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DEVELOPING AND ESTABLISHING A BLOGGER OUTREACH STRATEGY

– Case ElämysLahjat.fi

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BACHELOR'S THESIS | ABSTRACT

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DEVELOPING AND ESTABLISHING A BLOGGER OUTREACH STRATEGY – CASE ELÄMYSLAHJAT.FI

Cooperation between bloggers and companies has become more common in Finland during the past few years, and today it is one of the developing forms of content production enabled by social media. The objective of the thesis is to create a strategy model for companies that are interested in cooperation with bloggers and the marketing potential that is attached to blogger outreach. The specific goal of the thesis client company was to find out what do bloggers expect from cooperation with companies.

The theoretical part discusses influencing themes behind blogging, including the growth of online marketing, significance of quality online content and the commoditization of social media. Deeper attention is drawn to blogger outreach in specific, its current state in Finland and its different forms currently used. Literature, published research data as well as relevant online sources are used as the theory base.

The research data was collected through an electronic survey that aimed to reveal Finland's most popular bloggers' opinions, previous experiences and expectations in relation to cooperation with companies. Research data was collected also in personal interviews where the bloggers were able to share more of their thoughts and contemplate on their central motives for company cooperation.

Based on the research it can be stated that a majority of bloggers are open to cooperation with companies, provided that it is executed with a fair mindset and along with the practices of the blogosphere. From a company point-of-view the cooperation process has multiple stages, each of which should be invested in. For example, when taking the first steps in planning the cooperation companies should take into account the content and appearance of the cooperation proposal, publishing style of the blogger, theme of the blog and possible compensation paid, among other factors.

As a final result, a five-step strategy model for blogger outreach is presented, based on which the client company and any other Finnish company may successfully plan, implement and track cooperation with bloggers.

KEYWORDS:

Blogger outreach, blog strategy, blogs, digital marketing strategy, web content.

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BLOGGAAJAYHTEISTYÖSTRATEGIAN KEHITTÄMINEN JA TÄYTÄNTÖÖNPANO – CASE ELÄMYSLAHJAT.FI

Bloggaajien ja yritysten välinen yhteistyö on yleistynyt Suomessa viime vuosina ja on tänä päivänä yksi kehittyvistä sosiaalisen median mahdollistamista sisällöntuottamisen muodoista. Tämän opinnäytetyön tarkoituksena on luoda strategiamalli yrityksille, jotka ovat kiinnostuneita bloggaajien kanssa tapahtuvasta yhteistyöstä ja siihen lukeutuvasta markkinointipotentiaalista. Opinnäytetyön toimeksiantajan keskeisenä toiveena oli selvittää, mitä bloggaajat toivovat yhteistyöltä yritysten kanssa.

Työn teoriaosuudessa määritellään bloggaamisen taustalla olevia vaikuttimia nettimarkkinoinnin kasvun, laadukkaan online-sisällön merkityksen sekä sosiaalisen median yleistymisen kautta. Syvemmin tarkastellaan varsinaista bloggaajayhteistyötä, sen nykytilaa Suomessa sekä sen eri ilmenemismuotoja. Teoriataustana käytetään teemoja käsittelevää kirjallisuutta, aiheeseen liittyvää julkaistua tutkimusdataa, sekä relevantteja sähköisiä lähteitä.

Tutkimusaineisto koottiin sähköisen kyselyn avulla, jolla selvitettiin Suomen suosituimpien bloggaajien mielipiteitä, aiempia kokemuksia, toiveita ja odotuksia koskien yhteistyötä yritysten kanssa. Tutkimusaineistoa koottiin myös henkilökohtaisissa haastatteluissa, joissa bloggaajat pääsivät laajemmin jakamaan ajatuksiaan sekä pohtimaan yritysyhteistyön keskeisiä motiiveja.

Tutkimuksen perusteella voidaan sanoa, että suuri enemmistö bloggaajista on avoin yritysten kanssa tehtävää yhteistyötä kohtaan, olettaen että se toteutetaan reilusti ja blogosfäärin käytäntöjä myötäillen. Yhteistyöprosessi on yrityksen näkökulmasta monivaiheinen, ja jokaiseen vaiheeseen tulee panostaa. Esimerkiksi yhteistyön ensiaskelia suunnitellessa tulisi ottaa huomioon muun muassa yhteistyöehdotuksen sisältö ja ulkoasu, lähestyttävän bloggaajan julkaisutyyli, blogin aihepiiri, sekä mahdollinen maksettava kompensaatio.

Opinnäytetyön tuloksena esitellään viiden kohdan strategiamalli, johon pohjaten toimeksiantajayritys sekä mikä tahansa muu suomalainen yritys voi menestyksekkäästi suunnitella, toteuttaa ja seurata bloggaajien kanssa tapahtuvaa yhteistyötä.

ASIASANAT:

Bloggaaja-yritysyhteistyö, blogistrategia, blogit, digitaalisen markkinoinnin strategia, sisältö.

CONTENT

APPENDICES

FIGURES

TABLES

1 INTRODUCTION

Social media has changed the game rules of marketing. The golden days of interruptive promoting are behind, at least for the most attentive segment of marketers. The era of dialogue, interaction and two-way conversational marketing has arrived.

Blogs are a particle of a company's modern communication and digital marketing strategy. By utilizing the great potential attached to blogging, companies can among other benefits boost their marketing and image, reach a bigger, well-targeted audience, engage into a valuable discourse with their customers, and save money (for instance, Scoble & Israel 2008; Pirskanen 2012).

Blogger outreach as an element of a company's blog strategy can be a highly successful one when implemented accordingly. A growing amount of Finnish companies are seeing the perks of cooperating with third party private bloggers, a development that is perceived as the increase of promotional cooperation campaign contents on Finnish blogs (Manifesto 2012).

The thesis in question has been completed for a specific client, gift seller company ElämysLahjat.fi. The author's internship position as a marketing assistant in the company has enabled action research and close observation during the thesis process.

1.1 Defining the thesis topic and research problem

Despite the known advantages of blogging, majority of Finnish companies are still clueless and hesitant when it comes to applying this new channel of social interaction and marketing in everyday business (for instance, Leppäniemi 2012).

Due to the recent developments of the Finnish blogosphere, and therefore the increasing need for companies to understand its function, there exists research data on how to conduct modern marketing via a corporate blog. However blogger outreach, in other words companies cooperating with third party private bloggers, as an element of a blog strategy has not yet been as vastly studied. There currently exists published research on bloggers' profiles (for instance, Hagman 2012) as well as bloggers' aspirations and general conditions in the blogosphere (Deski 2010; Manifesto 2010-2012). Bloggers' concrete needs, wants and ideas with regards to cooperating with companies have however not yet been systematically documented as a compiled entity.

While creating the plan for this applied research, the possibility of investigating the whole concept of a blog strategy was considered. This idea was rejected later in the process as too wide a concept. Moreover, the main desire for the case company ElämysLahjat.fi is precisely to find out bloggers' needs with regards to company cooperation: what do they expect and want? Due to these reasons, the final thesis topic was particularised as blogger outreach strategy.

The thesis in question will not focus on online marketing: the concept is briefly explained as to provide attestation for the importance of understanding the online marketing atmosphere. The thesis will not focus on social media either: it will be presented as a general concept in order to provide a more full understanding on the interactive environment where blogs function in. Finally, as the topic of the thesis is blogger outreach in particular, the thesis will not focus on corporate blogging as such nor provide guidelines for companies interested in launching a corporate blog.

1.2 Thesis objectives and research questions

The objective of the thesis is to provide the case company ElämysLahjat.fi with a blogger outreach strategy model. The work aims at creating a general understanding regarding blogger outreach as an element of a blog strategy – practicalities, available benefits, key issues and successful implementation.

The research questions are as follows:

Q1. Can private blogs be an effective marketing channel for companies and what types of blogger outreach cooperation forms currently exist?

Q2. Keeping in mind the rules of the blogosphere, what do bloggers expect from cooperation with companies?

Q3. What measures can a company implement in order to appear as an interesting cooperation partner for bloggers?

The thesis in question is driven by the case company ElämysLahjat.fi's desire to become more widely known in the Finnish markets with the help of an effective blogger outreach strategy. Despite the blogger outreach strategy being somewhat fitted to the specific case company's needs, other Finnish companies may also benefit from the research in the form of a general understanding of the blogosphere, bloggers' expectations and the possibilities of blogger outreach as a marketing channel.

Finally, this work is powered by the author's personal interest in blogs, social media and the changed prerequisites of successful marketing. The subtle yet recently fastening development of the Finnish blogosphere is important for companies to keep up with as bloggers are becoming a growingly important stakeholder group (Manifesto 2010).

1.3 Thesis structure and applied research methods

The thesis is set of by presenting the case company ElämysLahjat.fi in chapter two along with a description of their initial blog strategy. Chapter three will start forming the theoretical framework of the thesis with insights on changed prerequisites of marketing, meaningful content, and social media in general. Chapter four will focus specifically on blogs and different forms of blogger outreach. Chapter five will present the research design, followed by research results in chapter six. A suggested blogger outreach strategy will be presented in chapter seven and concluded by final comments and further implications for academic research in chapter eight.

The thesis is presented in two main parts, the theoretical framework and the empirical part. The theoretical framework is based on several articles, books and cases found upon the main topics. Due to the fact that blogging is strongly an online concept, plenty of up-to-date, relevant online material was found and utilized in order to create a strong theory foundation to support the empirical part.

The empirical part was constructed using mixed research methods in order to facilitate a more complete understanding of blogger outreach prerequisites. The used quantitative research method was an online questionnaire on company cooperation conducted among Finnish bloggers in late 2012. Having analyzed the results of the questionnaire, a deeper view on the subject was obtained by using qualitative research method in the form of interviews. The semi-structured interviews of three bloggers were conducted in December 2012.

2 CASE COMPANY

ElämysLahjat.fi is the Finnish unit of the Lithuanian LaisvalaikioDovanos.lt, a gift company specializing in intangible experience gifts. The company was founded in Lithuania by owner Linas Ceikus in 2004. His initial intention was not actually to found a company, but to look for great service providers and new kinds of gifts. He searched for interesting experiences, paid the companies beforehand and then signed gift cards for his gift receivers, family and friends. The idea of giving experiences instead of conventional gifts was a huge success, and in 2006 Ceikus opened an online store that would later expand also to Finland as ElämysLahjat.fi.

Today the company has functions in nine countries: Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Finland, Sweden, the UK, Poland, Belarus and Mexico. Currently the company employs approximately 30 people internationally, consisting of 1-3 area experts in selected cities in each of the countries. Together the company has sold over 400 000 experience gifts throughout its market area.

ElämysLahjat.fi debuted in the Finnish markets as a limited liability company in 2010. Back then there were no notable competitors or similar type of companies working specifically among experience gifts, which helped the company reach a market leader position very quickly. Since the beginning the SME has functioned on online-basis: all the experience gifts can be purchased at http://www.elamyslahjat.fi. There is no company store space or warehouse owing to the intangible nature of all the gifts.

ElämysLahjat.fi is currently managed from Estonia by country manager Kadri Lepiku. The company's online presence is developed by marketing manager Joni Salminen, who also runs the company office located in Turku.

In March 2013 ElämysLahjat.fi housed a selection of over 580 experience gifts, including anything from relaxing spa treatments to extreme sports such as tandem jumps. In their everyday business the company stresses their strong attributes: wide and versatile selection, vast geographical presence, price guarantee and the quick and easy nature of the gift purchase online.

Marketing via blogs is not a new concept to ElämysLahjat.fi. The company's corporate blog at http://elamyslahjat.blogit.fi/ has been active since March 2011 with an average posting frequency of 1,5 posts per month. Overall nature of the published posts is rather commercial: gift tips, campaign offers, calls to action.

ElämysLahjat.fi has also engaged into blogger outreach. By May 2012 the company had had some 10 Finnish bloggers write an article or several articles on the company and its products. In September 2012 the company decided to launch a blogger outreach project. The idea of the project was to offer free experiences for the bloggers to test in exchange for blog articles written on ElämysLahjat.fi and their experiences. A total of 49 Finnish bloggers were contacted with a cooperation proposal. The selected bloggers were from the three main cities in which ElämysLahjat.fi offers experiences: Helsinki, Tampere and Turku. The contacted bloggers were mainly selected from blog database Blogilista's most read blogs list, but also thematically relevant blogs outside the top 30 were chosen to be approached.

Initially, 23 bloggers responded approvingly and their experience preferences were listed and archived. In September – December 2012 the group titled "experience bloggers" were approached with three different campaign offers, which will be reviewed in table 1.

Table 1. ElämysLahjat.fi's blogger outreach campaigns in late 2012.

Campaign	Proposition	Invited/ agreed
Fall (September)	Blogger gets to test a pampering experience for free in exchange for 1) writing a campaign promotion post including campaign banner and 2) writing a testing post of the experience	18 / 6
Father's	Blogger receives a free experience for father in ex-	13 / 1

Day (November)	change for 1) writing a campaign promotion post including campaign banner and 2) writing a testing post with father's thoughts on the experience	
Christmas (December)	Blogger receives a free experience from an experience category created especially for bloggers in exchange for 1) writing a post on intangible experiences as Christmas gifts, focus on search engine optimization SEO	10 / 2
Independent testing	Blogger receives an experience for free in exchange for writing a testing post of the experience	4 / 2

As can be seen from the table the amount of bloggers invited to join the campaigns has not converted very well to the actual number of carried out cooperation, meaning the completion rate of the proposals is not very high. Despite room for improvements, it can also be stated that ElämysLahjat.fi's current blogger outreach strategy is a moderately refined one due to the changes made prior to launching the blogger project. Over 20 bloggers have agreed to cooperate with the company, of which roughly 10 already have.

All in all, it can be constituted that ElämysLahjat.fi is already engaged into the Finnish blogosphere. The company's improved blogger outreach strategy has increased their visibility online via the published blog posts, at least momentarily. By creating the concept of "experience bloggers" the company has aimed to establish a group that represents ElämysLahjat.fi in the blogosphere. They have created clear campaign propositions linked to their own high sale periods. The company is still pursuing improvements especially when it comes to blogger outreach. These improvements will be sought, identified and reviewed in the following chapters.

3 THE ERA OF DIALOGUE

3.1 Changed prerequisites of marketing

"Traditional marketing doesn't work."

- Jon Reed, author of Get up to speed with online marketing (2011)

This thought was first put forward in the end of last century when the heavily quoted Cluetrain Manifesto was published in 1999. Authors Rick Levine, Christopher Locke, Doc Searls and David Weinberger called for radical changes in traditional business practices. It was the initiation of a global conversation: through Internet people began to discover and invent new, fast ways to share relevant knowledge (Levine et al. 1999).

During the past 12 years, the estimated global Internet user amount has increased 566,4 % from nearly 361 million in 2000 to 2,5 billion in 2012 (Internet World Stats 2013). As an increasing amount of consumers' daily chores, jobs and free-time take place online businesses are facing great possibilities. The market for any product or service is wider and more global than ever before. More and more people are getting access to broadband connections, making Internet the modern market place: an open field where people, ideas and commodities meet and are exchanged by a few clicks (Reed 2011, 5). Reed lists 10 points explaining why online marketing works for businesses.

