Saimaa University of Applied Sciences
Faculty of Business Administration, Lappeenranta
Degree Programme in International Business

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Online Content Marketing Strategy.
Case: Mediatalo Toimelias Oy

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Abstract

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The purpose of the study was to get a deeper knowledge of content marketing concepts, its techniques, benefits, challenges and trends, and to create an online content marketing strategy and give clear guidelines to the case company on how to lead customers through the buying cycle.

The data for this study were gathered from the various sources, particularly articles and books. The information concerned core concepts of content marketing, consumer behaviour, Internet channels, customer attraction and engagement. The qualitative research method was selected for acquiring data and analyzing the research results. Empirical findings were collected from personal semi-structured interviews with frontline employees in the case company and analyzed with the help of content analysis.

The results of the study revealed the importance of content marketing in today's world. By examining the information on the current customers, their characteristics, pain points, needs and preferences were revealed together with the best way to influence their behaviour with the help of content marketing. Based on the findings, clear guidelines were given to the case company on how to utilize different techniques and content in the most effective and efficient way in order to attract new prospects and increase leads and sales.

Keywords: content marketing, techniques, customer profiles, buying cycle, customer attraction, Toimelias

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background of the study

Ten years ago, interruption marketing ruled the world. Traditional interruption techniques such as TV/radio advertisements, telemarketing, print advertising, e-mail spam and others are all designed to interrupt what people are doing and break their concentration. You are at the crucial point of a thrilling movie when it cuts to a commercial. You are admiring the beautiful scenery while driving a country road- and a huge billboard comes into the view.

However, consumers are no longer interested in interruption marketing, and they have learned to tune it out. For example, they flip pages in a magazine without noticing advertisements or use commercial breaks to grab a snack. Nowadays people want to be entertained and educated, and they go online to find valuable information about the products and services they are looking for. Both B2B and B2C customers also expect to socially interact and share content with others who have similar interests. Social media platforms allow companies to talk to their customers directly, without all the marketing hype. A company creates the content, and its current customers and prospects will find, read and discuss it when they want to.

So, marketers understand that traditional marketing is becoming less and less effective, and that they must find a better way. Entering content marketing can be a great solution. Pulizzi (2014) deems that content marketing is a non-interruption marketing technique of creating and distributing relevant and valuable content to attract, acquire and engage a clearly defined and understood target audience.

The B2B Content Marketing Research published by the Content Marketing Institute (CMI) and Marketing Profs in 2012 showed that:

- 9 out of 10 organizations engage in content marketing.
- On an average, B2B marketers employ eight different content marketing tactics to achieve their goals.

- 60% report that they plan to increase their spending on content marketing (see Figure 1.1).
- Marketers, on an average, spend over a quarter of their marketing budget on content marketing (see Figure 1.2).
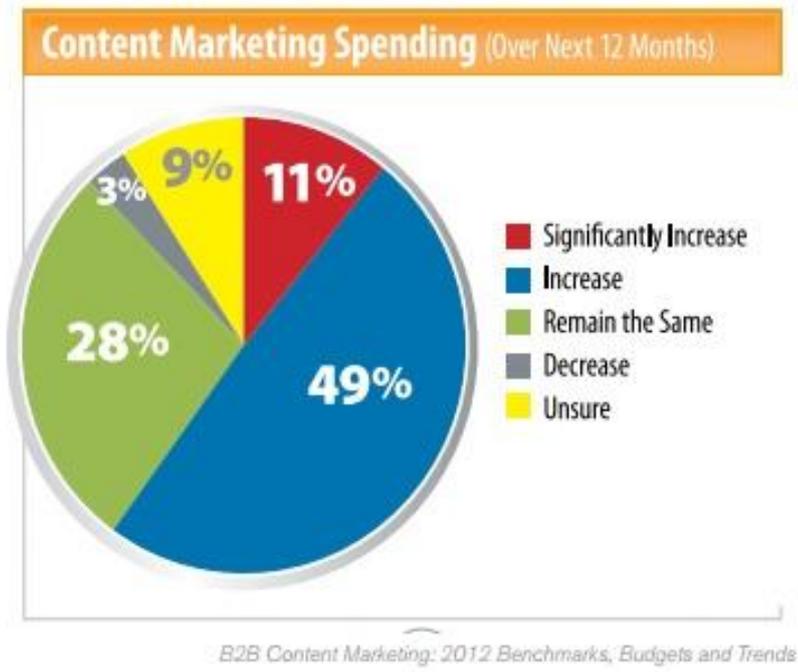
Figure 1.1. Content Marketing Spending (CMI & Marketing Profs 2012)

Figure 1.2. Total Marketing Budget Spent on Content Marketing (CMI & Marketing Profs 2012)

However, due to ineffective messaging, much of this effort will never be noticed by potential clients. Companies are currently facing the challenge of rethinking their content marketing strategy, and incorporate social media and search engine optimization in order to fulfill customer expectations for ease of discovery, consumption and sharing. On top of that, content must educate readers and make it easy to follow a logical conclusion to buy (Odden 2012, p. 54).

Content marketing trends and predictions for the year 2014 seem to indicate that there is a need for businesses to increase their investment in this type of marketing due to its importance in reaching business goals. For example, a study by Content Marketing Institute and Marketing Profs (2013) indicated that social media, newsletters, and blogs will be the top content distribution channels. In addition, conversions will become a more important indicator in measuring content marketing success. According to MarketingSherpa glossary (2012), conversion is the point at which a recipient of a marketing message performs a desired action. In other words, conversion is simply getting someone to respond to the call-to-action (to click on the link, go to the landing page, buy the product, etc.).

DeMers (2013), a contributor to the Forbes magazine, predicted in his article called "The top 7 content marketing trends that will dominate 2014" that businesses will finally be able to define content marketing, to explain what it is, how it aligns with their overall business goals, and why it is important. He also stated that Google + and SlideShare will become essential for B2B content marketers.

All of the facts mentioned above and many more have aroused an interest in the author to explore the world of content marketing and find a way to exploit its techniques for the business purposes of the case company.

1.2 Case company

Mediatalo Toimelias Oy is a Finnish limited company that helps its clients to succeed in Russian marketing. They specialize in online marketing campaigns and improving search engine visibility on Russian search engines.

This company provides services such as search engine optimization and search engine marketing, blog marketing, content creation and roadmap to Russia covering strategies for online marketing with a detailed action plan. In addition, they offer instructions and sparring of the management, and VK marketing to ensure the company's presence in the largest social media channel in Russia by creating group pages and organizing paid advertising. What is more important, they always work in co-operation with customers and do their best to build strong customer relationships based on loyalty and trust.

Recently, the company has set a long-term goal to expand the customer base by entering foreign markets with the same services targeted at the Russian customer. It views international business as an opportunity to generate incremental sales, extend the lifecycle of services and replicate home market success.

To support achieving the long-term goals, the company has set the short-term goals as follows: to acquire international market knowledge, understand the needs and interests of potential customers and get contacts with them, not just spread a word about the company in international circles.

1.3 Objectives

The first objective of the current study is to get a deeper theoretical knowledge of content marketing concepts, techniques, benefits, challenges, trends and statistics.

The second one is to define the content marketing audience of the case company and understand its problems, needs, interests and preferences. This is needed to find out what kind of content is valuable for the customers and, consequently, should be created, distributed and promoted by Toimelias.

Creation of a content marketing strategy is the third objective of the project. The author aims to give clear guidelines to the case company on how to create a strategy that can be easily integrated into the existing marketing mix. Besides that, the author proposed to explain each step of this process separately and provide practical suggestions for implementation.

1.4 Delimitations

Content marketing is a very broad concept involving many issues that can be explored. However, as the project is done for the case company operating in a specific business field, it is easier to build the frames of the study.

Firstly, at the moment of conducting the present study, the case company is interested in operating content marketing techniques such as blogging, SlideShare, Twitter and LinkedIn. In spite of the fact that Facebook and Google+ are extremely important channels in today's world, they are not relevant for the case company and, consequently, for this particular study. Secondly, the company is interested in gaining deep analyses of the research results, not numbers, percentages and statistics. So, qualitative research methods have been approved for use in the current study.

Thirdly, the case company is at the very beginning of their "Go international!" journey. That is why this project is focused on setting goals, identifying the audience, understanding its needs and preferences, digging for content topics and building an editorial calendar. Other issues such as content distribution, promotion and measuring results are left out from the empirical part. However, the theoretical part covers the whole content marketing strategy and all the steps of the process. It is also important to mention that the focus of this study is not on the internationalization process, but more on practical suggestions and guidelines.

Finally, two versions of the study will be created: internal and external. The internal one will contain confidential information that will be used as a means of competitive advantage by the case company. Consequently, in the published version some issues will not be included, meaning that not all the answers to the research questions will be covered there.

1.5 Research questions

The research problem of this study is: *How to build an audience that will build the case company business with the help of content marketing?*

The author aims to give clear guidelines on the creation of a content marketing strategy. In order to achieve this goal, answers to the following research questions should be found:

1) What is content marketing?

2) What are the relevant content marketing techniques for the case company?

3) What customer profiles can be developed for the case company?

4) What kind of content should be created, promoted and distributed by the case company?

5) How to lead customers through the buying cycle with the help of content marketing?

1.6 Research method

One of the reasons for conducting this study is to examine consumer behaviour and ways to influence it. In order to collect and analyze the data revealing different points of view towards the work the company does, and come to the correct conclusions, qualitative research methods are used.

Qualitative research aims to gather an in-depth understanding of human behaviour and the reasons that govern such behaviour. This discipline investigates the why and how of decision making (Glenn 2010, p.104). Qualitative research is exploratory; it generates a hypothesis by collecting, analyzing and interpreting data acquired from different sources. It refers to the concepts, meanings, definitions, characteristics and descriptions of phenomena, not their counts and measures.

There are two primary ways to gather information about customers or other relevant groups: ask them questions, or observe them and their behavior and draw conclusions from this (Imms 2002, p.34). In the current study the author does not interact with the research subjects, but conducts personal interviews with frontline employees of the case company in order to gather valid and reliable data that are relevant to the research questions and objectives. This approach

does not let the subjects know that they are being observed, but still offers an opportunity to understand their motivations, values and attitudes (Desai 2002, p.14).

In general, qualitative research generates detailed, rich and valid information, and this can truly contribute to an in-depth understanding of the context and answering research questions.

1.7 Structure of the study

The current study consists of two main parts: theoretical and empirical. In the first section, the author reviews theoretical information and statistics concerning content marketing found in books, journals and Internet sources, explains theoretical concepts and highlights current trends in the content marketing field.

The second part of the study describes the empirical findings, which are collected thorough the qualitative research methods applied, particularly personal interviews, solutions for acquiring and engaging customers, content marketing strategy guidelines and practical suggestions for the implementation of the strategy. In the end, the author gives a summary, highlights discussions and makes relevant conclusions of the study.

