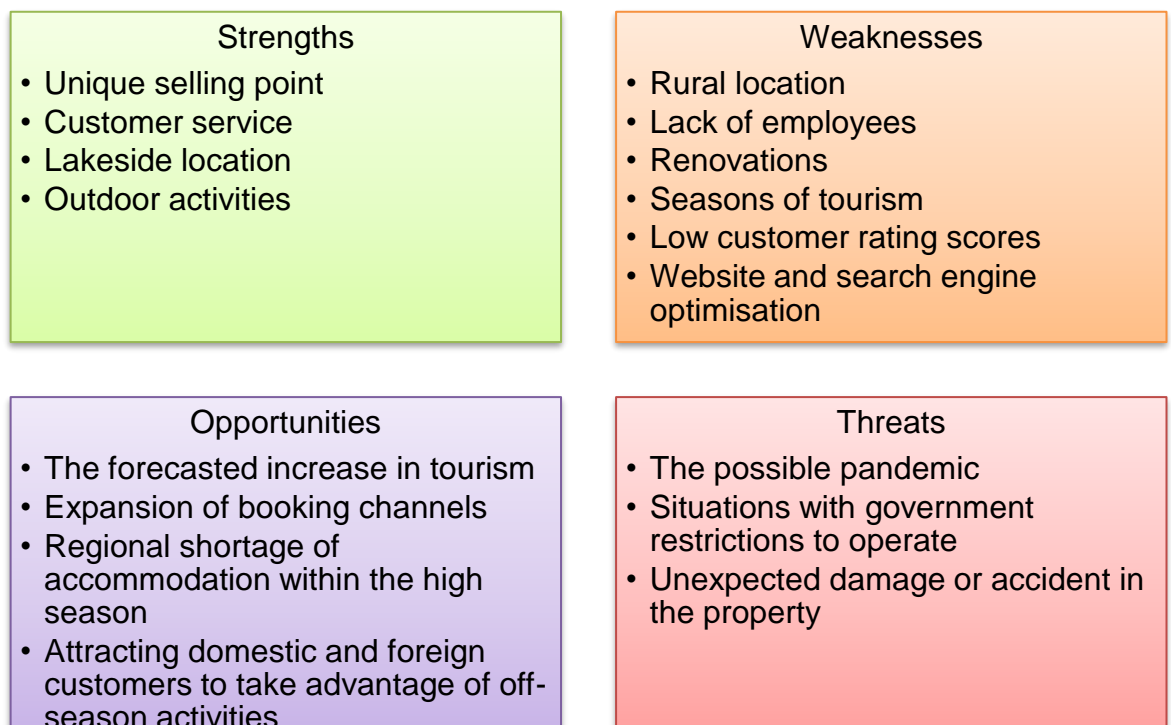
2.4 Marketing analysis

2.4.1 SWOT

Understanding how to manage marketing functions starts with analyzing the company's overall situation. Insight is often gained by conducting a SWOT analysis which is used to assess the company's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. The purpose is to find advantages by pairing the companies strengths to possible opportunities while trying to remove or overcome weaknesses and minimize threats. (Kotler & Armstrong, 2021, p. 74)

Strengths assess the internal capabilities that can support the company reach its objectives. Weaknesses assess the internal limitations that can restrict the company reach its objectives. Opportunities focus on the external factors that that company may be able to take advantage of. Threats focus on the external factors which may challenge the current or future performance. (Kotler & Armstrong, 2021, p. 74)

Figure 2. SWOT Analysis.