1. Drives traffic to the company website, hub of the business
2. Offers new ways to connect with the market; establishing a presence on the social sites that the market audience uses
3. Builds trust; customers get to know the company thanks to online presence
4. Starts a conversation instead of a lecture
5. Creates value through useful content
6. Builds communities and relationships

7. Provides quick, up-to-date information about the business or topic of interest
8. Helps capture data from e.g. Facebook fans lists
9. Facilitates market research; closeness to the actual market, feedback
10. Low-cost, low-risk, effective

According to Leino (2010, 12) the days of interruptive marketing are over. Like-minded statements by marketing specialists have stamped also mass marketing as ineffective and expensive (for instance, Levine et al. 1999; Scoble & Israel 2008; Reed 2011). Business forefront has entered, and actually already settled in, the era of dialogue and interaction in trading and marketing.

Reed (2011, 4) conceptualizes this change with the term social marketing: creating interactive online communities around companies, products and services. Consequently, in the fast-paced online environment where marketing situations, customers and competitors change constantly, companies need to be quick and responsive, hence the term agile marketing (Saleslion 2012).

Basic attributes of agile marketing include customer-oriented approach, fast reactivity, interactivity, and experimenting and testing marketing. The starting point is to offer consumers memorable customer experiences via interactive (digital) storytelling. Agile marketing does not focus on praising the product or the company, but on creating value for the marketed product and offering the consumers interesting, useful content. Modern technology offers agile marketers the tools to analyze individual marketing proceedings, which enables experimenting with different types of new ideas and reacting promptly and efficiently to any needed changes. (Saleslion 2012)

3.1.1 Birth of the produser

Since the early days of commercial Internet in the 2000’s, the possibilities of the Web have developed extensively. Slow connections, static homepages and simple links have given room to Web 2.0: social networks, blogs, video streams, add-ons, widgets, user comments and other user-generated content (Lietsala &

Sirkkunen 2008, 19; Leino 2010, 11). Hence the modern consumer chats, views, shares, comments, downloads, orders, explores and participates more than ever before (Leino 2010, 11). Along with the increased amount of channels for participation the consumer has gained more influence and power, obtaining an advantage over the marketer. The traditional media model suggests that the viewers watch, listeners listen and readers read – in social media the users can have multiple roles, adding up to their authority (Lietsala & Sirkkunen 2008, 43).

The term prosumer was first introduced by Toffler in the 1970’s, followed later on in 2007 by the combination of producer and user, produser, by Bruns and Jacobs (see Lietsala & Sirkkunen 2008, 43). Central idealism behind both terms was the concept of making individual people part of the business and identifying the increased power of the consumer. Moreover, Bruns and Jacobs underline the importance of community and openness, giving a more active role for the participants (see Lietsala & Sirkkunen 2008, 43).

While the existing production orientation and marketing orientation models have suggested that products ought to be created based on what is cheap to make and later on what is in accordance with customer needs (Perreault & McCarthy 1996, 19), today there exists a growing trend of developing and creating products in collaboration with consumers. A blog-related example of such collaboration will be reviewed in chapter 4.5.1.

Related to the concept of produsers is the term participatory economy, an economy created by a group of participants that are fulfilling various motives of their own (Lietsala & Sirkkunen 2008, 14). The origins of participatory economy or parecon lie in the 1990’s when Michael Albert and Robin Hahnel proposed an alternative to capitalist market economies. In a parecon the means of production are owned commonly, hence it is a form of socialism (Albert & Hahnel 1991).

In their work Lietsala and Sirkkunen (2008) view social media as the central tool of 21st century participatory economy. According to their interpretation, participatory economy equals an economy where consumers are opting to create, follow, watch or comment content centred on their own desires, preferences and reasons. Based on Michael Bauwens' interpretation Lietsala and Sirkkunen (2008, 84) have comprised their definition of the participatory economy.

1. Based on use-value for a community of users; use-value can be fun, meaningful things to spend time with, connections, friends and practical tools, to mention a few
2. Participation creates social capital for the participants; they achieve know-how, trust and fame within the communities or feel self-satisfied
3. The processes empower people to do things by themselves, with their peers or in networks, communities and organizations that can be outside the market sphere, too
4. When the activity accumulates, at the same time as it brings the use-value for the participant, it brings something new; an additional value for others; to people, to the design, for the owner of the site or the stake-holders related

In relation, content created, maintained and developed by its participants is referred to as user-generated content UGC (Lietsala & Sirkkunen 2008, 19) or as consumer-generated media CGM (Maurya 2011, 1). Both terms include the idea of emerging sources of online information created, initiated, circulated and used with the intention of educating other consumers about products, brands, services, personalities and issues (Maurya 2011, 2). Word of mouth has simply become word of mouse.

3.2 Reaching the modern consumer

Leino (2010, 14) describes in his work the changes that digital marketing and technology have caused in the consumers' customs. These include a new type of attitude towards media: music is no longer bought as cd's but downloaded online, newspapers are not necessarily subscribed to home addresses but read via laptops and smart phones, and magazines are followed via their websites and online communities. An online generation is growing in modern societies –

there exists even a term Google generation to represent digital natives born after the year 1993 who have no subjective experiences of a time before Internet (Heinemann 2008).

Today, Finland is among the European frontrunners when it comes to usage of Internet. According to Tilastokeskus (2012), 90 % of 16 - 74-year-old Finns used the Internet in 2012, 64 % of which used it several times a day. The use of Internet seems to have reached a saturation point in Finland as only the oldest age group keeps increasing its presence online. Finns are also rather eager smart phone users as 45 % of the population connected to the Internet via mobile networks, leading age group being 25 – 34-year-olds with a total of 70 %. Tilastokeskus (2012) predicts that this use will increase and become more regular in the future.

A TNS Gallup research on online advertising presents results that indicate Finnish companies are acting on the increased online attendance at least when it comes to advertising. A total of 77 % of the respondent advertisers state they will increase the portion of online advertising in their total budget within the following year, 13 % of which plan to increase it remarkably (TNS Gallup 2012). Changed marketing attitudes can already be seen in media advertising: between January and July 2012 online media was the only growing media group with 8,9 % increase. Except for television, traditional media groups faced decreases: magazines -4,7 %, outdoors advertising -6,9 % and newspapers -8,1 % (TNS Gallup 2012). In summary, as nearly all the customer focus groups are already in the Internet, it is progressively important for companies to follow them and establish an online presence.

Despite the evident role of technology in the change, modern marketing is stated not to be about technology per se, but ideas and experiences that arouse conversation and create entertaining value or useful services for the consumer. The current mission for marketers is to make their brand the topic of discussion. This can be attained by finding and convincing the expert consumers who will refer the brand to others. (Leino 2010, 13)

According to Gladwell (2000), economists’ 80/20 principle states in any situation about 80 % of the work will be done by 20 % of the participants, meaning the success of any kind of social widespread is dependent on the involvement of people with a particular set of social gifts. This can be seen to apply also to the online era where the set of social gifts could be translated as attention and power on the Web. (see Leino 2010, 13)

Gladwell (2000) has classified the expert consumers into two groups: mavens and connectors. Mavens are usually the first ones aware of new matters and products and they actively gather information on their targets of interest. Connectors on the other hand appreciate social currency: any information, stories, tips or content that will help them maintain their wide network of contacts. (see Leino 2010, 13)

Essential from a company’s communication strategy point-of-view is to gain the attention of these two groups and convert them into talking positively about the brand, at least semi-actively. Leino describes this as pampering of regular customers, only in different types of channels. In order to be mentioned positively, companies need to consider different ways of bringing value into their communities and keep reminding those communities of why they actually are interested in the brand in question. (Leino 2010, 14)

3.2.1 Social media

Social media is a communal media, an environment implemented with the help of the newest Internet technologies where people can publish, edit, classify and share different content (Juslén 2011, 197). In practise social media consists of a wide range of services and sites that all have a specific functional idea or meaning. Lietsala and Sirkkunen (2008, 13) have defined social media as web services that receive most of their content from their users or that aggregate the content from other sites as feeds. From a company point-of-view social media could be seen as the new online marketing tools (Reed 2011, 7).

There currently exist a vast number of versatile social media sites. Their wide offering base makes categorizing social media rather difficult – how can one define a set of categories while social media sites often obtain numerous features that could fit several categories' description? Lietsala and Sirkkunen (2008, 26) have identified a total of six genres of social media, while Juslén (2011, 199) has described three. For clarity the following categorization is based on Reed's simple division of social media into two main categories: content tools and outreach tools (Reed 2011, 16). Content tools are the communicators of the four main content types on the Internet: text, images, audio and video. These include content creation and publishing tools such as blogs, wikis and podcasts, as well as photo, video or other content sharing tools like Digg, Flickr and YouTube. Outreach tools on the other hand include everything else – virtual worlds such as Second Life, Habbo and World of Warcraft, and particularly social networks like Facebook, MySpace, Bebo, LinkedIn and Twitter.

In order to be able to act in the environment of social media, it is important to understand its culture. Reed (2011, 10) has identified seven core principles for social media.

1. Be authentic and open
2. Do not go for the hard sell: instead of spamming with marketing messages, provide useful content with value
3. Build social currency; gain experience and trust via social media
4. Do not view social media as just another marketing channel: it is a commitment, not a campaign
5. Do not treat social media as a one-way broadcasting medium
6. Be clear about responsibilities: who updates and how often
7. Be patient: social media needs a long-term approach

In the social media environment act the different social media sites. Lietsala and Sirkkunen (2008, 24) have investigated and identified five main characteristics common to the most popular social media sites.

1. There is a space to share content

2. Participants in the space create, share or evaluate all or most of the content themselves
3. It is based on social interaction
4. All content has an URL to link it to the external networks
5. All actively participating members of the site have their own profile page to link to other people, to the content, to the platform itself and to the possible applications

Other listed social media site characteristics include a community-feel among the users of the social media site in question, possibility to contribute for free, an available tagging system allowing folksonomy, content distribution with feeds and the developmental, changed on the run -nature of the social media platform itself (Lietsala & Sirkkunen 2008, 24).

3.2.2 Meaningful content

"The one true branding mechanism online is content marketing."

- Gilad de Vries, VP of content discovery platform Outbrain (2012)

While the time consumers spend online is growing, it is also getting very limited. Internet users tend to build their own routines, making online visits growingly task-oriented. Customers might attend only to the sites and social networks they know of and are accustomed to.

According to Reed (2011, 4) the key for marketers online is to be findable – but what happens after consumers find a company? In order to create attention, discussion and interest online, companies need to repeatedly attract consumers to visit their sites and communities. Nowadays page displays do not indicate success as well as actual time spent on a website (Leino 2010, 11). Marketers need to have something useful and worthwhile to say to consumers in order to grasp their attention and time. According to an estimation presented at Forbes.com, search marketing and social marketing will eventually be followed by content marketing – the next digital media revolution (De Vries 2012).

In order to produce meaningful, value-based content, attention should be moved back to the actual message a company wants to communicate. In the process of creating influential content in online business, Jones suggests marketers need to shift their attention and approach from gaining awareness among consumers to building influence (Jones 2011, foreword). In her work, Jones refers to the Harvard Business Review 2010, which calls for maximizing customer lifetime value: making products and brands compliant to long-term customer relationships (Jones 2011, 10). This idea is supported by the views of marketing 3.0 where the customer is seen as an entity and marketing is lead by emotional, practical and mental values along with vision and mission (Kotler et al. 2010, 20).

The traditional marketing point-of-view sees content as a mean to build the main asset, brand reputation, while from the social media perspective content is meant for building relationships, making them the actual asset (Jones 2011, 201). The below table 2 illustrates well the required attitude changes marketers need to realize in order to be influential and interesting from a modern consumer's point-of-view.

Table 2. Old thinking versus new thinking in marketing in relation to content (Jones 2011, 12).

Old thinking	**New thinking**
Target people	Attract people
Plan for campaigns	Plan for entire customer relationships
Tell and talk the message	Tell, show and walk the message
Blast the message repeatedly	Reveal features of the message
Force or trick	Nudge
Detached	Contextual
Action only	Attitude and action

As the table shows, the basic marketing thinking of segmenting, targeting and positioning still remains, but it should be adapted to the new, social marketing environment. Instead of targeting consumers, they should be attracted and campaigns should be seen as customer relationships. Sometimes less is more: instead of bombarding customers with calls to action, sending out less information with a few interesting elements revealed can attract considerably more positive attention (Jones 2011, 12).

It is worth noting that all content, even fact-based, is not self-explanatorily good. Kortesuo and Kurvinen's (2011, 75) criteria for meaningful blog text content can be applied to social media content in general.

1. Uniqueness: style, point-of-view or other reasons why a consumer would choose a specific content provider
2. Novelty value: developing new products, bringing new points-of-view to industry discussion and presenting new ways of approach will offer a content provider the pioneer stamp
3. Personality: Web is filled with neutral information, meaningful content needs to have personality
4. Utilizing entertainment and fiction in matter-of-fact writing: wrapping information in an interesting way and using lively language professionally will provide consumers with both emotional and intellectual experience
5. Evolvement: learning points and fresh perspectives need to reflect on the content in a way that showcases development

Striving for meaningful, useful and interesting content online benefits companies and organizations in several different ways (Jones 2011, 12). These include for example building a good reputation along with good web quality and character, earning loyalty and forgiveness and attracting the right people who match the business' goals. Furthermore, quality content is especially important for companies functioning strictly on online basis, as web content is the only opportunity to demonstrate the company's character and build a reputation (Jones 2011, 19). Jones' (2011, 41) practical views on web content in the frame of psychological and rhetoric principles can be found in appendix 1.

4 BLOGGING

4.1 Basic definitions

Blogging is a form of communication taking place online (Alasilta 2009, 12). In their work digital marketing specialists Scoble and Israel (2008, 62) describe blogging as “discourse reinforced with doping” – a transparent, two-way conversation benefiting from the Internet. The term ‘blog’ is short from weblog, an online site updated in reverse chronological order with different types of content, posts. Blogs can have one or multiple writers and together all blogs on the Web form the blogosphere.

Blogs differ from other websites and static pages in several ways (Lietsala & Sirkkunen 2008, Reed 2011). Possibly their most remarkable feature is the option of commenting which is the central element behind blogs’ two-way discursion label. Other social aspects of blogs include subscribing through feed aggregators such as the RSS or Atom, as well as fixed theme categories that facilitate readers to find exactly the content they’re interested in (Reed 2011, 70). Blogs differ from static pages also in that they are presented with an authorial voice of the writer: popularity of a blog lies practically solely on the shoulders of the writer or writers. Other differences include page add-ons: blogs are customized with banners and several links and trackbacks to increase the site’s content diversity. Most blogs have a sidebar, meaning one or two columns containing useful information such as links to recent posts, recent photos from the writer’s Instagram or other photo application account and contact information of the writer. A blog site usually also presents a blogroll: a list of other blogs the writer likes or suggests to his/her readers (Lietsala & Sirkkunen, 2008, 20).

It is hard to define the actual current amount of blogs in the global blogosphere as new blogs are set up continuously. In 2008 the founder and CEO of Technorati David L. Sifry estimated the amount of blogs to be 20 million worldwide (Scoble & Israel 2008, 41), while in 2011 the projection rose to nearly 153,5 million (BlogPulse 2011, in Spinks).

There exists few metrics to define the size of the Finnish blogosphere. Blogilista houses an extensive listing of Finnish blogs, yet based on industry parties' evaluations it is not an exhaustive one. According to Blogilista's data there were a total of 50 729 blogs in March 2013 (Blogilista 2013). According to blogger-writer Katleena Kortesuo's evaluation the figure would be at least 150 000 (Kortesuo 2012). The growing amount of blogs in Finland can be explained by the ease of starting a blog, the lure of the possible earnings and privileges as well as by the increased visibility and power of blogs and the blogosphere (Manifesto 2012).

