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**SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS PLAN FOR A B2B COMPANY**

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Bachelor's thesis  
Spring 2014  
Degree in International Business  
Oulu University of Applied Sciences

## ABSTRACT

Oulu University of Applied Sciences  
Degree programme in International Business

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Title of Bachelor's thesis: Social Media Marketing Communications Plan for a B2B Company

Supervisor: Miikka Blomster

Term and year of completion: Spring 2014

Number of pages: 61 + 2 appendices

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The commissioner of this thesis, ebrand Suomi Oy, is a digital media agency possessing significant ability and knowledge of social media but they have trouble communicating this value for the customers even though they have a good presence in social media. The objective of this thesis is to develop a proper social media marketing communications plan for ebrand Suomi Oy, which could eventually be turned into a product package that the commissioner could offer to customers. Even though social media is becoming more important in people's daily lives, the main emphasis has been on the consumer side, which is why it is very relevant and timely to consider social media marketing communications from a B2B perspective.

The theoretical section consists of the basic concepts of marketing before focusing on how to deliver value to customers via relationship marketing and integrated marketing communications, after which, social media marketing is discussed. Supported by this theory, the actions required of ebrand Suomi Oy to improve their marketing communications on each of the chosen social media channels will be presented. The research methods are qualitative and desktop research was applied when the theoretical background was conducted while using highly topical references.

The final result of this thesis is a social media marketing communications plan. It will provide the means to become a thought leader in the industry while generating leads and building stronger relationships with current and future customers. The thesis also examines the somewhat unfamiliar aspect of social media in B2B use and provides insight on why social media is just as efficient in B2B use, as it is in the consumer industry.

The plan might prove slightly difficult for ebrand to follow, as they might not possess the required resources to fully implement it. A recommendation considering this problem has been made to hire internships to provide content and monitor the efficiency of the plan. To aid in the implementation of the plan, a year clock of activities was composed which should prove useful when implementing the plan. It should be noted that with slight alterations, this marketing communications plan can be utilised for both B2C and B2B companies.

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Keywords: marketing, b2b marketing, marketing communications, social media, social media marketing, integrated marketing communications

## TIIVISTELMÄ

Oulun seudun ammattikorkeakoulu  
Degree Programme in International Business

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Tekijät: Tero Puumala & Paavo Heliste

Opinnäytetyön nimi: Social Media Marketing Communications Plan for a B2B Company

Työn ohjaaja: Miikka Blomster

Työnvalmistumislukukausi ja -vuosi: Kevät 2014

Sivumäärä: 61 + 2 liitesivua

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Opinnäytetyön toimeksiantaja ebrand Suomi Oy on digitaalisen median toimisto, jolla on huomattavasti tietotaitoa sosiaalisesta mediasta. Toimistolla on kuitenkin vaikeuksia osaamisen tuoman arvon viestimisessä asiakkaille, vaikka toimistolla onkin sosiaalisessa mediassa hyvin näkyvyyttä. Opinnäytetyön tarkoituksena on kehittää toimiva sosiaalisen median markkinointiviestintäsuunnitelma ebrand Suomi Oy:lle. Suunnitelma voidaan muuntaa myös asiakkaille tarjottavaksi tuotepakkaukseksi. Vaikka sosiaalisen median tärkeys lisääntyy ihmisten päivittäisessä elämässä, on se kuitenkin keskittynyt pääosin kuluttajapuolelle. Tämän vuoksi on erittäin oleellista ja ajankohtaista harkita sosiaalisen median markkinointiviestintää yritysmarkkinoinnin näkökulmasta.

Opinnäytetyön teoreettinen kehys koostuu perusmarkkinoinnista, keskittyen tuottamaan asiakkaille arvoa suhdemarkkinoinnin ja integroidun markkinointiviestinnän avulla. Tämän jälkeen avataan markkinointi sosiaalisen median kontekstissa ja esitellään ebrand Suomi Oy:lta vaadittavat toimenpiteet markkinointiviestinnän parantamiseen valituilla sosiaalisen median kanavilla, teoreettisen pohjan tukemana. Tutkimusmenetelmä on kvalitatiivinen ja teoreettinen kehys on rakennettu kirjoituspöytätyöskentelyllä, samalla hyödyntäen mahdollisimman ajankohtaisia lähteitä.

Opinnäytetyön lopputuloksena syntyy sosiaalisen median markkinointiviestintäsuunnitelma. Suunnitelma tarjoaa kaiken tarvittavan toimialalla ajatusjohtajaksi tulemiseksi. Samalla se luo mahdollisia asiakassuhteita ja auttaa rakentamaan vahvempia suhteita sekä nykyisten että tulevien asiakkaiden kanssa. Opinnäytetyö tarkastelee myös joksikin vierasta yritysmarkkinoinnin käyttöä sosiaalisessa mediassa ja kertoo miksi sosiaalisen median käyttö yritysmarkkinoinnissa on yhtä tehokasta kuin kuluttajapuolella.

Suunnitelman toteutus saattaa tuottaa hieman vaikeuksia ebrand Suomi Oy:lle, sillä toimeksiantajalla ei välttämättä ole sen kokonaan toteuttamiseen vaadittavia resursseja. Suositus tätä ongelmaa koskien, onkin palkata työharjoittelijoita tekemään sisältöä ja tarkkailemaan suunnitelman tehokkuutta. Suunnitelman toimeenpanemisen kannalta laadittiin hyödyllinen vuosikello, jossa esitetään vaaditut toimenpiteet. On myös tärkeä huomioida, että vähäisillä muutoksilla tätä markkinointiviestintäsuunnitelmaa voidaan hyödyntää sekä kuluttaja-, - että yritysälähtöisessä viestinnässä.

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Asiasanat: markkinointi, yritysmarkkinointi, markkinointiviestintä, sosiaalinen media, markkinointi sosiaalisessa mediassa, integroitu markkinointiviestintä

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

Social media has become a staple for marketing communications for companies focusing on consumer sales. The evolution of social media use among companies in business to business industries has not developed at the same rate. As this type of social media usage is still relatively new, the potential for gaining competitive advantage is high. The aim of this thesis is to develop a social media communications plan for the commissioner, ebrand Suomi Oy, a digital marketing company. The purpose of the plan is to further develop the commissioner's B2B marketing communications and provide insight into developing a possible product package to sell onwards to their existing and future customers.

Social media has become a significant player in most people's lives. Consequently, advertising has undergone a significant change in focus. Mostly this is visible in the need for companies to work interactively in their marketing campaigns. Instead of just submitting an advertisement for television or radio and waiting for results, social media campaigns require constant and often immediate responses to customer feedback. This has forced companies to designate more resources in this type of interactivity not only in funding, but human resources as well. These changes are most apparent in companies focusing on business to consumer sales but as this trend involves most of the people employed and unemployed everywhere, it becomes apparent that social media strategies are necessary in B2B companies as well.

The thesis consists of the following main parts: Theoretical framework, research work, and results. The theoretical framework consists of defining the key concepts of marketing, marketing communications, integrated communications strategy, and social media and its main channels. Because social media is mainly about relationships, the main theoretical concept behind this thesis will be about relationship marketing. After the theory, a marketing communications plan will be devised based on theory and the best practices found in the research followed by conclusions and discussion about the results.

## 1.1 Research Question

The aim of this thesis is to concentrate on B2B marketing communications over social media. To accomplish this, key concepts like Integrated Marketing Communications will be defined. The main research question of this thesis is: What kind of a marketing communications plan should ebrand Suomi Oy implement in their strategy to improve their social media marketing. Answering this question will help formulate a marketing communications plan for the commissioner to facilitate in their own B2B marketing communications and perhaps to develop products and services to offer for the commissioner's B2B clients.

The main research question that will be answered in this thesis is:

- What kind of a marketing communications plan should ebrand Suomi Oy implement in their strategy to improve their social media marketing?

Followed by supporting sub questions:

- Which tools should be used to improve ebrand Suomi Oy's marketing communications and possibly help them develop new services/products to sell to B2B companies?
- Can the results of this thesis be valid in other companies' marketing communications plans?

## 1.2 Methodology

Due to the nature of the topic, the research methodology chosen was qualitative research. The type of information needed to form a comprehensive understanding occurs in circumstances that are natural and case specific. Understanding and analysing the concepts and the circumstances of their application to real life situations requires the personal comprehension and observations of the researcher. The targets of the research are also specifically chosen for the purpose of the topic, as the random sampling method favoured in quantitative research would be impossible to apply to the topic. Furthermore, the purpose is to combine a theoretical base to successful practices, rendering a random sample survey completely useless. (Hirsjärvi, Remes, & Sajavaara 2009, 164.)



The data collection method chosen was desktop research. This included marketing literature, contemporary websites and blogs. Personal experiences as past and present employees of ebrand, along with conversations with other employees were used in the analysis of ebrand and their practices.

### **1.3 Commissioner**

The commissioner of this thesis, ebrand Suomi Oy is a digital marketing agency specialising in social media advertising as well as an increasing amount of consulting and educating. In discussion with Social Media Strategist Jukka Weissenfelt and CEO Juha Huovinen, the possibility of additional revenues and projects concerning B2B companies was discussed. The necessary theoretical research combined with finding the best practices available to B2B companies was seen as a mutual interest in terms of both commissioner and the necessities of academic writing. However, a decision was made to first straighten their marketing communications and then see if it could be used with future customers as a base for a new service.

ebrand Suomi Oy was established in 2011 and has been an active and growing company with a variety of clients in the B2C field, including SM-Liiga, Budget Sport, multiple Intersports and several restaurants in the Northern Ostrobothnia region. ebrand has also worked with several municipalities and organisations in Northern Finland in successful consulting and educational seminars.

ebrand's focus is on social media and the company's main products include Facebook applications, most common one being a content application to increase visibility for clients, an advent calendar for Christmas season, and a team roster for sports teams but they are able to develop whatever the client desires to have on their Facebook page. In addition, ebrand does targeted Facebook advertising for companies that are wishing to gain more visibility—Facebook advertising is usually included in applications so users know how to find clients' competitions.

Currently ebrand Suomi Oy is present on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, SlideShare, Pinterest, Instagram, Google+ and Foursquare—basically all over the place with disregard for some of the platforms. Main usage of social media derives from promoting infrequent blog posts, clients'

ongoing competitions and other work done for them. Also, in the summer of 2013 ebrand published and shared on multiple social media platforms a research report on how young people in Finland use social media, which was commissioned by the municipality of Oulu and gained recognition in the Finnish media.

#### **1.4 Thesis Process**

The commissioner of this thesis is already active in social media and has a colourful history in different marketing ventures. Due to these circumstances, the focus of this thesis is in marketing communications, specifically those between B2B companies in social and digital media. The process of developing a successful marketing communications plan requires a theory base of marketing and marketing communications, during which key concepts such as the value delivery process, relationship marketing, customer relationship management, and integrated marketing communications are discussed. The main channels of communications in digital and social media are also discussed, along with the theory and application of marketing communications planning. The thesis culminates in a set of plans explaining how and why the communications of the commissioner are reorganised and implemented.

## 2 MARKETING

Marketing can be found everywhere. Whether it is formally or informally, organisations and people partake in marketing in various ways that could be called marketing. Starting from the clothes a person is wearing to the take-away coffee bought from a café, marketing is embedded in our daily lives without many people even realising that it is there. (Kotler & Keller 2006, 4.) However, to be able to truly define marketing, it is necessary to clarify that it does not consist of only selling and advertising—which are naturally crucial. Marketing is about satisfying customer needs and in order to be able to do that, the marketer has to understand consumer needs, develop products that provide superior customer value, while pricing, promoting and distributing them effectively to make them sell easily. To summarise, marketing is the process by which firms provide value for customers and build strong relationships to receive value from customers in return. (Kotler, Armstrong, Harris & Piercy 2013, 5.)

### **Five core customer and marketplace concepts**

To be able to understand marketing properly, it is required to go through the five core customer and marketplace concepts: needs, wants, and demands; market offerings (products, services, and experiences); value and satisfaction; exchanges and relationships; and markets (Kotler et al 2013, 6).

