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GUIDELINE FOR COMPANIES: CREATING DIGITAL MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

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Markkinointiviestintä on muutoksessa. Perinteisten markkinointiviestinnän keinojen rinnalle on nousut uusia digitaalisia välineitä, joita voidaan hyödyntää yrityksen markkinointiviestinnässä. Tämän opinnäytetyön tarkoituksena oli tehdä ohjeistus, kuinka luodaan digitaalinen markkinointiviestintäsuunnitelma, jonka avulla yritykset saavat paitsi tietoa näistä välineistä, että kuinka näitä uusia välineitä voidaan käyttää tehokkaasti.

Opinnäytetyö on tehty työpöytätutkimuksena, jossa kirjoittaja on tutkinut olemassa olevaa teoriaa, ja sen pohjalta luonut suunnitelmapohjan yrityksille käytettäväksi omissa suunnitelmissa. Opinnäytetyötä ei ole tehty tietylle toimeksiantajalle vaan tavoitteena on ollut muodostaa yleinen ohjeistus yrityksille toimialasta riippumatta, kuitenkin keskittyen B2C-yrityksiin.

Kirjoittanut on koonnut teoreettisen viitekehyksen, joka pohjautuu sekä kirjallisiin että digitaalisiin lähteisiin. Tutkimus nojaa vahvasti mm. Philip Kotlerin tuotantoon sekä Damian Ryanin ja Calvin Jonesin kirjaan Understanding Digital Marketing – Marketing strategies for engaging the digital generation.

Tutkimuksessa havaittiin, että strategisella suunnittelulla on merkittävä rooli viestinnän onnistumisessa. Yrityksien tulee pyrkiä luomaan strategia, joka nojaa vahvasti yritysten laajempaan visioon tavoitteista ja kohderyhmistä. Tutkimalla tarkoin kohderyhmän käyttäytymistä digitaalisissa välineissä, kuten sosiaalisessa mediassa, yritykset voivat saada tärkeää informaatiota, jonka pohjalta voivat joko kehittää olemassa olevia tuotteitaan tai luoda uusia. Tärkeäksi havaittiin myös sitouttamisen rooli viestinnässä. Digitaaliset kanavat mahdollistavat asiakkaisen sitouttamisen entistä tehokkaammin.

Avainsanat: Digitaalinen markkinointiviestintä, markkinointiviestintäsuunnitelma, www-sivut, sosiaalinen media, hakukoneoptimointi

ABSTRACT
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Marketing communications are changing. Beside traditional communications' tools have risen new digital tools which can be used in companies' communication. The purpose of the thesis was to create a guideline for companies about how to create a digital marketing communications. Guideline will give information for companies of new methods and how to use them effectively.

The thesis is done as a desktop research where author investigate already existing theory and uses it to set up a basis for guideline, which companies can use in their own planning. The thesis does not have any particular commissioner. The goal was to create guideline that can be used widely in all branches of business, but still concentrating on B2C-companies.

Theoretical framework consists of both printed and digital sources. Main sources of the study were Philip Kotler's production about marketing and Damian Ryan's and Calvin Jones' book Understanding Digital Marketing – Marketing strategies digital generation.

In the research was noticed that strategic planning has a major role in succeeding in marketing communications. Companies should pursue to create strategy, which is based on the wide vision of companies' goals and target groups. By investigating the behavior of target groups in digital channels, like social media, companies will achieve relevant information on how they can develop their products and services and if new products have to be created in order to satisfy customers' needs and wants. Also customer engagement was noticed to have a major role in communications. Digital channels enable more efficient customer engagement.

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Keywords: Digital marketing communications, marketing communications plan, www-pages, social media marketing, search engine optimization

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1 INTRODUCTION

After rise of the Internet, the world has not been the same. It has brought many new ways for people not only to interact with each other but also to take care of the daily routines, e.g. searching information and banking. For organizations, Internet offers multiple new possibilities to make profitable business by using it as a tool for marketing communications. Thus, consumers have become more sophisticated in a sense that they are more interested to find information about products and services and comparing different possibilities with a critical eye, companies has to change their way of thinking and strategies in order to fulfill consumers' expectations.

The purpose of this thesis is to create a guideline for B2C-companies on how to create a digital marketing communications plan. The idea for thesis arose over a year ago, when local entrepreneur contacted the author, and was interested to develop the internet marketing of her company, social media marketing especially. It was noticed that in order to develop companies' social media marketing, one have to have solid base for all parts of digital marketing, social media being only one part of it. Later, author decided to do guideline that will serve companies in general not only for one commissioner.

Based on the purpose of the thesis, the main research question was set to be:

- "How to form an efficient digital marketing plan?"

The thesis is a desktop research, where author search and analyze already existing information. (Management Study Guide. Date of retrieval 9.5.2013).The theoretical background consists of printed literature as well as web articles. The main references that have been used are the Marketing Management by Philip Kotler and Kevin Lane Keller, Contemporary Advertising & Integrated Marketing Communications by William F. Arens, Michael F. Weigold and Christian Arens, Digitaalinen markkinointiviestintä by Heikki Karjaluoto and Understanding Digital Marketing - Marketing strategies for engaging the digital generation by Damian Ryan and Calvin Jones. Many other references are used as well. They are mentioned in the reference list at the end of the thesis.

Chapter 2 is about theoretical framework of the study. Author starts by highlighting the importance of strategy in marketing. The meanings of segmentation, targeting and positioning are

explained. The definition and main functions of marketing communications are introduced as well as revealing the meaning of integrated marketing communications. Definition of digital marketing is opened to reader. Different features of digital marketing communication are introduced and explanations of how they can be measured. Chapter 3 is the practical part of the thesis. Author will conduct a guideline for companies based on the theoretical background. Author will explain step by step how to form a digital plan efficiently. Conclusions about the research are done in the chapter 4. Finally, in the chapter 5, author will discuss about the findings and the research process as a whole.

2 FROM MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS TO DIGITAL MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS

Marketing has many different definitions as it is so diversified. American Marketing Association defines it as follow:

> *"Marketing is the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society in large."*
>
> American Marketing Association 2007, date of retrieval 5.6.2013

Philip Kotler argues that marketing is satisfying customers' needs and wants more than others. (Cohen, 2011, date of retrieval 5.6.2013) He highlights the importance of customers' role in marketing. As the business world has changed more customer-orientated, Kotler's definition can be said to fulfill the requirements that are set for businesses.

According to Arens and Weigold marketing is *a process* by which companies aim to satisfy customers' needs profitably. (2011, 15) The process includes parts dealing with product development, pricing, distribution networks and using advertising and sales for promoting them to customers and prospects. The most important objective for companies in general is to gain profit. By putting effort on marketing, companies can achieve their goals more efficiently.