Research show that majority of Finnish bloggers, over 80 %, are women in their 20's and 30's (Deski 2010; Manifesto 2012). This reflects on the distribution of the blog themes. Blogs can focus on almost any theme varying all the way from politics to gossip stories. Most popular Finnish blogs concentrate on fashion and lifestyle, food and cooking, and interior design (Deski 2010, 8). Also beauty, wellness and motherhood are well-liked blog themes (Manifesto 2012).

A straightforward indicator of a blog's popularity is the amount of unique readers it attracts over a certain period. The most read Finnish blogs have around 200 000 unique readers a month (Pirskanen 2012; Manifesto 2012). A valid example is the blog Mungolife that currently holds the position as Finland's most read blog with a reported total unique reader amount of 60 000 per week (Mungolife 2013). Finnish blogger and affiliate marketer Markus Ossi has compiled a reader amount chart that, despite not being a scientific evaluation, can offer a directional estimation when defining the popularity of a blog. According to Ossi, a bronze blog has 1 000 – 5 000; silver 5 000 - 10 000; gold 10 000 - 25 000 and a diamond over 25 000 unique readers per week (Ossi 2012).

From a company point-of-view it is interesting and important to consider the demographics of a blog reader. According to a Tilastokeskus research on the Internet usage of Finns, an average blog reader is a young woman, a student or graduate among higher education, living in an urban area (Tilastokeskus 2012). This gives a general idea of the main target audience of blogs, still keeping in mind the numerous exceptions and niche audiences within the blogosphere.

4.1.1 Blog genres

As with social media in general, there are different kinds of approaches to define blog genres. In the turn of the new millennium Blood (2000) has divided blogs into two main categories, link blogs and diaries, based on the birth history of weblogs (in Alasilta 2009, 26). Back then the concept of blogosphere was in an early development phase and most blogs housed either just a list of interesting links to other webpages or simply posts in a diary-form, concerning the writer’s personal life. Bruns and Jacobs (2007) refer to diary blogging, corporate blogging, community blogging and research blogging as different blog genres (in Lietsala & Sirkkunen 2008, 33). Also in this case the main divider is the nature of the blog content. Another possibility to categorize blogs is to look at the form the content is published in, meaning written blogs, photo blogs or video blogs (Lietsala & Sirkkunen 2008, 33), yet this approach seems rather complicated as more and more bloggers publish content in all of the mentioned forms.

Blogs can also be categorised based on their writers and publishers. This would entail citizen blogs, community blogs, journalist blogs and media blogs (Heinonen & Domingo in Alasilta 2009, 41). Possibly the simplest division allocates all blogs into either private blogs run by individual citizens or organisational blogs hosted in the name of an organization (Alasilta 2009, 41).

Blogs have nowadays also several sub-genres such as celeblogs with posts about celebrities, slogs as in story blogs, vlogs as in video blogs and unfortunate flogs or fake blogs. The most known sub-genre is likely microblogging – publishing short messages via social media tools such as Twitter with basic information of one’s location, activities and company at a given moment.

4.1.2 Blog portals

Blog portals are online medias that host several independent blogs on their own website. Blog portals function on commercial basis, earning their profits from advertisements shown on their site. Portal blogs differ from private blogs in that the writers receive a regular paycheck from the host portal (Ahola 2012). In addition, all the portal blogs are implanted in the host portal's site url-wise as well as design-wise. This means that blogs belonging to the same portal sport the same background advertisements and standard layout, excluding the banner picture and add-ons that can be personalized. In practise the blog is run independently and the content is in the individual blogger's hands.

Finnish blog portals include the likes of Indiedays, Lily, Costume-community and the magazine-run portals Trendi, Divaani and Cosmopolitan (Auramo 2012). The 2010 launched Indiedays is the leading blog portal in Finland, housing 30 fashion and lifestyle blogs as well as content produced by the editorial staff. In addition the portal runs a community called Inspiration that contains 300 selected blogs (Indiedays 2012).

According to public relations office Manifesto's 2012 blog barometer, 24 % of bloggers have placed their blog into a commercial blog portal. Main reasons for the transformation are increasing the visibility of the blog, community feel with other portal bloggers, desire to be involved with something new and innovative, possibility to earn more and engage into interesting cooperation with companies (Manifesto 2012).

4.2 Evolving role of the blogger

Public relations office Manifesto has published a blog barometer reflecting the Finnish blogosphere since 2009. The year 2010 barometer was titled: "Little girls updating online diaries or an important stakeholder group?" (Manifesto 2010). The title illustrates well the prevailed attitudes towards blogging and bloggers in Finland only a few years ago. Since then bloggers have gained increasingly more power. Rise of the blog portals, increased reader amounts and overall commoditization of blogging have made blogs an important and visible part of social media in Finland. Manifesto's 2012 barometer acknowledges this change by the title: "Blogger became a celebrity and an expert" (Manifesto 2012).

Indeed, for many bloggers what started off as a fun hobby has later developed into something more professional as their aims have become more serious and ambitious (Manifesto 2012). For many Finnish bloggers the professional blogger role models are abroad, but blogging is gradually started to be seen more as serious business in Finland as well – at least by the bloggers themselves.

Manifesto's blog barometer results show that while in 2009 24 % of the respondent bloggers viewed themselves as experts, in 2012 the figure had risen to 47 %, nearly half of the respondents (Manifesto 2012). There exist also contrary research results on the topic. According to a thesis research by Marika Hagman from Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences, only 7,1 % of the respondent bloggers viewed themselves as experts (Hagman 2012, 41). The significant variation between the results could be explained by the difference in the average age of the respondents, which is 30 years in Manifesto's barometer and 23 years in Hagman's thesis research. The fact that Hagman's research questionnaire link was distributed freely in social media may have led to the younger respondent average age. In any case, age and experience in blogging seem to bring more confidence and an expert sense to a blogger.

With the growing power and expert status of bloggers comes the question of earning. According to the Manifesto barometer, 42 % of the respondents receive income or other privileges through their blog (Manifesto 2012), while Hagman's thesis research reported some 14,2 % (Hagman 2012, 43). Usually the regular payments come from media houses, blog portals or companies on whose site the blog is hosted. Other acquired privileges can include company cooperation, product samples, events, trips or advertising income (Manifesto 2012). These cooperation forms will be further discussed from a company point-of-view in chapter 4.5.1.

For now there seems to be some bloggers in Finland who earn their entire livelihood through blogging. A documented example is Mona Nieminen, the writer of the blog Mona's Daily Style. Owing to cooperation partners and advertorial income, Nieminen has been able to set up a trade name and currently works as a full-time blogger for 30 hours a week (Turkulainen 2013). Nieminen is an independent blogger who maintains her own blog site and therefore controls also the advertorial contents. Her blog attracts 30 000 unique readers per month, positioning the blog into the top 30 of most read Finnish blogs (as of 3.4.2013). Earning logics will be further discussed from a company point-of-view in chapter 4.5.3.

In addition to bloggers gaining credibility and status in their own field of interest, some are also functioning as a media mediator of a sort. Mike Manuel, Director of Voce Connect, describes blogs as representatives of the transparency of companies' functions. Moreover, Manuel states that as trust in the mainstream media and company brands is weakening, blogs offer a possibility for the public to shout back. He even describes the blogosphere as a guardian of the mainstream media, taking part in the news processes and offering the public a channel through which they will be heard instantly (in Scoble & Israel 2008, 140). Lietsala and Sirkkunen (2008, 179) have also discussed a similar idea in the form of a new media ecosystem theory.

A recent example of the blogosphere correcting mainstream media in Finland is the case with Helsingin Sanomat and blogger-writer Katleena Kortesuo. Kortesuo read an article published by Helsingin Sanomat concerning paranoia-driven rejection in workplaces (Mäenpää 2012). She posted hesitations about the authenticity of the resources used in the article to her blog Ei oo totta. Within the same day readers of the blog confirmed Kortesuo's suspicions after finding the real resource statements on foreign webpages (Kortesuo 2012). The topic aspired over 200 comments in the blog post and an apology from Helsingin Sanomat the following day.

4.3 What blogs have to offer for companies

Engaging into the blogosphere is a valid option for companies implementing their digital marketing strategy. Blogs are already used by Finnish companies of all sizes from market giants employing thousands to small enterprises run by only a few people. Blogs can serve companies in multiple ways, offering both financial and communicational benefits.

First of all, blogs offer companies a cheaper marketing medium than traditional media (see for example Pirskanen 2012). Compared to the costs of a television commercial or a newspaper ad, creating and implementing a blog strategy is considerably less expensive. Simply setting up a blog is in most cases free.

Blog texts are communication from one consumer to another. Such informal interaction can help increase consumer trust towards a company, something that could be difficult to obtain via traditional marketing methods (see for example Halligan & Shah 2010). Today statements by non-professionals work better among consumers than pitches made up by marketing force (Mäkitalo 2012, Scoble & Israel 2008, 56). This statement is supported by Mohit Maurya's case research on the evolution of blogs as a credible marketing tool (Maurya 2011). Referring to a Nielsen Global Online Consumer Survey conducted on more than 25 000 Internet consumers, Maurya reports that recommendations and opinions coming from real friends are trusted 90 % of the time and those coming from virtual strangers also 70 % of the time. As a contrast, TV ads were trusted 62 %, signed up emails 54 % and online banners only 33 % of the time (Maurya 2011, 4).

Indeed, the so-called passive recommendations have become everyday life: by showing what one has bought functions as a sign of approval for others to buy it as well, leading to increased consumption (Lietsala & Sirkkunen 2008, 44). For example when buying a product online the consumer is often lead to a new window or banner showing what other people who have bought the same product have bought in addition. This phenomenon is very clear in private consumers' blogs, of which a great part presents new, purchased products or services as part of the content. Many readers can relate to the blogger's lifestyle and views on a product, increasing the desire to buy. Even modest product praise by the blogger can have a significant impact (Pirskanen 2012).

Engaging to the blogosphere can help companies increase their visibility (Halligan & Shah 2010). This is highlighted especially in cooperation with private bloggers: blogs with tens of thousands of unique monthly readers can guide vast amounts of visitors to company sites, helping consumers find the company's products and services. Increased visibility can also be obtained via a high search engine ranking, which is partly fuelled by appearance on the Web overall. In addition, the vast variety of presented blog themes enables companies to target a more specific audience, facilitating wide visibility even among niche markets. Increased visibility can have a very dramatic, positive impact on a company's sales. Case studies have reported even hundreds of percentages increases in company sales after starting a blog (Scoble & Israel 2008, 158).

One of the key benefits blogs represent for companies is the opportunity to create a connection to an untraditional, more effective network. In this network companies can find current conversations about them, their product or their marketing, engage into the conversations and input information on the web. For executives blogs are the most applicable tool to send messages directly to the target audience and receive prompt feedback. (Scoble & Israel 2008, 62)

According to Richard Edelman, the President and CEO of the public relations company Edelman, blogs are a vital condition for companies striving to create a spontaneous, continuous connection to their target audience. Edelman states that the persuasion model worked well up until the 1980's – these days there exists a paradox of transparency. Companies often develop brands together with their important clients, set real people to address the public and create synergy advantages between sales promotion campaigns. All this leads to offering a real two-way dialogue instead of just talking to the public. (Scoble and Israel 2008, 131)

4.4 Blog strategy for companies

As stated above, creating a digital marketing strategy is central for modern marketers. Media is in a transition phase where both the public and businesses are still adapting to and getting acquainted with the new game rules of social media and the blogosphere. The first step in engaging into blogging is choosing a blog strategy.

In the midst of the past decade Kirby and Marsden (2005, 149) presented three emerging approaches to blog marketing for companies. These include seeking endorsements on popular opinion leading private blogs, setting up corporate business blogs and creating faux blogs. The first two options are widely in use nowadays, while the latter has since proved a risky option for companies. Today there exist a vast number of reported faux blog cases demonstrating unflattering and costly consequences. Two company examples are Vichy and Sony (Maurya 2011, 9, 11) that both used fake characters, supposedly average consumers, praising the companies' products in a blog. In Vichy's case the blog did not enable RSS feed and the comments were filtered, while in Sony's case the company continued with fake blog posts even after the gaming community found out about the blogging deception (Maurya 2011, 11). In general, faux blogs can be seen as in contradiction with the transparency and openness principals of social media and blogs – the more power blogosphere gains, the riskier faux blogs certainly become.

A more current and apparent approach to blog marketing strategy is taken by Reed (2011, 73), putting forth four blog strategy options:

1. Starting an own blog
2. Commenting on other blogs
3. Going on a blog tour
4. Blogger outreach

In general, strategy options one and four are currently the most used options among Finnish companies, both employed by nearly 40 % of companies (Mainostajien Liitto 2012). The appropriate strategy or strategies depend on factors such as the company resources, nature of marketed products and services as well as company culture, to mention a few. All the suggested strategy options will be shortly reviewed in the following.

Starting an own blog means setting up a company blog either on the company's own website or on a blogging platform such as Blogger or Wordpress. This option offers an effective, low-cost communication channel between a company and its markets. When communicating with customers via a blog, many authors underline the importance of not selling through a blog, stating it does not work and leads to losing credibility (see for example Scoble & Israel 2008, 92).

In a case on Finnish chocolate and bakery product manufacturer Fazer the company was facing a problem regarding brand journalism (Sulin 2012, 43). They had a well-updated quality website for corporate communication, campaign sites for commercial promotion of new products and Facebook as well as Twitter accounts for social media small talk. However, Fazer recognized a gap in their virtual storytelling: a new type of content necessity brought by the consumerization of the Web. The contrast between elaborate corporate communication and informal language of the social media had become too strong. In order to establish a medium between the two, Fazer decided to launch a blog project. For them it was the solution to the link problem: answers to Twitter questions requiring more than 140 characters as well as Facebook topics needing more background information could be allocated to the blog. It also offered them the channel through which introduce new points-of-views to the topics discussed on their website, a possibility to invite guest experts for a blog tour and most of all, dialogue potential (Sulin 2012, 45). As a conclusion, blogging provides a possibility for companies to change their communication into a more approachable direction by giving the company a humane face, a quality increasingly important especially for big multinational corporations.

If starting an own blog seems too laborious, a lighter option is to comment on other blogs. This way a company will not be excluded from the conversations in the blogosphere. When commenting on other blogs it is good to include valid arguments and opinions in the text as if writing an own blog post. This will tell the public that the commentator is well informed, professional and therefore reliable. (Reed 2011, 73)

A company may also decide to go on a blog tour. This means inviting other professionals to write guest posts to the company's blog or alternatively writing posts on some other organization's blog. Blog tours are a good way to increase conversation in a specific industry field. (Reed 2011, 73)

Finally, the fourth blog strategy option is blogger outreach or simply cooperation with bloggers. As this thesis focuses on establishing a blogger outreach strategy model for ElämysLahjat.fi the topic will be analysed separately in the following chapter 4.5.

4.5 Strategy focus: blogger outreach

Blogger outreach is the practise of finding, researching, engaging and contacting bloggers with the aim of receiving media coverage (Blogdash 2013). Blogger relations work similarly to public relations outreach programs: a company decides to reach into a certain target group, establish a relationship with the most relevant bloggers in a certain vertical, and then request a media making experience related to the product or service (Brogan 2009). Manifesto's 2012 blog barometer results suggest sustainable blogger relations can be built by:

1. Following and getting acquainted with interesting blogs
2. Offering blog-friendly material: easily sharable pictures, linkable content, videos
3. Creating something new and unique with the bloggers
4. Encouraging open discussion that includes also criticism
5. Keeping in mind the national nature: blogs are maintained and read all over Finland and the world
6. Serving this important stakeholder group individually and with quality

Blogger outreach is a valuable mean of cooperation for companies for five reasons (Spinks n.d.), some of which have already been presented in chapter 4.3 as the perks associated with blogs and blogging in general.