The most driving factor behind all marketing is that of human needs—for instance, the need for clothing, affection, and knowledge. It is crucial to understand these to be able to create value and satisfy them. However, marketers are not responsible for the creation of these needs since they are natural to humans, thus making it impossible to create them. Needs then turn into wants as they become shaped by culture and individual personality and these are what marketers aim to understand. Finally, wants can become demands if backed with enough buying power to bring value and satisfaction to the customer. (Kotler et al 2013, 6).

Having understood what customers want and demand, it is time to satisfy their wants with market offerings. Kotler et al (2013, 6) define market offerings as products, services, or experiences that exist to fulfil the consumers' needs and which in addition to physical products, include intangible

services. It is possible to lose sight of the customers' actual needs and focus more on the specific products while ignoring their benefits and experiences which is called marketing myopia. Due to this, it is important to recognise the actual needs and not to fixate on the existing wants. (Ibid., 2013, 6-7.)

When customers face multiple choices in the buying process, it comes down to value and satisfaction—the key elements in building and developing customer relationships—in the decision making. The customers will form expectations about the value and satisfaction that the diverse market offerings comprise of and then buy accordingly. Satisfied customers become loyal and tend to repurchase the offering and share their good experiences whereas a dissatisfied customer might switch to another brand and criticise the product to others. In order to avoid disappointing customers, it is crucial to set the expectations right. Set them too high and the buyers will be disappointed or too low and they risk attracting customers even though the product may satisfy them. (Kotler et al 2013, 7.)

Marketing is present when exchange relationships happen between people to satisfy needs and wants. Exchange means to acquire a wanted object from someone by offering something in return. The actions taken to build and maintain desirable exchange relationships with the target group are included in marketing. However, it is not enough for marketers to simply attract new customers and create transactions as they want to make the customers loyal and this can happen by developing strong relationships with them to deliver superior customer value. (Kotler et al 2013, 7.)

Finally, the concept of market consists of all actual and potential buyers of a product or service. These buyers then share a specific need or want that can be fulfilled via exchange relationships. Marketing can be defined as managing markets to obtain profitable customer relationships but creating the relationships can be arduous. This process happens when sellers search for buyers, identify their needs, design good marketing offerings, set prices and promote them, and then finally store and deliver them. Thus consumer research, product development, communication, distribution, pricing and service can be said to be the core marketing activities. (Kotler et al 2013, 7.)

## **2.1 Holistic Marketing**

In order to meet the demands of marketing practices brought on by the advances in digital marketing, such as online stores and social media, along with the effects they have had on customer awareness have necessitated a shift towards more comprehensive and cohesive application of the traditional marketing concept. Due to the speed and the viral spread of information, all actions taken by organisations send messages. The impact of actions and messages sent require an integrated and wholesome perspective. Holistic marketing aims to understand, control, and enable actions and procedures in marketing on all levels of the organisation. Holistic marketing is based on four main components: Relationship marketing, integrated marketing, internal marketing, and social responsibility marketing. (Kotler & Keller 2006, 16-17.) Through these four components, holistic marketing attempts to bind the entire organisation in a common goal of developing and sustaining successful marketing and business practices. The reason holistic marketing is presented in this thesis is that it is a foundation for many of the marketing and communication practices that are required in order to commit to a functioning communications plan. The basics of the holistic marketing concept will be referred to throughout this thesis.

### **2.1.1 Relationship Marketing**

At the core of the holistic marketing concept, lies relationship marketing. According to Kotler and Keller (2006, 17-18), “relationship marketing has the aim of building mutually satisfying long-term relationships with key parties—customers, suppliers, distributors, and other marketing partners”. The ultimate goal of relationship marketing is customer retention, shifting focus from one off sales to prolonged partnerships that benefit all parties involved. For the purposes of this thesis, relationship marketing stands out as perhaps the most important aspect of holistic marketing; mainly due to the way B2B sales and partnerships are structured. Therefore relationship marketing is discussed further on in this thesis as a cornerstone of the value delivery system.

### **2.1.2 Integrated Marketing**

Integrated marketing combines two key themes, the first of which is the pursuit of several marketing activities that aim to communicate and deliver value to customers. The second is that these activities are coordinated together. This means that the activities being planned and implemented are aware of other programs being undertaken. These include concurrently running marketing activities, but also include actions taken by the organisation. (Kotler & Keller 2006, 19-20). The integration of marketing programs is important in holistic marketing to cement the goals of the organisations marketing endeavours. The integration of marketing programs and practices is necessary in the managing of integrated marketing communications, which is key part of this thesis. This integration will be further explored in the integrated marketing communications portion of this thesis.

### **2.1.3 Internal Marketing**

In order to integrate marketing activities and build successful relationships, an organisation must take into account both external and internal activities. This is why internal marketing is the third main theme of holistic marketing. Internal marketing is a result of the realisation that marketing cannot be just a department of an organisation, but the common attitude of the whole company. Internal marketing relies on a coordinated approach to hire, educate and motivate employees to meet organisational goals of customer satisfaction. Furthermore, coordination of management level strategies must be integrated in order to facilitate the needs of marketing goals, including the allocation of resources throughout the organisation to enable the requirements of outward bound messages to be met. In other words, the promises and expectations that marketing activities create must be met by the organisation's actions. (Kotler & Keller 2006, 20.) In other words, internal marketing is an idea that must permeate throughout the whole organisation. For the purpose of the commissioner of this thesis, being a small business works in favour of the implementation of internal marketing strategies as there is less bureaucracy and workforce to communicate internal marketing guidelines to. The necessity of internal marketing however, does not decrease with the size of the organisation.

#### **2.1.4 Social Responsibility Marketing**

The fourth pillar of holistic marketing is social responsibility marketing. As the results of marketing are felt beyond the organisation and its customers, marketers must understand how the ethical, legal, environmental and social contexts are affected by their marketing programs and activities. The value organisations place on social responsibility are not the only reason for attention to corporate social responsibility (CSR), as the potential risks involved in the fore mentioned list of contexts are monumental. This has led to many companies actively seeking out CSR projects, both to combat future risks and for use as marketing material. Social responsibility is increasingly important to the consumer, meaning that its marketing fits in well with the idea that every action a company takes reflects on its image from a consumer satisfaction standpoint. Successful social responsibility marketing has a positive effect on brand awareness, sales, and customer loyalty. (Kotler & Keller 2006, 22-23.) While not directly applicable to the purpose of this thesis, social responsibility is an important message that concerns many of the potential clients of ebrand and should therefore not be forgotten as an important part of future projects.

#### **2.2 Value Delivery Process**

Since marketing is about satisfying customers' needs and wants, it is essential for any business to deliver customer value at a profit. In order for companies to satisfy customers with an increasing buying power, it is required of them to fine-tune their value delivery process by choosing, providing and communicating superior value. Figure 1(a) shows the traditional view of marketing—of making something and then selling it to a customer—which is simply not enough to win customers over in the contemporary age when they are facing abundant choices. Because the consumers can choose from a wide array of products, companies need to provide more value for them which can be done by careful choices in strategic marketing and tactical marketing as can be seen in figure 1(b). The formula “segmentation, targeting, positioning” is the essence of strategic marketing, followed by the second phase of providing value which will be decided with the help of marketing mix and the first three Ps in it—product, price, and place. The final stage of communicating the value for the customer will be done by the fourth P of the marketing mix, promotion. Both strategic and tactical marketing are further explained in the following chapters. (Kotler & Keller 2006, 19, 36-37.)

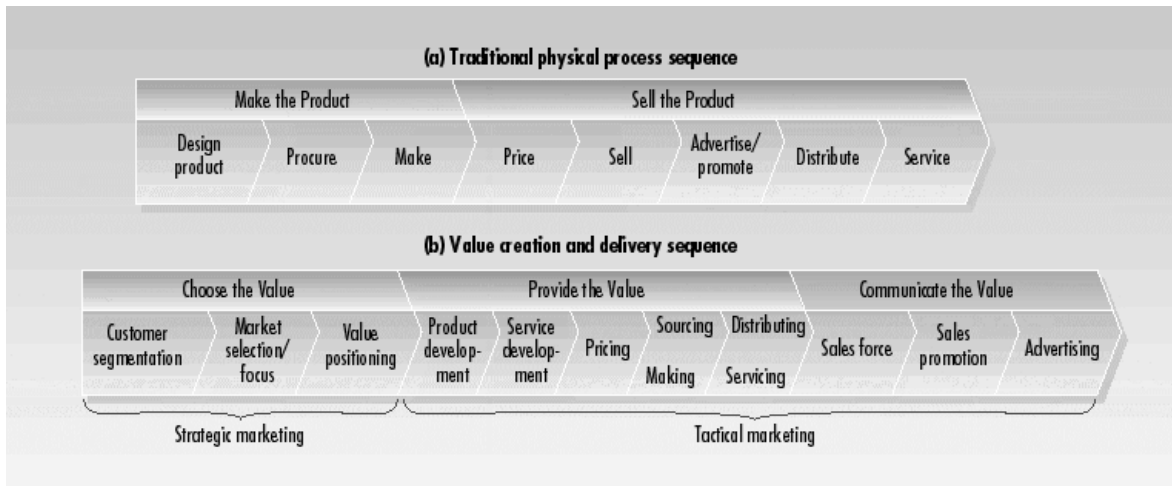


FIGURE 1. Two views of the value delivery process (Kotler & Keller 2006, 36)

## 2.2.1 Strategic Marketing

As can be understood from the value delivery process, the customers are in the centre of the strategic marketing which defines the company's overall mission and objectives. Due to the customers being the focal point, it is simply necessary to understand the concepts of both relationship marketing and customer relationship management as well, to which we will return later on. According to Kotler et al (2013, 50), the goal is to create value for customers and build profitable customer relationships followed by marketing strategy which is the logic behind creating customer value and acquiring these profitable relationships. The strategy consists of deciding which customers the company will serve via segmentation and target marketing and how it aims to do it by positioning and differentiation. This is done by identifying the total market and then dividing it into smaller segments after which the most promising ones are selected and the focus shifts on to serving and satisfying the customers from the chosen segments. (Kotler et al 2013, 50.) The reason to not select certain segments can be due to the lack of resources required to be able to satisfy their needs which would leave more promising ones lacking their deserved attention. Sometimes companies are required to pass a customer so that they can concentrate more on their existing ones and if they feel like they could not actually deliver the expected value.

Since the market consists of various types of customers, products, and needs, it is required of the marketer to determine which segments offer the best opportunities. Market segmentation is the



process in which a market is divided into distinct groups of buyers who possess different needs, characteristics or behaviours, and who might require separate products or marketing programmes. The consumers who respond similarly to certain marketing efforts create a market segment. (Kotler et al 2013, 51.)

Having defined the market segments, it is possible to enter one or many of these segments. This is when target marketing comes into play and it involves evaluating the attractiveness of each market segment and selecting the most viable ones to enter. It is preferred of a company to target segments in which it can profitably generate the greatest customer value while being able to sustain it over time. Depending on the resources of the company, their target marketing can vary from offering a wide range of products to a few special segments or market niches. (Kotler et al 2013, 51-52.)

After the market segments in which to enter have been chosen, a company has to choose how to differentiate its market offering for each targeted segment and the positions it desires to occupy in those segments. By positioning is meant the place in which the company's product is in consumers' minds compared to competitors' product. It is desirable to develop unique market positions for products so that it will differentiate and more likely be purchased. In positioning, it is essential of the company to first identify possible customer value differences that allow competitive advantages to be gained and on which the company can then build the position. Greater customer value can be offered by charging either lower prices than competitors or actually justifying the higher prices with more benefits. This means that in order to effectively position, a company has to start with differentiation and truly alter it to stand out in the market place in a way that it gives more value to customers. Having decided on the position, it has to take a firm approach in delivering and communicating that position to target consumers and be able to back it with the entire marketing programme. (Kotler et al 2013, 52.)