2 Content marketing

2.1 What is content marketing?

Content Marketing Experience (2014) explains that content marketing is an umbrella term covering a set of strategies, techniques and tactics to fulfill business goals by using content across the customer lifecycle and the business functions in a consistent, integrated and continuous way.

Generally speaking, content marketing is a connected, customer-oriented, strategic and, foremost, an ongoing process. It can be considered as a pull strategy because it attracts, informs, educates, persuades and engages prospects, current customers and repeat buyers. Good content answers the questions and satisfies the needs of different customer groups. A content marketing strategy

will bring better results if the material is not just informative, but entertaining and memorable at the same time.

Rose (2012) states that traditional marketing and advertising is telling the world you are a rock star, while content marketing is showing the world that you are one. In order to succeed in that, a company should deliver the content in all the places where its audience can search for it.

2.1 Content marketing techniques

Content does not have to be limited to text and images. Different types of content can appeal to diverse types of people and serve varying purposes. Any content that can be optimized for better visibility on search engines can also be shareable with social media (Odden 2012, p.107). The following chapters describe the techniques on which the case company focuses its attention at the moment of creating this study.

2.1.1 Blogging

According to Sauers (2010), blogging is the act of creating posts for a blog, and the person who creates those posts is known as a blogger. The collective environment of all blogs and bloggers is commonly referred to as the blogosphere.

Blogs are designed for fluid content production, push-and-pull distribution of content and social interaction. Many blog systems are created to be fundamentally search engine-friendly (Garner 2012, p.170). Each blog has discrete entries or so-called posts, and the newest ones are presented at the top of the page, followed by older posts.

Features of blogs are the following:

- Blog posts are marked with the date and time of publication. This is important both for conveying timeliness and for the functioning of aggregators.
- Unlike items on a standard webpage, which may be modified regularly, a blog entry typically remains unchanged once posted. A topic discussed in

one post may be revisited in a new post or in updates appended to an existing post.

- Most blogs written by individuals allow readers to post comments. These comments are automatically attached to the end of a post, and all readers can view them. Blogs from large organizations tend not to have this feature, as allowing public comment may be determined as more hassle than it is worth (Sauers 2010, p. 17).

From the user's perspective, there are three different types of blogs: individual, subject, and organizational. Individual blogs are created and maintained by individuals for their personal reasons. This model is the original blog style. Typically resembling an online journal, these blogs are commonly personal in nature, relating to the blogger's life experiences or professional life.

Subject blogs can be produced by one or more people and are focused on a particular topic: hobbies, politics, pets, or any other topic of interest to an online community. As for organizational blogs, they represent the views, opinions, and events of an organization. Sauers (2010) states that it is important to keep in mind that these three categories are generalizations to help to learn more about blogging and are not meant as hard and fast rules. Many blogs may fall into more than one category or may not easily fit into any of them.

According to Sauers (2010), the first companies that started blogging were technology companies such as Google, Microsoft, Sun Microsystems and Cisco. Already in the 1990s people considered blogging as a new way of communication with customers.

Nowadays much attention is paid to blogging. Bodnar and Cohen (2011) describe that a blog is the hub of the company's B2B social media presence. All inbound traffic from social media postings should drive to a blog because it allows a company to quickly publish content and spark social media discussion (see Figure 2.1 below).
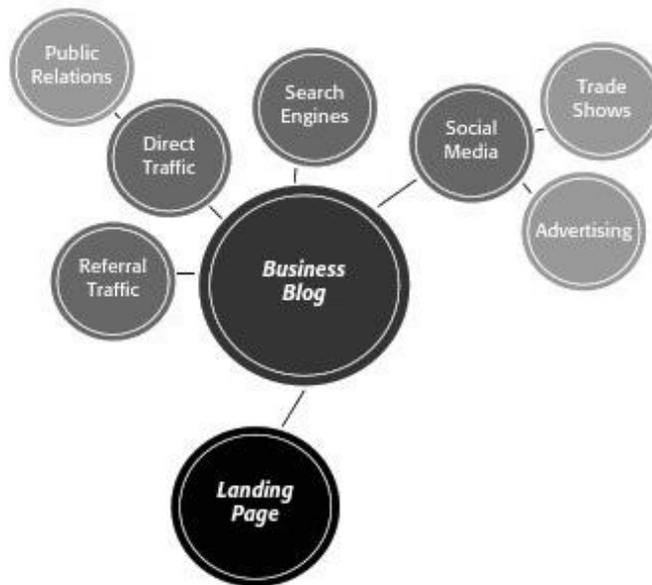
Figure 2.1. The Blog as a Hub of Social Media Leads (Bodnar & Cohen 2011)

A well-maintained blog can best capitalize on the high-speed benefits that real-time marketing provides in a search and social world. Real-time benefits of blogs are the following:

- blogs are available to the audience from all over the world
- comment systems provide additional conversation and feedback
- people can share blog posts and articles via likes, retweets, links, etc.
- frequency of new posts and updates is an indicator to search engines and customers that the blog is still relevant and "alive"
- reverse chronological order of posts makes readers know how active the company is.

2.1.2 SlideShare

What is SlideShare?

As stated on the company website (2014), SlideShare is the world's largest community for sharing presentations. With 60 million monthly visitors and 130 million page views, it is amongst the most visited 200 websites in the world. Besides presentations, SlideShare also supports documents, PDFs, videos and webinars.

How does SlideShare work?

SlideShare features professional and educational communities that comment, favorite and download content on a regular basis. Information spreads virally through blogs and different social networks such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn.

Individuals and organizations upload presentations onto SlideShare in order to share ideas with a wide audience, tell the world about their products and services, conduct research, be connected to others and, ultimately, generate leads for their businesses. Depending on the type of content publication (public or private), anyone or certain groups of people can view presentations and documents on the topics that arouse their interest, download them and reuse for their own purposes.

Benefits of SlideShare

Friedmann (2012) analyzed the value of the SlideShare network and presented the benefits of it. From her point of view, SlideShare can:

- support the company's public relations efforts by acting as another thought-leadership platform
- provide quick and easy feedback in the form of view counts (similar to YouTube)
- boost SEO and increase traffic to the website
- offer an easier and less expensive means of content creation, as compared to YouTube
- offer the opportunity to identify new partners and business contacts (e.g. SlideShare PRO, in particular, enables users to specifically track views and downloads to know exactly who downloaded files).

In addition, SlideShare plays well with other social media tools. It is easy to align this platform with other social media tools by putting its "share" button on the corporate website, as well as sharing recent uploads on platforms such as Twitter and Facebook. LinkedIn is another special distribution channel for

SlideShare content. Because of the recent acquisition of SlideShare, LinkedIn allows a unique integration of these two networks.

To sum up, SlideShare is the best way to get one's own ideas (slides) out on the Internet, so that others can easily find and share them. As soon as the slides are uploaded, they start doing the talking, and the world takes notice.

2.1.3 Twitter

What is Twitter?

Twitter is a microblogging messaging service that limits to 140 characters per message, including spaces and punctuation, to post updates, called "tweets", anytime from anywhere to be read by anyone. Twitter began by asking the question "What are you doing now?" (Dixon 2012, p.40).

How does Twitter work?

On Twitter, it is possible to read updates of people, latest news, updated content and important links. Users can post their updates directly onto Twitter with the use of the Twitter website or the Twitter application on mobile devices. Content posted there is usually public, so users can easily search for specific users, tweets, topics, keywords and places.

Apart from this, people can use Twitter to quickly catch up on and learn the latest news and how people are reacting to it. As soon as someone posts information about any breaking story on Twitter, this content is spread across the Internet within a few seconds. Dixon (2012) states that worldwide events, from elections to government overthrows, are totally broadcast via Twitter, by passing and outpacing the mainstream media.

Features of Twitter

In order to better use this service and communicate with others more easily, users create and modify their tweets with the help of **@usernames** and **#keywords**. So, when writing a post, a user can mention another one by typing his or her @username. This will notify the other person that s/he was mentioned in

a new tweet posted by someone else. This feature is very powerful because it does not only spread a word, but also makes people become instantly connected, so that they can easily engage in short conversations with each other.

As for #keywords, they allow a user to include the subject of his or her tweet, for example, #content #marketing #tactics. These hashtags can also become links, so other people can click on them to see what others are talking about the same topics, to see what is going on in the world around.

Moreover, a user can forward a message posted by another person to his or her own followers. This practice called "retweet" is a simple way to give credit to the original author of a reposted tweet.

Benefits for brands and organizations

Odden (2012) deems that Twitter's built-in search functionality makes it easier for brands and organizations to target prospective clients efficiently. Another great use of Twitter Search is finding competitors and observing how they use Twitter and with whom they connect. Twitter chats are also a great opportunity for experts within the organization to instantaneously answer questions presented by prospective customers.

The most effective way to expand the network on Twitter is to promote useful content and engage with this network. In general, Twitter can be a communication and networking channel: a news source, a channel for blog posts, a cross-promotion tool for Facebook and a way to survey the community for new ideas and suggestions.

2.1.4 LinkedIn

What is LinkedIn?

LinkedIn is a social website focused on professional networking. It is similar to Facebook because users create their own profiles and connect to people they know there. Where it differs is that Facebook connects a person to his/her friends and family, whereas LinkedIn is for staying in touch with and growing own professional network (Dixon 2012, p.188). It has been called Facebook

with a suit and tie, and Twitter on its best behavior. With the help of this social network, B2B marketers seem to be gaining the most leads.

LinkedIn is a dynamic social media tool that is perfect for searching for job opportunities, engaging professional communities of like-minded people, hosting links to colleagues, recommendations and multimedia presentations.

How does LinkedIn work?

A user first creates a profile by adding personal information including basic data, professional experience, education, skills, interests, website links and contact information. Next a user adds and manages connections. LinkedIn suggest a list of people this user might know by integrating with e-mail programs, such as Hotmail, Gmail or Microsoft Outlook. It is also possible to search for people, companies, universities, groups, jobs and articles there. Once a user has set up on this website, s/he can communicate and engage the network by asking questions, sharing content and making introductions.

Features of LinkedIn

There are many applications for further customizing presence on this website. They help a profile to become an interactive multimedia portfolio. For instance, SlideShare allows uploading and sharing PowerPoint-like presentations with visitors, seeing the number of views and commenting on each other's presentations. The Google Docs application enables adding YouTube videos into the presentations. WordPress is one of the world's most popular blog platforms. It is an easy way to keep connections informed on written content because it provides an application that lets users link their recent blog posts to LinkedIn profiles. With the use of Amazon's Reading List application a user can add books to the bookshelf, and share and recommend them to connections.