1. Targeted

2. Long-term relationships
3. Trust
4. More accessible
5. The network effect

Firstly, blogger outreach is a targeted mean of communication. There are millions and again millions of blogs globally, providing that even the most niche topics have their own advocates and audiences. By finding and cooperating with the advocates that appreciate their mission, product or service, companies can send a message targeted more precisely than via traditional media.

Secondly, blogger outreach entails creating long-term relationships. The company is not getting only media coverage in the form of a blog post, but a relationship and a vocal supporter for their work, someone that can be turned to again in the future. This relationship enables the company also to evoke trust: if a blogger trusts a company's product, and the readers of the blog trust the blogger, the readers will consequently trust the company's product (Spinks n.d.). As pointed out previously, even the slightest praise by the blogger can have a significant impact.

Finally, average bloggers are a more accessible cooperation partner than traditional media's big publications (Spinks n.d.). Companies need to recognize however that there are many bloggers, also in the Finnish blogosphere, that receive hundreds of contacts or 'pitches' weekly. David Spinks suggests targeting the middle range of bloggers is smart: they will be enthusiastic for targeted opportunities and also capable of making an impact for a company's business. Due to the network effect in the blogosphere there's also the possibility that when one blogger writes about a company, others will follow accordingly (Spinks n.d.).

Cooperation with bloggers is a growing marketing mode for Finnish companies (Pirskanen 2012). This reflects the fact that business and trade are moving to the online environment, as are the consumers. There currently exists a suitable cooperation base for companies and bloggers in Finland as a majority of 85 %

of bloggers react positively to contacts by companies (Manifesto 2012). In addition to most popular blogs, greener, rising blogs can also present a cooperation opportunity for companies as 80 % of bloggers who currently are not engaged into cooperation with companies would be interested in doing so (Manifesto 2012).

Mainostajien Liitto, a national guardian of the Finnish companies and communities purchasing advertising has researched blogs as a tool for marketing and communication. According to the research results 37 % of the respondent companies host an own blog on their website while 38 % cooperate with third party private bloggers through blogger outreach. The cooperation can have several different forms; most common ones are presented in chapter 4.5.1.

Companies engaged into blogger outreach may take care of the projects on themselves or use assistance outside the company. According to the research data by Mainostajien Liitto approximately half of the respondents do not use external help in blog-related projects while around a quarter relies on a public relations office. When it comes to measuring the effectiveness of blogger outreach, Finnish companies do not have a uniform method: part of the respondents monitor indicators such as amount of comments and sharing in social media, some analyse the effects of the cooperation on sales while some do not follow the results at all. (Mainostajien Liitto 2012)

In accordance with the social media era, also blogger outreach projects function ideally on the basis of transparency, communication and two-way discursion, establishing pleasant conditions for both the company and the blogger. Looking at the underlying motives and wants of a blogger can benefit companies in understanding the reasons bloggers have to engage into cooperation with marketers and advertisers in the first place.

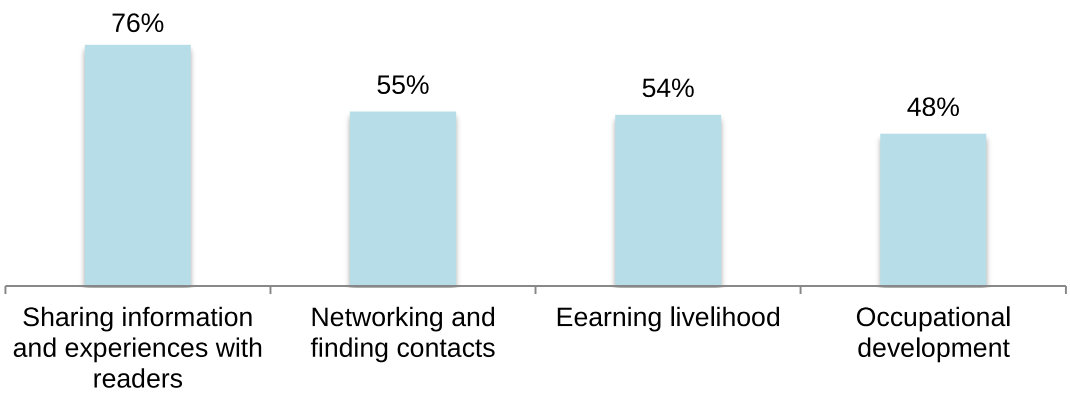

Figure 1. Bloggers' most important aims (Manifesto 2012).

Figure 1 illustrates well the reported developments in bloggers’ identity and self-confidence. Nearly half of the respondent bloggers aim towards occupational development, the expert position. As Manifesto’s report explains, bloggers perceive their blog as a business card and a medium to present their abilities (Manifesto 2012). The figure indicates that the single most important aim for bloggers is to share information and experiences with their readers. This reflects the core ideas of the previously presented participatory economy and consumer-generated media: educating other consumers about products, brands, services, personalities and issues. As readers come first to a majority of bloggers, companies need to be able to offer interesting cooperation proposals with potential for content that both the blogger and the readers find meaningful.

Furthermore, according to the data presented in figure 1 over half of the bloggers aim to make their livelihood via their blog. Compensation seems to be one of the most discussed issues in blogger outreach. A well-known blogger Chris Brogan suggests in his blog that there exist two sorts of content compensation types: blogger relations and sponsored content (Brogan 2009). According to Brogan, blogger relations entail cooperation campaigns where the blogger is not paid for his/her time but is instead given gear or opportunities and told to write their thoughts about it. Sponsored posts, on the other hand, involve a company working directly or indirectly with a blogger to place a fragment of paid content on a website.

This is an interesting topic for companies as the type of compensation may affect the reaction and response of the blog's readers towards the cooperation company. Jones firmly addresses in her work that sponsoring content or in other words paying bloggers to post about a company is not a good idea (Jones 2011, 41). She argues that by trying to buy credibility instead of earning it a company can harm itself quite badly in the blogosphere and social media in general. Brogan addresses the issue by explaining it is up to the bloggers to give information to their community in a way that preserves the trusted relationships. Compensation is viewed from a practical point-of-view as part of the rules of the blogosphere in chapter 4.5.2.

In general, blogger outreach as a phenomenon appears to be more vastly studied, documented and implemented abroad, especially in the United States, than in Finland. This can be seen as a straight consequence of earlier adaptation and development, which is still at a somewhat early stage in Finland. There seems to exist very few scientific research data, publications or theory related to blogger outreach. For this reason the two latter parts of this chapter, 4.5.3 and 4.5.4 will be based on materials found on U.S. blogs and websites specialized in blogger outreach.

4.5.1 Forms of cooperation

Mainostajien Liitto's research lists several forms of blogger outreach currently used by Finnish companies. These include sending information, product samples and invitations to events, companionship marketing, display advertising in a blog, service development and utilizing Kiosked, Thinglink or other similar linking to more information or the online store (Mainostajien Liitto 2012).

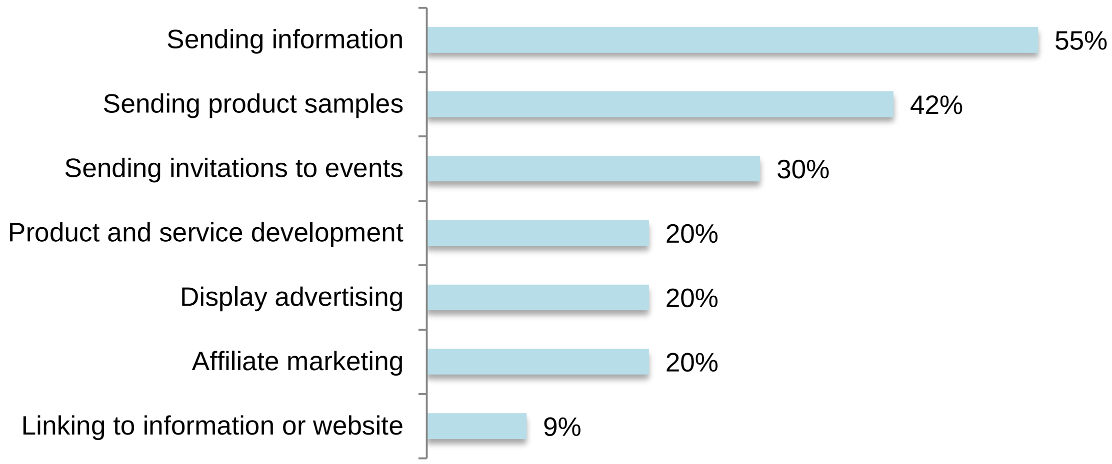

Figure 2. Companies' percentual usage of different cooperation forms with bloggers (Mainostajien Liitto 2012).

As shown in figure 2, sending information, product samples and invitations to events are the three cooperation forms most used by companies when it comes to blogger outreach. These could also be seen as the simplest forms as the company does not in fact lose anything: the product or company as a whole will likely receive positive publicity or no publicity at all, as few bloggers want to write about something they do not like (Mäkitalo 2012).

Product and service development as a cooperation form enables more discursion and interaction between the company and the blogger. Possibly the most visible product development cases in the Finnish blogosphere are currently clothing and accessory lines created by bloggers in cooperation with companies. One example of such cooperation is jewellery and beauty product fabricator and seller Cailap Oy's campaign with four Finnish bloggers. In early 2012 the company published four cooperation jewellery collections designed by selected bloggers. The collections go by the name of Cailap by bloggers, and they underline the beauty of weekdays and everyday life, which according to the company can be best recognized and communicated by bloggers (Cailap 2012).

Looking at the other forms of cooperation identified in Mainostajien Liitto's research, affiliate marketing and display advertising are used as commonly as product and service development, by 20 % of the respondents. In affiliate marketing the blogger is rewarded based on the amount of visitors or sales produced by the blogger’s marketing efforts. Examples of known affiliate networks in Finland are TradeTracker and TradeDoubler. Display advertising on the other hand means banner ads published on blog sites. By clicking the banner the reader will be taken to the company or product website.

In general, there seems to not be just one right answer when choosing a cooperation form to implement within blogger outreach. Companies should review their needs and possibilities individually and base the cooperation form selection process on their own strengths.

4.5.2 Rules of the blogosphere

As private blogs are becoming an increasingly important stakeholder group for companies, it is important to take note on their needs and opinions. Research results and observation on blogs’ comment boxes reveal several mistakes companies make when initiating and implementing blogger outreach projects.

Firstly, companies seem to not be aware of how to approach bloggers successfully. The contacts can often be rude, uninteresting, awkward or indifferent; often a straight consequence of companies being unaware of how cooperation could be led and what the specific blog in question concentrates on (Leppäniemi 2012). The latter is particularly important from the company point-of-view: choosing a cooperation blog with a theme related to the company’s product or industry field enables an optimal target audience and a smoother acceptance by the blog readers.

Another common mistake made by companies is underestimating bloggers. This can externalise as for example offering too low compensation compared to the workload or blogger’s visibility. Professional bloggers run their blogs as a business and expect to be compensated for their time. In the United States the estimated industry average for blogger compensation per post is around \$50 – \$300, approximately 35 € – 225 € (SEOmoz 2012).

For now 55 % of Finnish companies do not reward the cooperation bloggers in any way. 6 % pays a salary, while a quarter pays another type of reward (Mainostajien Liitto 2012). The figures could indicate that blogger outreach cooperation in Finland does not unescapably involve the expectation of compensation as long as the company or the product is interesting enough to the blogger. However, this may change in the near future in case bloggers continue to gain more power and wish to realize this power in the form of income.

Underestimating bloggers can also appear as companies proposing unfair cooperation conditions or hidden advertising. In August 2012 one of Finland's most popular bloggers, Natalia Tolmatsova, wrote a blog post about a set of unfair cooperation proposals sent her way (Tolmatsova 2012). The blog post sparked a total of 181 responses and conversation on unfair blogger outreach practices. Among the examples was a cooperation proposal that between normal text had a small, uneasily detectable print proposing that all pictures taken by the blogger in relation with the company's product would be transferred under the copyright of the company, leaving the blogger with loss of her own pictures. Another example was a company advising the blogger to write a positive review on the product sent for testing. Some companies have reportedly even offered a list of adjectives to use when writing a post on a product, excluding the possibility of any negative remarks (see Tolmatsova 2012).

Furthermore, the discussion around Tolmatsova's post revealed proposals where companies have directly asked the blogger not to mention the product is sponsored, but to present it to the readers as the blogger's own purchase choice. Companies engaging into blogger outreach should identify that hidden advertising is forbidden by the Finnish Law. According to the consumer protection law the consumer needs to be able to identify the marketing as marketing and also know who is the marketer in question. This applies also to online communities and blogs (Heima 2010).

The Finnish Consumer Bureau has expressed its concern on the blurring line between "real" and "sponsored" content. The Bureau's lawyer Katri Väänänen comments that all bloggers can not be expected to know the consumer protection laws, shifting the greater responsibility in disclosing the existence of marketing practices to the company. According to Väänänen, a clear way for bloggers to disclose content’s marketing nature more homogeneously is being planned (Mäkitalo 2012). Today several Finnish bloggers mark sponsored content with an asterisk symbol explained in the sidebar or by adding a clear verbal statement in posts containing commercial content.

In addition to hidden advertising being illegal, it can also backfire depending on a case-by-case basis. If a blog post appears too commercial, a counter reaction can cause the readers to disappear, leaving the marketing message with no audience. Per se, the public is very sensitive to detect when the marketed product or service is not in line with the blogger’s style. As Pirjo Vuokko from Turku School of Economics states, too much monitoring and trying to influence the blog text will lead to a pure extension of marketing communication, causing the text to lose its credibility (in Mäkitalo 2012).

4.5.3 The FREPT model for blogger outreach

Blogdash is an example of an online site offering tips and articles concerning blogger outreach. What makes the site interesting from a Finnish point-of-view is that it operates as an intermediary between companies and bloggers seeking cooperation, something that can not yet be seen on the Finnish markets. Blogdash offers companies and bloggers the possibility to enlist themselves to the website and communicate their preferences concerning possible cooperation. For example, companies can be paired with bloggers based on their topics, niches, levels of influence and reach, whereas bloggers can describe their pitch preferences and past experiences in order to facilitate more valuable and targeted opportunity offers by companies. Blogdash charges companies $44.99 per month, the service is free for bloggers (Blogdash 2013).

Blogdash has compiled a guidebook to blogger outreach explaining its prevailing motives and value. The guidebook presents a five-step FREPT model for blogger outreach, described in the following (Spinks n.d.).

1. Find
2. Research
3. Engage
4. Pitch
5. Track

In the first step the company defines the industry of which bloggers it wants to reach and then finds as many as possible. All the found bloggers will not be contacted, but the group will be the starting point. In the second step the company will conduct research on the found bloggers. According to author David Spinks, the second step is the most important in the whole model since the quality of the research will define whether the outreach will be successful. Vast research on the bloggers will help identify the right ones for the company's purposes as well as help create a pitch as personalized as possible. Spinks suggests the company should find out for example the following: the topic the blogger writes about and what kind of posts they write; who is the blogger's audience and what are their demographics; is the blogger influential on other social networks and what is their total reach; what is their level of professionalism, do they make money, do they have ads and have they engaged into blogger outreach in the past. As a generalisation, if the bloggers have worked with companies before and have a professional approach to blogging they will be more responsive to pitches (Spinks n.d.). Having studied the data recovered on each blogger, they should be narrowed down to 10-20 bloggers to avoid having to disperse the company's attention across too many bloggers.

