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INCREASING BRAND AWARENESS THROUGH UTILIZATION OF
SOCIAL MEDIA AND EXPANSION OF RELEVANT MARKET
CHANNELS

Degree Programme in Innovative Business Services

2014

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Degree Programme in Innovative Business Services

February 2014

Supervisor: Salahub, Jeffrey

Number of pages: 38

Keywords: Social media, brand awareness, marketing, services, event management

The purpose of this thesis is to suggest ways to increase and develop the brand image of A. Ahlström Real Estate Ltd. The plan involves more effort put on B2B events, adding new service concepts, highlighting social media as a marketing tool and creating a new sales strategy for foreign customers. The goal is not to create a brand, but rather enhance and develop the already existing one.

By implementing a variety of social media channels into their marketing strategy A. Ahlström Real Estate Ltd would achieve more visibility and improved connectivity among their customers and peers. The suggestions in this thesis include using multiple different social media channels and targeting each specified marketing strategy to a suitable target customer group.

Expanding the foreign customer base could be done by utilizing social media and by offering a new service concept that introduces Finnish traditions and local offerings to the non-natives. This thesis also introduces a new campaign for wedding services with the goal of increasing sales during the slower, winter season.

Business to Business events are a major part of A. Ahlström Real Estate Ltd's Services part of the company, formerly titled as Guest Services. Bringing in most of the sales, this customer group cannot be overlooked. Developing business functions and increasing the amount of in-house events for marketing purposes is one of the objectives of this thesis.

So basically this thesis strives to increase the brand awareness of the Services of A. Ahlström Real Estate Ltd by introducing two new service concepts, implementing social media into their marketing strategy and by developing their business to business events management.

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1 RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND OBJECTIVES

This thesis concentrates on the areas of brand awareness and marketing. The intention is to prove that there are other means of marketing that can be as effective as straightforward advertising. For example, reaching the customers through social medias, increasing brand awareness by word-of-mouth marketing and attracting B2B customers by executing flawless and noticeable events.

How to increase the brand awareness of a service-orientated company by utilizing social media? On a wide range of different customers, how to decide which channels of marketing to use for each specific target group? How to find out the customer's perspective on the offered services? How to implement new marketing strategies for gaining brand awareness and which platforms would be suitable? How social media should influence the methods of marketing? How to develop B2B services effectively and notably? These are the main questions this thesis strives to find answers to. The object of study is a service-orientated company, A. Ahlström Real Estate Ltd.

In conclusion, the main objective is to find out which type of marketing strategies A. Ahlström Real Estate Ltd should implement to increase the brand awareness of their Services.

1.1 Methodology

The data in this thesis is collected from several journals, books and publications circling around the topics of marketing, social media, B2B event management, brand management and service development. The facts about culture history is gathered from The Finnish National Board of Antiquities and from a dissertation concentrating on this topic.

Market research in this thesis was executed by collecting data from a survey that was implemented on a social media website. This survey utilized Facebook and included answers from an international group of people between the ages of 20-35. There was 10 questions from which the first five strived to find out the expectations and opin-

ions of foreigners about Finnish manners and habits. The rest of the questionnaire concentrated on social media behavior. The purpose of this part was to find out the customers perspective on a proposed service called Culture Tours and to use the collected data to develop the concept. The other half of the survey was meant for finding the channels for reaching the target audiences of the service. The other purpose of this whole survey was to show how fast and easy it is to utilize social media for collecting market research data.

A. Ahlström Real Estate Ltd could use the same method for finding out customer views on their services. The research could be improved by extending the amount of people invited to answer the questionnaire. A. Ahlström Real Estate Ltd has a page on Facebook so they could invite all of their followers to answer. The survey would attract more people if there was a gift randomly given to someone amongst the participants.