Apple is a prime example of successfully positioning itself as an innovative company and the level of differentiation they have achieved is admirable. Differentiating ebrand with the emphasis on social media expertise is an extremely valid option for this digital media agency and to support this strategy, the proposed action will be to position themselves as thought leaders in the industry. Forbes (2012, date of retrieval 25.2.2014) defines thought leader as an individual or firm that is widely recognised

by prospects, clients, and even competitors, as the foremost authority in selected areas of specialisation which is why its expertise is very sought after. Also, by identifying as a thought leader, that said individual or company also significantly profits from being recognised as such (ibid., date of retrieval 25.2.2014). The actions required of ebrand to be able to position as a thought leader will be introduced later on in this thesis.

## **2.2.2 Relationship Marketing**

Today it is believed that for companies to successfully build brand equity, they are required to develop interdependent and mutually satisfying relationships with customers. For market-driven firms it is crucial to be able to create happy and loyal customers as they, instead of products, allow companies to exist and function properly. This means moving away from transactional marketing to relationship marketing, which is about creating, maintaining, and enhancing long-term relationships with customers and other stakeholders to achieve information exchange and other things of mutual value. Since consumers can choose from a wide variety of products and services, the customer relationship, which only starts in the making of a sale, is viewed as the main strategic resource in the contemporary age. (Arens et al 2012, 270.)

The ultimate goal of relationship marketing is the development of a marketing network, which is a conglomerate of mutually beneficial business relationships between a company and its supporting stakeholders, such as customers, employees, suppliers, distributors, retailers, ad agencies, universities, and so forth. The interdependency between these entities and individuals serves as an enticement for working towards success. A competent marketing network understands the strengths and weaknesses of its links, as well as the importance of information sharing among participants. (Kotler & Keller 2006, 17-18.)

Relationship marketing's importance is applicable in business to business interactions, as B2B sales are predominantly relationships. Purchase orders are large and the sales cycle is long, meaning that the formation of a relationship during the sales and service processes is important. Expertise in the field of business is often shared, and successful relationship building can result in years of ongoing business. (Bodnar & Cohen 2012, 8-9.)

### **2.2.3 B2B Marketing**

Business to business (B2B) marketing consists of marketing goods and services between organisations and it differs from consumer goods marketing due to many fundamentally different characteristics, diverse marketing strategies and the need to implement operations to satisfy business customers' needs. Yet, it is possible to target products or services at both organisations and consumers. This for example, applies to such products as office furniture or mobile phones as they can be sold to both markets. However, Fill and McKee (2011, 18) distinguish the factors that separate business marketing from consumer marketing by two main ideas: first, the intended customer is an organisation; second, the intended use of the product is to support organisational objectives

Due to the two main ideas, it is required of companies to implement different marketing programmes to reach and influence organisational buyers when compared to consumers. This is mainly due to the differences between markets which consist of the way products and services are bought, the decisions usually involving a number of people, decision making requiring more time, and the size of orders. (Fill et al 2011, 27.) These differences can be best viewed in the following table 1.

TABLE 1. A comparison of buying characteristics in organisational and consumer markets (Fill et al 2011, 64)

	Consumer buying	Organisational buying
Number of buyers	Many	Few
Purchase initiation	Self	Others
Evaluative criteria	Social, ego and level of utility	Price, value and level of utility
Information search	Normally short	Normally long
Range of suppliers used	Small number of suppliers considered	Can be extensive
Importance of supplier choice	Normally limited	Can be critical
Size of orders	Small	Large
Frequency of orders	High	Low
Value of orders placed	Low	High
Complexity of decision making	Low to medium	Medium
Range of information inputs	Limited	Moderate to extensive

It has become clear by now that social media is an excellent way for B2B companies to build relationships and the shift to relationship marketing is evident. One might still argue that social media is not fit for B2B marketing since it happens between organisations. However, social media is all about relationships thus it becomes a powerful tool to be used when considering that even though businesses themselves as entities do not spend time in social media, the person working in the purchasing department most likely does. Much like Steve Olenski (2013, date of retrieval 23.1.2014) writes in his marketing blog post, this is why it is crucial to remember that even though it is called B2B, there is still a C at the other end and that consumer will first act as a social individual before considering work.

#### 2.2.4 Tactical Marketing

Having determined a company's overall marketing strategy as presented earlier; the company is ready to focus on the marketing mix which is one of the most notable modern marketing concepts. The marketing mix can be defined as the set of tactical marketing tools that the company blends to

produce the expected response in the target market. The marketing mix includes all the ways a company can influence the demand for its product. The various possibilities can be compiled into four groups of variables known as the four Ps: product, price, place, and promotion. What each P consists of can be seen in figure 2. (Kotler et al 2013, 53.) These four Ps will be used in providing and communicating value to the customer as a part of the value delivery process presented in figure 1.



FIGURE 2. The four P components of the marketing mix (Kotler et al 2006, 19)

Product means the combination of goods and services that is offered to the target market. Price is what customers are charged to obtain the product. All the activities required from the company to make the product available to customers are in place. Finally, promotion deals with the ways of communications to inform the customer about the product and make it seem desirable enough to make them purchase it. (Kotler et al 2013, 53.) In the case of improving ebrand's marketing communications in social media, the first three Ps will be mostly left untouched—excluding possible enhancements to the product—and the emphasis will be on communicating the existing product, its enhancements, and value to the customers via promotion.

## 2.3 Customer Relationship Management

The importance of customer relationship management (CRM) is highlighted due to the way relationships determine long term success in B2B transactions. As Fill points out (2006, 303), "It is more profitable to have a long-term relationship between a customer than a company rather than a one-off transaction." This provides the necessary interest in maintaining those relationships.

Customer relationship management is concerned with developing stronger bonds with the customers and it can be used as a useful tool in ebrand's marketing communications plan to build and develop relationships as is needed in the B2B section. As it has become evident by now that customers and value creation are the main priorities and like in the relationship marketing the strengthening of the bond is crucial, CRM can be used to substantially support that strategic decision. Storbacka and Lehtinen (2001, 5) describe the three cornerstones of CRM to be customer value creation, viewing the product as a process, and to relate to the provider's responsibilities to not merely satisfy the needs but to develop the relationships and provide possibilities for customers to create value for themselves. These cornerstones are all supporting factors as to why CRM should be implemented and understood as a tool in the strategic marketing process to make the relationship more beneficial for both the customer and the company. For the purpose of further explaining how long-term relationships are built, it is required to understand the customer development process described in figure 3.

The process of customer acquisition can be best seen in the customer relationship marketing ladder in figure 3. It starts with identifying anyone willing to buy the product (suspect) out of which the company determines the most likely prospects, which it hopes will become its customers. After they have become repeat customers, they can be called clients to whom the company gives special treatment. Next in the ladder are advocates who will start recommending the company and its products or services to others. The final step is to be able to turn advocates into partners. The whole idea of this ladder is for the company to be able to turn a sale into a long-term relationship which will be beneficial for both parties. Main reason why a company should aim for a long-term relationship is that customer retention is easier than going continuously over the customer development process. Although, it is natural that some customers drop out, the challenge is to win back those dissatisfied

customers. This should be done because it is simply easier to re-attract ex-customers due to the shared history between the participants. (Kotler & Keller 2006, 156-157.) Having implemented CRM as a tool to support relationship marketing, it should be possible to create stronger bonds with customers. The benefits of stronger relationships, that make clients climb up the ladder to become advocates, are much more beneficial than simply retaining them at the customer ladder.

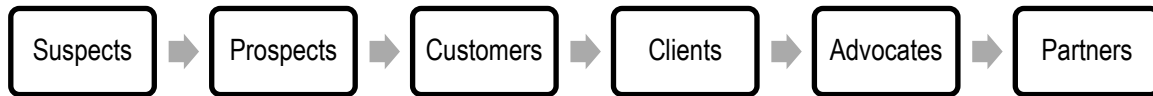


FIGURE 3. *The Customer Development Process* (Kotler & Keller 2006, 157)

## 2.4 Marketing Communications

The purpose of marketing communications ranges from informing customers of the product and persuading them to enter relationships with organisations, to reassuring and reinforcing those relationships and decisions. Marketing communications can also act as the process that enables differentiation from similar products, services and brands. (Fill 2006, 6.) Because the role and purpose of marketing communication can be diverse according to what needs it targets, defining marketing communications is a task complicated by the fact that its interpretation reflects on the organisation that is implementing it. Therefore the process of defining marketing communications is sifting through proposed definitions in order to establish one that applies to the purpose of this thesis. One of these definitions, as proposed by Chris Fill (2006, 8) is:

Marketing communications is a management process through which an organisation seeks to engage with its various audiences. To accomplish this, the organisation develops, presents and evaluates a series of messages, which it sends to and receives from its different audiences. The objective of this process is to reposition the organisation and its offerings in the minds of particular audiences and in doing so encourage the development of relationships that are of mutual value.

Fill (2006, 8) is also quick to point out that not all organisations seek relationships and two-way conversations, seemingly rendering his definition somewhat inapplicable. However, as this thesis focuses on B2B social media marketing and repeatedly points out the importance of the development and nurture of relationships, this definition is very topical—after all, social media is all about two-way

conversations. In this sense, Fill's (2006, 9) shorter definition provides a simple yet satisfactory explanation: "Marketing communications is an audience-centred activity designed to encourage engagement between participants". From an organisational viewpoint, the audience consists of customers and potential customers to whom the organisation seeks to communicate value to. Specifically for the purpose of this thesis, marketing communications is the plan of action that is undertaken to enable the much discussed concept of relationship marketing.

In order to understand the various ways a customer may be in contact with a brand, marketers are required to understand the six major modes of communication which exist to deliver the message to the customer. Kotler and Keller (2006, 536) call these six modes the marketing communications mix which consists of advertising, sales promotion, events and experiences, public relations and publicity, direct marketing, and personal selling. All of these communicate something about the brand for the customer, starting from what the sales person is wearing to the product packaging. How these communications modes are used, varies depending on planning or lack thereof. According to Kotler and Keller (2006, 538), planning marketing communications should start with an audit of how the organisation utilises these communications. This is a logical point of continuance on the topic in the marketing communications planning section of this thesis.

In order to communicate effectively with the customers, marketers need to understand two models about the communications process: a macro model and a micro model. The macro model can be best understood by viewing it in figure 4. It consists of nine elements where two represent the major parties in communications, sender and receiver. Two elements express the major communication tools, message and media. Then there are four functions, encoding, decoding, response, and feedback. The last factor is noise, random and competing messages that interfere with the intended message. In order to effectively communicate, the senders must know who they want to reach with their messages and what responses are wanted. The messages must be then transmitted through media that can reach the target audience and to monitor the responses, feedback channels need to be developed. (Kotler & Keller 2006, 539.)