Benefits of LinkedIn

Dixon (2012) states that LinkedIn is a valuable tool for increasing the ongoing social engagement in the professional practice. For example, there are different ways to use LinkedIn for building awareness. In order to make connections

aware of current events, a user can send direct messages to connections, share updates, attach links to articles, presentations, videos and other information. Besides that, this network allows users to receive feedback from their connections about the shared content by asking questions such as "What is your opinion about..?".

LinkedIn is also a great tool for building collaboration across professional networks. Joining a group allows a user to take part in discussions with other professionals who are interested in the same topic. Apart from this, each user can add value to his/her connections by answering questions posted on LinkedIn and introduce other members to each other. Dixon (2012) deems that a user will be seen as an individual who takes an interest in others. The goodwill earned through these acts can have an impact on the network in limitless positive ways.

It should be also mentioned that LinkedIn's search capabilities provide an excellent means of connecting with the right potential clients. LinkedIn shows how many degrees of separation exist between, for example, the sales manager of the case company and the marketing manager of the potential client company, as well as which contacts they may have in common.

LinkedIn company pages are an exquisite avenue for sharing content about the company, its products and services, recruiting new employees, and sharing information about the team.

2.2 Content marketing trends and predictions for 2014

This chapter reviews some interesting global trends in the year 2014 in order to shape the content marketing strategy for the case company accordingly. The main trends are outlined below.

A recent study by Content Marketing Institute and Marketing Profs on benchmarks, budgets and trends shows that brands that are using content marketing see a considerable ROI, meaning more sales and conversions. In addition, the study indicates that for the first time 44% of the marketers have a documented content strategy and 73% have a person who oversees the content marketing strategy.

#1 Social Media, newsletters and blogs will be on the top

In 2014 more brands will use social media as one of their top distribution channels. The importance of articles posted on the website, corporate blogging and eNewsletters will also grow (see Figure 2.2 below).
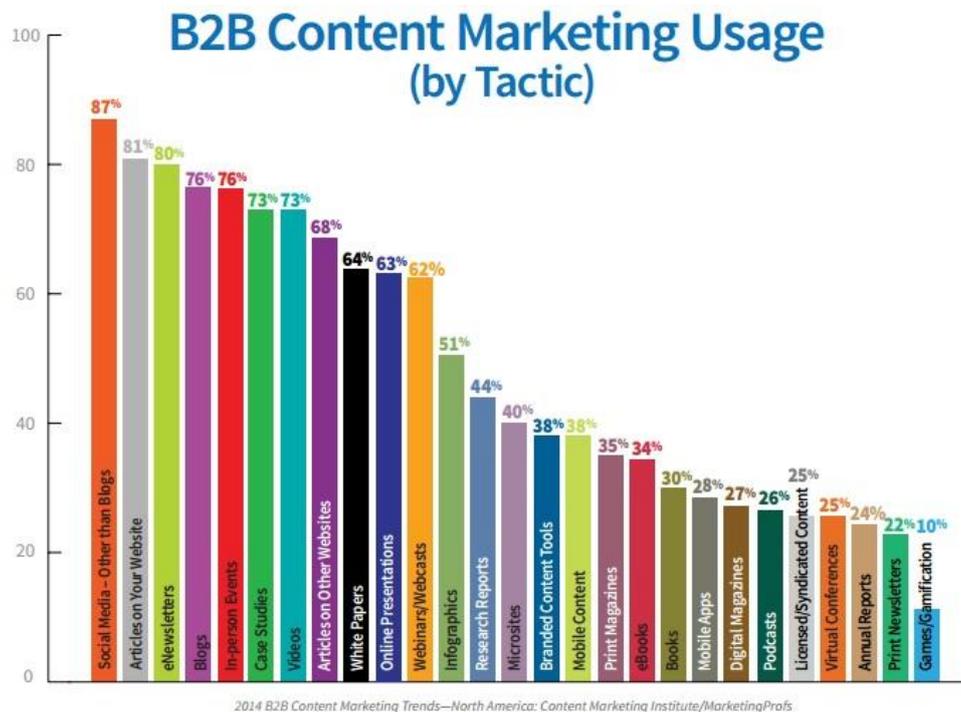
Figure 2.2. B2B Content Marketing Usage (CMI & Marketing Profs 2013)

So, in order to be successful this year, companies should spend money and time on blogging, particularly blog content creation, and creating a definite social media strategy to promote blog content and increase customer interaction and engagement.

#2 Conversions will become a more important metric of success

According to the CMI study (2013), most B2B companies measure their success by the oldest metrics such as web traffic (see Figure 2.3). This year, there will be a trend of getting traffic to the web pages. However, more and more companies are changing their minds because they are starting to understand the importance of the conversion rate, which is another tactic to measure the success of converting website visitors to paying customers.

Certainly, the metrics will differ from industry to industry. For example, some companies will measure their success in the volume of orders, and others will monitor the number of downloads or quality leads.

Figure 2.3. Metrics for B2B Content Marketing Success (CMI and Marketing Profs 2013)

Gaya (2013) states that the better SEO efforts are, the more customers will find the company, and the better chances it will have to convert them. So, in order to succeed in 2014, companies should increase their page ranks and page authority with link-building and producing strong original content. Companies should also optimize for conversions by using different tools and practices.

#3 Mobile and location-based content marketing strategies

According to comScore (2013), in the U.S. more than 50 percent of Internet users are accessing the Web using more than one device. Furthermore, the average leading retailer receives a third of the monthly traffic exclusively from mobile devices, such as smartphones and tablets.

DeMers (2013) deems that creating content that can be read 'on the go' will be-come increasingly important, which means that mobile-friendly formatting, shorter and more actionable blog posts should be taken into account. Besides that, with the rise of mobile device usage, GPS-enabled smartphones will in-creasingly utilize location and personal-preference information to provide flash deals.

So, mobile and location-based strategies are essential for increasing the market share and reaching new audiences. That is why companies should outline their strategies so that they suit different devices. For example, creating apps, using geo-targeting and GPS can enhance the user experience and make it more convenient. When companies offer a good mobile experience, the majority of people have a better opinion towards their brands.

#4 Google+ and SlideShare will become essential

With the predicted growth of Google+ in future, DeMers (2013) expects that it will become an even more important tool for content dissemination and social sharing. This can be explained by its importance for Google Author Rank and Authorship, which will be two of the dominant trends within the SEO industry by the end of 2014.

SlideShare will also continue to be a key player when it comes to content shar-ing, if it continues to follow the current trend. According to a study by CMI (2013), 40% of B2B marketers are currently using SlideShare for content distri-bution, as compared to 23% the year before.

#5 SEO and Social Media will be intertwined

According to Web Content Blog (2013), in the past links were the primary way for search engines to recognize the strength and value of content. Even though links are still important, social signals are gaining importance. The more people are sharing the content, the higher quality it seems to have. It is no coincidence that the top-ranking search results tend to have more social shares than those which are ranked lower.

So, companies should invest more into social networks such as Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter. In order to make social networks grow, time and effort is needed. However, Gaya (2013) deems that analytics should be applied first to identify where the audience is present, and only after that the company can start the action.

3 Content marketing strategy creation: Theory

3.1 Objectives

Whether the goal is to acquire new customers and increase revenue or to facilitate public relations and customer service effectiveness, identifying tactical objectives and the steps to reach them is essential for success (Odden 2012, p.39). So, each company should identify its overall business goals for content marketing, including end goals such as an increase in leads and sales, media coverage, social engagement, or better search traffic and brand awareness.

All of those business objectives are worth reaching, but the more important issue is to tie marketing objectives together with overall organizational goals. The process of establishing marketing goals starts with a good understanding of current business performance and efforts to acquire and retain customers (Odden 2012, p.42). Common focus areas in an online marketing strategy can include the following key performance indicators:

- search visibility
- web page links
- social shares and links
- the number of visitors to the company' website
- newsletter, blog and social content subscribers, friends and followers
- comments and other measures of engagement.

Odden (2012) deems that the simplest thing to do is to assess the online marketing strategy for what has been successful so far and what needs some improvement. For example, a review of the website analytics may show a steady

increase in search traffic. However, the quality of that traffic should be improved in terms of leads, sales, and profitability.

In order to tie marketing goals to overall business goals, a company should analyze how well its website is currently performing and contemplate what the overall business goals might be for the future. It is easier to look at each business goal separately, understand its focus (on revenue, retention, or service) and see how it can be related to the content and what kind of content marketing tactics can be applied for achieving this goal.

As for identifying marketing-centric objectives, a company should think about the specific aims it wants to accomplish through content, so that this will ultimately lead to overall business goals, for example:

- to elevate brand perception
- to drive customer engagement
- to provide better customer service
- to increase customer retention
- or to build a bigger referral network (Odden 2012, p.44).

The point is that as soon as a company understands its overall business goals, it can easier map them to supporting marketing objectives.

3.2 Audience

If a company aims to create a more effective content marketing strategy, it should become more sophisticated in understanding of its customer needs, behaviours and preferences. It means that a company should optimize for its customers by researching and segmenting customer data with the purpose of developing customer personas.

But what is a persona? According to The Buyer Persona Manifesto by Revella (2011), a persona is an archetype, composite picture of the real people who buy, or might buy, products like the ones the company sells. Particularly, the idea of personas is based on a representation of common characteristics of prospects and buyers that can draw from a wide range of data sources of differ-

ent types and preferences for content search, consumption, and engagement. Odden (2012) states that insight into customer needs will help to develop a more relevant and effective content marketing approach.

By using these fictional characters and knowing what they care about, marketers can do a better job of creating relevant content that can be easily found on search engines and social media websites. This is extremely important because it inspires prospects and buyers to buy and share.

Figure 3.1 below shows the range of activities intended to reveal groups of customers with common characteristics.

Figure 3.1. Steps toward Persona Development and Implementation with Content Marketing (Odden 2012)

And in Figure 3.2 the sources for data collection are illustrated.
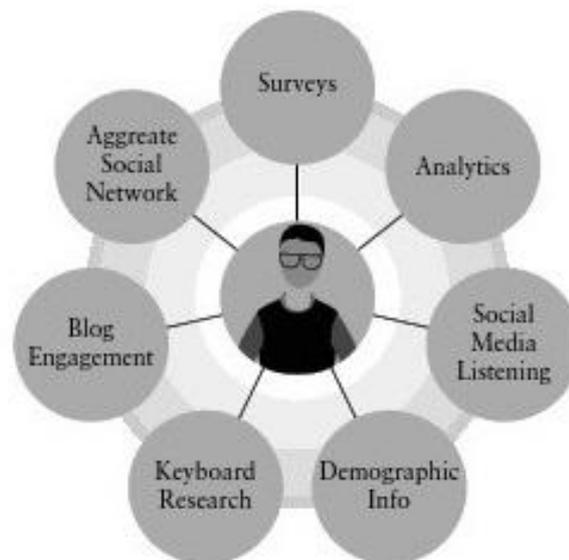
Figure 3.2. Data Collection for Persona Development (Odden 2012)

3.3 Content plan

3.3.1 General information

A company can translate its understanding of customer needs and business goals into a specific content plan that identifies the relevant content mix, keywords, topics and desired outcomes across the customer buying cycle.