Karunakaran states: "Marketing in modern times, means learning from customers, listening to customers, and transforming the organization around customers." (Karunakaran. 2008, 2) Nowadays the customers have an important role in companies strategic planning. By listening customers' opinions, companies can modify their plans to meet customers' expectations more carefully. In order to form a successful marketing strategy, we have to have thorough understanding about customers' needs and wants (Hundekar, 2010, 6.)

As mentioned earlier, the Internet offers to new possibilities to both companies and consumers. Companies need to include digital marketing on their marketing strategies, thus consumers are more and more interacting online. Digital marketing or Digital Marketing Communications (DMC), has no specific definition (Karjaluoto, 2010, 13). It provides new tools and channels for companies, such as Internet, mobile media and many more which will introduced later on the

thesis. In this chapter will be explained the meaning and the role of strategy in a sense of digital marketing as well as the importance of integration of marketing communications and customer engagement.

2.1 Strategic Marketing

In order to create value and satisfy customers' needs and wants, companies have to think how to achieve profit. This model of thinking, can lead to forming the base for the common business strategy. Marketing strategy defines how the company is going to operate in the market. It is a mix of strategic and operative goals by which company tries to create value for the customers and other stakeholders. To benefit the most, the marketing strategy has to be based on a wide vision of strategic marketing. (Tikkanen & Vassinen, 2012, 23)

Strategies one key feature is to serve selected markets profitably. It requires thorough design and planning. As marketing strategy being specific mixture of different elements, such as product concept, pricing, distribution and communication, which marketers' have control, can they be referred to marketing mix model 4P's (Arens, et al., 2011, 19). Although, the model, developed by E. McCarthy in the 1960's, has not been very popular among B2B-marketers, it is still widely used in mass marketing of consumer products. (Tikkanen &Vassinen, 2010, 24)

For B2B-marketers and service industry, there has been developed variety of new models for perceiving marketing strategies. The most well-known models are the ones measuring relationship management and service quality. Nowadays in B2C, it is important also include the value of relationships in the strategy, not only concentrate on competitive weapons. (Tikkanen & Vassinen, 2010, 24)

The traditional model 4P's of marketing has got beside it a new model. Although, the traditional model is still useful tool for creating picture of marketing as a whole, the new model of 4C's fulfill the requirements of integration more thoroughly. In the digital marketing point of view, it is important to consider if the 4C's are more suitable than the traditional model. The following *FIGURE 1* explains the words behind the letter C's and compares them to the 4P's.

FIGURE 1. From 4P' to 4C's (McLean, 2012, date of retrieval 10.6.2013)

In model of 4C's the product has been changed as a *consumer*. This means that instead of concentrating only different features of a product, in integration more important is to analyze products more of a consumers' perspective. Meaning that understanding the needs and wants and how to create the value. (Vierula, 2009, 86-87)

Second P price, in traditional marketing mix stands for pricing the product in a sense that it is reasonable in the eyes of consumers but also is competitive with other sellers in the market. In the new model, companies have to understand that the purchase price is only one aspect to consider. Consumers, nowadays, are more interested how products are done and delivered, e.g. how environmental friendly products are. The price includes the aspect of value. Are certain values, e.g. ecology, included in the pricing? (Vierula, 2009, 86-87)

The third P is for place. When one used to think the different places where to sell, now more important is to consider is the buying situation convenient for the customers. The Internet enables consumers to make shopping whenever they feel it the most convenience. Companies will have to think which are the best tools and channels for selling. (Vierula, 2009, 86-87)

Where the traditional model demanded for advertising, the integration model concentrates not only to advertise but also to create communication between the consumers. Communication should be interactive with target groups and by involving them to act as a marketers, company will benefit more. (Vierula, 2009, 86-87)

The rise of digital development has lifted the role of customers even higher. Because of that, adding digital marketing as a part of communication strategies is highly recommended. There is all time growing number of people using internet and digital equipments in everyday life, so the understanding the strategic aspect of digital marketing is crucial. Companies can be either big or small, but the fact that digital marketplace is relating to companies itself and affecting to business and customers relationships have to be analyzed. (Ryan and Jones, 2009, 19)

Considering the content for marketing strategy, offering and business logic in question, rise above other matters. Although, marketing strategy consists of the company's management's vision of company's capacity to produce value in customer relationship and other network relationships, it is important also outline what is company's business logic. The basis for forming marketing strategy and business logic is not only the offering, but also the targets of the offering and how it is going to be delivered. In order to avoid mistakes, one have to consider how and to whom value is produced, how the company organizes it business to produce value and how the relationships between partners and customers are build and exploited. (Tikkanen, 2011, 25-26)

Igor Anshoff created a matrix that presents four different growth strategies: market penetration, market development, product development and diversifications. (Business Dictionary, 2013a, date of retrieval 10.6.2013) FIGURE 2 presents how the Internet supports the popular matrix.

FIGURE 2. Using the Internet to support different organizational growth strategies, Chaffey/Smart Insight, 2011, date of retrieval 10.6.2013)

2.1.1 Segmentation

Marketing strategies are based on STP which refers on *segmentation, targeting*, and *positioning* (Kotler & Keller 2009, 308). Kotler and et al. start defining segmentation by introducing mass marketing and comparing it to segment marketing. Where mass marketing is reaching towards lowest costs and higher margins by creating the largest potential market, there segment marketing concentrates on differentiating customers by their needs and wants in smaller segments in order to meet their expectations more thoroughly. By segmenting the customers, companies can decide on which market they will target. (2009, 334) It is impossible for companies to contact with all customers in large. By dividing them into groups of consumers or segments, companies can identify which market segments it can serve effectively. (Kotler & Keller, 2009. 247.)

There are two different schemes how to determine the segments. One concentrating on descriptive characteristics such as *geographic*, *demographic* and *psychographic* and the other investigating *behavioral considerations*, such as consumer responses to benefits, use occasions, or brands. The main factor is not only to decide on which segmentation scheme to use, but understand to adapt the marketing program to recognize the differences between customers. (Kotler, et. al. 2009, 341) In the following listing is presented the schemes of segmentation:

1. *Geographic segmentation*: divides consumers into groups by geographical status like nations, regions, states, neighborhoods.
2. *Demographic segmentation*: division of a market is based on variables such as age, gender, family size, occupation, education, nationality etc.
3. *Psychographic segmentation*: determines consumers in to groups by social class, lifestyle, or personality.
4. *Behavioral segmentation*: divides consumers in to groups based on their knowledge, attitudes, uses, or responses to a product.

(Kotler & Keller, 2009, 253 and Karunakaran, 2008. 42-43.)

Behavioral variables resonate among some marketers. According to Karunakaran, by defining behavioral variables is the best place to start segmentation process (2008. 43 and Kotler et al. 2009, 352). Due to the Internet, consumer behavior has been changed. It does not matter where one physically is situated, one can interact with service providers, such as online stores, via internet, e.g. through mobile advisory. More relevant for companies, is to understand the behavioral reasons behind the consumers' buying habits. Of course the nature of the business affects on how the segmentation should be done. In *TABLE 1*, Kotler and others introduce the seven variables that should be taken under consideration in behavioral segmentation.