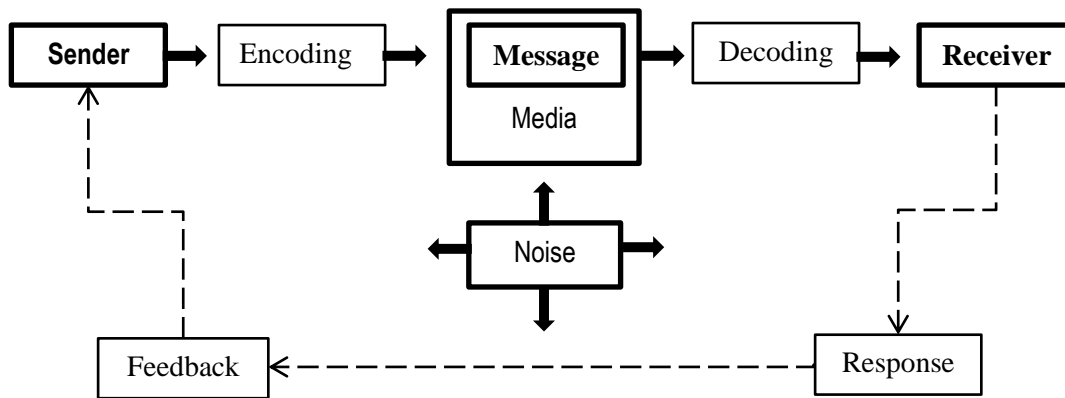


FIGURE 4. Macro model of the communications process (Kotler & Keller 2006, 539)

Kotler and Keller (2006, 540) state that the micro models of marketing communications concentrate on the customers' particular responses to communications. For the purpose of this marketing communications plan, AIDA model has been chosen as the response hierarchy model to be used in the B2B branding of ebrand in social media. The acronym AIDA consists of Attention, Interest, Desire, and Action and it aims to move a prospect from ignorance of one's offerings to actively participating in the sales funnel (Sargent 2013, date of retrieval 20.2.2014). When considering the first step, attention, Sargent (2013, date of retrieval 20.2.2014) writes that one should not post drunken pictures of co-workers but instead to get the right kind of attention, content and postings need to have relevant stopping power—with a creative and professional tone. However, moving on to the next step can be difficult as attention can be brief, interest should be generated instantly. To make prospects become interested, there needs to be a proper hook in the headline to capture attention and interact but that alone is not enough for sealing the deal. Interest without desire can lead to multiple unqualified leads and their act to contact the company is not a genuine motivation to learn more. (Ibid., date of retrieval 20.2.2014.) If an incentive is offered to create interest, there should be a more pressing desire to connect with the company and that desire could derive from differentiating to provide more value to the customer—as is expected in the value delivery process. The final step is action and it should have become obvious by this stage that actions in social media are not to sell but rather about the process of creating affinity for the brand, creating leads and engaging in conversations. According to Sargent (date of retrieval 20.2.2014), there has to be a clear view of how the actions you provide for customers help to build a connection with the brand; do the

actions reinforce the brand personality or value proposition and does it help prospects to see how one's business complements theirs? Usually the calls to action include a free consultation or a contest and these may not inspire trust in the brand or articulate clearly enough how the company is differentiated.

## **2.5 Integrated Marketing Communications**

The concept of integrated marketing communications (IMC) has been created through a number of years and trials of application. This has resulted in several different definitions and explanations of what IMC is, depending on the organisation that has implemented or attempted to do so. A consensus that encompasses the key concepts of Integrated Marketing Communications is defined by Arens et al (2012, 701) as:

The process of building and reinforcing mutually profitable relationships with employees, customers, other stakeholders, and the general public by developing and coordinating a strategic communications program that enables them to make constructive contact with the company/brand through a variety of media.

IMC strategy strives to homogenise communications concerning the organisation, both internally and externally, to enable the use of multiple channels of communication. This helps create a broad view of the brand values that are sought. In some cases this results in a single idea being marketed to all potential customers, while in others the target may be more segmented. The underlying theme however, is the strategic management of the messages to ensure controlled and targeted communications over time, instead of singular campaigns. Customers constantly apply communications to brands, regardless of if that message is intentional or not. (Arens et al 2012, 272-274.)

One of the key premises of IMC is that everything a company does or does not do sends a message to customers. Tom Duncan of the University of Denver organised the types of messages a company sends into four categories. Planned messages are traditional promotional messages, for example advertising, promotions, and PR-releases. These are coordinated messages that originate from the company that work towards a predetermined communications goal. Product messages are also purposefully designed, but are linked to the product through design, pricing, distribution channel, or

packaging. Product messages are powerful, but must adhere to the truth, as failing to meet customer expectations creates damage to the brand. Service messages move away from the previous two product and sales related messages. Customer service is a key part of IMC due to the third type of message. Service messages are employee interactions with customers. These interactions may have greater impact from a marketing standpoint than planned messages, especially in situations where continued relationship with customers is a staple of the business, for example in subscription based goods and services. The idea behind an integrated communication strategy helps control these situations with the aim of delivering more positive marketing. The fourth type of message is the unplanned message. This can be public perception about a company's actions or word of mouth that leaks out from employees, business partner's observers, or competitors. Out of all the four types of messages, the unplanned are the most difficult to control from the company standpoint, yet again highlighting the importance of true integration in communications throughout the organisation. (Arens et al 2012, 273-274.)

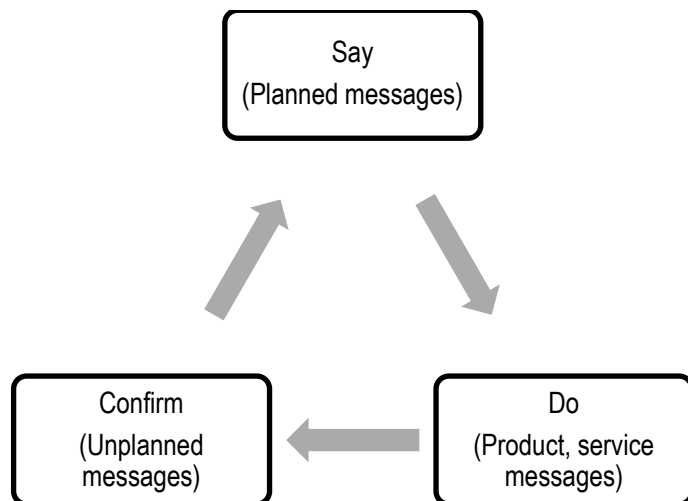


FIGURE 5. The Integration Triangle (Arens et al 2012, 275)

The integration triangle shown in the figure above is a simple illustration that demonstrates how the different types of brand messages function together under the IMC model. Ideally by proving the product or service is as advertised and supporting that argument through proper service, while doing so in a manner that gains attention from those outside the organisation, the success of the integration is measured. (Arens et al 2012, 275.)

## 2.6 Digital Marketing

The relevance of digital marketing exploded with the rapid evolution of the internet. Kotler, Keller, Brady, Goodman and Hansen (2012, 131) describe the term digital marketing as “the management and execution of marketing using electronic or digital media such as the web, email, interactive TV, wireless media, mobile technology, and self-service technology, in conjunction with digital data from a range of databases and software applications.” The popularity of technology by consumers for entertainment and social purposes has led to further development of that technology. A useful perspective into how this evolution has directed marketing methods is to split digital technologies into two subcategories; Information technologies and interaction technologies. (Ibid., 132.)

Information management through technology is necessary due to the amount of data available through a variety of sources. These sources can include web analytics, market research, social media, customer interactions and feedback, and many others. Sifting through this information is a gargantuan task probably unfit for everyone except the NSA, so marketers must learn to identify useful data in a controlled manner. Kotler et al suggest (2012, 132) viewing information in four ways, ranging from product and/or company orientation to a customer-centric marketing focus. The simplest way is descriptive customer information, which deals with basic numbers, how many units are sold, how much for, and how often. Moving towards more customer-centric, the second way to view information is analytic customer information, which is essentially using database analysis to help with segmentation. Further evolution of these two ideas is use of predictive customer information, which uses analysis to predict trends and changes in customer preferences and responses. The fourth way to view information is called holistic customer information, which moves even farther away from focusing on raw numbers to understand customer behaviour. Information management on a holistic level refers to the ability of marketers and management to have a wholesome understanding of consumer habits. As this type of information is the hardest to gather, holistic customer interaction requires active communication and healthy relationships between the customer and the organisation. (Ibid., 132.)

By looking at the division of information types, it becomes apparent that the process of information management is also a process towards more customer-centric marketing. This is explained in the

reasoning for digital marketing's growth and importance. The old mass media method of outgoing messaging placed for example, in print media, has very limited interaction with the customer. Digital media provides possibilities for more immediate and diverse responses and feedback, which brings us to the second subcategory of digital technologies.

Interaction technologies are defined as “technologies which support communications, connections and collaborations with customers and businesses across networks. They include internet, email, mobile communications, social networking sites, Twitter, interactive products and services, and self-service technologies- - ” (Kotler et al 2012, 133), among others. In other words, interaction technologies enable companies, customers, and stakeholders to interact with each other in ways that have an effect on the marketplace. As Kotler et al point out (2012, 133), “Whether a company is directed or customer controlled, a mixture of information and interaction technologies dominate marketing practice”. The result of this reality is that the importance of digital marketing cannot be undermined.

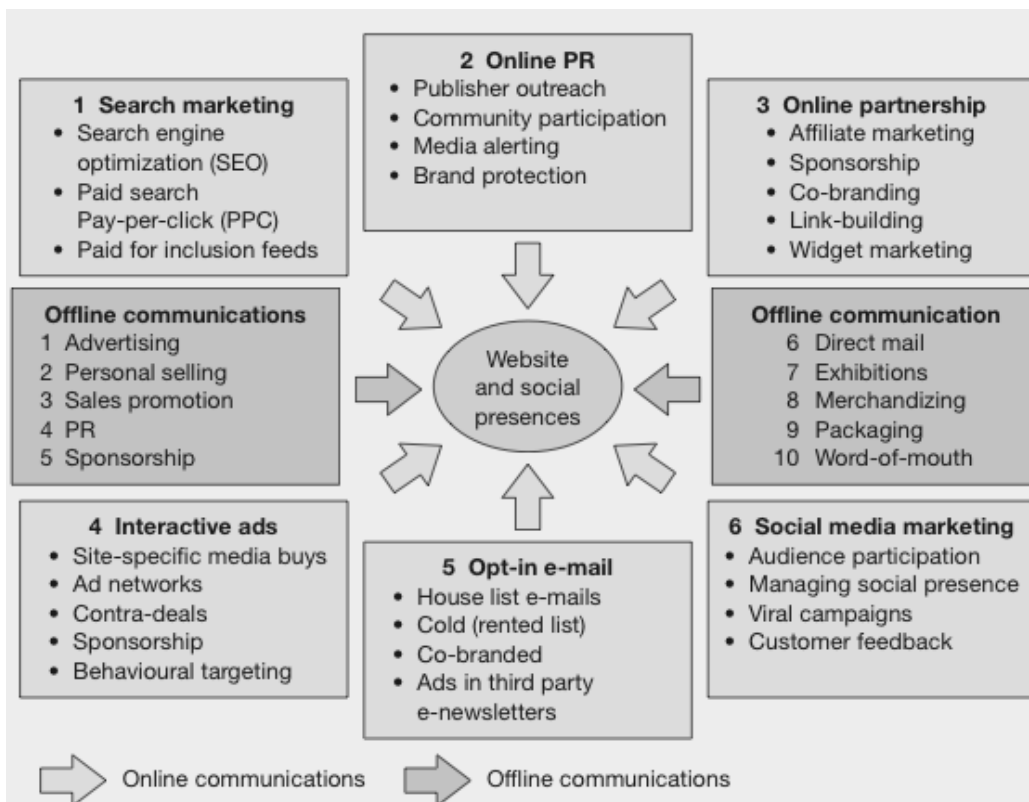


FIGURE 6. Six main types of digital media communications channels (Chaffey 2013, date of retrieval 6.2.2014)

The previous figure displays six different types of digital media communications channels, along with offline communications that drive conversation and interest into online and offline presences. The figure is useful in displaying the necessity for interdependent and integrated marketing efforts. Even as this thesis is focused on the social media channels, it is important to remember the possibilities that even small efforts via other digital and traditional channels provide for strengthening the efforts made via social media. For example, successful social media and website visits are often intertwined, shifting visitors from one entity to the other. This can be fuelled by word of mouth, partnerships, search engine optimisation, or a combined result of several other channels, highlighting once again the importance of IMC in planning and executing marketing communications. Furthermore, the result of what is displayed proves the necessity of a digital marketing presence on several levels to be obvious.

## **2.7 Marketing Communications in Social Media**

Due to the back and forth nature of conversation in social media—the interactional relationships formed there between individuals and/or organisations—there are some nuances in the types of marketing communications that take place or are desirable. Content and comment marketing are key concepts in social media communications for organisations and are therefore important to clarify for the purpose of this thesis.

### **2.7.1 Content Marketing**

The best advertisements generate conversation and catchphrases. The perfect example of this is the National Football League Super Bowl. Game is a classic event and is usually the most viewed TV programme in the United States. Along with the actual game the conversations on the following Monday centre on what commercial was best. The reason commercials during the Super Bowl are talked about is simple: They are good, expensive, and broadcast during a live sporting event. This is a rarity during modern advertising. The viewing public has become savvy enough to ignore advertising and in cases such as skipping commercial breaks with the help of DVR recording, avoiding advertisements completely (Content Marketing Institute, Date of retrieval 21.1.2014).