Odden (2012) deems that an understanding of customer groups helps to gain a sense of how they like to find and engage with online content. The better the alignment of content availability and relevance with customer interests is, the more effective content marketing efforts become at increasing sales and customer satisfaction. Again, a marketing focus on personas can also help to create a more targeted and effective content plan.

Persona-guided content is considered to be more relevant and useful, and that is why it is appealing for both search engines and customers. But good content quality is not a solution. The quantity of quality content which is relevant and easy to find inspires readers to take actions.

So, based on the needs, pain points (weaknesses), or goals of the ideal customer persona, a company can identify whether appropriate content already exists. If sufficient content does not exist, it should be incorporated into the content plan for creation (Odden 2012, p.72). The point is that a company can easily map its customer needs (e.g., "How can I succeed in search engine marketing on the Russian Internet?") to specific content such as a blog entry, a SlideShare presentation, or a service page will help this persona along in search engine marketing in Russia.

3.3.2 Content plan creation

With an understanding of business and marketing goals and target consumer personas, it is possible to create an optimized and socialized content plan. Consumers tend to engage with information that is the most interesting, timely, and relevant to them. Odden (2012) states that content marketing is not as simple as publishing and distributing what a company thinks potential customers

want to see. There has to be some kind of order and strategy in place to achieve mutually beneficial results. For example, an editorial calendar is vital for bringing together customer needs and solutions provided by the company's products or services into a schedule of useful content and media creation.

Thus, any company should create a plan for building up a content bank or inventory that will help the overall number of unique pages rise and address many of the common themes and problems that the target audience may encounter.

Garner (2012) suggests that a calendar should outline the following:

- asset types to be published
- location of where to publish (blog, YouTube, etc.)
- social networks to participate in and frequency of participation
- planning for execution and research for in-the-moment content topics.

The purpose of these calendars is to secure a steady stream of fresh content consistently into the future. They provide focus and planning in development efforts and remove the pressure of constantly developing content on the fly (Garner 2012, p.110). They also ensure the content is relevant and suits the needs of content producers, readers, and advertisers.

To create one, a marketer should understand the communities and individuals the company is trying to reach. The insights from this understanding can be transformed into topics and keyword ideas. After that, relevant search keywords describing the brand, products, or services along with the relevant topics of customers' interest on the social web are analyzed in terms of popularity and competitiveness. The results are then synthesized and organized into an editorial calendar (Odden 2012, p.103).

3.4 Promotion

Once relevant and valuable content has been created, it should be easily found by potential readers, and this is where content promotion comes into play. There are primarily two ways to promote content. The first on is automatic promotion of content through social channels, e.g. Google +, with the use of RSS

feeds bringing additional readers to the content. However, this is something to be careful about. If a company uses this method too much, readers will see its activity as overly aggressive. Manual promotion and outreach help to leverage the social networks the company participates in, such as Facebook, personal Twitter accounts and LinkedIn.

Based on what is effective and important for the target audience, the titles, descriptions, and timing of promotion will vary according to the social channel. For example, Twitter promotions can use tools such as Timely or Buffer, which analyze the Twitter network's tendency to retweet, and schedule the publishing of tweets in such a way as to maximize the likelihood of sharing. This tactic can promote blog posts, public Google+ and Facebook posts, YouTube videos, or any other type of public social media content (Odden 2012, p.176).

The mix of promotion channels usually depends on the content, purposes and the nature of the communities that a company will be sharing content with. With content promotion and social sharing, it is important to build trust and credibility among the community. These are important factors affecting their willingness to interact and share the content.

Odden (2012) deems that if the content promotion approach focuses solely on the company's own material, the company may quickly be designated the label of a social narcissist and blatant self-promoter. The percentages can vary according to the social channel and reasons for participation, but a 70 percent mix of third-party content combined with 30 percent of the company's own content is a good ratio.

To sum up, in order to promote content through social channels in the most effective way, a company should provide social networks, the community, and search engines with a steady stream of relevant and valuable content that people will be willing to share and link to. As a result, the company will be rewarded with top search visibility and mentions wherever prospects are looking for.

3.5 Engagement

The Internet brings people closer together by allowing them to easily connect even if they are thousands of miles away. That is why social networking websites have become increasingly popular and important over the past years. Nowadays, social media allows people to upload and post unique content easily and share with the global audience easily. Simply put, social media is involved with any kind of information people share it with their social network, using social networking websites and services (Eley &Tilley 2009, p.78).

Odden (2012) deems that in order to attract, engage and inspire customers, it is important for brands to have relevant visibility where their customers are. To do that, the company must determine where conversations are happening relevant to the company's products and services.

There are four steps in engaging with social media:

1. listen
2. join
3. participate
4. create

Eley and Tilley (2009) state that it is crucial to take these steps in the right order. A company should start with listening to what people are talking about it, its products, services and brands, what customers think of the company and what they need and want. Keeping tabs on current customers and potential clients can result in a valuable insight into the company's products or services. So, by reading blogs, browsing online communities and discussions related to the company's industry it is easier to monitor what people are saying online. There are conversations going on every day, and it is quite easy to stay abreast of them.

Once a company understands the lay of the land by listening, it can think about joining a social network as a way to claim its brand and take ownership of its contributions. As it was mentioned before, it is wise to join those communities where a company can find its customers participating. For example, the most

popular websites include Facebook, MySpace, LinkedIn, Twitter, YouTube, Flickr and Delicious. These sites cover a range of different purposes and can be very beneficial in terms of marketing.

The third step is to participate. Participation means that a company can reply to blog posts and topics in various forums, review products or services, and even just bookmark interesting websites. This is extremely important for online brand building because people will come to respect this company as a valuable contribution to the community, and when the company has news to share people will help it promote content (Eley & Tilley 2009, p. 88).

Only after participating in other social networks, a company can create and post its own content, because only now it has an audience to share this content with. So, this is the time to start talking, posting updates, blog posts, photos, links and new stories. Eley and Tilley (2009) claim that this process represents a cycle rather than a one-time exercise, i.e. constantly monitoring, looking for interesting content, commenting on it and posting one's own substance. People will begin to comment and share what the company has posted, and the cycle starts again.

Odden (2012) states that companies should engage into social networks and communities through listening, participation, and content sharing because this can provide an insight into future content, enable advocacy and reinforce sharing behaviors.

3.6 Measurement

Are content marketing efforts sufficient? Are they helping customers? Are those interactions leading to more inquiries, sharing, and sales? Have we achieved our content marketing goals? Effective content marketing is more than just creating great content and sharing it. It is about learning, measuring, analyzing and modifying approaches to fine-tune tactics and get better results.

The relationship between setting goals and measuring performance must be in a close alignment in order to successfully reach overall marketing and business goals. Organizations have many reasons for publishing digital content, and

while the attention is focused on marketing and sales objectives, it also extends to other communications, audiences, and business benefits (Odden 2012, p. 195)

Garner (2012) remarks that many marketers skip over this important measurement step for a short-term gain. Unfortunately, these people miss the greater opportunity of understanding the business impact of their efforts and are unable to apply business lessons and intelligence accordingly. Marketers have to be patient and spend their time to establish the right metrics, to benchmark, and to understand where they are going and how much it may cost to get there. It is important to keep in mind that real-time content marketing is a long-term effort, with long-term gains, and measuring right leads to real sustainability.

Key performance indicators (KPIs) measure companies performance, identify best practices and give warning signs of drop-offs. There is a variety of different KPIs, and it is highly important to choose the right ones in relation to certain marketing strategies. Dyer (2014) has given a good example about how to measure content marketing success based on Brandpoint practices, which are illustrated below.

1. Awareness: Exposing new people to the brand, product, or service

Awareness is important because:

- quality content can increase the number of keywords ranking the website
- 93% of online experiences begin with a search engine, and 75% of searchers do not move past the first page of search results
- social media is an excellent content distributor; more than 15 million online consumers say that they research products via social media before making purchases.

In this case, the metrics for measuring awareness success can be:

- higher ranking in search engine results pages (SERPs)
- steady increase in first-time visitors on the website
- improved social metrics (increased likes, follows, upvotes, etc.).

2. Consideration: Inspiring potential customers to engage, read, download, comment, and share

Why is consideration important? Search engines rank content based on its relevance. High attention is placed on the time spent onsite per user, and the amount and age of pertinent original content. Studies have shown that 61% of consumers feel better about a company that delivers custom content and 65% of social media users learn about products and services via social media.

Metrics for measuring consideration success can be the following:

- increased total page views
- longer visit duration
- lower bounce rate
- improved social metrics (video views, content shares, positive comments, interaction, etc.).

3. Conversion: When a customer makes a purchase or fills out a contact form

Content marketing drives conversions because it supports searches for specific products and services. Statistics have shown that 77% of B2C companies and 41% of B2B companies have acquired a customer through Facebook. Increased conversion rates are usually measured by sales or leads. As for social media metrics, there are referrals from Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, and other social networks.

There are a number of measurement and analytics applications and services available. Unfortunately, there is no "one size fits all" solution, but when a company understands the right KPIs, its overall goals, and the process for evaluation and improvement, it will be able to narrow down the choices available. In addition, many individual social platforms offer their own analytics. The social networks in which the case company, Mediatalo Toimelias, is interested are described below.

Twitter Analytics

On Twitter, the analytics feature shows the timeline activity, including new followers and unfollows day-by-day as well as a full list of tweets and interactions. It also gives reports on the engagement rates for each of the updates.

SlideShare Analytics

On SlideShare, the analytics feature shows who visited content most recently, identifies individual viewers using location, organization and referrer details, provides detailed traffic distribution of views, and allows to find out which content or country is giving the most views.

LinkedIn Analytics

On LinkedIn, the Analytics tab (available on the company pages) shows posts, impressions, clicks, interactions, new followers generated, and an overall engagement score.

There are also several third-party web analytics and social media measurement tools to consider, for example, Google Analytics (the most full featured free analytics tool with a social tracking plugin), Clicky (a real-time, low-cost web analytics tool), and HubSpot.

4 Content marketing strategy creation: Practical suggestions

4.1 Setting overall business objectives

Before the case company decides how, why, and what content should be created, optimized and socialized, it is important to ask the essential marketing question: "What are we trying to do?". The answer will be just obvious: "We are trying to get more customers to buy the services that we are selling!"