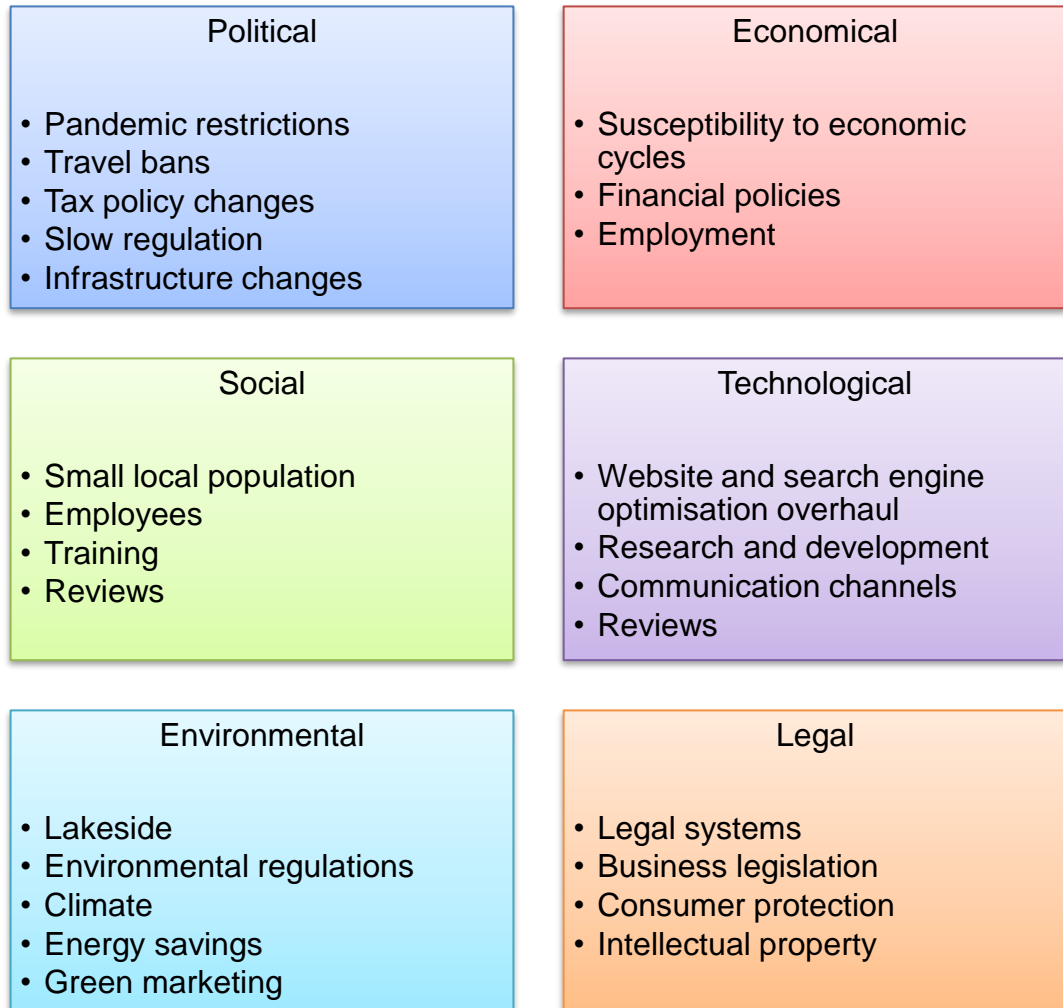


2.4.2 PESTEL

The PESTEL analysis is a tool for examining conditions of the macro or external environment the company is within. It analysis the political, economical, social, technological, environmental, and legal elements that may affect the market. This information is collected based on how it affects the company and concerning key competitors. A vital part of creating a marketing plan is to find out what to analyze as it will give a picture of the business and market current

and future pressures and trends. (Cooper, 2008, pp. 555-556) (Fletcher, et al., 2017)

Figure 3. PESTEL Analysis.