TABLE 1 Variables in behavioral segmentation (Kotler et al. 2009, 352-353)

Occasion	Either temporal well-defines aspects of a consumer's life or in terms of the time of day, week, month etc.
Benefits	Expected benefits varies among consumers
User Status	Different strategies for different user types
Usage Rates	Light, medium and heavy users
Buyer-readiness stage	Product awareness, unawareness, interest, desire, intention
Loyalty status	Hard-core loyal, split-loyal, shifting loyal, switchers
Attitude	enthusiastic, positive, indifferent, negative, hostile

2.1.2 Targeting and Positioning

After market segmentation has been done, companies have to decide on which segments to target. Kotler argues that segmentation schemes are not necessarily useful for finding the target markets in every case. One method to evaluate the prospect market segment is to consider if the segment covers five key criteria:

1. *Measurable*: Can the size, purchasing power and characteristics be measured?
2. *Substantial*: Are the segments large enough to serve?
3. *Accessible*: Are the segments effectively reached and served?
4. *Differentiable*: Are the segments distinguishable and differently responsive to different marketing-mix elements?
5. *Actionable*: Can the effective programs be formulated for attracting and serving the segments? (Kotler, et. al. 2009, 357).

After targeting the markets, companies have to consider how they want position in the segments. Shimp clarifies in his book, that positioning is a short statement that represents the message companies want to construct in the mind of its' customers. It is important to differentiate from

competitors. Companies have to consider, which aspects are the ones that are superior to competitive brands. Companies have to form their positioning statement that clarifies how they want to be known among their customers and prospects. In order to form a good positioning statement, two requirements have to be considered: is the statement reflecting a brand's competitive advantage and does it motivate consumers to action? (2007, 123) Positioning calls for identification of similarities and differences among competing companies. (Kotler & Keller, 2009, 309) By using channels of digital marketing communications, companies can more easily target the wanted message to prospect customers. Therefore the positioning is more efficient.

2.2 Marketing Communication

There are many different ways to define marketing communications. It can be said to be same as *promotion*, one of the competitive weapons (4P's) in marketing, which has goal to inform the markets about the products. It also can be the tool for influencing the demand by either create new demand or have positive impact on it. (Karjaluoto, 2010, 11)

Kotler and others refers marketing communication to be the voice of the company. By this they mean that companies can form a dialogue with their customers and have a relationship with them, using the brand as the ways for doing it. (Kotler et al., 2009, 690) Marketing communications have many functions. It is a marketing tool, by which companies inform their customers about their brand and products they market. The information can be related on how the product is used or for who it is meant. By well-planned marketing communication companies enhance their company or brand image and gain brand loyalty and also have positive effect on sales. It can determine if the company is going to failure of success in their business (Shimp, 2007, 4).

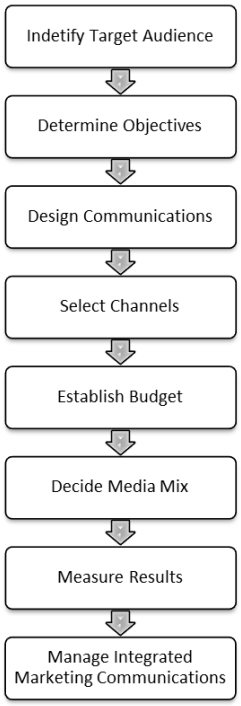

FIGURE 3. Steps in Developing Effective Communications (Kotler & Keller, 2009, 516)

Kotler and Keller introduce a model of eight steps for developing effective communications. First companies start by identifying the target audience. They are at the crucial element effecting on the decisions about what to say, how, when, where and to whom. (2009, 516)

Second step is to select the objectives for communications. Kotler and Keller refer on Rossiter's and Percy's theory on four possible objectives that can be determined. According to them objectives can be based on *category need* where products and services are established based on actual need to remove or satisfy difference between a current motivational state and desired emotional state. Second possible objective is *brand awareness,* where brand is recognized or recalled within the category. Third, objective can be based on brand attitude by evaluating the brand capability solve problems. The last objective is brand purchase intentions, meaning that how consumers are willing to buy a brand independently. (2009, 517)

Thirdly, in developing communications, companies have to design the communications by planning message strategy to determine *what to say*, creative strategy on *how to say*, and think message source for *who should say it*.

Message strategy helps company to decide the overall theme how they want to position in the market as well as differentiating themselves of competitors. In creative strategy companies

decide on the content for the communications and how they want to express themselves. The effectiveness of communication is highly depended on these aspects. Message source means that companies will find other spokesmen for the company not only company itself. This means e.g. having an agreement with celebrities will enhanced the companies' visibility among consumers as well as achieve higher attention and recall. (Kotler & Keller, 2009, 517-519)

Step four is about selecting the channels for the communications. Channels can be divided into personal and non-personal communication channels. By personal communication channels is meant face-to-face, person-to-audience, over the telephone or via e-mail communication between two or more people. From these, consumer-to-consumer interaction has risen along with the popularity of the Internet. Internet allows consumers give feedback instantly and easily straight to companies. Companies have to consider how to interact online, in order to satisfy the customers' expectations. Non-personal channels consist of media, sales promotions, events and experiences, and public relations which are directed to wider audience. (Kotler & Keller, 2009, 522-523) As mentioned earlier, mass communication may not be as effective as personal communication but it can stimulate the people for trying and using the products which lead then to personal communication or word-of-mouth (Kotler & Keller, 2009, 524).

Next step is to establish the budget. It is the one of the most difficult steps. Kotler and Keller introduce four common used methods: affordable, percentage-of-sales, competitive-parity and objective-to-task. *FIGURE 4* explains the main features of each method.

Affordable method	What company can afford? - ignores role of promotion as an investment - uncertainty on annual budget
Percentage-of-sales method	Specified % of sales - variety on promotion expenditure - Relationship between promotion cost, selling price and profit/unit. - sales as determiner of promotion - budget set by a availability - no logical basis for choosing the %
Competitive-parity method	Comparing to the competitors - The collective wisdom - Prevents promotion wars
Objective-and-task method	Defining objectives, determining the tasks, estimating costs - Assumptions about the relationship among money spent, exposure levels, trial rates and regular usage have to be thought.