Due to the trend of increased expectations and options, the concept of content marketing has become increasingly important to marketers. Content Marketing Institute (date of retrieval 21.1.2014) defines it as: “ - a marketing technique of creating and distributing relevant and valuable content to attract, acquire, and engage a clearly defined and understood target audience—with the objective of driving profitable customer action.” Content marketing seeks to provide consistent consumer participation and interest in a product or service, by providing content that interests the consumer. This interest may be the result of being informed or entertained, depending on the type of product and target demographic. Content marketing is a key part of relationship marketing. Content marketing is a building block of developing the relationships that pay off in patronage after that relationship has been established. Essentially, this is a process of generating sales without doing the actual selling. (Content Marketing Institute, Date of retrieval 21.1.2014.)

Inbound marketing is very closely related to content marketing, in fact so closely that they are often mistaken to be the same thing. However, it could be said that inbound marketing is a part of content marketing and as that, a part of the development of relationship marketing. Inbound marketing is the process of being found online by prospective clients due to the quality content provided by the application of successful content marketing. (Content Marketing Institute 2011, date of retrieval 21.1.2014.)

### **2.7.2 Comment Marketing**

The bare essentials of comment marketing are to find a conversation, for example by following a blog post, leave a comment and hope that the comment attracts traffic to the company website. Commenting on a blog post is easy and it can be done by anyone but this does not mean that efficient comment marketing is that simple. Comment marketing can turn into worthless spam if it is not valued as a proper tactic and given the full attention it deserves. In any case, comment marketing should not be meaningless opinions but rather quality comments by which the commenter shows thought leadership while earning exposure and making connections. By sharing insightful thoughts it is possible to show people that the person is serious and at the same time to build a strong presence that can help in lead generation via relationship building and generate Google Juice. (Carrizales 2013, date of retrieval 23.1.2014.)

### 3 SOCIAL MEDIA

The purpose of this thesis—concentration on social media marketing, requires the separation of social media from the larger concept of digital marketing. Social media can simply be defined by stating that it is the media we use to be social—whether they are blogs, Facebook, or YouTube. However, there exists a more detailed description of what is regarded as social media by Andreas Kaplan and Michael Haenlein (2010, 61): “Social media is a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and allow the creation and exchange of user generated content (UGC).” Web 2.0 was first used in 2004 to describe a new way in which the software developers and end-users started to use the World Wide Web as a platform whereby applications and content are no longer created and published by individuals and UGC came to describe the various forms of media content that are publicly available by end-users (*ibid.*, 61). Social media defines itself on the existence of interactive communication between all involved parties.

Kipp Bodnar and Jeffrey L. Cohen (2012, 8) point out in the B2B Social Media Book: “The social web is not linear. Information and interactions happen across the social web in every direction. There is not one clear path. It is critical to understand this simple idea of a nonlinear communications channel.” The authors go on to explain how this non-linear nature does not fit in with traditional models of B2B marketing. An example is given of a combination of direct mail and print advertising that runs for a set period of time. This method provides a simpler equation for determining end results, which in turn is easier for traditional B2B marketing budgets that yearn for easier return on investment (ROI) calculations. When compared to the effects that a successful blog post might provide, such as benefits to search engine optimisation of the company website and a presence that is not limited by a time frame, the results of and investment in blogging is not as easily defined. (Bodnar & Cohen 2012, 8-9.)

Trends affecting mass market communications tools, such as the costs inherent in traditional mass market media advertising and doubts over its ability to deliver results have forced companies to re-evaluate existing practices. The introduction of social media communications channels to the already



wide spectrum of advertising and marketing communication methods has further exacerbated this change.

### **3.1 Social Media Marketing**

Having defined social media, the reasons why a company should adopt it in its strategy should be introduced—from a business point of view as this has to do with B2B marketing for ebrand. Safko (2012, 4) writes that if a company is wondering whether to do social media marketing or how much should be spent on it, it can be answered by adapting the question to a more obvious one: Should I do marketing at all? It should be remembered that social media is a new technology which is not a wondrous miracle to a company but a way to efficiently create contacts, build relationships and trust while being there ready to reap the rewards as those people are willing to commit to a purchase. Social media is just a new way of acquiring customers and it is doing what the telephone, direct mail, print advertising, television, radio, and billboards have done up until now—only it is doing it more effectively. The conventional marketing has changed from pontificating to two-way communication and this fundamental shift in power is the reason why social media is so effective in marketing. More and more consumers are ignoring corporate messages due to lack of trust and this gives a chance to build a trusting relationship and bond with the customer via the use of social media. (Ibid., 4-5.)

However, social media should not be used to sell as the fundamental shift means a new way of communication—new way to sell is to not sell at all. What one should do in social media marketing is to first listen actively, understand and follow the conversation and then finally speak. No matter what social media platform is in use or in what industry the business operates, it is about participating in the conversation, lead generation and being there with a relationship when the prospect is finally willing to purchase. So if a company is considering about ignoring social media as one cannot do hard selling there, in fact a company can build more lasting and trusted relationships that will eventually result in more sales, fewer returns, and greater word of mouth. (Safko 2012, 5-6.)

Social media marketing also provides another advantage, in addition to relationship building. It will make it easier for potential customers to find ebrand's website when using search engines. This will happen via search engine optimisation (SEO) and it can help greatly in building awareness of the

commissioner. Only the basic definition of SEO will be provided as it is a vast entity and the commissioner already possesses a deep knowledge about. Nevertheless, it should be introduced due to its importance when considering social media marketing—in order to fathom its relevance, see appendix 1. Safko (2012, 412) describes search engine optimisation as how well a company ranks when people are looking for a type of a product or service that the company provides via search engines.

### **3.2 Main Channels**

According to a content analysis in a journal by Brennan and Croft (2012, 110), the B2B social media leaders in it were sharing a lot of material—for example videos, blogs, and similar material—and then cross-referencing them on Twitter and Facebook to ensure that each piece received the maximum amount of visibility on search engines. Also, slideshows and white papers were being linked within questions and answer sessions and discussion groups on LinkedIn and Facebook to continue the conversation and multiply the impact through SEO. The most used social media channels used in B2B marketing that were presented in this journal were Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Youtube, blogs, and SlideShare, thus they shall be introduced and will serve as the main channels in this thesis. (Brennan & Croft 2012, 108-110.) However, even though Google Plus was not mentioned in the journal, it is becoming more relevant for marketers than one might think, at least according to Neal Schaffer (2014a, date of retrieval 19.2.2014) it's importance is growing when it comes to social media trends in 2014—which is why it will be included as one of the main channels.

#### **Facebook**

Facebook was founded in 2004 and is currently the biggest and most popular social network on the Internet with over 800 million active members. It enables people to connect, interact and share with their friends around the world. Facebook is now available in 70 languages and to use it, one has to be over the age of 12 with an e-mail address. (Safko 2012, 31-32.)

When setting up a Facebook account, users start by adding friends with whom they will share content and information. What people share depends on the individual but normally users tend to share what is on their mind, what is happening in their day or any interesting links, videos, articles, and pictures

that they have found on the Internet. Users can also like and comment friends' posts. Besides allowing users to reconnect with old friends, make new friends and even find family, there exist a number of activities on Facebook, such as gaming, music, events, messages and applications. (Safko 2012, 32.)

Facebook is free to use and their revenue comes from advertising with no paid services. Safko (2012, 31) writes that Facebook Ads allows to target individuals based on their personal profile—for example, age, location, and interests—and provides businesses the means to advertise their service, event, Like Page or other external links to those who are interested. Facebook uses two self-expletory kinds of payment models for ads: cost per click (CPC) and cost per thousand views (CPM) (O'Neill 2010, date of retrieval 20.2.2014).

For businesses the opportunities Facebook has to offer are massive and should not be ignored as by doing so, businesses will risk not receiving visibility and potentially being the topic of hundreds of thousands of people. The users share their shopping and spending habits, ask for advice, complain, compliment or quite possibly even recommend a business and its products to their friends. Thus becoming a part of the conversation should seem a very attractive addition to companies' marketing strategy. Organisations can create Business/Like pages on Facebook which allow them to engage with consumers and share information. Like pages can also be used to do your customer service, sales, marketing, public relations and promotion. It might take time but the pros of obtaining a network of people who care and want your information is worth it—if it is used properly. (Safko 2012, 33.)

## **Twitter**

Twitter is a micro blogging platform with a 140-character limit that allows its users to share information rapidly to followers. Twitter can be best described by saying that it is like sending a text message to a group of people who might even be unknown to you but who care about your message. It can be operated through a mobile app with a smartphone, on your computer or by simply sending a text message. It was started in 2006 and has gained global popularity with over 200 million users sending over 200 million tweets per day. Since its launch, the users now range from celebrities to major corporations. (Safko 2012, 39-40.)

Twitter is all about the present, what is happening right now. The users follow everything that interests them, thus creating a unique community for themselves on which happenings they want to stay updated. Tweets tend to have a short life span and are forgotten in 24 hours. Because of the 140 character limit, the user's thoughts have to be quick, precise and summed up—the use of abbreviations and hashtags is common to deliver the message. Some tweets also lack spelling but it should be noted that one's online reputation is at stake and to seem professional, proper spelling should not be forgotten. (Safko 2012, 40.)

For businesses, Twitter provides an opportunity to communicate with a massive amount of people, whether to promote a service or to share industry related information. With the use of Twitter, companies can share information, take part into the relevant industry related conversations and answer questions to show their expertise while building relationships within the Twitter community. It should be noted that Twitter is not the place to be spammy, salesy, or pushy but rather it is a place to let people get to know the business and build a quality community. (Safko 2012, 41.)

### **LinkedIn**

LinkedIn's mission is to bring professionals together from all around the world to accelerate their success and making them more productive. Via LinkedIn, people can contact all the different people that they have worked with in the past. For example, having someone's old business card and wanting to get in touch with the person after he has started working in a different company might have been a problem in the past but with the use of LinkedIn, it is possible to connect with the person easily. (Safko 2012, 404.)

From the B2B marketing point, joining LinkedIn provides many possibilities to improve the company's marketing, relationship development, and lead generation. One way to do so is by joining groups—either closed or open—on LinkedIn and the goal in joining groups is to provide value to other members by sharing expertise and resources. This should eventually lead to new connections, getting people to visit your website to read more and thus increase traffic, obtaining indirect leads from others checking out your company profile. (Bodnar & Cohen 2012, 103-14.)

LinkedIn also has another area called LinkedIn Answers, where it is possible to demonstrate one's expertise, share information, and raise the awareness of the company to acquire new prospects. By answering enough questions properly and providing expert information, the company can position itself as a thought leader, which holds its own advantages. (Bodnar & Cohen 2012, 105.)

## **Blogs**

Blogs are websites that are maintained by individuals who add content to them regularly by posting thoughts, commentary, ideas, photos, graphics, audio, or video. Blogs tend to provide news and content on a particular subject, while some are used as personal journals. Also, when businesses use blogs for sales, branding, branding, public relations, and communicating internally or with customers and prospects, they are called corporate blogs. Blogs contain text, images, and links to other blogs or websites that are related to the blog's subject. However, what really makes blogs important is the reader's ability to interact with the author by commenting on it. (Safko 2012, 148.)

Safko (2012, 164) describes blogging as "by far the easiest and most effective way to communicate with your customers and prospects." He also mentions that starting a blog is easy and it only requires a few simple steps to publish blog on the internet. In addition, it takes little time to write a blog and by doing so one can create links through which possible prospects can find the company, it is possible to position oneself as an industry leader by providing recent and up to date information in your field, while allowing for a two-way conversation, and building trust. Not to mention the generation of Google Juice that describes the results followed by searching for the company's, service's or product's name in Google or other search engines. The more pages and listings that a search engine returns, the more Google Juice one has and it is the thing that a company's social media usage should be generating as much as possible. (Ibid., 164, 166.)

Having published a few posts, one should use all the other forms of communication—other social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter—to promote the new source of information to the customers and prospects. If the posts are relevant and worthy to share, the readers will begin to grow and the industry will start to expect new blog posts about the company's insights. (Safko 2012, 164.) By actively writing blogs about the social media industry, ebrand can position themselves as thought leaders as is the goal of much social media marketing according to Brennan & Croft (2012, 105-106).