However, to dig deeper, the company should first analyze its overall business goals and tie them up with the content marketing objectives. Toimelias has stated that at the moment their overall business goals are the following:

- to build better customer attraction
- to expand media coverage
- to raise customer retention
- to increase leads and, consequently, sales.

In order to tie these objectives to content marketing goals, this study looked at each objective separately to create an understanding of how the targets can be achieved through content marketing.

4.1.1 Building better customer attraction

According to Simone (2009), high-quality content trains readers and listeners to keep opening shared content. Each piece of content is like a cookie that rewards the audience for consuming it. So, the content created by the case company should solve problems its customers care about, or it should entertain them. Preferably, both of these functions should be obtained. The main goal is to make sure that everything the audience receives makes them feel good.

If the case company manages to do this consistently, accessing the content the company creates can become an appealing habit for the audience. The ideal scenario can be the following: when prospects or current customers see the name 'Mediatalo Toimelias' in their inbox or in any post or tweet, they get a feeling that inside there will be something interesting and worth reading. So, they will click through and get acquainted with the content shared.

In order to get more customers, Toimelias needs to be worth doing business with. The audience wants to become a friend with someone who truly understands the subject, can share experiences and lead by example. Simply, the audience needs a trustworthy person whose words mean something. When content is compelling enough, people begin to stick around to find answers to the questions they care about.

4.1.2 Expanding media coverage

As it was mentioned above, the most relevant channels for the case company are LinkedIn, Twitter, SlideShare and the company blog. Three of them have

already been in use, but faced a need for certain improvements. As to LinkedIn, Toimelias has not been present there before. Employees have their personal profiles, but no company page has been created. It is possible that due to this non-presence, the company can miss valuable opportunities to spread the word about itself and getting the right contacts.

That is why it was suggested to use this social platform to help prospects find the case company and its services easier, see recommendations from the current customers and benefit from the content posted there. Besides that, LinkedIn is a great tool to create a better brand awareness by utilizing the word-of-mouth and PR techniques.

4.1.3 Raising customer retention

Many of today's content marketing articles pay attention to lead generation and conversion. This is definitely one of the main benefits of strong content marketing. However, outstanding results can be also driven by another tactic: increasing customer retention.

Sherbin (2013) states that the use of content for retention purposes can help to create a recurring stream of revenue. Besides that, it helps to build brand loyalty that contributes to referral sales through reviews, endorsements and shared content.

In order to achieve this goal, the company should find out what current customers want to learn. Content must convey something creative and unique that customers actually want to hear, and this content should be produced and shared regularly. However, from Sherbin's (2013) point of view, creating content for retention can become problematic, especially if the company runs an active content program for lead generation. So, the best way to attack this is to understand the different content segmentations that make up the current marketing activities.

Another issue is related to forcing content on customers. The case company should keep in mind that this tactic can have a negative effect if it ends up annoying rather than helping the audience. So, customers should also be given an

opportunity to opt-in and opt-out, in other words, to choose whether or not to follow the content provided.

Certainly, it is important to measure whether or not this retention-oriented content pushes the right buttons or to analyze the effectiveness in order to avoid mistakes, and make changes to the existing plan.

4.1.4 Leading to sales

Content can be used to address underlying objections that might keep prospects from buying. The case company should create content that tells inspiring stories about how other people have benefited and succeeded from the offerings. Moreover, it should apply proven persuasion techniques to show readers how much they need the services.

Successful salespeople propose that the customer needs to know, like and trust the company before s/he will buy any product or service. That is the reason why content marketing is so effective. The case company should bear in mind that great content buys the time to build relationships based on loyalty and trust, so it should use that time wisely.

Simone (2009) deems that when the company wants to ask for an order with a strong call to action, it should keep the balance right. First, the company should use content to create a need for a particular product or service and to build an unshakeable relationship with the audience. Only after that it can ask for the sale. At the point when the company begins striking this balance consistently, it can begin actually generating revenue with the help of content marketing.

4.2 Setting content marketing objectives

When the overall business goals have been set, it is time to identify the content marketing objectives that are relevant, achievable and measurable. The following content marketing goals were defined in the course of this project:

- to increase the number of visitors
- to get more subscribers, readers, fans, friends and followers.

An important point to note is that the case company does not seek for the audience by any geographical criteria; it targets a global customer and is willing to reach him/her by providing great solutions and valuable content.

4.3 Developing buyer personas

According to Stull, Nyers and Meerman (2008), the best way to develop products and services that resonate is to identify the unresolved problems of a particular group of people. If the case company breaks buyers into distinct groups, understands what problems those groups (or "buyer personas") have and how to solve them, and then analyzes everything known about each buyer persona, its hard work will become easier.

Developing buyer personas can help to create breakthrough experiences, articulate powerful ideas about what can be done, and establish good connections with the right people. This approach is utterly different from what most organizations do: either not segmenting the market at all (just creating nonspecific offerings and marketing them to everyone) or segmenting based on their own view of the world (Stull et al. 2008, p.76).

The fundamental steps in persona development were shown in the previous chapter, in Figure 3.1. Now it is time to have a closer look at each step separately and apply them in the current study.

4.3.1 Identifying key customer attributes

Understanding the characteristics, pain points, goals, and topical preferences of customer or buyer personas provides invaluable insight into planning content to guide those customers through the buying cycle. The motivations and context that bring customers to search or tap into their social networks for recommendations can be translated into tactics (Odden 2012, p.71).

It was decided to conduct personal interviews with frontline employees in order to get valuable data concerning the different existing customers of the case company. Each organization has ideal customers and customers to be avoided. There also can be some other categories of customers. In this case study, the

frontline employees were given an opportunity to choose six different customers based on their own experience.

The author prepared a list of themes to discuss with the participants in the study in advance because without any focus the work would clearly lack a sense of direction and purpose which is necessary to make progress. The set of themes includes variables such as characteristics, needs, preferences and other attributes related to the research topic. All of these issues were incorporated into the interview guide or the so-called list of topics that the author intended to cover in the interview along with initial questions and probes used to follow up responses and obtain greater detail from the participants (King 2004). What is more, while creating the guide, the author tried to ensure the logical order of questions and the use of comprehensible language.

The data points to be collected are listed below:

- the job title and time in the current position (of the main contact person)
- the nature of work and responsibilities (of the main contact person)
- the role in the buying process (cycle) and the influence on the decision-making process
- the size of the client company
- the business industry in which the client company runs the business
- motivators (What motivates the customer to buy the services provided by the case company?)
- any concerns and needs (What does the buyer persona care about?), mapping needs to a right content or service pages
- pain points (What are the customer's weaknesses or difficulties, for example minimal budget, not enough personnel or insufficient skills?)
- goals (What are the customer's overall business goals? How does the client company tie those goals with marketing objectives?)
- behaviours (What is the level of trust in the relationship with the customer? How much control does the customer want to have over the process?)

- willingness to pay (Is the client company willing to pay to get its problems solved?)

- interests relevant to brand solutions (What is the ideal service or content that can help the customer?)

- buying and service preferences (What are the services that the customer buys or 'likes')

- social media and search preferences (What media does the customer rely on for finding reliable answers to questions and problems?)

- online presence (In which social channels does the specific persona participate? How can the case company reach the client company? Where and how can the buyer persona be influenced?).

4.3.2 Collecting data

As it was mentioned above, the researcher decided to collect primary data for the persona development effort by applying the qualitative research method, particularly personal interviews. The author took a closer look at different types of research interview, and for the current study the choice was made to conduct semi-structured interviews on a 'face-to-face' basis.

According to King (2004), semi-structured interviews are 'non-standardized' and often referred to as 'qualitative research interviews'. In these interviews the researcher has a list of themes and questions to be covered, although these may vary from interview to interview. The order of questions and the questions themselves can be also varied depending on the conversation flow. Besides that, additional questions can be asked to explore in depth the area of interest and answer specific research questions.

As the current study is rather exploratory and explanatory, these kind of interviews can be helpful to reveal insights and probably understand causal relationships between variables. The value of using non-standardized interviews is derived from the flexibility that may be used to explore the complexity of the topic (Marshall & Rossman 1999).

Preparation

The key to a successful interview is careful preparation. Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009) claim that prior planning prevents poor performance. So, the author started with gaining knowledge of the case company and its customers while working as an intern. The researcher realized that the ability to draw on internal organizational information can truly help to demonstrate credibility, assess the accuracy of responses and encourage the interviewees to give more retailed answers.

Besides that, it was decided to promote credibility also through the supply of relevant materials to the participants before conducting the interview. The list of themes was given in order to promote validity and reliability, as interviewees were able to consider the questions beforehand, find supporting documentation and prepare themselves for the discussion.

Another issue to consider was the approach to questioning that is supposed to reduce the scope for bias during the interview and increase the reliability of the information obtained (Saunders et al. 2009). The author also analyzed the benefits of phrasing the questions clearly, using a neutral tone of voice, behaving appropriately and showing attentive listening skills. Also the researcher decided to use open-ended questions to obtain facts, reveal attitudes and encourage the interviewee to provide extensive and developmental answers. In addition to this, the use of specific terminology, too many theoretical concepts and long questions was avoided in order to ensure correct understanding and eliminate any lead or bias.

As regards recording data, the method of making notes during the interview and straight after was chosen. It is highly important to keep a full record of the interview and not to lose the exact nature of explanations and general points of value. Failing to do so can have a negative effect on the trustworthiness of data.

The last issue taken into consideration during the preparation stage was a need to take great care of the way of reporting the findings in order to preserve the anonymity and confidentiality of data.

Interview process

The frontline employees were called on to provide their knowledge of the customers for creating buyer personas profiles. The target population of this study consists of all the current clients of Mediatalo Toimelias Ltd. The elements of the research were the companies, both private and public, of varying sizes, with different numbers of employees and sales revenues. At the time of conducting the interviews, the researcher was doing her practical training period in the company, December 2013 - March 2014.

As for the interview process, the interviewer was playing a key role, leading the discussion and asking questions from participants, who were well-prepared and intensely involved in the process. Apart from questions concerning the list of themes, the respondents were also asked some general that came to the interviewer's mind during the interview. All the answers were recorded (typed) into a special table, where all the variables and companies were listed. In order to secure confidentiality, the interviewer was not given the real names. Instead, study names such as Company A and Company B were applied (see Appendix 1).

Finally, the interview process went very well. The interviewer followed successfully the instructions described in the preparation stage and helped the discussion keep the right direction. The participants were well-prepared, enthusiastic and active in the conversation. They gave clear answers to all the questions and contributed to gaining reliable and valid results. More information on the data acquired during the interview can be found in the full version of the study.

4.3.3 Analyzing and creating segments

A customer segment usually represents a group of customers who have common characteristics, needs and preferences that define what things are important to these people. According to Hutt and Speh (2013), effective segmentation provides the necessary information for understanding what marketing elements are going to be critical in satisfying the target segments.