FIGURE 4. Common budgeting methods (Kotler & Keller, 2009, 524-525)

Step six is deciding on the marketing communication mix. Advertising, sales promotion, public relations, events and experiences, direct marketing, word-of-mouth marketing and personal selling together are marketing communications mix. In traditional marketing advertising uses tools such as TV and newspapers. It is reaching the customers geographically. In sales promotion companies use tools like coupons, contest etc. in order to highlight its products and increase sales. By public relations is communication between company and public. Communication can relate e.g. on launching new products. It is said that companies are using PR too little although it can be very effective when integrated with other channels (Kotler and Keller, 2009, 512). Direct marketing is communication with consumers via mail, telephone, e-mail or Internet. Word-of-mouth refers on oral, written or interactive communication people to people. Personal selling is face to face interaction with prospective customers by making presentations, answering questions

etc. As the Internet is such huge influencer in today's marketing interactive marketing is also included in the marketing communication mix. It means online activities that are designed to engage the customers as well as raising awareness and increasing the sales (Kotler & Keller, 2009, 512).

Results of communications have to be measured in order to find out if the plan has been effective as wanted. Different tools for measuring are explained more detailed in the following sub-chapter about digital marketing communications.

As the budget has been set for the marketing communications companies should consider how to combine different medias to increase the power of marketing plan. To maximize the results of marketing communications online as well as offline, activities have to go hand in hand. Well-planned online activities will create opportunity to have more customers in stores. (Kotler & Keller, 2009, 532-533). This leads to managing integrated marketing communications.

2.3 Integrated Marketing Communications

Integrated marketing communications is said to be a trend in the field of marketing but in fact it is, as Arens and others put it: "*the business imperative for 21st century*. Understanding the facts such as, mass-marketing is not as efficient as it has been, consumers have become more critical and sophisticated and the real time actions do not meet with what companies are promising, companies and advertisers have little by little laid to integration of all messages with in company and advertiser agencies. (Arens, et al. 2011, 27) This means that marketing communications have to be planned so, that the output of marketing communications is the same in all the used channels. Integrated marketing communications, in fact, is a planning process, that is used to make sure that all customers or prospect are receiving relevant information about the company and products and the information is consistent over time. (Karunakaran, 2008, 193 and Karjaluoto, 2010, 10 and American Marketing Association: 2009, Date of retrieval 8.5.2013).

If the integration of marketing communications has been done successfully, companies will have more competence to provide marketing communication that is planned and executed more in the receivers' point of view and also, the brand image will be more clear and coherent. Thus, the digital marketing has become popular, the integration of marketing communications have

increased its importance. (Karjaluoto, 2010, 11) *TABLE 2* explains the differences between traditional and integrated marketing communications.

TABLE 2 Comparison of traditional and integrated marketing communications (Karjaluoto, 2010, 17)

Traditional marketing communications	**Integrated marketing communications**
New customers	Keeping the old customers
Mass-marketing	Selected communication
Monolog	Dialog
Sending the information	Asking the information
First move on sender	First move on receiver
Influence through repetition	Influence through meaning
Defensive	Offensive
Hard sale	Soft sale
Selling the brand	Confidence in the brand
Transaction-orientated	Relationship-orientated
Attitude change	Satisfaction
Modern, linear, massive	post-modern, cyclic, fragmented

Benefits from integration can be seen in many levels. The *message receivers* benefit by managing the associations, timing of the message and how the message was spoken to the receivers. In corporate level, benefits can be seen in broad-minded marketing visions, efficient usage of different medias and channels, minimizing the costs. Human resources are used more efficiently. As integrated marketing communications is more dialogs than monologs between companies and consumers, usage of channels of digital marketing communications can be very effective. Companies can build relationships and engage customers thus the information flow is so easy to maintain.

2.4 Digital Marketing Communications

For digital marketing communications (DMC) there is no one specific definition. Basically it means the usage of new digital forms of marketing communications, such as Internet, mobile media and other digital channels (Karjaluoto 2010, 13 and Kotler et al. 2009, 124). In some cases DMC is

mixed up with internet marketing. The difference between these is that in DMC other digital channels are used as well, not only the Internet. (Karjaluoto, 2010, 13).

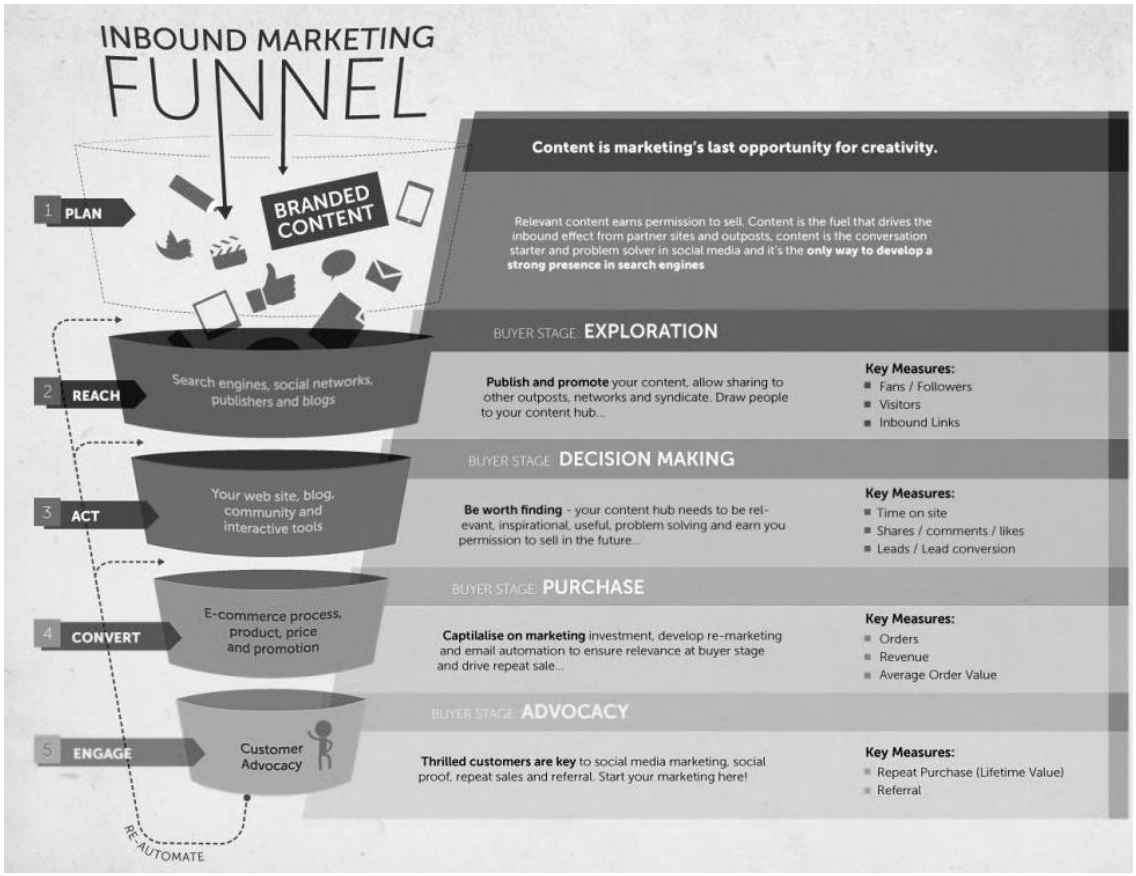

FIGURE 5 Inbound marketing funnel (SmartInsights.com, 2013. Date of retrieval 17.5.2013)