2.5 Consumer market analysis

Effective marketing requires understanding consumers. This can be accomplished by gathering behavioural data, identifying social ideas and conducting customer surveys. The marketing should integrate unstructured data from social media, interviews, or other marketing information systems. After this

different personas can be segmented appropriately to better understand their likes, dislikes, and spending behaviours. (Haddad, 2016, p. 73)

2.5.1 Customer analysis

Consumer analysis is usually done first out of marketing's '3 Cs' by investigating the common market characteristics. Secondly, it is followed by an in-depth understanding of the customer's needs and related characteristics and behaviours. The objective of this market analysis is to determine the attraction of the overall market and to find possible segments within it. Considerations to be included are overall market size, growth, margins, and profit potentials. In addition, it aims to detect the demand levels as well as possible trends affecting the market. (Wirtz, et al., 2018, p. 67)

2.5.2 Competitor analysis

The competitor analysis is used to find opportunities for differentiation and to gain competitive advantages. This can help in identifying their competitor's strengths and weaknesses. By using this information within the company's analysis they can better decide which advantages can be emphasized towards which target segments. (Wirtz, et al., 2018, pp. 67-68)

2.5.3 Company analysis

Company analysis identifies its strengths within its brand positioning, image, and the resources available; capital, human labour and physical assets. In addition, it investigates the limitations or constraints in how it shapes the way it does business. In return, the company may gain insight into how to manage select limited target market segments to be served. (Wirtz, et al., 2018, p. 68)

2.6 Segmentation, targeting, and positioning analysis

Utilizing the 3 C's (customer, competitor, and company) analysis the company can develop an effective segmentation, targeting, and positioning (STP) strategy. This is used to find a fitting market position and to develop a strategy to reach that target. (Wirtz, et al., 2018, p. 68)

Segmenting service markets separate the people that are potential customers into groups. The segments are comprised based on common characteristics, needs, spending behaviours, and consumption patterns. Once segmented the demographic, geographic, psychographic, and behavioural variables can be used to depict them. Within different segments, the customer's needs should be dissimilar to other groups. (Wirtz, et al., 2018, pp. 68-71)

Targeting service markets are about focusing efforts on the customers it can best serve. Meaning their target segment. A company cannot appeal to every potential customer due to a variety of different needs, spending behaviours and consumption habits. Playing towards a company's strengths they can better focus their efforts where they are most likely to yield a positive outcome. (Wirtz, et al., 2018, pp. 71-73)

The positioning strategy should be based on appealing to the target customers. It involves creating, communicating and keeping unique differences that stand out and are valued by the target customers it wants to maintain a long-term relationship with. The positioning ought to have simple and consistent messaging while standing apart from competitors. Companies should focus their efforts as they cannot be everything to everyone. (Wirtz, et al., 2018, p. 75)

3 Research design and data collection methods

The research focuses on utilizing different marketing theories that can provide a holistic understanding of different marketing strategies used in a marketing plan. The literature is based on services marketing, tourism principles and practices. Different marketing theories are utilized with the results of the analysed data in formulating viable marketing plan recommendations for the case study company.

Another source of empirical data was collected via the internal systems and networks that are in place. The author of this research was in charge of the creation of these internal systems while working for the case company. The primary internal system used for data collection was the Sirvoy property management system. Other systems include Google Business and Facebook Business in which the insight data was collected. Additionally, data on customers was gathered through reviews found via the booking channel used by the company. These sources of data provide real data on past and current customers. The data from these sources were used in formulating the marketing plan recommendations. The research results provided actionable information on the overall customer segments both demographically, geographically and other factors that play into the holistic marketing plan.

Observations of the case company were used as the author had participated in working for the company. The duration of this nature of observation was one year. The observation was done from an employees viewpoint and included several first hand interactions with customers. The observation provided information on the customers and company on an inside level. This type of observation provides high ecological validity but may be affected by error, drift, effects or observer bias. (Saunders, et al., 2019) To avoid any bias in this research, the author used different information verification methods.

In addition, the research includes primary data from an interview with a key company figure. The advantage of using an interview as a source of primary data is to gain specified data related to the study. (Saunders, et al., 2019)

Interviewing a key figure in the company provided accurate information on the plans for the project within the decision-making level. The interview was semi-structured and information was provided outside the scope of the questions. The interview was conducted through email as well as a later follow up via telephone.