The third step, engagement, is meant to increase the likelihood of success for the blogger outreach campaign. Engaging can be done for example by commenting on the bloggers' blog posts, replying to their tweets and re-tweeting their links, emailing them, and involving them in the company's project from the start. While engaging it is important for the company not to come across as too commercial or "pitchy", but to express sincere and genuine interest on topics relevant to the company's story. From the company's side it is important to have the blogger remember the contacting individual's name, not so much the company name, as this will come in handy later when pitching the blogger. According to Spinks, engaging is especially important with bloggers who are somewhat protective when it comes to their blog and have not yet reached a professional outlook to it. (Spinks n.d.)

The fourth step in the blogger outreach model is the pitch. David Spinks underlines the following components when preparing a pitch for bloggers: captivating email subject lines to get the bloggers open the email in the first place; always personalizing the message, referring to their previous blog post, using video pitch; reminding them of previous connections created for example in the engagement step by replying to an existing email thread when pitching; keeping it brief, a maximum of four paragraphs; being resourceful by offering information and multimedia in email attachments; keeping in mind also other contact channels than email, such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn; and finally, giving first. It is central to make the blogger and his/her readers the centre of the pitch and offer recognisable value by for example giving the blogger something to keep or give away to the readers, or by sending traffic to the blog by linking to it from the company's site, if possible. The more clear value the company offers the blogger, the more responsive he/she will be to engage into cooperation. (Spinks n.d.)

After the pitch comes the final step, tracking. By tracking the on-going conversations and completing follow-up the company will know when bloggers are writing about them and thus also know when to join the discussions and content sharing. Online tools such as Google Alerts and Tweetbeep provide information on company-related content as soon as it is published. David Spinks underlines staying in contact with the blogger also after the outreach campaign has been completed and results reviewed, as future outreach opportunities might be directed to the same bloggers.

4.5.4 Cooperation checklist

Before initiating cooperation with bloggers it is useful for companies to assess their internal readiness and capabilities to tackle such initiative. Search engine optimization server SEOmoz has created a checklist of five questions that will help companies determine their potential in blogger outreach (SEOmoz 2012).

1. Are you ready?
2. Do you have a plan?
3. Have you built the brief?
4. Have you come to mutual consent through contract?
5. Have you set your bloggers up to succeed?

Despite the fact that blogs are an unconventional and less costly marketing channel than traditional media, engaging into blogger outreach takes resources, money and most importantly time. Dedicated program management, true willingness, funds and internal stakeholder support are required (SEOmoz 2012). After this planning can begin: setting a primary objective for the program and defining key performance indicators will help quantify and validate the goal. To prevent overspending, estimation on the budget and costs should be drafted.

Building a program brief or a pitch is an important part of a blogger outreach process, as discussed in chapter 4.5.3. According to SEOmoz's checklist (2012), the pitch should clearly state the program background, objectives and rules for cooperation. It should identify the business opportunity, program objectives, program participation and offering, program mandatories and key milestones or deadlines for the blogger to follow.

Before sharing the pitch with potential third-party cooperation bloggers SEOmoz suggests executing a non-disclosure agreement that will protect the sensitive nature of the brief in question. In the United States such non-disclosure agreements are considered standard business practice amongst most brands and professional bloggers – a development that could take place in Finland as well as the blogosphere continues to mature.

Having shared the pitch and gaining opt-in, the next phase is to execute an official program contract. SEOmoz (2012) suggests consulting a company legal counsel or an expert specializing in Internet Marketing Law in order to create a proper agreement. Critical subject areas comprise of 1) program performance benchmarks and compensation including frequency of posting, length of post, social sharing and editorial quality; 2) full disclosure statement and placement proximity ensuring the program is compliant with common disclosure policy 3) non-allowable concurrent promotional items such as topics the company does not want to be associated with and promoting competitive brand while the campaign is live; and 4) program non-adherence and right to cancel in case the blogger is not complying with the contract’s terms.

In general, there exists little public data on the prevalence of blogger outreach program contracts between companies and bloggers in Finland. The fact that they are considered normal business practice in the United States does not translate directly to the Finnish blogosphere. A guiding estimation is provided by Mainostajien Liitto’s research, where only 14 % of the company respondents report to make written contracts with the bloggers (Mainostajien Liitto 2012). As with the non-disclosure agreements, this figure could be expected to grow in the future.

The fifth and final point on the SEOmoz (2012) checklist concerns the relationship between the company and the blogger. Getting acquainted both ways will help create a bond and set the tone for the rest of the relationship. The company can create a private program hub where a milestone calendar, creative assets, ideas and tips can be posted and shared with the bloggers. Access to company information and needed details such as specs and images should also be given to the bloggers beforehand, allowing them to concentrate on creating quality campaign posts. Manifesto’s blog barometer estimates that visual features, high-quality images and targeting are increasingly accentuated in blogger outreach (Manifesto 2012). All in all it is important to let the bloggers know their work is appreciated, keeping the morale up for the program members (SEOmoz 2012).

5 RESEARCH DESIGN

The general aim of the research is to better understand the Finnish blogosphere and its bloggers in order to be able to facilitate more lucrative cooperation projects between bloggers and companies. Based on the concepts by Saunders et al., the research in question is a combination of exploratory and descriptive study. Exploratory study seeks to find out what is happening and to assess phenomena in a new light. Consequently, as Robson (2002) suggests a descriptive research aims to portray an accurate profile of persons, events or situations (see Saunders et al. 2007, 134).

Looking at the research strategy, one main mean was selected for the study in question. The survey strategy tends to be used for exploratory and descriptive research: it allows collection of a large amount of data in an economical way. The survey strategy enables using a questionnaire directed to a sample group, offering standardized data that is easily comparable and understandable (Saunders et al. 2007, 138). In addition to the survey strategy, some action research was conducted during the thesis author's intern position at the case company ElämysLahjat.fi. The action research was however limited to understanding the common surroundings of an online marketing company engaged into blogger outreach, not the actual blogger outreach phenomenon itself.

5.1 Research methods and implementation

The thesis research was chosen to be implemented via mixed methods which is to say both quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques and analysis procedures were exploited in the research design (Saunders et al. 2007, 145). According to Saunders et al. (2007), the two major advantages of choosing to use multiple methods within the same research are the possibility to serve different purposes and the possibility for triangulation.

The expected outcome of the research is to find out the attitudes, preferences and expectations of bloggers in relation to cooperation with companies. According to Saunders et al., the time horizon for a research is cross-sectional when the research is a so-called snapshot, a study of a particular phenomenon at a particular time. As the research in question does not investigate the blogger-company cooperation over a significant period of time but rather evaluates its state at a given moment, the research can be categorized as cross-sectional.

Quantitative, numerical data in the research was collected in the form of a questionnaire and analysed with the help of graphs and statistics. On the other end qualitative, non-numerical data was obtained via an interview and analysed by categorizing the interview results in separate entities.

Increasing credibility of research findings is increased by ensuring reliability and validity. Listed threats to reliability include participant error and bias as well as observer error and bias, while validity can be threatened by factors related to history, testing, instrumentation, mortality, maturation and ambiguity about causal direction. (Saunders et al. 2007, 150)

These threats were endeavoured to be avoided in the research by different actions. The questionnaire was kept open for a longer period, ensuring different possible response timings. The interview was in a semi-structured form as to avoid observer bias. The thesis author followed the Finnish blogosphere and most read blogs during the research process, yet predicting possible history events' effects on the research results is difficult. Due to the cross-sectional nature of the research, mortality and maturation were not seen as central threats to the validity of the study. Consequently, due to the fact that the research results could not disadvantage the anonymous respondent bloggers in any significant way the threats of testing and instrumentation as well as the respondent bloggers being under the pressure of authoritarian managers while compiling their answers were not seen as prominent.

5.1.1 Questionnaire

The research questionnaire (see appendices 3 and 4) was created with Webropol survey tool. It comprised of structured questions with pre-determined answer options as well as open questions where the answers were not limited in any way. The structured questions were used to measure opinions, many of them in the form of a scale from one to five. Such results are presented as average figures. The questionnaire was tested several times by the thesis author before sending the final questionnaire link to the chosen research group. The questionnaire was also tested by other individuals and altered based on the user experiences.

When choosing the research group, it was decided to target the most popular Finnish blogs. It can be stated that a majority of the most read blogs are also the ones that engage most into cooperation with companies. This is partly due to the fact that they attract a vast amount of contacts. Bloggers with experience of company cooperation and its entails were seen as the most vital respondents for the research.

Contacted bloggers were chosen from Blogilista's most read list. The list organizes Finnish blogs in an order based on their number of readers, meaning the amount of times someone has visited a certain blog through Blogilista during the past 7 days (Blogilista.fi 2013). Considering all the other available means of visiting a blog, the number of readers for a blog can in reality be substantially higher than the figures announced at Blogilista.

The selected scope for the blogger research was 200 most read Finnish blogs according to Blogilista's statistics as of September 2012. Blogilista does not make any difference between its listed blogs, thus for the purpose of the research a total of 22 blogs were excluded from the initial research group. Five of these were written by bloggers who had several blogs, meaning only one email to contact them was sufficient; three had been closed down; seven did not have email contact information available; and other seven were excluded as they were not exactly individual blogs, but in fact communities.

A short introduction email (see appendix 2) with a link to the questionnaire was sent to 178 bloggers on Sunday 16th September 2012 after which the link stayed open for three weeks until 7th October. During this period two reminder emails were sent to the group, first on September 25th and the second a day before closing on 6th October, both messages including the link to the questionnaire. In order to attract more respondents ElämysLahjat.fi donated a gift card worth 25 € to be raffled between the respondents who agreed to participate with their own name or their blog's name. Due to unknown technical reasons the emails could not be sent to two bloggers. Therefore the final scope of the research was solidified at 176. The results of the questionnaire can be found in chapter 6.1.

5.1.2 Interviews

In order to get a more into-depth view on bloggers' needs and wants with regards to company cooperation, an interview invitation was included in the questionnaire as a final question. Bloggers who were interested in sharing more of their thoughts and ideas could leave their contact information for further discussion. A total of seven bloggers did, and finally three of them agreed for an interview.

The interview was in a semi-structured form with standard questions (see appendix 5). Depending on the interview answers, also additional into-depth questions were asked. According to the wishes of the interviewees, two of the interviews were conducted via phone and one as an email questionnaire. The results of the interviews can be found in chapter 6.2.

6 RESEARCH RESULTS

6.1 Questionnaire

The research questionnaire gathered a total of 36 answers during the three weeks it was open, resulting to a 20,45 % response rate. The questionnaire comprised of 20 questions, first four dealing with basic information on the respondents and the rest discussing their views on company cooperation (see appendices 3 and 4). The following will analyse the questionnaire results as four different entities: respondent profile, attitude towards cooperation with companies, previous cooperation experiences and expectations.

Most of the questionnaire respondents live in big cities, 34 % in Helsinki and Tampere each. Other represented cities were Oulu with 8,3 %, Vantaa, Jyväskylä and Kokkola each with 5,5 % and London, Kempele, Espoo, Hämeenlinna, Kuopio, Lahti, Turku, Vaasa and Salo each with 2,7 %, one blogger.

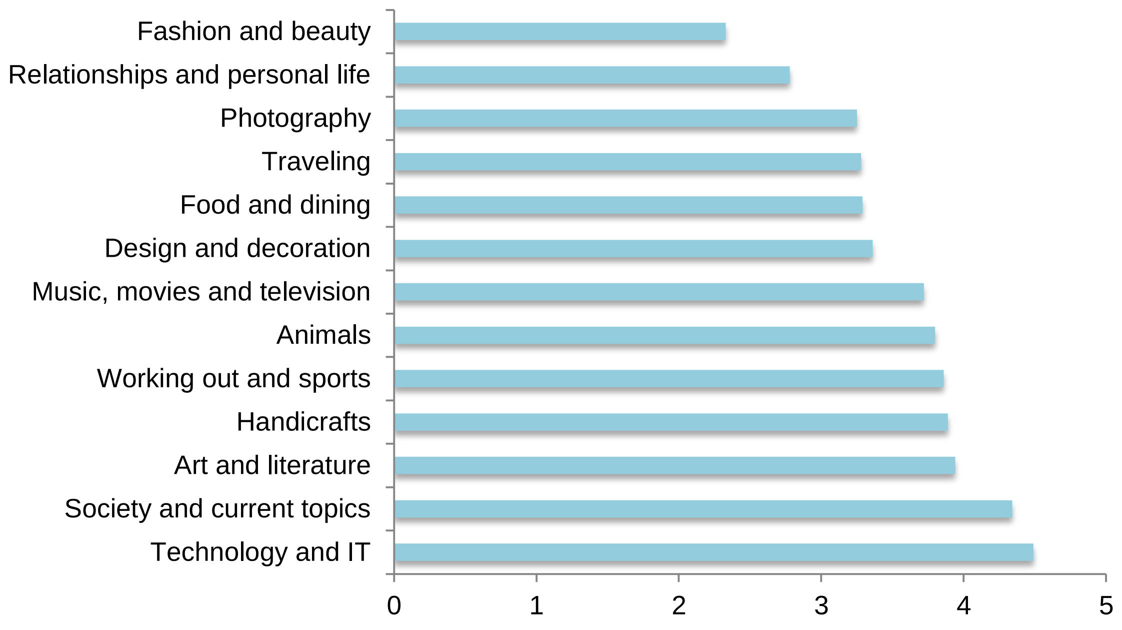

Figure 3. Question 3 – centrality of themes in respondents' blogs.

The respondents were asked to evaluate different blog themes based on how central those are in their own blog, 1 symbolising a very central theme and 5 meaning the theme is a topic almost never. As figure 3 illustrates, with the smallest average rate of 2,33 fashion and beauty is the most central theme for the respondents out of 13 different suggested themes. Other central themes are relationships and personal life, photographing, traveling, food and dining, and design and decoration. Least central themes are reported to be technology and IT, society and current topics, and art and literature.

Majority of the respondents are experienced bloggers. 52,7 % have been writing their current blog for over three years, 13,8 % for 2-3 years and 22 % for 1-2 years. Four bloggers out of the 36, meaning 11,1 % have been engaged into their current blog for less than a year.

A majority of 75 % of the respondent bloggers feel positively towards cooperation with companies taking place on blogs, as illustrated in figure 4. 5,6 % feel negatively towards such cooperation while 19,4 % remain unsure of their general opinion.

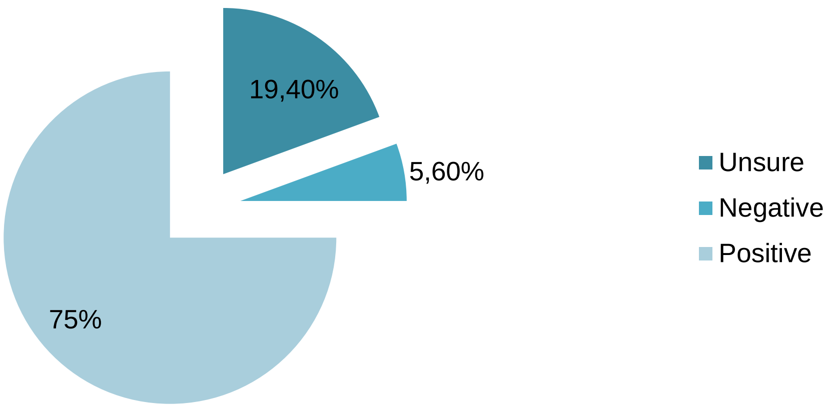

Figure 4. Question 5 – overall opinion on cooperation with companies in blogs.