SmartInsights.com presents a model of inbound marketing funnel, which clarifies the interaction between digital marketing planning and customer buying process (Smartinsights.com, date of retrieval 17.5.2013). The process starts by planning the content for digital marketing communications. Well-planned content is the only thing that enables company to be visible in search engines, therefore consumers can find the company when they are exploring options. As the plans are made companies will publish the content in the social media sites as well as get visibility in search engines. Results can be measured by amount of visitors, fans and followers in social media and by inbound links. Customers find the information while searching and make decisions about whether or not to go to web pages in order to find more information or even to do the purchase. Companies have to make sure that web pages are worth of finding. Meaning the content in the pages will satisfy the needs of customers. If customer is satisfied it will lead to purchase and positive word-of-mouth and alternatively if the experience is negative customers will share it with other people which can lead to bad reputation and have negative effect on sales.

By analyzing how long customers stay on the sites as well as how many times content in social media has been shared, commented on or liked, companies can see if the campaign has been successful or not. If the customers are happy and will make a purchase companies have to develop a plan how to get customers to come back and re-purchase. Marketing is ongoing process which does not stop after first purchases. The goal is to engage the customers and create customer base that is loyal and keep getting back for more. By the amount of received orders and revenue companies will analyze the effectiveness of a marketing process. To get customers to advocate one's company is the key to for success. Positive word-of-mouth creates new traffic to sites as well as engages the old customers to repeat purchases. By counting the amount of repeat purchases companies will receive information how the engagement has carried off. (Smartinsights.com, 2013, date of retrieval 20.5.2013)

2.5 Channels of Digital Marketing Communications

As mentioned earlier, companies have many options to choose from the channels of digital marketing communications. In this sub-chapter different channels are introduced. Author will tell the functions of each channel as well as present tools for measuring the results. The following *FIGURE 6* explains the structure of digital marketing communications. The basis for all digital actions is the company's own website. Succeeding in digital communications the website of the company has to be in order. When the basis is solid, the other functions of digital marketing can be used as support elements.

FIGURE 6 Structure of Digital Marketing Communications Channels (IT Partner Marketing, 2013, date of retrieval 5.6.2013)

2.5.1 WWW-pages

Web-page is the one channel in digital marketing communications, on which company have full control. By this we mean that companies can modify and change everything in the pages whenever they feel it is necessary. (Ryan & Jones, 2009, 40-42) Pages should contain information about the company, its' products and services but also is important to remember the *conversion goals* either directly or indirectly. Meaning that, content of web-page have to support the actions that are done via other digital marketing channels. Efficient web-page is something that combines company's business goals and needs of the target market. Main step of building websites, according to Ryan and Jones, are:

1. *Planning*: deciding on goals, analyzing the competitors, defining the target market, think how the customers will find the page and what information is looked for, making a schedule
2. *Design*: the outlook of pages
3. *Development*: constructing the actual pages align with decided goals, design and content
4. *Testing*: before publishing make sure that everything works as they should
5. *Deployment*: Publishing the pages

(2009, 42)

Web-pages are worthwhile when they are planned so that there can be seen to whom they are meant. Companies should consider the target markets carefully in order to create pages that will satisfy their customers' expectation while visiting the pages. Other important factors are usability and accessibility. (Ryan & Jones, 2009, 42-43)

2.5.2 SEO – Search Engine Optimization

Web page is said to be the most important channel for a company, but without any visitors it will not have any meaning what so ever. In the best case scenario, the web page is the place for company to interact with customers and do business. In order to reach this, customers need to find the pages. (Ryan & Jones, 2009, 66)

Kotler and others defines search engine optimization as a process that improves the volume of traffic to web pages via search engines (2009, 131). It means that by using certain words in the content, company can achieve more visibility, when people are searching information via search engines, such as Google. Search engines are all the time developing, researching, testing and refining ways to make their service more efficient. This means that they want to deliver timely, relevant and high-quality search results to users. Companies can reach better visibility in these pages by making the pages easy to use, choosing effective keywords and analyzing how the competitors are doing their optimization. (Ryan & Jones, 2009, 69-73)

2.5.3 E-mail marketing

E-mail marketing can be e.g. discount promotion send to the customer list. Via e-mails, companies can inform their customers not only about special prices but also maintain customer engagement, strengthen the brand and add credibility for business (Ryan & Jones, 2009, 134). For doing e-mail marketing, there are multiple tools offered to help company to manage the customer list, design the crafts and track the campaigns. Foremost, one of the important features of e-mail marketing is the customer relationship management. Companies should keep some kind of record about how their customers act, what do they buy etc. With these kind of records companies can target their e-mail marketing so that it is received by those customers that might be the most interested. (Ryan & Jones, 2009, 135-137) Even though social media marketing is

nowadays popular channel to manage customer relationships, e-mail marketing still keep its place as a reliable channel, as it can be very effective when it is done properly. (Ryan & Jones, 2009, 148)

2.5.4 Social Media Marketing

Social media is, like Ryan and Jones say: "the umbrella term for web-based software and services that allows users to come together online and exchange, discuss, communicate and participate in any form of social interaction." (2009, 152) It can include many kinds of interaction done with sharing text, video, audio and images. There are multiple websites that offer online interaction in daily basis. To mention few, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Pinterest and MySpace are the top five network sites at the moment (eBizMBA.com. Date of retrieval: 10.5.2013).

Social media contains different forms, such as social bookmarking, social media submission sites, forums and discussion sites, media sharing sites, review and rating sites, social network sites, blogs, micro-blogging and wikis. These are explained shortly next by examples for each form as well as tells the benefits that companies can gain from each. (Ryan & Jones, 2009, 157-169)

- Social bookmarking
  Users are saving bookmarks to favorite web resources with a help of certain web-pages.
  Benefits: Increase exposure and traffic as well as perceived relevancy and authority.
  Sites: Ma.gnolia, StumleUpon

- Social media submission sites
  Users can submit and discuss articles about online marketing. Articles can be e.g. text, video or audio. They are submitted to pages where other users can either consider it good or bad. More votes articles get more visibility it gets in the site.
  Benefits: Reveals people's interests, what are the hot topics at the moment, increase traffic as well as exposure and online reputation.
  Sites: Digg, Reddit, Sphinn.

- Forums and discussion sites

  The oldest form of social media marketing. Site, where anyone can log in and participate on online discussion whatever topic their feel interesting.

  Benefits: to get closer to the customers, by contribution in discussion to raise profile in the eyes of customers, to find out customers opinions about company.