During the research, the first step was to focus on the theoretical framework of a marketing plan while exploring possible marketing strategies relevant to the case company. To achieve this the research focused mainly on quantitative data while including a few qualitative research methods such as the interview and customer reviews for more inclusive data. The use of quantitative and qualitative mixed methods provides a more holistic understanding. (Saunders, et al., 2019) Finally, the overall goal was to have actionable marketing plan recommendations for the company.

Limitations of the research include the lack of a questionnaire for the customers due to time constraints. This could have provided valuable primary data and insights for the goal of this study. However, some customer feedback was gained through existing customer reviews which were provided via Booking.com. Another research limitation was the choice of excluding sensitive internal data as it was private information.

4 Conclusion

The main objective of this thesis was to create an effective marketing plan for the case company's resort. This was done by utilizing different theoretical frameworks and analysing relevant data relating to the case company to conduct the SWOT and PESTEL analysis. Literature based on services marketing and tourism principles and practices as well as data from the internal system were used to gather this information.

Internal and external forces were investigated by using the SWOT analyses. Additionally, a PESTEL analysis was done to gain a more holistic understanding of the current market situation. Another key point for identifying the current market was to analyse the customers, competitors and the company. The research found that the majority of hotel visitors have been domestic. Most of the bookings have been via the booking channel Booking.com.

Based on research and observations various findings were made regarding customer segments, targets and positioning. The research suggests that there is two segmentation of customer groups. These are accommodation seekers and the locals in the area. There are around 50 accommodation competitors within the region. Relatively the case company offers more competitive pricing but suffers from low customer feedback scores. Additional recommendations were made for the company's website. These results were used for the marketing plan recommendations.

The data used in this thesis was a collection from different internal operating systems. This data collected was analysed within different marketing frameworks to provide realistic recommendations for the case company. In addition, an interview was done with the owner of the property. There was no questionnaire made for the customers which could have improved the results of this research. However, some of the hotel booking channels send customers a feedback report. This information was taken into consideration for the buyer personas that were used to gain insight into the potential customers.

Different marketing concepts were used while analysing empirical data available to help formulate recommendations for the case company. Updating the marketing plan is important as the internal and external circumstances are likely to develop and change in the future. This research may help the case company in implementing some of the provided marketing plan recommendations, but it does not cover the full extent of a company's marketing plan. As the case company started operations during the pandemic the data collected in this research was also collected during this period. The case company does not have pre-pandemic data available. This should take into consideration as it has affected the results of this study.

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Appendix

Appendix 1. Interview questions.

This interview was done with the owner of the case company.

1. What are your main objectives and targets for the resort?
2. Who is currently buying your services?
3. What are the most important factors that motivate or influence these people to choose your services?
4. What audiences do you expect to be interested in purchasing these services in future?
5. What improvements could be done to existing offerings to improve customer satisfaction?
6. What are your competitive advantages?
7. Who are your main competitors?
8. What are your competitors doing to attract more customers?
9. Are you effectively reaching all of the people who would use your services?
10. How does the location of the resort work out in terms of customers and employees?

Appendix 2. Buyer personas.

Table 1. Persona 1.

Age	50
Location	X, Finland
Job title	Teacher
Average income	4000 euros
Buying behaviour	Hears from friends and colleagues about business opportunities, then does his research.
Interests and activities	Work, reading, and travelling.
Lifestage	Married and children.
Language	Finnish and Swedish fluently, has learned sufficient English.

Table 2. Persona 2.

Age	31
Location	X, Finland
Job title	Consultant
Average income	3000 euros
Buying behaviour	Likes to do extensive research before buying anything. Researches all options and their differences.
Interests and activities	Travelling
Lifestage	Unmarried, no children.
Language	Fluent in Finnish, English, and Swedish. Can speak German and French.

Table 3. Persona 3.

Age	28
Location	X, Finland
Job title	Constructor
Average income	2500
Buying behaviour	Goes with whatever sounds best at the moment.
Interests and activities	Enjoys doing activities with friends.
Lifestage	Unmarried, no children
Language	Speaks Finnish fluently, understands Swedish very well.