## **YouTube**

YouTube is the solution when a video has been created and should then receive visibility and viewers. YouTube is a video sharing website that was founded in 2005 and now serves the purpose to allow billions of people to discover, watch and share videos with original content for free (YouTube, date of retrieval 16.1.2014). However, Safko (2012, 279) notes that YouTube would not be a social media platform unless the users could communicate within it and this is one of its advantages: it allows the users to comment back and forth and reply to the comments. This ability to communicate within YouTube becomes a crucial aspect when considering comment marketing.

## **Google Plus**

Google Plus is a social networking site as Facebook or Twitter but it comes with a twist--The Layer, which consists of all the integrated Google products (Schaffer 2014b, date of retrieval 19.2.2014)—and has not been embraced by businesses as willingly as these two examples. The reason could very well be because people are not aware of all the possibilities the Google Plus has to offer. However, as Neal Schaffer predicts (2014a, date of retrieval 19.2.2014), that might be changing as people come to realise the potential behind Google Plus. More and more Google products are being integrated within Google Plus—most recent one being YouTube comments—, the social layer provides substantial opportunities for businesses (Schaffer 2014b, date of retrieval 19.2.2014). In addition to the layer, Google Plus is the main factor in ranking SEO—Facebook is coming as a strong second as can be seen in appendix 1—which should further prove why Google Plus should not be dismissed even though it might not be the most valuable platform, yet.

## **SlideShare**

SlideShare was founded in 2008 and is currently the world's largest community for sharing presentations. It has 60 million monthly visitors and 130 million page views. Besides just presentations, SlideShare can be used to share documents, PDFs, videos and webinars. It also has partnerships with LinkedIn and Twitter, and is used by, for example, The White House, Nasa, and UNICEF. (SlideShare 2014, date of retrieval 16.1.2014.)

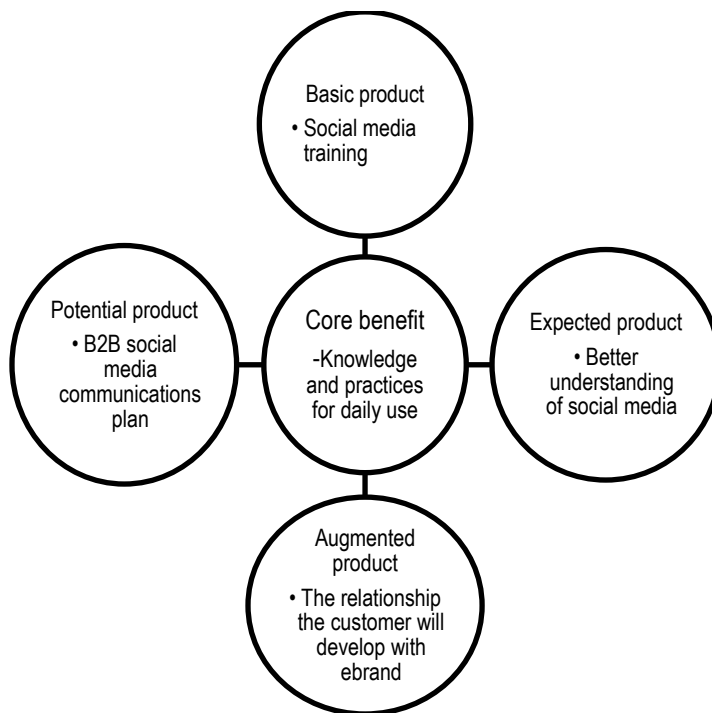
The community on SlideShare is professional and educational that frequently comments, favourites and downloads content. The content can spread virally through blogs and social networks such as

LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter—this is brilliant when considering Google Juice. Documents are uploaded on SlideShare by individuals and organisations with simple goals on their minds: to share ideas, connect with others, conduct research, and generate leads for their businesses. (SlideShare 2014, date of retrieval 16.1.2014.)

As SlideShare is a more professional channel compared to, for instance, Pinterest and Instagram, it will be used as the place to store content, thus making it easy to share by ebrand and others. The professional aspect of SlideShare should prove more worthy in the B2B sector. However, Instagram and Pinterest can be used by ebrand alongside SlideShare but this thesis will not be emphasising their use for the before mentioned reason.

## 4 PRODUCT VALUE ANALYSIS

Products are not always just what they seem to be but instead they can withhold various characteristics than just the initial offering about something tangible. A tool that is useful in deciphering all the layers that a product can possess is called the customer value hierarchy. With the help of it, it is possible to disclose the total value that a product or service intends to provide for a customer. Products can be said to have five levels or layers which include the core benefit, basic product, expected product, augmented product, and potential product. (Kotler & Keller 2006, 372.) The following figure 7 contains ebrand's five product levels.



*FIGURE 7. The five product levels of ebrand*

In the case of ebrand, they are currently offering Facebook applications and training/consulting services, the latter of which have been chosen to be analysed via the customer value hierarchy tool. The fundamental level is the core benefit which is the service or benefit the customer is really purchasing (Kotler et al 2006, 372). When organisations buy social media consulting from ebrand, they are purchasing knowledge and also practices for daily use. The next step is to turn that core



benefit into a basic product which in this case is the social media training that ebrand provides. The third level, the expected product, has a set of features and conditions that buyers usually anticipate from the purchase (ibid., 372). The customers of ebrand are expecting to have a better understanding of social media after the training and might even become surprised by the opportunities it presents. At the fourth level should be the augmented product that exceeds the customer's expectations and according to Kotler (2006, 272-272), the competition happens at this level via differentiation. When considering ebrand's augmented product, it is the relationship that will derive from the training that will bring additional value for the customer—especially if positioning as a thought leader is done correctly. Potential product is at the fifth level, which contains all the likely augmentations and transformations the product might undergo in the future (ibid., 373). For ebrand, the potential product could be to start offering social media trainings for B2B companies in addition to their current customers, municipalities and B2C customers. The offering could be based on to their new social media communications plan which would provide the possibility of being able to implement social media marketing into the B2B customer's strategy.

## 5 SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

Arens et al (2011, 261) argue that "business success often depends more on careful marketing and advertising planning than on advertising creativity", going on to note that some companies waste millions on ineffective advertising as a result of bad planning. In ebrand's case, even if millions are rarely applicable in any context let alone a wasteful one, planning still seeks to conserve and better apply the resources that are available. This plan also seeks to integrate the use of these resources towards a common goal. The eight necessary steps in developing effective communications can be seen in figure 8, and these steps will work as the foundation for the marketing communications plan for ebrand.

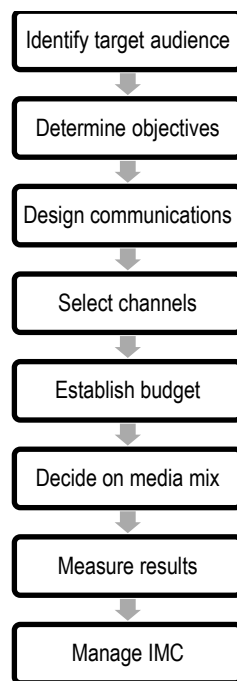


FIGURE 8. Steps in developing effective communications (Kotler & Keller 2006, 541)

### Identifying target audience

According to Kotler & Keller (2006, 541), it is necessary to start the process by having a clear target audience in mind in order to be able to clearly decide what to say, how to say it, when to say it, where to say it, and to whom is it directed. In the case of ebrand, we feel that they should decide on the segmentation as they have a better understanding of the business landscape in the area they

operate in. Market segmentation therefore, is essentially decided by ebrand. Yet, it is the opinion of the authors of this thesis that the target audience should not be limited too strictly, at least not purely based on their size. The size of the companies should not become an issue, even though the extent of consultation services will depend on the size of the client, since the offerings can be highly customised for each client. The only limiting factor will be the resources ebrand possesses.

### **Determine objectives**

Having defined the target audience, the next step is to determine the desired response—usually it is a purchase response. However, in order to result in that decision, customers need to go through a lengthy decision-making process consisting of six buyer readiness stages: awareness, knowledge, liking, preference, conviction, and the actual purchase. If the customer is unaware of the offering, it is required of the communicator to build awareness and knowledge. (Kotler et al 2013, 424.) Once the customers have a basic knowledge about the product, the interest lies in how they feel about it, do they like the product, prefer it to another one, or become convinced that it is the most suitable one for them (ibid., 425). If for example Google Plus would suddenly become the most popular platform and ebrand did not adapt and respond to the changes quickly enough, they might end up losing customers to competitors. However, even when some targeted customers might feel convicted, they might not be sure enough to commit to purchase and in this stage it becomes crucial for the product to provide superior value (ibid., 425).

Before determining ebrand's objectives, it should be reiterated that social media is very much about relationship building and it cannot be emphasised enough since the commissioner is in the B2B industry. This in mind, the objectives are to increase visibility and build awareness in the eyes of possible customers through the promotion of thought leadership that should transmit via active blogging. ebrand can become a thought leader and the company to contact when companies are considering the opportunities of social media, by sharing their expertise and insights in social media while building relationships with indirect leads. This will mean that the supplemental goals for ebrand are to generate more leads by building relationships which is further supported by thought leadership. Also, by showing their expertise it is possible to increase traffic to their website as well as the level of engagement in their social media communities. The ultimate goal for ebrand would be to become credible enough to be thought of as a thought leader in the social media industry in Finland, or at

least in the Oulu region. However, with the proposed plan of action for ebrand, it should not be too far-fetched to position ebrand as a thought leader, thus improving their authority as experts.

### **Design Communications**

As is vital in integrated marketing communications, the broadcast messages should be consistent on every channel used. This is when the AIDA framework will be used when devising messages to subdue customers to contact ebrand due to their thought leader position and knowhow. When devising these messages the three stages it takes to form them need to be taken into account and they are: message strategy, creative strategy, and message source (Kotler & Keller 2006, 544). Also, there is a need to include the message format in the communications design as it is a relevant for the purpose of IMC.

Starting with the message strategy, which is about what to say about the product when communicating with the audience, it should contain appeals that will tie it into the brand positioning and help to establish points of parity and points of difference (Kotler & Keller 2006, 544). Kotler and Keller (2006, 544) also state that buyers expect one of four types of reward from the product: rational, sensory, social, or ego satisfaction. As the marketing communications plan is about improving ebrand's visibility and positioning them as a thought leader, and it has been stated by Hague and Harrison (2013, date of retrieval 21.2.2014) that rationale reasoning affects B2B buyers most and they simply buy what they need, rational appeals should be included in the content of the message strategy. It should promote the opportunities of social media and the value and benefits gained by purchasing consulting services from ebrand.

Kotler and Keller (2006, 544) point out that the effectiveness of communications depends on both, how the message is being expressed and as well as the quality of the content included in the message. The commissioner can appeal to customers either by informational appeals (elaborating the offering's attributes or benefits) or transformational appeals (elaborating on a non-product-related benefit or image) (ibid., 544). When considering informational appeals, ebrand could include clients' testimonies on their website and demonstrating their products by uploading videos about them on YouTube. Kotler et al (2012, 784) write that informational appeals force the customer to process the

communications very rationally, which further supports adopting this choice of creative strategy for ebrand.

Message source becomes relevant when considering who will be delivering the messages in social media and with what credibility (Kotler & Keller 2006, 546). In the suggested plan, ebrand will be the main source when the focus is on building B2B relationships, they need to show what they are capable of and prove it by effectively communicating in social media. However, advantage should also be taken of internal marketing, as the employees of ebrand should become active in conversations, for instance on Twitter, to show the thought leadership on behalf of ebrand to further build awareness. ebrand already has references of all their customers on their website but what could provide more credibility for ebrand, is advocates' testimonies—proving why customer relationship management and the CRM ladder are highly relevant as tools to improve ebrand's marketing communications.

The message format should not be forgotten and it needs to be strong as it is a way to attract attention by using interesting pictures, colours, catchy headlines and so forth (Kotler et al 2013, 427). This would mean, in ebrand's case, the use of a unified colour theme on all the social media platforms as is central in integrated marketing communications.