Besides that, segmentation helps companies to become more attuned to the unique needs of customer segments, focus content marketing efforts, create

content, select appropriate channels of distribution, train and deploy the work-force.

In order to get valuable strategy insight, different types of business customers should be identified or different buyer persona profiles should be created. The process of creating those personas has some common characteristics with micro level segmentation, which focuses on dividing macro segments into smaller micro segments on the basis of the similarities and differences between decision-making units (Hutt & Speh 2013, p.97).

One aim in the study was to identify common characteristics among customers and reveal patterns or relationships, because correlations between such data points could provide key differentiators between segments. Also those behaviors that contribute to the business objectives might fall into an "ideal" customer persona (Odden 2012, p.71).

Content analysis was chosen for analyzing the data accumulated during the interview. Proctor (2005) states that in content analysis the text data is processed by looking for similarities and differences and by compressing the text content. The aim of this analysis is to form a bigger picture of the phenomenon that links the results to a wider context. To facilitate the analysis, the researcher highlighted/marked the themes by different colors in order to promote visuality, see the whole topic and parts at the same time, understand relationships more easily and draw attention to relative and irrelative issues.

4.3.4 Creating profiles for the target audience

Stull et al. (2008) encourage companies to name their buyer personas, e.g. Jim Small Business Owner. They might even cut out a representative photo from a magazine to help visualize those personas. Clearly, they must keep the buyer persona profiles, names, and photos internal to their organizations.

Creating profiles can be considered as a useful tool for Toimelias as well. This method can be used to develop empathy and a deep understanding of the real people whose problems the case company solves. Instead of being a nameless and faceless person, the buyer persona will come to life.

Odden (2012) proposes that a profile for each persona should include the essential data points necessary to understand the context and motivations for that customer group relevant to the company's goals. Moreover, references to this name in the marketing plans can help create consistency in how the company implements and measures the impact of this particular persona on its content marketing efforts.

The present study is a classified version. Buyer personas profiles can be found in the full version of the thesis work.

4.3.5 Identifying content types for personas

After the author came to understand what motivates different personas to buy the services offered by the case company, the topics they are interested in, their needs and the way they use search and social media to find information online, it was possible to extract content topics.

Odden (2012) claims that topics of focus help the content plan meet the information needs of the customers as they move through the stages of the buying cycle. The present study took into consideration that some personas may be attracted to distinctly different topics, and other categories might be a matter of nuance and slight refinement.

The researcher aligned the key pain points and motivations of the personas with their position in the buying cycle. This was needed to help Toimelias understand what the buyers are trying to accomplish and provide them with content that can aid in their journey.

Mutual benefit is extremely essential for an effective content marketing strategy. By planning content topics to address customers' needs and concerns in the right manner, the case company can inspire confidence and support its customers' motivation to buy. Besides that, persona-guided content together with optimization and social engagement should facilitate more relevant experiences with the content created by the case company, shorten the time to sale and improve customer satisfaction.

4.4 Content formats, materials and channels

One of the objectives of this study was to inventory existing content and map the gaps. So, this study was proposed not only to come up with ideas concerning new content creation, but also to leverage all of the existing online content to build business value for prospects and customers in and outside Finland.

In this case, leveraging means translating existing content from Finnish into English and integrating it into the content plan and the editorial calendar. An inventory was taken from the current content assets, mostly the case company's website and blog. The researcher also analyzed the gaps between those topics that Toimelias has already covered and shared with the target community and those that have not been discussed at all, or perhaps discussed inadequately.

This study also identified content topics of priority, meaning a high degree of interest and relevance for the customers, and insufficient content to meet that demand. The editorial and content plan addresses those gaps to ensure that Toimelias is publishing relevant, useful, and shareable content that supports achieving overall business goals and inspires readers to take the actions the case company desires (see Appendix 2).

Further information on the content types, materials and channels was excluded from the classified version, as the current study is supposed to bring a competitive advantage to the case company only.

4.4.1 Finding new topics

First it was analyzed what kind of content already exists or should be created and shared to satisfy the needs of buyer personas. However, those ideas are not enough, as the case company may run out of topics quite fast and face a need to find other sources of inspiration. That is why this study identified several sources of topic ideas to help, for example, the blog become a must-visit place online.

Frequently asked questions

A great place to find blog topics is frequently asked questions. The case company can start with questions often asked by current customers and prospects on different online discussion platforms related to Internet marketing. As soon as the blog post (answer to the question) is ready, it can be cross-posted on the website where the question was originally asked. Later on this post will continue to be read by future visitors looking for answers to that same question.

The local and national news

As an expert in the digital marketing field, the case company can engage with its community by writing about and responding to local and national news that affect the field of business. The content producer can consider the impact of news on the community and write a short post incorporating a summary of the story, a few thoughts on the impacts, and a link back to the original news story online.

Dixon (2012) suggests that national news sources provide excellent, content-specific blog topics of national importance. A blog can provide practical examples about a theoretical article or a local perspective on a national issue. The producer can also post his or her response to the page on which the article appears, so that readers of that original source can read this comment. If they find it fascinating, they can click on the link to the case company's website to see what more is available there. In addition, including an invitation to visit the blog at the end of the comment can help to make the blog audience begin to grow.

Trending topics

As it was already mentioned, Twitter is a great source for learning what people are currently talking about and finding ideas for blog posts. The Twitter homepage feature 'trending topics' highlights the ten most popular topics on Twitter at a given moment. Those ideas can be great starting points for creating content that people care about. Besides that, recent customer studies can be a good source of up-to-date and valuable information.

The point is that the case company can capitalize on trending topics in its business field and quickly become the go-to expert on those topics in which others are actively interested. It is important to bear in mind that an effective blog has high-quality, timely, and relevant content posted frequently enough to keep readers coming back. So, the case company should approach this issue seriously.

4.4.2 Suggestion for maintaining the blog

This chapter presents a few best practices to help the case company's blog become a valuable tool for promoting professional practice and reputation.

Keep it updated

It is important to keep the blog updated, establish a writing routine or so-called editorial calendar. Infrequent posts will discourage readers from checking the blog for updated content. However, this expectation of new content builds trust and establishes rapport. Content producers should follow the tips this study has suggested to invent new topics in order to find something new to write about once a week and not to lose readers' interest.

Keep it appropriate

Blog is a great opportunity to engage the community in an authentic way. However, one thing to remember is the following: what is written in a blog will be seen as representing the company. So, Dixon (2012) advises to avoid politics, controversial personal opinions, or anything else that might cause the company problems and, instead, focus more on a certain business field.

Make it accessible

No matter what platform customers are present on or where they are searching for information, content should be accessible, so that people will be able to explore it. Another important issue is not to use excessive links and ads, but keep the layout simple. The point is to avoid all the meaningless items and focus on posting great content bringing value to the readers.

Make it shareable

Blog content should also be shared across multiple platforms by connecting the blog to Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn accounts. This helps to keep followers updated about new blog content released. Besides that, the more often blog content is sent across the Internet, the more opportunities there are to increase the blog visibility in search engines. So, by posting content on multiple platforms and having multiple links tracking back to the blog page the case company can improve its influence. Thus the more influential Toimelias is, the more search engines will believe that it should be near the top of the search results.

Make it searchable

Using accurate tags, keywords and categories will ensure that blog content is searchable and also help content spread across the Internet. Content producers should spend as much time on tagging and categorizing posts as they do on creating content. It is essential to keep in mind that great content that cannot be found is not valuable. Considering how the audience will find content in the future is an integral part of the distribution process that aims at giving a long shelf life to content (Dixon 2012, p. 160).

4.4.3 Suggestions for using content on SlideShare

Use existing content

Using existing content is recommended, e.g. materials from the blog entries or slide shows. Besides that, any existing PowerPoint presentation (e.g. sales presentations, recent product launches, trends and figures) that do not contain confidential and internal information can be posted on the SlideShare platform as well. Before uploading, however, the case company should consider adding images to slides where appropriate, updating the figures and trimming the slides to keep data in a succinct format.

Keep it simple

It is better to keep the text simple and to a minimum, and, where it is possible, to tell the story with the use of images or video. Friedmann (2012) advises to

put the most design work into the title slide, as the first slide serves as a de fac-to advertisement for the content provided.

Enable embedding

One of the immensely useful features of SlideShare is the possibility to allow embedding presentations on the websites, blog posts, Facebook pages, etc. This can provide a great opportunity to expand the case company's content reach. In addition, it provides the visitors with an ease of use, as they will not need to open another application, such as Microsoft PowerPoint, to view and study the material.

Optimize

SlideShare content ranks very well in searches engines such as Google and Bing, and search engine optimization (SEO) can be used to an advantage. That is why the case company should accurately use titles, descriptions and tags in order to facilitate the location of online material.

Integrate multiple channels

Another important suggestion is to integrate SlideShare, LinkedIn and Face-book accounts. By adding hyperlinks to the corporate website, Facebook page, Twitter feed or LinkedIn page on the front page and last page of the slide decks, the case company can lead those people who enjoyed the presentation to learn more about the company. Friedmann (2012) suggests another way of integra-tion by adding the SlideShare apps for LinkedIn and Facebook because these applications enable automatic sharing across networks.

Check the analytics

Toimelias should also take advantage of SlideShare analytics. It can help to get a better understanding of what the audience is and is not interested, as this tool shows how many views, comments and shares the uploaded presentations have got.

If the case company wants to leverage the full power of SlideShare to acquire new customers and partners, it can upgrade its account to SlideShare Pro, which provides an insight into who exactly is viewing decks. Friedmann (2012) says that based on these analytics, SlideShare will present the company with up to 30 leads per month. Additionally, with SlideShare Pro, the case company can brand its account and do private uploads.

In order to reach prospects and customers with a unique message in today's world, companies have to break through the noise. Utilizing SlideShare and implementing the tactics mentioned above can help to offer content in a much more interactive and visual way. In combination with the analytics tools and overall flexibility, SlideShare can become an excellent channel to pull new leads while enhancing the ones the case company already has.

4.4.4 Suggestions for keeping the Twitter account

Decide the purpose

First of all, the case company should decide its purpose for using Twitter. Toimelias should utilize this social media platform in order to build the brand or generate leads. Twitter can be used to share valuable and relevant content (innovative ideas in the marketing field, educational articles, trends, etc.), keep followers updated about the current activities of the case company and to see what others, for example key players or institutions, are writing about the areas in which Toimelias is interested. So, defining the purpose can help to decide who to follow and what kind of information to share.

Focus on passion

Toimelias should focus on its passion. Krogue (2013a) advises not to be a jack of all Twitter subjects and a master of none. Tweets surrounding a certain passion are going to be stronger and attract users who have similar interests, not just meaningless followers.