  Sites: Google Groups, Suomi24 (in Finland).

- Media sharing sites

  Multiple different sites, those are for sharing and uploading pictures, videos and audios. Users can then discuss and comment on the material posted on the sites. A possibility to make the content public or not.

  Benefits: Find out the likes and dislikes within target market, easy to share own digital media content.

  Sites: Flickr, Picasa Web Albums, Youtube.

- Social network sites

  Users create own sites by which they network with group of people. Users can share data like, pictures, videos, texts and etc. Popularity of the sites is based on that they offer to users' ability to connect with other people they already know.

  Benefits: many advertising options, improve online reputation and exposure, sharing information about company is easy.

  Sites: Facebook, MySpace.

- Blogs

  Place where anyone can be a publisher. People are writing on topics whatever suits their personal interest or is so called hot topic at the moment. Blogs are easy to establish. After quick login to service providers' web pages one can share own thoughts and ideas. Ryan and Jones recommend that companies should investigate the popular blogs about the industry they are working. By building a relationship with the blog writers one can have good opportunity to spread a word about the company via those blogs.

  Benefits: opportunity to reach high level exposure online, engagement of consumers.

  Sites: Blogger, Wordpress

- Podcasts

  Digital media files such as video and audio clips which are shared online are called podcasts. This format is widely used in radio and TV industries. Companies add clips on their web pages where people can comment on them after watching.

  Benefits: By following the podcasters of industry company is working one might learn on which topics are relevant for one's business. By learning to do podcasting, companies will achieve good channel to reach their customers.

  Sites: Podcast.com

- Micro-blogging

  is he most recent channel in social media marketing. Users send messages that are not longer than 140-160 characters.

  Benefits: Helps to understand the influences on ones' business, easy to communicate with customers, achieve more visibility, increase traffic on web-pages.

  Sites: Twitter, Jaiku

2.6 Measuring the DMC

As the one aspect of this thesis is to create an efficient plan, introducing the different methods for measuring the results is important. Companies need to have information on how their digital marketing communications plan is functioning and is the company able to reach their goals. One aspect to measure those is to calculate *Return on Investment* (ROI). Tikkanen and Vassinen state on their book that by calculating ROI, marketing can be lifted at the same level with other investment. (2010, 78) This statement emphasizes the fact that companies should consider marketing and marketing communications as important part of investments as any others. Unfortunately the appreciation and understanding the importance of marketing communications is lacking in many companies still, therefore planning and putting effort on it is deficient (Karjaluoto, 2010, 10).

Tikkanen and Vassinen introduce a term ROMI, which refers on *Return on Marketing Investment*. They argue that it is popular term at the moment as the goal for marketers is to point out that marketing does not create only expenses to the company but also can be a wise and well planned investment that will have positive effect on sales in long run. (2010, 78) To calculate the

return on investment it is crucial that different departments of the company are working together and the internal communication is in order, as the process of calculation demands effort on many departments, not only the marketing department. (Tikkanen & Vassinen, 2010, 78) By calculating return on marketing investments companies will benefit on positioning the budget more coherently and it eases the comparison of different investment choices. (Tikkanen & Vassinen, 2010, 79)

Companies need to have clear vision of the goals of the company in order to define the return on investment because the calculations have to be based on the comprehensive goals. Return on investment calculation is basically dividing the net profit by the investment. It means that for calculation have to be noticed that the costs of investments have to be excluded of the profit achieved. Tikkanen and Vassinen refer to Powel's argument. Since the marketing investments have higher risk than ordinary investments also the return requirements have to be set higher than normal. (2010, 79-80)

Companies can also measure the efficiency on their online activities by different web tools such as Google Analytics. Also different social media sites have their own measuring tools. Google Analytics offers companies multiple tools for analyzing the results of digital marketing activities. Companies will get information on how many visitors the web pages have and how the visitors are using the pages. Google analytics enables companies to create pages that have clear and functioning content by providing a tool that reports which parts of pages are performing well and which are not. For measuring the success on social media programs as well as mobile media and other online advertising campaigns, companies can use Google Analytics. (Google.com, date of retrieval 1.6.2013)

2.7 Customer engagement

Nowadays many business owners and companies are putting effort on finding new customers. The new technology enables businesses to enhance their visibility in their online actions, therefore reach new people who hopefully end up being new customers. In the making business and profit point of view, increasing the customer base is crucial, but in the other hand companies should also consider how to maintain the relationships with the customers. The correct term for this is *customer engagement*. Paul Greenberg, author and specialist in the field of customer

relationship management (CRM), defines customer engagement being: “ongoing involvement of customers with the company for their own specific reasons.” (Greenberg, 2011, date of retrieval 4.6.2013) This means that companies do not have to know all the customers but they have to have understanding on which aspects the customers feel important in order to have lasting relationship with them. The process for customer engagement is ongoing dialogue between company and customers, yet it is driven by customers. This fact has to be remembered. Customers can independently decide when and how to act. This leads to modification of customer service. Companies have to extend their conception on customer service. It has to be integrated on company’s strategy, not only being a separated part of a business. (Lea, 2012, date of retrieval: 4.6.2013).

FIGURE 7 From satisfaction to engagement.(Peoplemetrics, 2010, date of retrieval 10.6.2013)

Article on Peoplemetrics website explains how pursuing the customer satisfaction has changed to engaging the customers. According to them, customer satisfaction has been a popular measurement tool for companies but due to its’ weak effect on loyalty, companies are nowadays more tracking the customer engagement. (2010, date of retrieval 10.6.2013)

Digital marketing tools, social media in particular, enables companies to build long and lasting relationships with customers as it provides easy access for communication. Company and business owners are easier to reach and people feel that they can have more personal service than just by leaving feedback by using readymade feedback template and sending it to some message box. It is also crucial to understand that customers are not only interacting with the

company about the products and services but they are also sharing experiences and ideas with each other. Companies should not only act as listener but also take part on conversations happening online. (Lea, 2012, date of retrieval 4.6.2013)

3 SETTING UP A DIGITAL MARKETING PLAN

There are many firms providing guidelines for companies to help in setting up a digital marketing plan. Framework for establishing marketing plan SOSTAC® was developed by PR Smith, marketing author. It is widely used in companies all around the world. (Prsmith.org. 2009. accessed: 20.5.2013). SOSTAC® stands for situation analysis, setting the objectives, planning the strategy, deciding the tactics, planning the actions on how to implement the tactics in practice and controlling the results of whole process. (SmartInsights.com. 2012, Accessed: 20.5.2013). Guideline presented in this thesis is based on SOSTAC® model.