In the following question six the respondents were asked to state reasons to their prevailing attitude. Several respondents commented that an ideal cooperation campaign serves the company, the blogger as well as the readers. One respondent referred to blogs as “a great marketing channel, making cooperation [in blogs] with different parties very current”. Another respondent compared perks earned by bloggers in company cooperation to national television channels earning from the broadcasted ads, and commented “from the readers point-of-view it is sensible when someone has already tested and evaluated certain products through personal experience”.

According to the comments, positive attitude towards cooperation with companies demands for example the following features: the carried out cooperation is blogger-driven, campaigns entail quality, the cooperation fits seamlessly to the content of the blog and it is presented in a right manner, companies treat the bloggers well and offer rightful conditions, bloggers receive a pay for their effort, topics are treated openly and transparently, and the advertising is not hidden, not forced upon nor stands out compared to other content.

As for the characteristics of a company engaged into cooperation with blogs, in questions 16 and 17 the respondents were asked whether size or international nature of the business would affect bloggers’ interests in initiating cooperation. 83,3 % of the respondents commented the size of the company does not matter, while 16,7 % stated they would rather cooperate with an SME (defined as a company with less than 250 employees, annual turnover maximum 40 million euro) as opposed to an MNC (defined as a company with 250 or more employees, annual turnover more that 40 million euro). Similar result was obtained in the question of internationality as 72,2 % of the respondents agreed it does not affect their interest in a company. A bit over a fifth of the respondents, 22,2 %, stated international features increase their interest in cooperating with a company, while 5,6 % reported the opposite, decreased interest.

According to the answers to question seven, 86,1 % of the respondents already have experience in company cooperation while 13,9 % do not. Out of the bloggers who are experienced with company cooperation 27,7 % are in constant cooperation, 5,5 % several times a month, 22,2 % approximately once a month and 25 % a few times a year.

In question eight the respondents were asked to define the nature of the previous cooperation they've had in their blogs with companies.

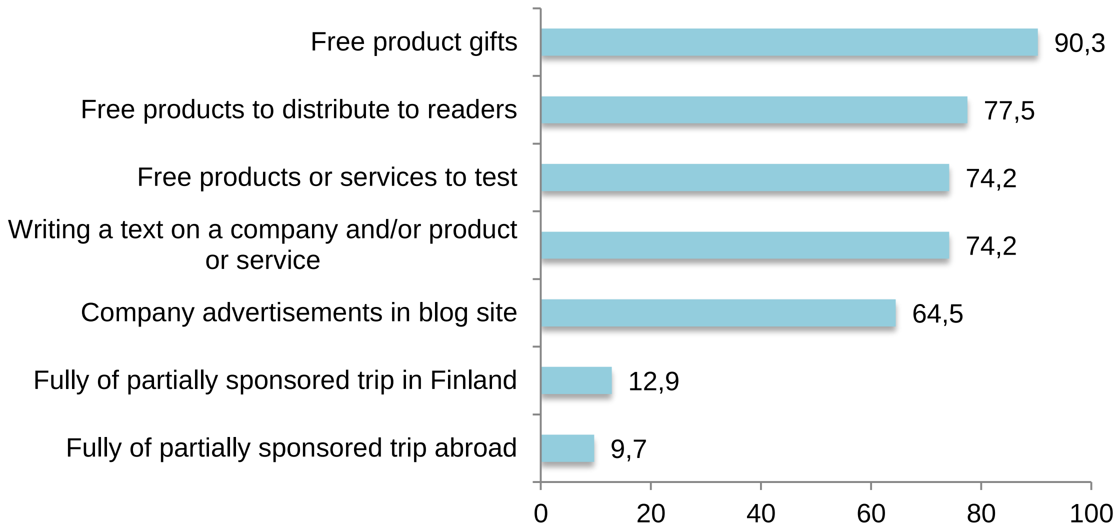

Figure 5. Question 8 – modes of previous cooperation with companies.

As can be seen from the figure 5, free product gifts from the company are the most popular form of cooperation among the respondent group. These free products can be either for the blogger to keep, to distribute to the readers or to test for a certain period of time. Presentation texts and company advertisements have also been popular among the respondents' blogs. Sponsored trips are not a very common cooperation form among the respondent bloggers.

In question nine the 86,1 % of the respondents who have experience in company cooperation were asked to define the effects of the cooperation on their blog. 32,3 % reported an increase in reader numbers and 61,3 % noted an increase in their company contacts due to cooperation campaigns. Looking at the readers' reactions, 22,6 % of the respondent bloggers reported increased positive commenting during the cooperation, while 6,5 % experienced an increase in negative feedback. More than a third of the respondents, 38,7 %, reported company cooperation not having had any notable effect on their blog whatsoever.

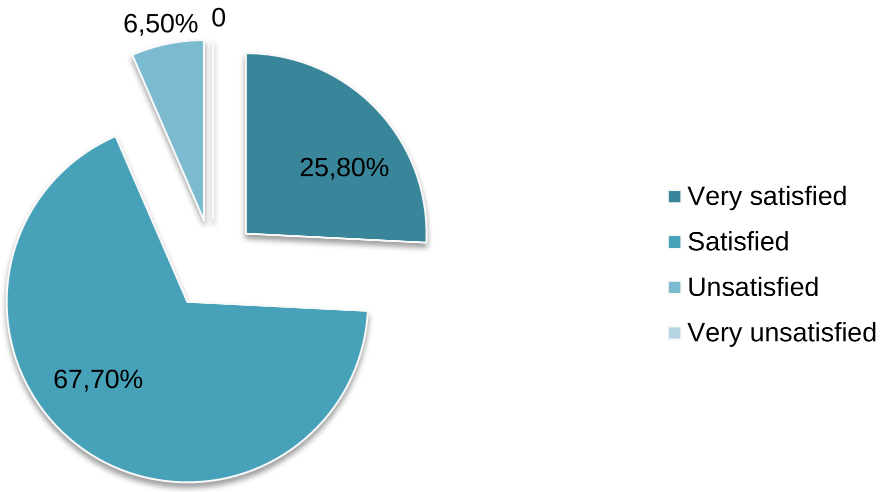

Figure 6. Question 13 – evaluation of previous cooperation experiences.

All in all, a total of 93,5 % of the respondents who have experience in company cooperation reported to be satisfied or very satisfied with their previous experiences, as illustrated in figure 6. Only two respondents argued to be unsatisfied, none very unsatisfied. In question 14 the respondents were asked to explain their evaluation. Attributes such as the blogger being allowed to influence the implementation of the cooperation projects and allowing the blogger to decide upon the project content were related to positive evaluations of previous experiences. Basis for dissatisfaction was presented by a respondent stating “there should be more contacts by companies and the companies should consider more thoroughly whether their line of business is in accordance with the blog in question”.

Looking at cooperation campaigns in question 11, a majority of the respondent bloggers, 72,2 %, would be interested in initiating projects or increasing the amount of projects taking place in their blog. Not being interested in such activity or being unsure of such activity are each claimed by 13,9 % of the respondents.

In question 12 the respondents were asked to evaluate different features based on whether those make a company an interesting cooperation partner for the blogger on a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being a very important feature and 5 being an unimportant feature.

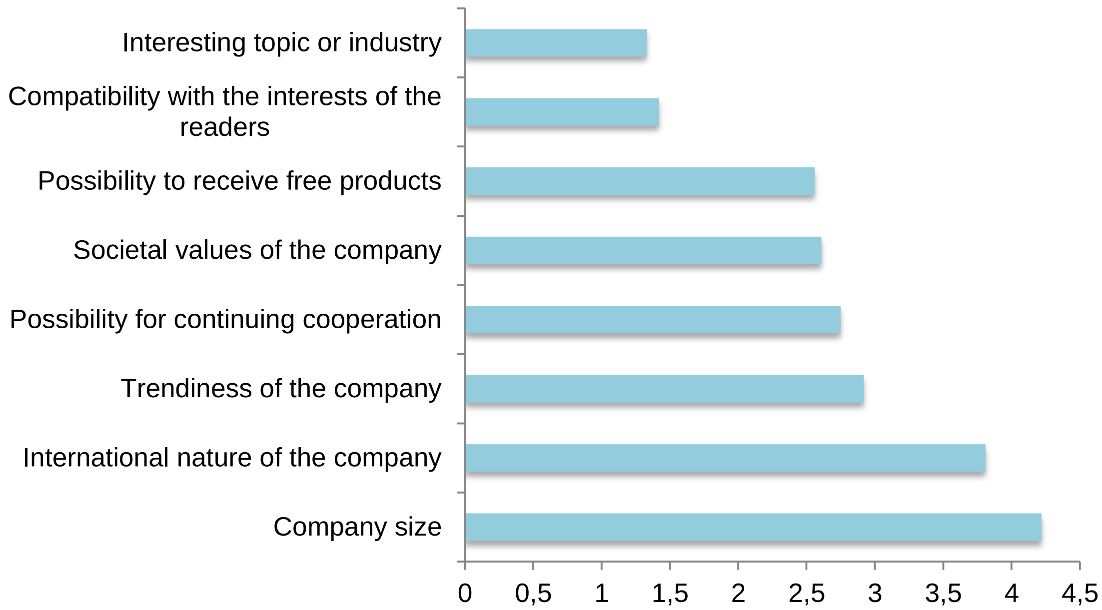

Figure 7. Question 12 – features that make a company an interesting cooperation partner for a blogger.

The figure 7 illustrates three different waves of importance. Firstly, the two most important features that arouse interest towards cooperation with a company are an interesting topic and compatibility with the interests of the blog readers. The second wave comprises of the possibility to earn free products, valued a tad more important than the societal values of the company, possibility for continuing cooperation and the trendiness of a company. Finally, the third wave consists of the size and international nature of a company, neither very important feature for the bloggers as confirmed also in questions 16 and 17.

In question 15 the respondents were asked to define specific features important for them in company cooperation and to explain what they expect from the cooperation companies. The answers include blogger-oriented mind set, getting to know the blog before initiating contact, companies taking bloggers seriously as business partners, offering fair conditions and a rightful pay, providing the bloggers the freedom to draft the blog texts and ensuring reliability, honesty, professionalism and ability to cooperate.

Consequently, when asked about possible hindrances for cooperation with companies in question 18, the respondents identified following features: company not having any connection to the theme of the blog, blogger being told beforehand what kind of (positive) evaluation to write about a product or a service, contacts being impersonal, contacts suggesting the blogger could get more content and readers to the blog via cooperation, blogger being told not to disclose the cooperation, company being in cooperation with “too many” other bloggers, company having a bad reputation, and company having unethical business policies or functioning on an unethical field (such as online casinos, quick loans, erotic shops, fur shops).

6.2 Interviews

A total of three bloggers were interviewed individually in December 2012, two of which by phone and one by email. The interview consisted of 13 semi-structured questions (see appendix 5), some of which were particularized during the interviews. Due to the semi-structured nature of the questions, particularly the phone interviews developed into more of conversations. The interview results will be reviewed in the following, divided into four entities: interviewee profile, cooperation offers, cooperation campaigns and advertising in blogs.

The interviewed bloggers are Helianna of Äitiyshousut (A), Anna of HelsinkiAnna (B) and Taina of Charming Nails (C). Blogger A has 20 000 unique readers per month, blogger B 24 000 and blogger C 50 000. All the respondents are in contact with companies and engaged into cooperation in their blogs, thus all are in favour of cooperation with companies.

According to the bloggers’ responses, a good cooperation offer includes a well thought-out campaign proposal with a topic that interests the blogger. A good contact is clear: it presents the company and its mission, explains what the company expects, what the blogger will receive and is tailor-made for the blogger in question.

As for the decision process in accepting a cooperation proposal, blogger A gave an example in which she had been contacted and offered a whole line of household products for free in exchange for posting about them. She underlined that even though the face value of the offer was high (expensive electronics), the content would have been boring for the readers, hence she denied the offer. Same response was given by blogger B, who explained to have turned down lucrative cooperation campaigns because they would not have been interesting for the readers. Blogger C sees a product as a more genuine reward than money, hence she doesn't look for a direct monetary refund, but is content for receiving free products that she would purchase and use also if she did not have an agreement with the specific company.

The respondents understand their control over accepting cooperation proposals. Feature that blogger A values in cooperation campaigns is not preparing ready-made content since she wants to develop the specifics herself. On the same line is blogger B who describes the best features of a cooperation campaign as having the freedom to develop the idea on one's own, including a positive message or theme to the campaign and having a chance to uplift one's self-esteem. Blogger C comments to expect mutual honesty in a cooperation campaign, a decent reward for the blogger, mutual valuation of the parties' work and a genuine interest from her own side towards the products of a company.

As for the forms of a good cooperation campaign, blogger B mentions different experiences, visits and seeing new things that interest oneself. Her goal is to bring new material to the readers, hence the content needs to be interesting. Blogger C mentions as her favourite cooperation forms free products, getting acquainted with a company, organizing lotteries and in general introducing her readers to new products.

All the interviewees were introduced a pilot campaign form created based on the results of the previous questionnaire. The pilot campaign was described as an interactive campaign where the blogger would communicate with her/his readers on a more personal level, such as live campaigning or hosting events related to a product/company. Blogger A comments the personification of bloggers is already leading to in real life (irl) cooperation, increasing the interactivity between the parties involved. Blogger B is also compliant with the idea, presenting an example of taking her readers with to fashion shows and showroom events. Furthermore, she commented that such campaign form would initiate more two-way cooperation as the blogger would not only market the company, but the company would also market the blogger. Blogger C commented not to be interested in such interactive cooperation.

When discussing advertising in blogs, blogger A commented that the current discussion seems black-and-white: paying a blogger to present a product and not paying a blogger to present a product are both judged in the Finnish blogosphere. In her opinion people are facing difficulties in how to react to the topic as it is still new. Blogger B commented that in her opinion there are already too many ads in blogs, partly due to the fact that some bloggers accept any cooperation proposals as the advertorial revenue is viable for many low-income students who blog. According to blogger B, a good model would be to have fewer cooperation campaigns and more quality, hence one big campaign would overrule ten small ones. Blogger A agrees, adding that having several small campaign posts will steal ground from other contents on the blog. Blogger C would rather have several smaller cooperation campaigns, as it would be suitable for the prompt posting pace.

When asked about the future of advertising in blogs, blogger A believes that the diary-like essence of blogs will not lose its position, but the traditional magazines will. She comments that blogs have better coverage and through them content can be targeted more easily. Blogger C is in accordance, pointing out that blogs are a free media for consumers to read and that offer the chance for communication, unlike traditional magazines. According to her estimation, the commercialization of blogs will only increase in the future.

6.3 Summary

As for the questionnaire, around 90 % of the respondent bloggers come from urban areas and have been writing a blog for longer than a year. The most common blog themes are fashion and beauty, personal life, photographing, dining, traveling and design. Three quarters of the respondents feel positively towards cooperation with companies. Central motive for this are mutual benefits earned by the blogger, the company and vicariously the blog readers.