Define the brand

The case company should define its brand or decide how it wants the Twitter world to view it. This will guide in determining who to follow and what to tweet. The case company could specialize in one subject to attract a targeted audience and find the right balance between a casual and a very professional style of tweets.

Determine the strategy

In addition, Toimelias should determine its strategy on whether to communicate or to listen. As the case company has set a goal to influence, promote and sell, its strategy should involve communication targeted to attract attention. To attract this attention, Toimelias should tweet, send direct messages, engage with others and bring information out into the Twitter world.

However, it is also important for Toimelias to keep an eye on news and constantly learn new tactics and become more professional. That is why it is useful to listen, find those who provide content in which the case company is interested and follow them.

Identify keywords and hashtags

Finding appropriate keywords, headlines and attractive hashtags can bring additional value as well. This will help to categorize tweets, make content more searchable and connect with users who have similar interests.

Moreover, Krogue (2013a) advises to use a maximum of two hashtags per tweet. From his point of view, hashtags are a useful way to get tweets out to people who are actually interested, but too many hashtags in a single post can be overwhelming.

Combine content

Krogue (2013a) also mentions that it is important to use a combination of short-form content, like tweets, and long-form content, like blog posts, to establish the

company as a thought leader. Toimelias can also alternate tweets by the time of day and day of week depending on the purpose of those tweets.

As stated above, Toimelias should also retweet content that is worth sharing in their stream. It can help to make friends with other influencers and to show followers that the company is also an active member of the online community. Besides that, sending direct tweets, more personal by nature, can be a productive form of communication and build strong relationships.

Toimelias should create and tweet engaging, informative and entertaining content that fits the purpose. For example, it can post information about industry news, provide commentary on trends, current events or researches conducted. The case company can also use their own expertise to explain why these issues are important and how they can be applied in the real working life.

The last suggestion is to leverage tweets by sharing them with the audience on other networks such as Facebook and LinkedIn, when appropriate, and embedding a tweet into the blog or website, as it lets others know that the company is on Twitter and helps them find it easily.

4.4.5 Suggestions for utilizing LinkedIn

Share engaging content

LinkedIn is another useful platform for sharing engaging content. The case company can add links to blogs, articles, slide shows and other professional resources in order to bring additional benefits to its followers. If Toimelias regularly and frequently shares valuable content, the connections will consider the company as a powerful resource of valuable information.

Dixon (2012) advises reading with a purpose as a good strategy to share valuable content. Toimelias can think of some social news tools available for sharing information and articles, e.g. Forbes, Mashable and Content Marketing Institute, and when it finds something interesting and valuable there, it can share a post with LinkedIn followers, saying, "You might want to check this out. This might be helpful to you because …".

Write recommendations

Every employee of the case company can participate and use LinkedIn to recommend those with whom they have worked in the past. This process takes only a few minutes, but it has a strong impact on others. Writing recommendations is an excellent way to provide value to connections without asking for anything in return.

Besides that, others who read the recommendation might click the link to the page of the person you recommended and learn more about him or her. This kind of unsolicited recommendation can also boost loyalty and friendship with connections.

Stay current

LinkedIn allows making it easy for connections to stay engaged with the current activities of the company or professional work of a person. This can be done by simply posting a status update once a week that shares, for example, the case company's excitement about its current project.

Seeing LinkedIn as part of professional practice will help the case company increase its brand equity and grow professionally. Toimelias should become a frequent LinkedIn updater by establishing a regular routine of posting, for example, a link to a good article or slide show once a week, as this can help keeping the content in front of the connections all the time.

Select "Doorway" people

LinkedIn allows two levels deep of connections free of charge, and more with the premium version, which is highly recommended. The case company can select their own so-called 'doorway employees', who will join industry-specific and local LinkedIn groups and connect to important sales people, managers and executives. Additional meetings and training can assist in sharing the LinkedIn strategy and tactics, getting people together and coordinating their efforts and responsibilities.

Connect professionally

LinkedIn is an outstanding tool for building professional networks. Individuals can connect to anyone in the world, including heavyweights in their business fields. However, it is important to be careful with how to reach out to new connections. Dixon (2012) suggests following these steps: reach out in a timely way, send personalized invitations, provide value after acceptance and follow up.

The doorway personnel should start with inviting the people they have just met in conferences or meetings to connect with on LinkedIn. However, instead of sending standardized connection invitations, they should customize those messages to suit the nature of the relationship with those people. It is important to bear in mind that a personalized request always stands out from the crowd.

Once a person accepts the invitation, the employee can write him or her back and send a link to content that might be valuable, stating, "Ville, thanks for connecting on LinkedIn. Here is a link to the article we discussed in the conference." When this person gives a response, it may be a good time to begin a conversation. It is important to ensure that this new connection is contacted multiple times because these "touch points" will assist in cementing the position of a valuable resource for that new connection.

The case company should create a LinkedIn company account, post company information and write about current activities, follow customers and other companies, and ask for referrals and recommendations. LinkedIn can tie companies and individuals into news feeds and assist in meeting the right people to offer them a better experience.

4.5 Editorial calendar creation

The basic process for creating an editorial calendar starts with determining the topics of interest. Odden (2012) states that topical relevance is essential for meeting customers' needs, answering questions, and motivating return visits, whether topics are directly about the brand or related information that customers can benefit from. In order to reveal a gold mine of such topics, research into

customer segments and persona development was conducted as a part of this study.

4.5.1 Creating content categories

According to Odden (2012), creating content categories is about identifying what major topics are going to be covered and how they relate to the buyer personas and product or service offerings. In this study one aim was to decide on the manageable number of departments and divide topics of interest into certain categories chosen in order to provide continuity and organization in published content.

The categories will vary depending on the publishing platforms and editorial direction for customer segments. In addition, new categories may be created later due to changes in the industry, service offerings, customers' needs, preferences and behaviour.

4.5.2 Assigning content types

The editorial plan included in the current study was developed for a primary publishing platform (the website blog) and social media platforms (SlideShare, Twitter and LinkedIn). Content types vary according to the topics of interest, publishing platforms and customer preferences. At the moment of conducting this study, the author identified the following types for the case company's content: blog posts, articles, slide shows, tweets and LinkedIn posts.

It is important to choose such content types, formats, and topics that are relevant to the customers, the brand, search engines and social communities.

4.5.3 Organizing content

The development process of an editorial calendar starts with deciding how specific each piece of content is. The author followed a suggestion by Kuenn from Marketing Land (2012) to provide each content project with its own row, ordered by the publish date. As a result, columns to be filled in are the following:

- Title/Topic Description: What is the title of the content piece? A description of the piece of content allows others easily identify the main theme and message to be distributed.

- Status: What is the current status of this project? This column can be labeled with different categories such as "in progress," "on hold" or "with editor," in order to easily identify the status of the content project.

- Type of Content: What type of content is this piece? Types of content include blog posts, articles, videos, press releases, slide shows, etc. This information is important for resource planning in terms of identifying content trends and popularity.

- Category: In which content category does this piece fall? This column is needed to provide some organization to published content.

- Producer/Designer: Who is responsible for creating this piece? This person will be in charge of completing the content piece and managing the project throughout.

- Editor: Who is the editor for this content project? This person is usually the last one to see the content piece before it is distributed. This person is responsible for checking and distributing content.

- Target Audience (Buyer Persona): Does this content piece address to potential customers, current customers or another audience? This information is identified in the buyer persona development process.

- Distribution Channels: Where will this content live? On which platforms will this content be shared? It is important to keep in mind that the content distribution channels must match the target audience online presence.

- Promotion: What promotional efforts will take place to distribute this content piece? Perhaps another digital marketing channel can leverage this piece, giving content a longer life cycle.

- Meta Data Tags: What tags or keywords can be associated with this content piece? It is better to check with the SEO specialist on the best tags and keywords to use with each content piece in order to reach maximum SEO potential.

- Metrics: What success metrics should be used to measure this content project? Are there any baseline measurements? These metrics and baselines will portray whether a content project is successful or not.

- Notes: Are there any specific instructions or notes regarding this content piece? Are there any changes or upgrades in the project? In this column it is possible to add anything extra worth noting.

4.5.4 Establishing a timeline

It makes sense to prepare a regular publishing schedule according to the case company's resources and the expectations of the targeted customers. At the same time, every business often fluctuates due to seasonality, sales cycles, and changes in the industry or company. So, the case company should allow wild-card content in its timeline and adaptations to the schedule.

Changes may come up unexpectedly meaning that the case company may need to define something within weeks or even days. The main goal for the case company is to create and maintain a consistent and regular publishing schedule in compliance with the content marketing goals and customers' needs.

4.5.5 Charting a publishing schedule

Taking all of the information from the previous steps, a plan was complied for creating and publishing content (see Appendix 2). As stated above, the classified version does not include all the information. That is why only the format of the editorial calendar is presented.

Designing this kind of a schedule can help the case company keep up a certain regularity and cross-promote content between different media channels. Besides that, a blog post, press release and slide show on a similar topic can provide some consistency and help readers build up some expertise in those areas of focus.

Odden (2012) states that content marketing practices should integrate with other marketing, advertising, and PR efforts. That can include online and offline communication tools and media. It may also make sense to organize a content

council at least quarterly to talk about how the employees can work together in the organization in order to leverage resources and cross-promote content.

4.5.6 Continuing the process

Once the content marketing plan has been designed, and the case company has started creating, optimizing, and promoting attractive content, it is time to head back to the beginning. Toimelias should evaluate content effectiveness in order to determine the topics that interest customers the most and inspire intended outcomes such as shares, engagement, network growth, leads and sales. It is important to expand on categories that are popular and pull back on those that fail to perform, and fill in the gaps where content may be incomplete (Odden 2012, p.106).

The ideal scenario is to create an efficient cycle of creation, publishing, interaction, analysis and refinement. A well-planned, thoughtful, and adaptable editorial calendar will help the case company streamline the publishing process, reduce stress on content producers and facilitate generation of new content ideas.

5 The path from prospects to repeat buyers

If the case company aims at increasing leads and sales, it should take into consideration various issues. Posting content online is not enough. It is essential to build better customer relationships, ensure better customer satisfaction, provide lowered costs for support services and achieve an increase in both retention and referrals.