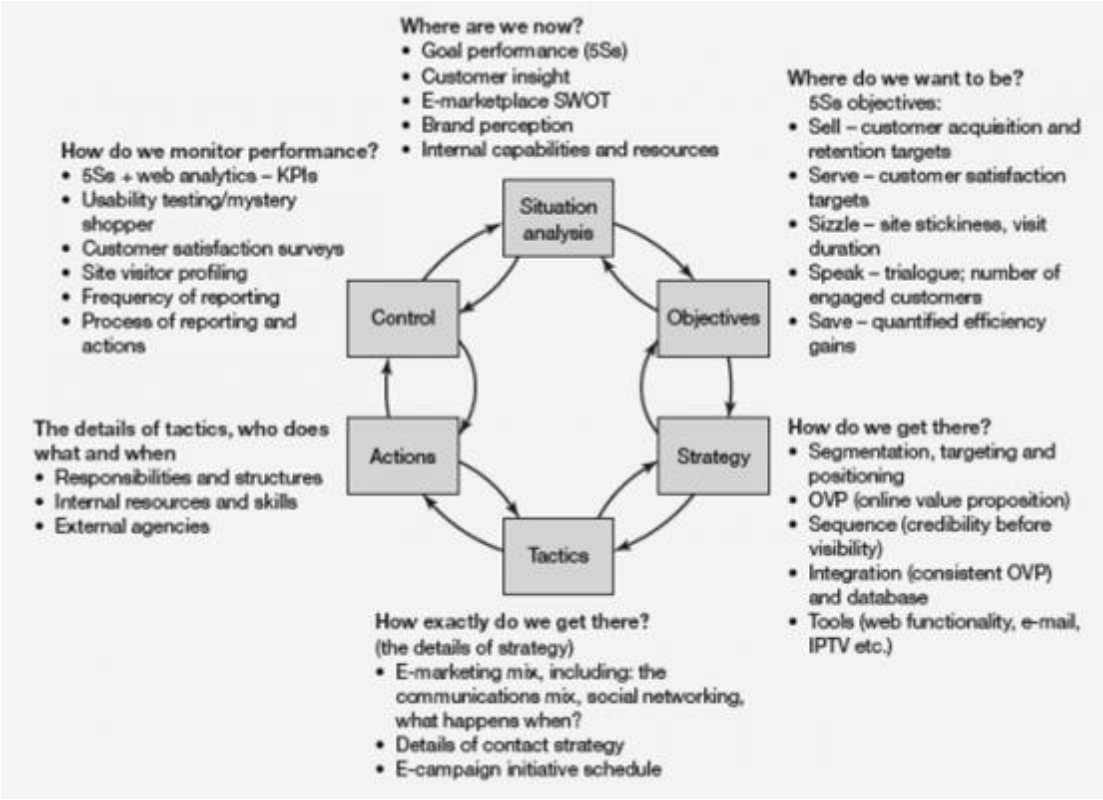

FIGURE 8 SOSTAC-MODEL, (Smart Insights, 2012, date of retrieval 10.5.2013)

3.1 Situational analysis

Situational analysis' main idea is to get a clear picture of the state of the business both internally and externally. By situational analysis companies determine where they are at the moment. It should include analysis of products and services, market, environment, competitors, and customer base as well as opportunities. (About.com, 2013, date of retrieval 13.6.2013)

One way is to do SWOT-analysis of the marketplace. By analyzing internal aspects as the strengths and weaknesses of the marketplace as well as the external issues like opportunities and threats, the picture of overall situation may become clearer. David Chaffey argues on SmartInsight.com that for creating digital marketing plan, preparing a SWOT-analysis is crucial. (2012, date of retrieval 27.5.2013). *FIGURE 9* shows the structure of SWOT-analysis.

The organisation	**Stengths – S** 1. Existing brand 2. Existing customer base 3. Existing distribution	**Weaknesses – W** 1. Brand perception 2. Intermediary use 3. Technology/skills 4. X-channel support
Opportunities – O 1. Cross-selling 2. New markets 3. New services 4. Alliances/Co-branding	**SO strategies** Leverage strengths to maximise opportunities **= Attacking strategy**	**WO strategies** Counter weaknesses through exploiting opportunities **= Build strengths for attacking strategy**
Threats – T 1. Customer choice 2. New entrants 3. New competitive products 4. Channel conflicts	**ST strategies** Leverage strengths to minimise threats **= Defensive strategy**	**WT strategies** Counter weaknesses and threats **= Build strengths for defensive strategy**

FIGURE 9 SWOT-analysis. (SmartInsights.com, 2012, date of retrieval 27.5.2013)

3.2 Objectives

Companies have to determine their objectives for the digital marketing plan. By setting objectives companies answer to question *where do we want to be*. Business dictionary defines the communication objectives to be the goals of promotional actions. It means that companies will set goals for how to use digital communications in order to create knowledge, project the image of the company, modify attitudes towards the company, create demand for new products and increase sales (Business Dictionary, 2013, date of retrieval 27.5.2013).

While Kotler and Keller speak about Rossiter's and Percy's theory of four possible objectives which are mentioned earlier in chapter 2, SmartInsights.com introduces the model of 5S's of objectives; *sell, serve, sizzle, speak*, and *save*. Rossiter and Percy approach the objectives from brand perspective and the 5S's is setting the objectives by investigating customers. Sell means determining the already existing customer base and how to maintain those relationships by using digital marketing. On the other hand it is also determining how to use digital marketing to get new

customers. In order to serve companies have to consider which customers' expectations they can and will satisfy. Sizzle refers to adding value. Companies need to determine some specific factors that will get the attention of customers. It is not enough to just get the attention but companies have to set up goals for how to engage the customers (Smartinsight.com, 2013, date of retrieval 27.5.2013). If the primary goal is engagement of customers, companies should consider on how the content of different digital channels such as web pages and social media sites support the goal.

3.3 Strategy

As the web page is the one and only channel that company can fully control is good way to set up the strategy in a way that it concentrates on creating web page that is functional and will satisfy the expectations of the customers. As mentioned in chapter two, strategy is based on segmentation of customers, targeting the message and positioning of the company among competitors as well as in the eyes of customers. All these factors have to be included on planning the content for web page. Strategy has to also be based on communication objectives. (Tikkanen & Vassinen, 2012, 23) As engaging being one of the objectives, web page have to include components that help customers to answer the questions which may arise while visiting the pages such as what I am doing here and am I getting here that I was looking for. If customers feel satisfied on what they get, they will most probably come back to the pages. Strategy has to be set as clear as possible so that all workers in company will have clear picture on how to act in a way that the objectives and goals are reached.

3.4 Tactics

In tactical planning, company design the implementation of strategy more detailed. Which channels will be used, how it will be executed and when this all is going to happen? (Prospect consulting, 2013, date of retrieval 10.6.2013) As the strategy is defined next step is decide on which channels of digital marketing mix will be used beside web pages. As mentioned earlier there are multiple channels which can be used. In general the selected channels have to be appropriate for company in question. The tools have to be selected in a way that those will benefit the company the most. Author selected social media marketing and search engine marketing

beside the web pages as those being the ones that can be done and measured relatively easily. Also those three support the web pages and can drive and persuade traffic on it.