Over 80 % of the respondents have experience in company cooperation. Most common cooperation forms are product gifts from companies, writing texts about a company and/ or a product, and hosting advertisements in the blog. Over 90 % of the respondents with previous completed company cooperation involvement are satisfied or very satisfied with their experiences.

Nearly three quarters of the respondents are interested in initiating or increasing cooperation campaigns in their blog. Most important features that make a company an appealing cooperation partner for the respondents are an interesting topic or industry and compatibility with the interests of the blog readers. From the cooperation the respondents expect professional and personal contacts, fair conditions and compensation, and a certain level of freedom of expression.

As for the interview, points similar to the ones discovered in the questionnaire results were underlined in the interviewees' commentaries. With regards to cooperation offers the interviewees appreciate tailored, clear contacts that present the company's mission, expectations and blogger's gain. In general, matching the readers' interests is more valuable than the face value of the offer. As for the actual cooperation campaigns the interviewees want to bring new material to their readers and would like the blogger to be allowed to develop the campaign content. Two of the respondents were interested in increasing interactivity in the available cooperation forms. Finally, as for advertising in blogs, the interviewees commented it is a rather new topic, making reacting to it complicated. The interviewees believe that the commercialization of blogs will continue in the near future.

7 BLOGGER OUTREACH STRATEGY

Reviewed with the theoretical framework and research results, the FREPT model for blogger outreach by David Spinks includes several key points regarding a blogger outreach strategy. The model consults and resolves central cooperation issues reported by bloggers, making it a blogger-driven model that can be seen as a highly applicable one. For this reason the FREPT model for blogger outreach is used as the base for the following blogger outreach strategy, complemented with other presented research data as well as the collected thesis research data. The strategy is most applicable for Finnish companies as it is drafted for the Finnish case company and applies research data based on the Finnish blogosphere and its bloggers.

Step 1. Find

Finding relevant blogs among a selected industry is the starting point for the outreach strategy. Finnish blogs can be found for example from the blog portals, blog servers' lists, blog databases such as Blogilista or by individual research in the blogosphere. If the aim is to target blogs internationally, resources suggested by David Spinks in the FREPT model are also applicable: blog databases such as Technorati; Twitter directories such as WeFollow; Twitter Chats such as Blogchat; and company sites offering blogger outreach services such as Blogdash. Also buying a list of bloggers is possible, even though not recommended due to weakened level of targeting.

Step 2. Research

Conducting thorough research on the found bloggers can be seen as a precondition to successful blogger outreach. Based on the recovered data a decision can be made as to which bloggers to actually approach with the pitch. Majority of the required data can be found on the blog itself: theme, type of posts, level of professionalism, amount of advertorial content and type of audience. If the blogger is influential also on other social media networks, such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Pinterest or Instagram, those are likely to be linked in the blog. Other factors to review are the frequency of the blogger's posts and their site analytics, such as Google page rank. In the U.S. companies aldo measure the Klout score of a blogger, meaning the level of online influence.

Having researched the data on the bloggers, the group should be narrowed down to 5+ bloggers, depending on the company's size and available resources. Despite blogger outreach being a more affordable marketing opportunity than traditional media, it does require money and plenty of time. In the case company ElämysLahjat.fi's previous blogger outreach the company targeted approximately 50 bloggers in their general project, an amount too high for the company considering the resources they had available for blogger outreach.

A smaller targeted blogger figure than suggested in the original FREPT model was chosen for the fact that in blogger outreach quality trumps quantity. If the company or project is interesting enough, having only a couple of well selected bloggers write about it can make it more interesting in the eyes of other bloggers as they are constantly on the lookout to find new, interesting content to report to bigger masses. Research on blogs' comment boxes also shows that when a company appears in several blogs' posts simultaneously and constantly it can create a negative reaction in both other bloggers and the readers. Whether such reaction will actually affect the sales negatively is not known.

Step 3. Engage

The third step of the presented blogger outreach strategy, engaging, is an optional step. Implementing the step depends on whether the company actually has some basis for engaging. For example, if an email is to be sent to a blogger concerning their blog post, it should be a meaningful one conducted with genuine interests in the post topic. Faking interest and forcing flavourless comments will not spike up interest from the blogger's side.

Possibly the best engaging option from bloggers' point-of-view presented in the original FREPT model is involving the blogger to the project from the start. Asking a blogger to influence a product or offer insights and ideas in its production serves as a strong label of customization. Several research show that bloggers want tailor-made, individual treatment – something where they can use their expert position and feel themselves appreciated. Another good engaging option is to do an interview on the blogger, however, also in this case there would need to be genuine interest from the company's side towards the blogger's contribution.

Step 4. Pitch

When pitching the selected group of bloggers, there are several factors to be taken into account. To start with, the email's subject line should be interesting enough for the blogger to open the email. Looking at the message itself, a centrally important feature is personalizing: using the blogger's first name, referring to their blog post, sharing a thought on it. The key is to make it clear that the message has been written for the specific blogger in question without sounding too sales-like.

The pitch should be short, no more than four paragraphs, and it should clearly communicate what the company would like the blogger to do and what the blogger will receive in return. When planning the blogger's role in the project it is relevant to keep in mind that some bloggers prefer to plan the exact presentation concept and contents themselves. The bloggers often know their audience the best and know what type of content will receive an interested admittance by the readers. The company should under no circumstances try to order the blogger to write a certain type of evaluation including certain positive praise, but they need to be able to state their own opinion freely. Some general content guidelines can be discussed with the blogger in case the company would like the blogger to focus on a specific aspect (for example company has launched a new environmentally friendly product collection and wishes to promote it specifically). If the proposed project contains key milestones or deadlines for the blogger to follow those should also be preliminary discussed in the proposal. The company should also confirm that the cooperation relationship is disclosed in the blog as hidden advertising is prohibited by the Finnish law.

If the company has additional materials relating to the pitch such as a press release or company introduction, couple of the most central ones should be added to the email as attachments. Having a refined visual appearance and imaging to showcase is crucial especially when approaching professional bloggers. By offering the bloggers interesting, useful, usable and quality material the company will come across as a knowledgeable and resourceful partner and support the bloggers without being controlling. After gaining opt-in the company can also consider setting up a private database, a program hub for the cooperation bloggers including the creative assets as well as ideas, tips and a possible milestone calendar in case the project in question is for the long-term.

Some bloggers will be happy about a collaboration opportunity as it is, but some will expect added value. A way to do this is to include in the pitch something to give to the blogger to keep or give away to their readers. By providing the blogger with a “taster” – whether a product, service, gift card, free account or a discount code – the company can spike up the blogger’s interest towards the cooperation.

Before sending out the pitch, the company should decide upon the form of compensation for the actual cooperation project: money, product or service, or perhaps something else. Research show that bloggers expect to receive a fair compensation for their work. However, for most bloggers content is more important than compensation, leading to the conclusion that separate compensation is not always required, as long as the campaign itself is interesting enough.

All in all the suggested conditions of the cooperation should be transparent and fair towards the blogger. The company should aim to make the cooperation smooth and pleasant for the blogger, meaning not to ask too much too often. If the company wants a written contract between themselves and the blogger, such agreement would be best drafted in a face-to-face meeting in order to avoid misunderstandings and negative associations. An agreement could become current in case the company’s offer includes sections of classified intellectual property, per example.

Concerning the mode of pitching, email is not the only available channel. Research show that Finnish bloggers are increasing their use of other social media channels in reaching readers and presenting their blog (Manifesto 2012). In 2012 60 % of the bloggers had set up a Facebook account for their blog (42 % in 2011), making it possible for companies to contact the bloggers also via Facebook. As for Twitter, there is yet no concrete data available concerning the Twitter use of Finnish bloggers. In general, tweeting in Finnish is increasing even though the amount of active tweeters is still relatively low, 26 000 (Kauhanen 2013), compared to other Nordic countries or let alone the U.S.

One might also consider pitching via phone, but this might be unpleasant for some bloggers due to privacy reasons. The company would also need to have someone who can pitch effectively not only on paper but on a live conversation. Finns tend to keep their own personal space, making an email approach a safer option. If however a company should want to try out a different approach, a videotaped pitch could be very interesting and memorable if implemented well.

Step 5. Track

Tracking the executed cooperation is important for the company for several reasons. Firstly, it will offer the company a chance to follow, join and spread the conversation on the business. Monitoring the commenting and sharing regarding the cooperation post will give the company an idea of the readers’ reactions towards the campaign – is it welcomed positively or are there some aspects that cause negative feelings in the readers; is there something the readers would like to receive more information on? Tracking is an important part also in the process of measuring the success rate of the campaign, where observed commenting and sharing function as the qualitative basis and actual increased online traffic and sales as the quantitative basis. Finally, conducting follow-up and staying in contact with the blogger will help build on possible future cooperation campaigns.

If the company is dealing with professional bloggers, they are likely to understand the reciprocal nature of blogger outreach based on their previous experience. Despite the fact that the presented blogger outreach strategy underlines bloggers' rights and needs in the cooperation, companies should also make sure they receive what they are promised in the cooperation. Some bloggers might not follow the general guidelines set by the company nor perform adequately when it comes to the length, quality, imaging or schedule of the post. Such issues are more likely to take place when cooperating with greener bloggers representing the middle or lower section of the most popular blogs' listing. If cooperation with such blogs is initiated, setting some ground rules and expectations on paper in the form of a written agreement is recommended as to avoid future problem situations.

8 CONCLUSION

8.1 Research findings versus existing theory

Existing theory on changed marketing prerequisites for companies, social media environment and blogger outreach supports the thesis research findings. Issues and expectations in blogger outreach reported by bloggers in for example Manifesto's blog barometers were confirmed both by research on blogs as well as the mixed methods thesis research findings.

Majority of bloggers react positively to contacts by companies. Bloggers' single most important aim is sharing information and experiences with their readers, increasing the demand for blogger outreach campaigns with interesting content. Monetary compensation is not a necessity in blogger outreach – however some compensation, even if the feeling of being a part of a highly interesting project producing great content, is required in order for the blogger to feel valued and respected.

The rules of the blogosphere, compiled based on research conducted in different blogs, correlate with the thesis research's findings on bloggers' expectations regarding company cooperation. The themes of the listed blogosphere rules are apparent in the most applicable found model for blogger outreach, the FREPT model. Due to its blogger-driven nature the FREPT functions as a valid basis for the produced blogger outreach strategy.

8.2 Credibility of the research findings

The credibility and reliability of the research design were strengthened by means presented in chapter 5.1. Issues emerged in the data collection process included the rather small size of the respondent group in the questionnaire, rather small size of the into-depth interviewee group, transcribing the interview data by hand and quantifying qualitative interview data.

It is relevant to question whether the small size of the respondent groups in the questionnaire and interview are a reliable sample and reflection of the Finnish blogosphere as a whole. Based on existing research material it can be constituted that the respondent groups represent the average Finnish blogger in their blog themes as well as attitudes and reported issues regarding blogger outreach. Therefore the research results can be interpreted as reliable and certainly guiding in the process of establishing a blogger outreach strategy.

8.3 Implications for further academic research

Blogger outreach in Finland is still in a somewhat early stage and can be expected to develop during the coming months and years. As this happens, several interesting topics become available for further academic research.

Firstly, the elaboration of different blogger outreach forms can be expected to take place in the near future. In the completed thesis research there were already some indications of bloggers becoming bored with the current forms applied, suggesting they would be interested in initiating more interactive cooperation. Consequently, the research materials reveal perceptions implying that writing would be just one of the blogger's tasks in the future, leaving room for several other activities (Pirskanen 2012).

On the other hand, some scientific sources comment that the unique spirit and social cohesion of blogs vanishes during the commercialization process (Lietsala & Sirkkunen 2010, 179). Some bloggers such as Natalia Tolmatsova speculate the commercialization in blogs will slow down, allowing the blogs to return to their original diary-form (see Huhtala 2013). The development of marketing in blogs in general is something of interest for companies to follow.

Measuring social media marketing is a relevant yet difficult topic for marketers today. This applies also to measuring blogger outreach. What are the most appropriate tools for measuring, how can the measuring be done accurately and how can the measures be interpreted as effectively as possible? As blogger outreach forms continue to develop, the comparison between the measured results of different forms will become current.

Finally, blogger outreach contracts represent another interesting research topic. Recent research data show that around a seventh of companies create written agreements with their cooperation bloggers (Mainostajien Liitto 2012). What features are included in these agreements, in which cases are these decided to be drafted, how common they actually are, and are they accepted and tolerated by the Finnish bloggers in the first place? The results could help create a common standard agreement draft for blogger outreach.

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Appendix 1

According to Jones (2011, 42) companies engaged into creating meaningful content can be categorized in three phases based on their developments: 1) raising awareness among consumers; 2) becoming liked and trusted; and 3) motivating, inspiring and helping action. In her work content is approached with two tools, rhetoric and psychology, a combination of art and science. For all the three developmental phases exists a set of practical principals, demonstrated in the following table 3.

Table 3. Psychological and rhetoric principles of influential web content and the developmental phases to apply those in (Jones 2011, 41).

Tool	Principles	Phase
Psychological	1. The tried-and-true appeals: credibility through experience, reputation and association, logic through evidence and warrant, emotion through tone and style	**1, 2, 3**
	2. Applying identification to content: characters and spokespeople, UGC, content around a cause	**2, 3**
	3. Applying subtle repetition to content: planning content over time, using content relevant at a particular time, intensifying a point instead of repeating it	**1, 3**
	4. Obtaining the opportune moment: not to ask too much too soon or too often, asking clearly, reacting promptly to a crisis	**3**
Rhetoric	1. Guiding attention by framing content: tone of content can be changed when using different word forming or when placing the content differently	**1, 2, 3**
	2. Using metaphors: providing readers with vivid associations	**1, 2, 3**
	3. Availability of social proof – value of referrals: most watched video on a topic on YouTube will most likely be the choice for new viewers as well	**2, 3**

	4. Reciprocity – give to get: offering valuable information or offers in exchange for email addresses and member sign-ups	**2, 3**

By applying the psychological and rhetoric principles to web content companies can appeal to customers with several different instruments including credibility, identification, logic, repetition, emotion, framing, metaphors, social proof and reciprocity. When deciding which principals to apply, a company should consider its current developmental phase. When still in raising awareness phase, best principles to adapt are credibility, logic, emotion, repetition, framing and metaphor. Once a company is already liked and trusted, principles to use are credibility, logic, identification, framing, metaphor, social proof and reciprocity. In the final, third phase of motivating, inspiring and helping action all the principles are considered usable (Jones 2011, 41).

Appendix 2

Hei!

Oletko joskus harkinnut blogi-yhteistyötä yritysten kanssa, vai oletko kenties jo osallisena kyseisessä toiminnassa?

“Yritysyhteistyö – bloggaajan näkökulma” -kysely pyrkii selvittämään bloggaajien mielipiteitä ja motiiveja yritysyhteistyöhön liittyen. Ilahduttaako, mietityttääkö, ärsyttääkö? Jaa mielipiteesi ja kokemuksesi!

Kysely on keskeinen osa blogiyhteisösuhteita käsittelevää opinnäytetyötäni Turun ammattikorkeakoulussa. Vastaaminen vie sinulta 5-10 minuuttia, kyselyyn pääset oheisesta linkistä: http://www.webropolsurveys.com/S/C4060D4E7757ED21.par. Kaikkien kyselyn täyttäneiden kesken arvotaan 25 euron arvoinen elämyslahjakortti, jonka arpaonnettaren suosikki saa käyttää haluamallaan tavalla osoitteessa www.elamyslahjat.fi. Huomioithan, että kyselyyn voi osallistua myös anonyymisti.