Odden (2012) claims that whatever the reason why companies publish content online, that content can leverage keyword optimization for better visibility where prospects, employees, or customers are looking for it. Besides that, the case company can also use social discovery and content sharing as an opportunity to better connect its messages and value with communities that are interested. It is also important to mention that business value from optimized and socialized content marketing comes in different forms, and in order to get a clear picture of

those forms, Toimelias should understand the role of content across the customer life cycle (see Figure 5.1).
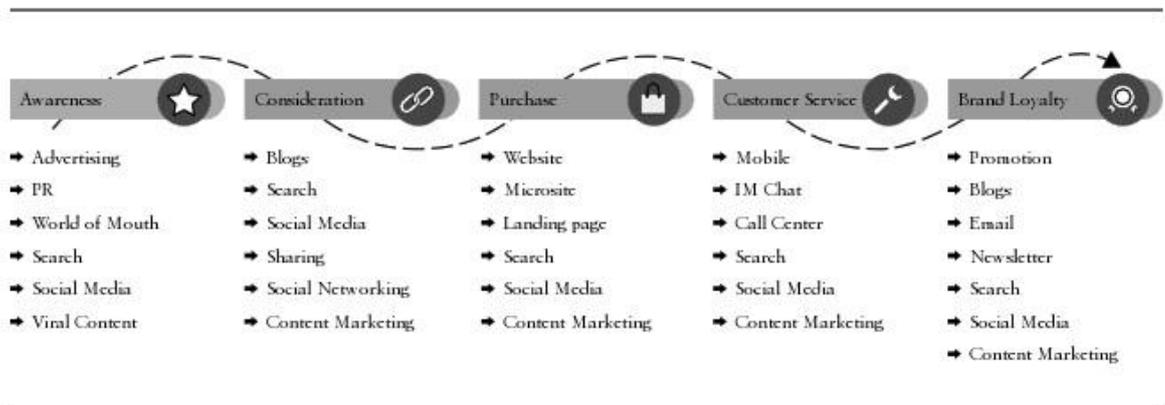

Figure 5.1. Customer and Content Life Cycle (Odden 2012)

This cycle was considered in the current study when making suggestions and giving guidelines to the case company how to lead customers across the buying cycle in the most effective way with the help of content marketing. In this chapter, the stages of the process are highlighted again in order to complete the whole picture.

5.1 Awareness

The awareness stage is about making others become aware of the case company and its services. Marketing tactics such as SEO, advertising, social media and PR are initiated in order to grab prospects' attention, help them find the products or services offered and bring their problems and needs to the relevant solutions. This is the stage where content plays the role of an information source, and content marketing contributes to developing brand awareness and arousing interest among prospects.

5.2 Consideration

This is the stage where prospects or leads develop an increasing interest to learn more about Toimelias and understand how its services can support them in achieving their goals. Besides that, they also test out the company and answer remaining questions before converting to customers.

Content in this phase should be planned out carefully to help prospective customers readily answer any objections or questions they have. Content provided on the website, blog, social media networks, and other online platforms should educate them on the unique selling proposition and make them easily understand the advantages and key benefits of the case company.

Tracking performance and analyzing content items within the journey through this stage is critical. It can help to get an understanding about, for instance, what content is engaging to those prospects who convert to customers. Besides that, it is important to target certain behaviour and tactics to prospective customers in order to increase conversions.

5.3 Purchase

Once the case company has gained customers' trust and respect, and they have decided to purchase from the company, the work of content marketing and optimization is not yet complete. There are more efforts Toimelias can take to guarantee the effectiveness of the content to bring inquiries and sales. This is the stage where website statistics, analyses, tracking views and shares can assist in refining the strategy with the purpose of improved conversion performance.

5.4 Service

This is the stage where content is aimed to make sure that customers are getting the maximum out of the services provided by the case company. Content and social applications are supposed to encourage customers to have a great experience on the website, even when they are not making any purchase at a given moment. Content such as FAQs and other information about brand offerings can make up a baseline post-purchase support service, so that customers can turn to it at any time of the day to find answers without having to contact any of customer service resources.

Toimelias should make it easier for customers to find answers to their questions. As a result, this can save on support costs and lead to better customer

satisfaction. It is a well-known fact that satisfied customers are more likely to become repeat customers.

5.5 Loyalty

The Loyalty stage is about a long-term customer relationship that supports on-going repeat business. Increasing loyalty reduces fluctuation in the customer base, which has a major impact on total revenue and profitability. The case company knows that it is much easier and cheaper to maintain an existing customer than to find a new one.

Clients are very satisfied with the services that Toimelias offers, they visit the website, they engage with the case company on social networks. Each of the interactions with content created and shared by the case company will provide more insight into customers' interests and motivations. Blog posts, slide shows, helpful articles and similar content offerings that help customers get more out of their purchases and the brand relationship can encourage loyalty above and beyond the competition.

A strong search and social media presence can boost credibility and shorten sales cycles. The value of content marketing goes beyond attracting leads and sales. It also fosters goodwill, brand value, and empowerment of fans who refer products and services they like to others. As the company develops and implements its content plan, it should also consider the holistic impact of content on reaching and engaging with customers throughout the relationship (Odden 2012, p.102).

5.6 Applicability of the current study

This study is positioned mainly into the first three stages of the customer and content life cycle: awareness, consideration and purchase. Plentiful information has been found, and in-depth analyses have been done in order to create a clear picture of the case company's audience, its needs and preferences. In addition, the researcher has also found a way to attract prospective customers, make them believe that the case company is worth doing business with and build customer relationships based on loyalty and trust.

The content marketing techniques suggested in this work can effectively assist Toimelias in creating a better brand awareness, making people know about the services as great solutions for their needs, educating the audience and showing them how beneficial the cooperation can be. Besides that, with the help of attractive content, Toimelias can prove its customers how much it cares about them, and how the company does its best to provide the best solutions and customer service.

6 Conclusion

6.1 Summary and discussion

The present study has proven the importance and relevance of content marketing in today's world. More and more companies are employing different content marketing tactics and increasing their budget spending on it. Content marketing is no longer a modern trend. It is an essential activity to stay competitive and up-to-date. Content marketing is a customer-oriented, strategic and ongoing process that helps companies attract, inform, educate, persuade and engage customers.

With the help of traditional marketing and advertising companies are telling the world that their services and products are the best. Through content marketing it is possible to show others that your offerings are really worth buying. In order to succeed in that the company should deliver valuable content in those places where its audience can search for it.

In the current study, the author has used both books and articles as sources of data in order to compile theoretical knowledge of content marketing and its techniques, particularly how they work, what kind of features they have, and how beneficial they are. Besides that, the author has taken a closer look at some major current trends in order to shape the content marketing strategy for the case company accordingly.

The biggest part of the literature review related to the creation of a content marketing strategy, which consists of six stages: setting the objectives, identifying

the audience, creating a content plan, promotion, engagement and measurement. Special emphasis was placed on the last three stages in the theory part of the study because practical suggestions for their implementation were excluded from the empirical part.

First and foremost, while describing all the steps in the strategy one by one in both parts, theoretical and empirical, the author also analyzed the findings and stated personal opinions of the topics discussed. This was a great method to gain a better knowledge of and expertise in the field.

The qualitative research method was used in the empirical part of the study, and data were obtained via personal interviews with frontline employees at the case company. Due to the careful preparation phase and the well-planned interview process, the researcher was able to get an invaluable in-depth understanding of the characteristics, pain points, needs and topical preferences of customer personas.

Those interviews helped also to identify the motivations and context that bring prospects and current customers to buy the services from the case company and transform this knowledge into effective tactics. The interviewer and participants were well prepared, enthusiastic and active in the conversation, which contributed to gaining reliable and valid results that were clearly described and incorporated in the customer profiles.

Proving the world that the case company is trustful and truly worth doing business with is not an easy task. Different tactics should be planned and applied in order to show the expertise from different sides. This is a perfect point to benefit from content marketing. Once the case company has understood what the customers are trying to accomplish, it can provide them with content that can aid in their journey.

Based on the buyer persona profiles, the author has extracted content types in which customers are interested. By planning the content topics correctly, the case company can inspire confidence and influence customers' motivation to buy services. The author has leveraged all the existing content by translating it

from Finnish into English to build value for prospects and customers in and outside Finland. Besides that, the gaps between content covered and not covered have been analyzed, and new topics have been determined.

The researcher has also made suggestions for how to utilize different channels effectively and efficiently in content marketing. At the moment of conducting this study, the case company considered the following channels as the most relevant and important ones: the blog, SlideShare, Twitter and LinkedIn. So, the author has given clear instructions on how to keep those platforms updated, appropriate, accessible, sharable and valuable. All the guidelines were discussed one by one and in a logical order.

In order to streamline the publishing process, reduce stress on content producers and generate new content ideas more easily, the author has created a well-planned and adaptable editorial calendar that covers items such as topic descriptions, different content categories and types, names of producers and editors, target audience, distribution channels, and tags. It is important to build a consistent and regular publishing schedule according to the goals of the case company and needs of its customers because this can help to put content effectiveness and efforts into the process.

The author has also analyzed the different stages in the customer and content life cycle. This was needed in order to help the case company lead its customers through the buying cycle (from prospects through current customers to repeat buyers) with the help of content marketing.

The researcher has found answers to the research questions stated at the very beginning of the process, solved the research problem and achieved the goals set by the case company. The whole process was based on the needs of the case company, but it was also a great experience for the researcher in the sense of a learning process. In the beginning, the author did not know about the existence of content marketing as a separate field, and was only familiar with online marketing and social media in general. While working on this study, the author has enriched the theoretical knowledge and gained expertise related to

content marketing, its techniques, benefits and challenges, and can utilize this knowledge in real working life now.

6.2 Recommendations for further research

The current study has several delimitations. It focuses only on those content marketing techniques and channels in which the case company was interested at the given moment. So, the blog, SlideShare, Twitter and LinkedIn were taken into consideration, and other important channels such as Facebook, Google+ and YouTube were excluded. Accordingly, further research could investigate and present a detailed action plan on how to utilize those platforms in the most effective and efficient way.

The author has positioned the present study only into the first three stages of the customer and content life cycle: awareness, consideration and purchase. Therefore, further researches could examine how content marketing can help the case company in two other stages: customer service and loyalty. For example, further research could provide some guidelines for the company on how to employ different content and social applications in order to encourage customer experience on the website and other platforms, provide post-purchase service support (e.g. FAQs), and maintain customer relationships by getting a deeper insight into the motivations and interests and generating more content offerings.

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Interview form

Variables	Company A	Company B	Company C	Company D	Company E	Company F
Job title and time in the position						
Nature of work and responsibilities						
Role in the buying cycle						
Size of the company						
Industry of the company						
Motivators						
Any concerns/needs						
Pain points						
Goals						
Behaviours						
Willingness to pay						
Interests relevant to brand solutions						
Buying and service preferences						
Social media and search preferences						
Online presence						

Editorial Calendar

Editorial Calendar 2014 (Mediatalo Toimelias Ltd.)							
Month	Topic/title	Status	Due Date	Publish Date	Type of Content	Category	Producer/ Designer
January							
February							
March							

Editor	Buyer Persona	Distribution Channels	Promotion	Media Data Tags	Metrics	Notes