Web-pages

For creating web pages, companies should consider if external help is needed. If there is lack of acknowledge and practical skills the usage of specific agencies is highly recommended. Together with specialists the content as well as outlook of the pages can be set so that it will meet the expectations of customers and in the other hand support the objectives and goals of a company. Good web pages can be noticed for its easy usage and clear visual image. All the information is easy to find with couple clicks on the pages. If company is using social media, those should be linked on the web pages so that customers can easily access those as well. (Ryan & Jones, 2011, 40-45)

Social media marketing

As social media marketing includes so many different channels, company should consider how the products or services can be presented to target audience in a sense it will differ from competitors and reach the customers as effectively as possible. For social media marketing, creating own site e.g. in Facebook is recommended. By updating in daily or weekly basis company can inform its customers quite easily on what is happening. Updates can relate for example on announcements on special offers of products or changes in opening times. Also advertising campaigns can be arranged via social media sites. The communication with customers is easy as there is possibility for commenting on updates as well as leaving feedback for the company. Also establishing a blog or sharing advertising videos on media sharing sites can be very useful. As engaging the customers is one of the core issues companies should also take part on conversations online. Customers are sharing information with each other so participating in these conversations company can represent themselves more human way. Therefore it is recommended to follow different forums as well as discussion in social media sites. The information that companies will receive from customers can be worthwhile as it can be taken under consideration while developing products and services. (Ryan & Jones, 2011, 151-157)

Search Engine Optimization

The content of web pages cannot be highlighted enough. If customers do not find their way on web pages there is no meaning on having web pages. To make sure that customers find the pages search engine optimization can be used. Search engine optimization concentrates on

finding the right keywords used in content. By using analyzing tools, such as Google Analytics, one can get information on which words are used when customers are finding information by search engines, and which words are finally the ones that lead the customers to web pages. By analyzing the words used, company will get visibility in search engines and therefore increase visitor rates on own pages. (Karjaluoto, 2010, 133-134)

3.5 Actions

Company will conduct a plan how to implement the strategy in practice. Management team will consider the internal resources and skills as well as if there is a need for external agencies. By setting up clear guidelines for workers the process will go smoothly. It is important that people are familiar with the decided strategy and can follow it in daily routines. When everything is clear for everyone, communications will be done effectively. (Smart Insights, 2012, date of retrieval 10.6.2013)

3.6 Control

For controlling the results of used digital channels, companies can select the best method that suits the purpose. To analyze actions in web pages the usage of different analytics tools are suggested, such as Google Analytics. Finding out the how customers use the pages as well as how they find the pages, companies will receive information that can be used to modify the usability and content of pages. If company have online store, also so called mystery shopping can be done in order to find out if the different functions of store are working correctly. To find out customers satisfaction level on provided products and services, surveys may be worthwhile to conduct. By analyzing the customers companies will get important information. It is suggested that companies categorize different types of customers in order to fulfill the different expectations. It helps targeting the message and therefore increases the benefit of communications. The situation should be analyzed constantly in order to keep the development of communications effective. (Smart Insights, 2012, date of retrieval 10.6.2013)

4 CONCLUSION

As the world has changed more digital due the development of technology, marketing communications has been changed as well. More digitalized technology enables businesses to develop their communications to become more customers friendly as well as easier. Although the popularity of using digital marketing communications tools such as web-pages, social media marketing and search engine optimization has increased steadily by the years, there still are many businesses that are lacking the knowledge and skills on how to benefit with it.

Though, the process of digital marketing communications plan goes along with traditional marketing communications planning process, the understanding functionality of new tools is crucial. By determining the company's strategy, objectives and target audience, company can more easily choose the right channels for communications. As there is so many different channels to choose the message planning have to be done coherently in order to reach the potential customers. The major change in the marketing communications is the change in the way of thinking. Communications has become more integrated. It means that the roles of customers and companies have changed. Companies are now more searching the information rather than sending it. The communication between customers and businesses has become more of a dialog rather than a monolog. Customers' role in marketing communications has become more important as they have become more sophisticated and critical in sense of finding information and comparing products and prices. Customers have to be included as part of marketing team. Internet and social media in particular, enables people to communicate with each other about the products and brands so the value of word of mouth has increased. To follow and investigate the hot topics of the field of business that one is operating, make possible for companies to develop and create products in order to satisfy the needs and wants of the customers.

In order to make profitable business, companies need customers. Nowadays marketers speak about customer engagement. Although finding new customers is highly important, maintaining the relationships with old customers has increased its value. Companies should get familiar with their customers and their expectations. As Paul Greenberg said, the customer engagement is an ongoing process where customers can decide independently and for own reasons if they are

going to act. (Greenberg, 2011, date of retrieval 4.6.2013). Companies have to prepare themselves to meet the expectations.

What comes to the creating the actual digital communications plan, the SOSTAC-model noticed to be very useful. The model stands for situational analysis, setting the objectives, deciding the strategy, setting up the tactics, making the action plan and controlling the results. The model has been used widely in the marketing field. It covers all the relevant issues which have to be included in the planning process.

5 DISCUSSIONS

Rapidly changing world and technology creates challenges for companies trying to keep themselves updated of new trends and channels in communication. For this reason the subject of the thesis was felt to be interesting. Although, the information is out there due to Internet many companies are not capable utilize it. It can originate either from lack of acknowledge or reluctance to reform the old methods. Author felt that by investigating and delving into world of digital marketing communications one can learn a lot, not only about digital aspects but understanding the different characters of marketing and how it has changed. It is important to companies to have willingness for change in order to develop themselves and keep in the business. It is suggested that if the company do not have enough internal resources for developing digital marketing communications, hiring an external agency is recommended. Although, companies can survive without using digital marketing tools, the benefits of it should be considered thoroughly. Marketing costs of traditional channels can quickly rise above company's budget so considering the cost level in using digital channels could be worthwhile. Money affects on everything and the situation on economy at the moment forces companies to make cuts also in marketing costs. Therefore using digital marketing channels companies can still maintain the level of marketing and advertising but with low costs. While talking about the benefits of digital marketing communications, one thing arise above others. Due the digitalization the gap between companies and ordinary people has reduced. Companies have more humane touch, which make them easier to approach. People are more contacting companies and therefore companies are receiving valuable information.

The whole process of making the thesis was interesting learning process. Although, conducting the thesis was difficult for time to time, the effort put in the work has been worth it. During the process author learnt a lot about the subject itself but also many new things about herself as learner. It was noticed that time management has to be developed. For finding the information for the theoretical framework took more time that was first planned for it. As making the plan for digital marketing communications the role of strategy and setting the objectives is crucial. It also applies in thesis writing process. By clearly stating the goals and plans the framework for the study the practical execution is easier.

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