Kiitos ja kumarrus jo etukäteen kaikille vastanneille!

Ystävällisin terveisin,

Noora Sirén

Opiskelija / Turun ammattikorkeakoulu

P.S. Opinnäytetyöni toimeksiantajana toimii ElämysLahjat.fi. Kyselyn kohderyhmäksi valikoituivat yhteystietojen keräyshetkellä blogilista.fi -palvelun top200 luetuinta blogia.

Appendix 3

Yritysyhteistyö - bloggaajan näkökulma

Alati kasvava blogimaailma ja sen kanssa käsi kädessä kehittyvä blogimainonta ovat tämän päivän kiinnostavimpia ilmiöitä markkinoinnin saralla. Oheisen kyselyn tavoitteena on hahmottaa paremmin blogi- yritys -yhteistyön edellytyksiä sekä sitä, miten yritykset voisivat toimia mielenkiintoisina kumppaneina bloggaajille. Mitkä ovat sinun kokemuksesi, mielipiteesi ja toiveesi - mitä juuri sinä haluaisit yhteistyöltä?

Tulosten avulla tarjolla olevia yritysten ja bloggaajien yhteistyömahdollisuuksia voidaan kehittää, tarjoten täten sekä bloggaajille että lukijoille entistä värikkäämmän blogikokemuksen.

Kaikkien kyselyyn osallistuneiden kesken arvotaan elämyslahjakortti (arvo 25€)! Mikäli haluat osallistua arvontaan, muistathan ilmoittaa ensimmäisessä kysymyskentässä blogisi kotisivun yhteydenottoa varten.

Suurkiitos jo etukäteen osallistumisestasi!

1. Blogisi kotisivu?

2. Asuinkaupunkisi?

3. Mitkä teemat kuuluvat blogisi keskeiseen aihepiiriin? Arvioi jokainen vaihtoehto asteikolla 1-5 (1 = hyvin keskeinen, 2 = melko keskeinen, 3 = keskeinen, 4 = ei keskeinen, 5 = ei teemana juuri koskaan).

- Suhteet & oma elämä
- Muoti & kauneus
- Ruoka & juoma
- Matkailu
- Design & sisustus
- Kuntoilu & urheilu
- Taide & kirjallisuus
- Musiikki, elokuvat & TV
- Yhteiskunta & ajankohtaiset aiheet
- Valokuvaus
- Tekniikka & IT
- Käsityöt
- Eläimet

Muu, mikä

4. Kauanko olet kirjoittanut nykyistä blogiasi?

- Alle vuoden
- 1-2 vuotta

○ 2-3 vuotta

○ Yli 3 vuotta

5. Mikä on yleinen mielipiteesi blogeihin sijoittuvasta yritysyhteistyöstä?

○ Myönteinen

○ Kielteinen

○ En osaa sanoa

6. Miksi? Perustelethan vastauksesi edelliseen kysymykseen.

7. Onko sinulla aiempaa kokemusta yritysyhteistyöstä?

○ Kyllä

○ Ei

8. Jos vastasit edelliseen kysymykseen kyllä, täsmentäisitkö, minkälaista yhteistyö oli?

☐ Esittelytekstin kirjoitus yrityksestä ja/tai tietystä tuotteesta/palvelusta

- [ ] Ilmaisia tuotteita/palveluita testattaviksi
- [ ] Ilmaisia tuotteita omaksi
- [ ] Ilmaisia tuotteita arvottaviksi lukijoille
- [ ] Yrityksen mainoksia blogin ulkoasussa
- [ ] Yrityksen kokonaan tai osittain sponsoroima matka kotimaassa
- [ ] Yrityksen kokonaan tai osittain sponsoroima matka ulkomailla

Muu, mikä

9. Millaisia vaikutuksia yritysyhteistyöllä on ollut blogiisi?

- [ ] Lukijat ovat lisääntyneet
- [ ] Positiivinen kommentointi on lisääntynyt yhteistyön aikana
- [ ] Negatiivinen kommentointi on lisääntynyt yhteistyön aikana
- [ ] Yrityskontaktit ovat kasvaneet ensimmäisen yhteistyön myötä
- [ ] Ei mainittavaa vaikutusta

Muu, mikä

10. Kuinka usein osallistut yritysyhteistyöhön?

- ( ) En koskaan

- Joitakin kertoja vuodessa
- Noin kerran kuukaudessa
- Useita kertoja kuukaudessa
- Yhteistyö on käynnissä jatkuvasti

Muu, täsmennä

11. Olisitko kiinnostunut lisäämään yritys-yhteistyöhankkeita blogissasi?

- Kyllä
- En
- En osaa sanoa

12. Mitkä ominaisuudet tekevät/tekisivät yrityksestä mielenkiintoisen yhteistyö-kumppanin juuri sinulle ja blogillesi? Arvioi jokainen vaihtoehto asteikolla 1-5 (1 = hyvin tärkeä, 2 = tärkeä, 3 = melko tärkeä, 4 = ei kovinkaan tärkeä, 5 = ei lainkaan tärkeä).

- [ ] Kiinnostava aihepiiri tai ala
- [ ] Yhteensopivuus lukijoideni mielenkiinnonkohteiden kanssa
- [ ] Yrityksen yhteiskunnalliset arvot
- [ ] Yrityksen trendikkyys

☐ Yrityksen kansainvälisyys

☐ Yrityksen koko

☐ Mahdollisuus saada ilmaisia tuotteita/palkintoja omaksi tai arvottaviksi

☐ Mahdollisuus jatkuvaan/pitkäaikaiseen yhteistyöhön

Muu, mikä

13. Miten arvioisit tähänastisia kokemuksiasi yritysyhteistyöstä?

☐ Erittäin tyytyväinen

☐ Tyytyväinen

☐ Tyytymätön

☐ Erittäin tyytymätön

☐ Ei kokemusta

14. Miksi? Perustelethan vastauksesi edelliseen kysymykseen.

15. Mitkä tekijät koet tärkeiksi yritysyhteistyössä; mitä odotat yhteistyöyrityksiltä?

16. Minkäkokoisten yritysten kanssa blogi-yhteistyö olisi sinulle mieluisinta?

- Pienten ja keskisuurten yritysten (< 250 työntekijää, vuosiliikevaihto enintään 40 milj. €)
- Suurten yritysten (250 tai > 250 työntekijää, vuosiliikevaihto yli 40 milj. €)
- Koolla ei ole merkitystä

17. Miten yrityksen kansainvälisyys vaikuttaa kiinnostukseesi yritysyhteistyötä kohtaan?

- Lisää kiinnostusta yhteistyötä kohtaan
- Vähentää kiinnostusta yhteistyötä kohtaan
- Ei vaikutusta

18. Mitkä kokisit yritysyhteistyön mahdollisiksi esteiksi omalla kohdallasi?

19. Lisäkommentit:

20. Mikäli olet kiinnostunut kertomaan lisää ajatuksistasi blogi-yritys-yhteistyöstä ja haluaisit mahdollisesti osallistua lyhyeen haastatteluun aiheen tiimoilta, jätäthän alle yhteystietosi.

Kiitos osallistumisestasi! Elämyslahjankortin voittajalle ilmoitetaan henkilökohtaisesti.

Appendix 4

Cooperation with companies – blogger’s view

The growing blogosphere and developing commercialization of blogs are some of the most interesting phenomena in marketing today. The attached questionnaire is set to better understand the prerequisites of blog-company cooperation and to figure out how companies could act as interesting partners for bloggers. What are your experiences, opinions and wishes – what do you want from such cooperation?

With the help of the questionnaire results the cooperation possibilities between companies and bloggers can be developed, thus offering an even more colorful blog experience for both the bloggers and the readers.

An experience gift card (worth 25 €) will be raffled among all the participants! If you wish to take part in the lottery, please make sure to state the homepage of your blog in the first question field for contact.

Many thanks in advance for your contribution!

1. Homepage of your blog?

2. Home town?

3. Which themes form the central core of your blog? Please evaluate each option on a scale from 1 to 5 (1 = very central, 5 = as a theme almost never).

- ☐ Relationships & personal life
- ☐ Fashion & beauty
- ☐ Food & dining
- ☐ Traveling
- ☐ Design & decoration
- ☐ Working out & sports
- ☐ Art & literature
- ☐ Music, movies & television
- ☐ Society & current topics
- ☐ Photography
- ☐ Technology & IT
- ☐ Handicrafts
- ☐ Animals

Other, please specify ______

4. How long have you been writing your current blog?

- ○ Less than a year
- ○ 1-2 years

○ 2-3 yeas

○ More than 3 years

5. What is your general opinion on cooperation taking place in blogs?

○ Positive

○ Negative

○ Unsure

6. Why? Please explain your answer to the previous question.

7. Do you have previous experience on cooperation with companies?

○ Yes

○ No

8. If your answer was yes, please specify what kind the cooperation was.

☐ Writing a presentation text on a company and/or a certain product

☐ Free products/services to test

☐ Free products to keep

☐ Free products to raffle among readers

☐ Company ads on the blog site

☐ Fully or partially sponsored national trip

☐ Fully or partially sponsored international trip

Other, please specify

9. How has cooperation with companies affected your blog?

☐ Reader amounts have increased

☐ Reader amounts have decreased

☐ Positive commenting has increased during the cooperation

☐ Negative commenting has increased during the cooperation

☐ Company contacts have increased through the cooperation

Other, please specify

10. How often do you take part in cooperation with companies?

○ Never

○ A few times a year

- Approximately once a month
- Several times a month
- I’m involved in constant cooperation

Other, please specify

11. Would you be interested in increasing the cooperation projects in your blog?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

12. Which features make a company an interesting cooperation partner for you and your blog? Please evaluate each of the following options on a scale from one to eight (1 = very important feature, 8 = not at all important feature).

- Interesting topic or industry
- Compatibility with the interests of the readers
- Societal values of the company
- Trendiness of the company
- International nature of the company
- Company size

- [ ] Possibility to receive free products
- [ ] Possibility for continuing cooperation

13. How would you evaluate your experiences on cooperation with companies so far?

- [ ] Very satisfied
- [ ] Satisfied
- [ ] Unsatisfied
- [ ] Very unsatisfied
- [ ] No experience

14. Why? Please explain your answer to the previous question.

15. What features do you feel are important in company cooperation; what do you expect from the cooperation companies?

16. Which sized companies would you see as ideal cooperation partners?

○ Small and medium-sized companies (< 250 employees, annual turnover no more than 40 million €)

○ Large companies (250 or > 250 employees, annual turnover over 40 million €)

○ Size does not matter

17. How does the international nature of a company affect your interest towards cooperation?

○ Increases interest

○ Decreases interest

○ No affect

18. What would be the possible hindrances for you in cooperating with companies?

19. Additional comments:

20. If you’re interested in telling more about your thoughts on cooperation between blogs and companies in a short interview, please leave your contact details below.

Thank you for your contribution! The winner of the experience gift card will be contacted personally.

Appendix 5

Haastattelu yritysyhteistyöstä

Olet osallistunut Yritysyhteistyö – bloggaajan näkökulma –kyselyyn. Alta löytyy kyselyyn liittyviä, tarkentavia haastattelukysymyksiä. Olet vastannut joihinkin peruskysymyksiin jo kyselyssä, mutta koska anonyymeja vastauksia ei voida jäljittää tiettyyn vastaajaan, kerrothan kantasi uudestaan.

Haastattelukysymyksiä on yhteensä 13, ja niihin vastaaminen vie sinulta 10-20 minuuttia. Vastaathan kaikkiin kohtiin, väärää vastausta ei ole. Perustelethan vastauksesi – kerro rohkeasti oma mielipiteesi niin tarkasti ja monisanaisesti kuin pystyt.

Suuri kiitos jo etukäteen!

Ystävällisesti,
Noora Sirén, noora.siren@students.turkuamk.fi

Perustiedot

1. Paljonko blogillasi on uniikkeja lukijoita? Muistathan lisätä, onko määrä /vk vai /kk.
2. Mitä mieltä olet yritysyhteistyöstä - kyllä vai ei?
3. Paljonko olet tähän mennessä tehnyt yhteistyötä yritysten kanssa?

Yhteistyötarjoukset

4. Millainen on mielestäsi hyvä yhteistyötarjous? Mitä tietoja ja yksityiskohtia yrityksen tulisi mainita esim. sähköpostilla lähetetyssä yhteistyötarjouksessa?
5. Mikä on ollut mieluisin yritysyhteistyösi tähän mennessä? Yrityksen nimeä ei ole pakko mainita, mutta tarkennathan yrityksen alan sekä syyt, jotka tekivät yhteistyöstä sinulle erityisen mieluisan.

6. Edellistä kysymystä tarkentaen, millainen on hyvä yhteistyökampanja? Mitä ”pelisääntöjä”, ominaisuuksia, teemoja tms. liität hyvään yhteistyökampanjaan?
7. Kumpi seuraavista yhteistyötahdeista olisi sinulle mieluisempi? Miksi?
   a. Useita pieniä projekteja kohtalaisen tiheällä aikavälillä (esim. 1 tai useampi yhteistyö /1 kk)
   b. Yksi suurempi projekti pitemmällä aikavälillä (esim. 1 yhteistyö /3-4 kk)
8. Millainen on sopiva korvaus bloggaajalle yritysyhteistyöstä? Korvauksen voidaan yleisesti ottaen katsoa riippuvan esim. yhteistyön laajuudesta tai bloggaajan siihen käyttämästä ajasta. Miten itse määrittelet omalla kohdallasi sopivan korvauksen?
9. Onko yhteistyöstä saatavalla rahallisella korvauksella ja tuotteen muodossa saatavalla korvauksella mielestäsi eroa? Kumpi on sinulle mieluisampi korvaus, käteinen vai tuote/palvelu?

Yhteistyön muodot

10. Mitkä ovat itsellesi mieluisimmat yhteistyön muodot? Esim. yrityksestä kirjoittaminen, ilmaiset tuotekokeilut, arvonnat, alekoodit jne.
11. Yritysyhteistyö – bloggaajan näkökulma –kyselyn vastausten mukaan blogeihin kaivattaisiin monipuolisempia yhteistyömuotoja (erästä vastaajaa lainaten, arvonnat ovat ”kulunut” juttu). Tuleeko mieleesi ideoita, joiden avulla yhteistöistä voitaisiin tehdä mielenkiintoisempia sekä bloggaajalle itselleen että lukijoille?
12. Edellistä kysymystä jatkaen, olisitko itse kiinnostunut interaktiivisemmasta yhteistyöstä, johon lukijoita tai toisia bloggaajia otettaisiin enemmän mukaan? Tällaisia voisivat olla yritysten kampanjat, joissa bloggaaja pääsisi esim. tekemään tai testaamaan tuotetta /palvelua yhdessä lukijoidensa tai muiden bloggaajien kanssa.

Blogit ja mainonta

13. Lopuksi pohdintaa: miten näet blogien ja mainonnan /yritysten suhteen kehittyvän tulevaisuudessa? Menettävätkö blogit alkuperäistä hohtoaan mainosten lisääntyessä, vai ovatko mainokset tulleet blogeihin jäädäkseen ja lisääntyäkseen? Miten omasta mielestäsi voitaisiin saavuttaa tasapaino lukijoiden, bloggaajien ja yritysten intressien välillä?