### **Select Channels**

In the next stage, the channels of communications must be chosen and there are two broad types of channels: personal and non-personal. According to Kotler et al (2013, 427), in personal communication channels two or more people communicate directly with each other, whether it is face to face, on the phone, via email, or through an Internet chat. However, the personal communication channel can also be used when communicating in social media, as it is a two-way communication channel, and especially when considering content marketing. Not all personal communication channels can be controlled by the company as there are channels not directly controlled by the company, including advocates and word of mouth influence (ibid., 428). With a carefully devised content marketing strategy, it is possible to gain visibility by word of mouth as people share ebrand's content and discuss it. Much like ebrand managed to create substantial discussion when releasing its study on how young people use social media and they gained visibility by content marketing as they

actively shared the study in social media. This is what ebrand should be trying to do by actively sharing insights and blogs in social media.

Kotler et al (2013, 428) define non-personal communication channels to include media that carry messages without personal contact or feedback, for instance, online media which is relevant for this plan as it includes company websites and social media. An example of this would be Facebook Ads that are paid for to reach more than one person. Sales promotions by content applications might not be the choice for ebrand, as it does not really communicate the value they are trying to communicate to the customers but taking part in events such as tradeshow will help ebrand in building relationships with potential customers while generating leads.

### **Establish Budget**

Establishing a budget for marketing communications is a complicated process. Setting a budget or forecasting marketing communications expenditures is impossible in the process of completing this thesis and the actual task of budgeting is therefore left to the controlling parties of the company. It is however, important to make some short notes on budgeting, as resource management is an important aspect of integrated marketing communications.

Kotler et al (2012, 793) suggest that many companies base their budget calculations on what they assume the company can afford, ignoring the fact that instead of being just an investment, marketing communications has an impact on sales volume. This impact is at the core of the belief in relationship marketing. It is therefore important to understand that budgeting for successful marketing communications is, in fact, budgeting for a change in organisational policy. Considering that for a digital media marketing company, the most important customer interactions and introductions happen on digital and social media anyway, resources for improving communications through those channels should be an obvious investment.

### **Deciding on the marketing communications mix**

The organisational changes and budgetary constraints dictate to some extent how the marketing communications mix is decided. For this plan, the mix is determined by the context in which the commissioner operates. As Kotler et al (2012, 798) state: "Consumer marketers tend to spend

comparatively more on sales promotion and advertising; business marketers tend to spend comparatively more on personal selling.” Be they B2B or B2C companies, ebrand's clients are businesses. This means that ebrand’s own marketing communications mix should be focused on personal selling, specific direct and interactive marketing, and the occasional event, such as a trade show. Personal selling is the point of sale where B2B transactions occur, and marketing communications should be organised with the goal of gaining as many personal selling leads that can be turned into conversations and potential relationships.

The marketing communications mix as a model leaves a hazy picture of how social media channels are applied. After all, social media can act in part as personal selling, direct and interactive marketing, advertising and PR. The use of social media and digital media channels can be organised in a manner that allows for these channels to jointly enable several parts of the marketing communications mix to be utilised. The aggregation and integration of these channels and the potential results of their usage is further discussed in the social media plan.

### **Measure results**

It is often argued that social media advertising results are difficult to judge. This is true to some extent, especially as there are numerous channels of communication. It should be noted that ROI is measured at some point, regardless of complaints of its difficulty. Coming up with a decent plan to enable some sort of user controlled statistical data is important, especially when convincing clients in the fact that investing in social media is beneficial to companies. Generating conversations and developing relationships should be relatively easy to monitor, even before those relationships turn into sales. At the simplest level of monitoring, it is suggested that success of actions in social media is monitored daily through the monitoring services provided by the different social media channels. Measuring the results of this plan will therefore be done primarily through observation, along with Google Analytics, which can yield additional information into successes of applied actions and how they translate to website visitors.

### **Managing the integrated marketing communications process**

Integrated Marketing Communications has been discussed numerous times in this thesis. As it is a central concept, some care should be taken in its management. Kotler et al (2012, 801-802) talk of

how companies are combining online and offline communications strategies. In ebrand's case, implementing and managing IMC should be founded in a restructured approach to digital and social media. Specifically this means the company website and the different social media channels. They serve as a foundation of what ebrand does and should be used as a basis for any other potential marketing communications practices. Going back to the integration triangle displayed in figure 5 of part 2.5 of this thesis, care should be taken to ensure that all four types of messages being sent are congruent. This has to begin with making sure the unplanned, product and service messages are working, even before any planned messages are sent. In other words, the website and social media channels must present a picture of professionalism. It is only at that point that planned messages, i.e. advertising, direct advertising and personal selling should take place. If ebrand wants to act as a professional entity, consulting other companies and further developing those companies' communications, the base of their own operations must be maintained. In other words: Cleaning your own house before advertising cleaning services to others.

To help demonstrate how messages and actions develop in this plan, a figure has been devised and will be introduced in the social media plan section.

## **5.1 Social Media Plan**

The goal of this social media plan is to communicate value. The value is the knowledge that ebrand has concerning marketing in digital media and social media. Furthermore, the goal is to define and exemplify a functioning IMC plan and to discuss how it works in ebrand's case. This plan can function as a blueprint for ebrand's clientele, when developing similar plans for different kinds of companies. As the marketing communications mix and the steps in developing effective communications function as the theoretical basis for explaining this plan, parts of it are interchangeable for further use in marketing communications planning for a wide variety of B2B and B2C companies.

ebrand already has a functioning set of social media channels and a website. The challenge of implementing this plan is to integrate and develop those channels so they best serve the end goal of brand awareness and lead generation, along with the potential to create a functioning network of interactions that sustains existing relationships and promotes future ones. This includes a suggested



working schedule that aims to ensure necessary investment into content creation and communication.

The centre of ebrand’s social media presence is strangely enough, the website. The website needs to be a central platform for several reasons. Web presence still ends and begins with a functioning site that functions as an intermediary between social media channels. For example, if ebrand publishes a tweet on a topical social media trend, interested parties can be persuaded to inspect further information on the website. Content published in social media should always be found in depth on the website. The importance of this should not be understated. Google analytics are still the predominant and most widely accessible measuring tool for digital media metrics, and metrics are important in analysing and managing the IMC plan. They also provide tangible tools in the sales process. Interaction between the website and social media channels are presented in the interaction chart in figure 9, with lines symbolising back and forth communication. There is a necessity for a fixed point of observation that the website can function as a base for, in order to make implementing the overall plan possible.



FIGURE 9. The interaction chart

The figure also presents the most applicable parts of the marketing communications mix on the periphery. The inner portion of the figure represents a working entity of digital and social media

interaction. This portion is intersected by personal selling, direct advertising, word of mouth and events and experiences (trade show). These parts of the communications mix are introduced to the formula once the core of the message sending and receiving component is functional. Referring back to figure 5, the integration triangle ensures that the expectations that are promised by planned messages are met by the product and service messages. This set up also ensures that most of the unplanned messages are in fact planned messages, in the sense that the overall shape of social media activity and interaction sets an example. It is not an unfair assumption to make, that professionals appearing to be professional in their fields have a better chance of enticing customers to rely on the professionals for that professionalism. All joking aside, leading by example is a great advocate of trust during the formation of business relationships.

## **5.2 Tactical Plan**

After the effective communications plan has been devised, the focus can turn on implementing it via social media strategies on the various channels that have been chosen. The intent on the tactical plan is for ebrand to use the key concepts of content marketing, comment marketing, and inbound marketing to get the most out of the use of social media. A year clock will depict the daily, weekly and monthly tasks designed to help in effective communications. The tactical plan will also explain the relevant strategies for each channel to drive traffic to the website, for example, by updating ebrand's blog regularly to generate leads and Google Juice. The recommended actions will be depicted in table 2, followed by the intended outcomes for each channel.

As the objectives are to position as a thought leader, build awareness, generate more leads and traffic to the website, the main task should be on updating the blog frequently as it is an effective way to show ebrand's expertise and to help in relationship building. Also, by sharing the blog on every social media channel, it is possible to generate Google Juice while promoting ebrand's thought leadership.

Ideally, Facebook and Twitter are linked together and are used to promote each other simultaneously. However, as consistent and frequently updated content in social media is the number one thing to do to build awareness and generate leads, one has to learn to properly use the

opportunities provided by each channel. Twitter should be used to tweet ebrand's blog posts which will help in lead generation by providing Google Juice and showing thought leadership. Also, ebrand should often tweet recent industry news and if others in the industry have come up with something relevant, it should be retweeted. It should be mentioned, that tweets should contain a link to ebrand's website if it is convenient as this will generate more traffic. Since the lifespan of tweets is quite short, it should not be frowned upon to tweet older blog posts as resurfacing older content is an excellent way for ebrand to engage the community it has created.

Facebook should be used to engage the community ebrand has managed to create. With 1300 fans on their Facebook page, they should be posting more content there than they currently are. ebrand could try to engage their fans by posting more than a few pictures of coffee breaks on their wall but instead use it as an efficient content marketing platform to build relationships, generate leads and drive traffic to their website—while occasionally posting something humorous. Even though Google Plus is the number one when it comes to influencing factors in SEO, Facebook shares are the second best influencer, followed by comments and likes (see appendix 1), which should be utilised.

The reason to use Google Plus is simple, as can be seen in appendix 1, it is the number one ranking factor in search engine optimisation and even though this channel has not peaked like other social networks, it should be used for this purpose. This means it is an efficient channel for content marketing and it should be the main strategy for SEO. ebrand's every blog post and industry news piece that has been shared on Facebook and Twitter, should be shared on Google Plus as well to generate Google Juice. Also, ebrand should put more emphasis on Google Plus and be ready to utilise every aspect of it as Google is sure to develop it further in the future.

B2B companies tend to prefer LinkedIn over the other social media platforms and it has a lot of potential for ebrand as well, if ebrand would start using it properly. LinkedIn is an excellent channel for ebrand to do comment marketing while promoting their thought leadership. This will lead to new leads and in the process, help in relationship building. The way for ebrand to acquire new connections via LinkedIn, is to join industry-related groups and monitor them for a month—as is suggested in the year clock of activities in appendix 2—after which they should start sharing insights, and company content while taking part in conversations. The comment marketing strategy applies to

LinkedIn Answers as well. ebrand can search for relevant social media keywords to find questions to which they can add value by answering. ebrand should also share proper content on LinkedIn via status updates concerning relevant topics and discussions.

The use of SlideShare as a social media channel is an excellent platform to store and promote the knowhow ebrand possesses. By uploading professional material on SlideShare, ebrand can easily use it in content marketing when sharing it on other channels. By using SlideShare and promoting it via other social media channels, ebrand can generate the all so important Google Juice, while connecting with others which will help in relationship building and lead generation.

YouTube is not one of the most essential channels for ebrand but the commissioner can act there as well to raise awareness. Even though ebrand is not specialised in making videos, they could create and upload a few videos about their products and services. The length can be from one to two minutes but just by having some content about ebrand on YouTube should prove useful when considering Google Plus, The Layer, and Google Juice.

The year clock figure (see appendix 2) is a proposed guideline for implementing the social media plan. Arens et al (261, 2011) has been previously quoted in this thesis referring to the necessity of planning in marketing endeavours. Integrated marketing communications requires control and coordination. The year clock figure suggests a timeline of implementing key parts of the marketing communications plan. The figure provides daily and weekly guidelines for creating and monitoring content in order to provide the visibility and information flow necessary for a successful social media strategy. Included are planning and implementation time tables for a new website, its publishing and marketing. The goal of the year clock is to gradually convert the commissioner's activities into an IMC format while measuring the projects advance through metrics and visibility growth. The clock suggest two potential trade shows, the latter of which should be a late enough in the year to provide results that are presentable. The figure is a proposal, the actual actions and time tables should be reviewed according to company preferences. The importance of agreeing to and coordinating a schedule like the year clock figure should nevertheless be highlighted in implementing the plan. Although following such a strict plan requires significant workforce contributions, it is a necessary evil in building a B2B network of relationships.

TABLE 2. The actions recommended for ebrand Suomi Oy

Channel	Message	Tactic	Intended outcome
<b>Facebook</b>	- Content about the company and its blog posts →Direct to ebrand's website -Content about industry related news	-Content marketing -Comment marketing -Advertise -Engage in conversations within the community -Promote older blog posts	-Google Juice & SEO -Relationship building -Thought leadership -Lead generation -Word of mouth
<b>Twitter</b>	-Share company content and content that others have created →Direct to ebrand's website	-Actively engage in conversations -Content marketing -Comment marketing -Promote older blog posts -Retweet relevant news/blogs -Use of hashtags	-Google Juice & SEO -Relationship building -Word of mouth -Thought leadership
<b>LinkedIn</b>	-Share company content →Direct to ebrand's website -Show expertise	-Become active in the Answers section -Join groups and become involved in the discussions having monitored them for a while	-Thought leadership -Lead generation -Relationship building
<b>Google Plus</b>	-Share company content to promote expertise and direct to ebrand's website	-Content marketing -Monitor its progress as a social media network	-Google Juice & SEO
<b>SlideShare</b>	-Share company content to promote expertise and direct to ebrand's website	-Publish professional social media related material -Store and share ebrand's knowhow	-Google Juice & SEO -Thought leadership -New connections
<b>Blogs</b>	-Show expertise -Recommend the readers to contact the company for an offer related to the blog post	-Update regularly -Follow and professionally comment other people's blogs	-Thought leadership -Relationship building -Building awareness -Lead generation -Google Juice & SEO -Word of mouth
<b>YouTube</b>	-Rationally reasoning the benefits of purchasing services from ebrand	-Create a few short videos about the products/services ebrand has to offer	-Google Juice & SEO -Lead generation

## 6 CONCLUSIONS

Analysing and developing marketing communications for any organisation requires observation from an outside perspective, the compiling of a theoretical foundation, and only then applying the organisational perspective and knowledge to the equation. The authors of this thesis originally struggled with this, as both had prior knowledge of the commissioner and therefore had a somewhat unbiased viewpoint to the questions and problems presented. The process of completing the social media marketing communications plan for ebrand Suomi Oy became a learning experience in how to use marketing and marketing communications theories in practice. The steps required to accomplish the plan start at the very basic elements of marketing theory and build upon them to provide the sufficient theoretical background for the social media marketing communications plan.

The main research question for this thesis is: What kind of a marketing communications plan should ebrand Suomi Oy implement in their strategy to improve their social media marketing communications? In order to answer that question, a theory base was built. This consisted of marketing and holistic marketing theories, as well as marketing communications theories. These theories were then applied to the commissioner's situation and a plan was formed with the focus on B2B communications as suggested by the commissioner. The sub questions in this thesis are: Which tools should be used to improve ebrand Suomi Oy's marketing and possibly help them develop new services/products to sell to B2B companies? Can the results of this thesis be valid in other companies' marketing communications plans? This chapter will discuss the process of answering these questions.

Social media marketing and digital marketing form a complex field in which the commissioner, ebrand Suomi Oy has been active in for years. The commissioner was interested in the potential of acquiring more B2B customers. For that reason, B2B marketing and marketing communications were researched. The realisation that a thorough marketing communications plan was necessary came after finding constant mentions of the same phenomenon throughout the research process. There is clearly a focus on relationships and relationship marketing within holistic marketing theory, marketing communications, integrated marketing communications and B2B sales, not to mention social media,

which is in essence, just an enabler of relationships. It was determined throughout the research that the encouragement, development, management and continuance of those relationships were the most important ones. To further support the decision to focus on relationship marketing, value delivery process was described, through which the customer will receive added value in the relationships and CRM was included as a tool to support the relationship marketing, thus providing an answer to the sub question about the possible tools to improve ebrand Suomi Oy's marketing.

The most significant finding, that is the cornerstone of this marketing communications plan, is the positioning as a thought leader by regularly updating ebrand's blog and sharing their insights on every social media network possible as is instructed in the tactical plan. Purely the actions required of reaching the status of a thought leader in social media industry should help in lead generation and in building better relationships with customers—which are the most crucial ones when it comes to social media marketing. Yet, if the plan is successfully implemented, being a thought leader should generate significantly more leads for ebrand due to the company's vast knowledge about social media and everything related to the social media networks. By constantly showing their expertise, ebrand will become one of the companies to go to when organisations are considering social media trainings.

The development and implementation of the social media marketing communications plan will work as recommendations for ebrand Suomi Oy to consider and hopefully the commissioner will choose to use the results that we came to. As it has been mentioned that social media has mainly been used by B2C companies in their marketing efforts, making it to work in the B2B industry can be a challenging task even though the focus on both is in relationship marketing. However, this thesis proves that it is a worthwhile strategy as the theoretical framework fully supports the actions required of ebrand Suomi Oy to take in improving their marketing communications in social media. Each of the actions are presented in the tactical plan, which concludes what must be done in the chosen social media channels to promote thought leadership, build awareness and generate leads. A year clock was composed, in which the recommendations for daily, weekly, and monthly activities are listed but it is up to the commissioner to decide the specifics of the activities based on the availability of their resources.

A final conclusion is that if ebrand Suomi Oy successfully manages to implement the proposed plan and is able to clearly measure the desired outcomes, the marketing communications plan should be adaptable for other B2B organisations as well. This would mean that we have managed to develop a new product/service as an addition to their existing product range which was their initial request for the purpose of this thesis.



## 7 DISCUSSION

The purpose of this thesis was to create a social media marketing communications plan for a B2B company and to understand B2B opportunities in social media. The topic was developed through preliminary research and conversations with the supervising teacher. Initial complications over defining the topic were overcome. All of the research in this thesis was qualitative and was carried out via desktop research. The marketing theory formed a base of information onto which further theories such as marketing communications and value delivery models were applied. This theory base was important, because it enabled the analysis and application of later empirical portions of this thesis, such as the social media plan. Thus the authors gained a deeper understanding of how the process of creating a marketing communications plan is taken through from initial idea to final result.

Social media has been lauded as an immense and important tool for advertisers. This hype has carried over into the industry and in some cases the cart has been placed in front of the horse. Social media communications are amazing opportunities for companies, but need to be thought of in a larger context along with other marketing actions. Integrating these practices under the principles of IMC was seen as the correct method of proceeding and IMC is a staple throughout this thesis. The commissioner has a significant ability and knowledge in the industry but is currently not communicating this value to its customers and potential customers. Implementing this plan in the commissioner's online presence helps maximise the potential of these communications channels to yield desired results, which are interactions and relationships that develop into business opportunities and partnerships.

The thesis refers to the importance of control and planning in marketing and marketing communications on several occasions. The plan also includes a suggestion to create a set checklist of things to do, as resource management can be seen as a tough task for many small enterprises. The management of marketing communications through control programs is a necessity that must be realised when implementing a plan.

The completion of this thesis according to the original plan and schedule failed miserably due to various reasons and commitments. A renewed timetable was established in the spring of 2014 and that schedule has been fulfilled. The largest obstacle faced by the authors when writing this thesis was the structure of the research and organisation of that research into a presentable form. This was mainly due to the complicated topic. A marketing communications plan for a marketing company, meaning the product is also marketing can be confusing.

A key realisation took place after the theoretical portion was mostly finished. The answer to the questions regarding future business opportunities for the commissioner in the B2B field were answered to some extent. An integrated marketing communications plan can be implemented on a case by case basis to most companies. Whether they are B2B or B2C companies does not really matter, as every company is different. Applying the correct marketing communications mix parts and developing an integrated social media and digital media plan can serve as a product the commissioner can consult customers with. The best example they can use in this is their own.

Another recommendation for the commissioner, as is apparent from the plan, is to focus more on creating and distributing content to build the relationships so often highlighted in this thesis. In some cases, larger industry leaders have been known to employ personnel specifically for content creation. Resources may not permit this in ebrand's case, but with as the Oulu region is full of students looking for internships, this resource should be utilised more.

In closing, it is essential to understand that building a successful online entity cannot be done overnight. It requires significant investment, in time more so than money. It also needs to be managed with a plan and capable control over how that plan is put into action in a professional manner. The results of this thesis can hopefully aid the commissioner in accomplishing those goals.

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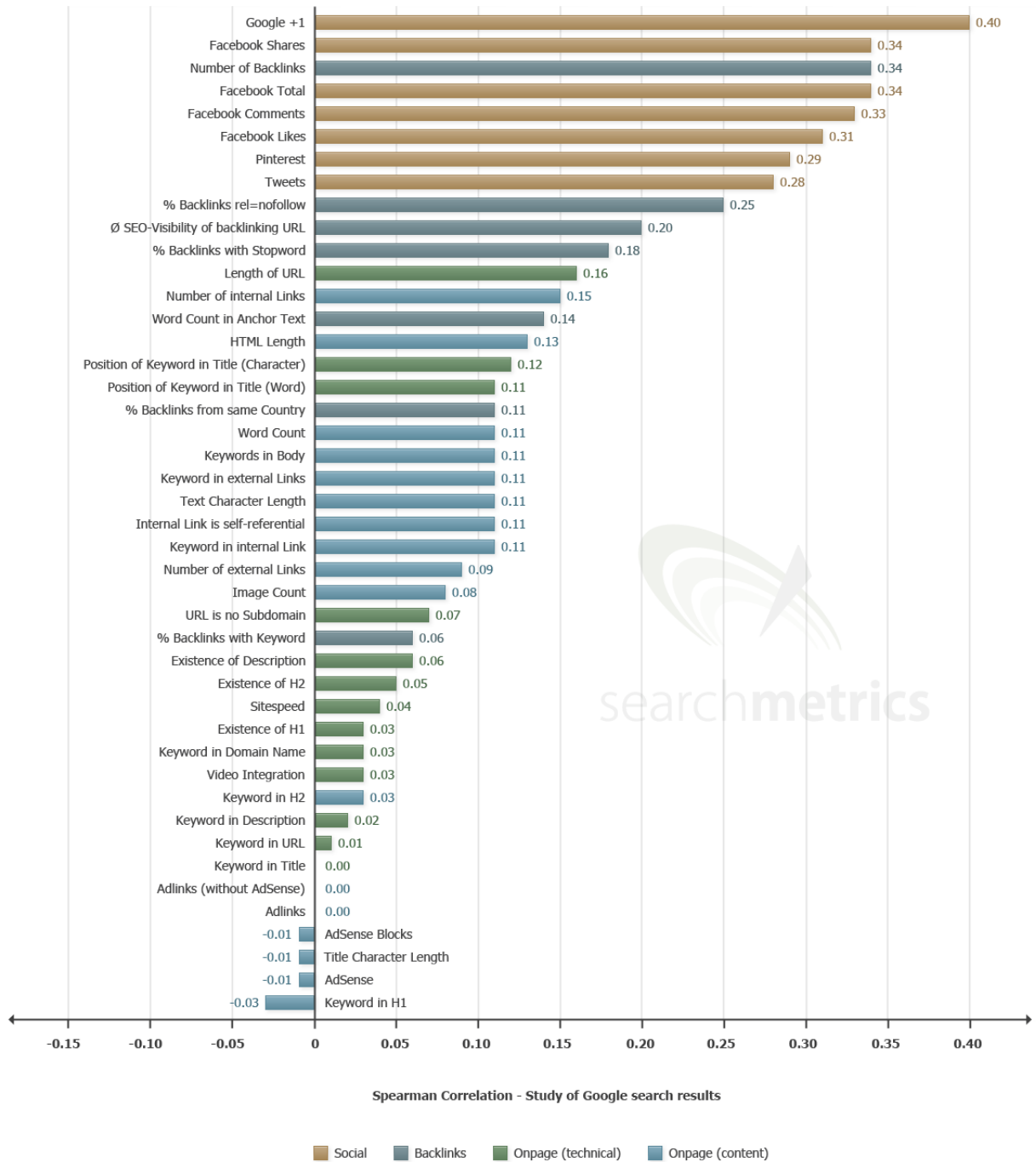
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