2 COMPANY INTRODUCTION

A. Ahlström Real Estate Ltd is a family based company located in Noormarkku, Pori, in the historically valuable industrial area. A. Ahlström Real Estate Ltd originates from 1851 and is one of the oldest family owned businesses in Finland (Grain 2014). A. Ahlström Corporation separated in 2001 and demerged into three new companies; Ahlstrom Corporation, Ahlström Capital Oy and A. Ahlström Corporation, which was re-named as A. Ahlström Real Estate Ltd in 1.10.2013. The latter one is a smaller, more service orientated part of the three above mentioned. A. Ahlström Real Estate Ltd also operates in Kauttua, Eura, with a similar service concept.

The three areas in which A. Ahlström Real Estate Ltd concentrates on are real estates, forestry and Services. The Services at Noormarkku offer everything from events, accommodation, weddings, cultural tours to hunting trips.

One of the three above mentioned is called Ahlström Capital Oy, which concentrates on real estates and other investments. The biggest of the three companies is the international Ahlstrom Corporation, which produces everything from tea bags to car filters and is listed in the stock market.

The Ahlström family is well known in Finland for their success and interminable strive in the field of entrepreneurship, and they own a large amount of significant properties across Finland.



3 CURRENT SERVICES OF A. AHLSTRÖM REAL ESTATE LTD

Though the company is versatile and consists of several different operations, this thesis concentrates on the Services of A. Ahlström Real Estate Ltd, located in Noormarkku. The information gathered for this chapter is mainly from The Finnish National Board of Antiquities inventory of nationally important cultural historical environments that can be found from the website of RKY.



A. Ahlström Real Estate Ltd's head office (Photo source: <http://www.a-ahlstrom.fi>)

3.1 Accommodation

A. Ahlström Real Estate Ltd offers a wide range of high class accommodation options. Varying from classic to modern, the interior design and atmosphere is carefully planned to suit the taste of different customer needs. Besides comfortable and luxurious nights of good sleep, the accommodation at the services of A. Ahlström Real Estate Ltd offers a view to the beautiful local nature. Surrounded by farming landscape, apple trees and the river of Noormarkku, A. Ahlström Real Estate Ltd takes care of the valuable environment, making it possible for the customer to fully enjoy the relaxing surroundings.

There are 4 different guest accommodation houses in the properties of A. Ahlström Real Estate Ltd. The more exclusive Havulinna castle is available for special company events, offering an inner look to the Family's history. The castle was completed in 1901 and was originally built as a home for Walter and Lilli Ahlström. Another

guest house is called Vainiola, which is one of the oldest accommodations in the area. The house renovation in 1943-44 for the building was designed by Alvar Aalto. (RKY 2009)

For more romantic and traditional taste, guest house Sahala offers former workmen's accommodation detailed to fit the taste of a modern day customer. Guest house Kultala serves for more private purposes. The whole house is usually booked for a small group of customers. The interior design is romantic, soft and full of natural light.

3.2 Catering

A. Ahlström Real Estate Ltd is famous for the quality of their local cuisine. The kitchen staff consists of talented and productive persons, who have a great sense of work morale and motivation. This combined with the beautiful dining areas and the excellence of their cuisine help create memorable moments for the customers of the Services of A. Ahlström Real Estate Ltd. The restaurant provides a variety of menus for weddings, meetings, get-togethers and to any kind of function the customer desires. They also provide a takeaway menu for customers who have their business events or other events elsewhere.



Jukka Luojukoski, The Chief Chef (Photo source: <http://www.satakunnankansa.fi>)

3.3 Business functions

A. Ahlström Real Estate Ltd offers exquisite conditions for business meetings. Varying from meeting rooms to saunas and different dining options, A. Ahlström Real Estate Ltd makes it possible for each company to have a conference or meeting detailed to their exact needs.

3.4 Culture offerings

The Noormarkku ironworks is one of the nationally important cultural historical environments in Finland. It consists of the old iron forge, saw mill, head office, company official and employee accommodations and other buildings owned by A. Ahlström Real Estate Ltd. Noormarkku Ironworks moved to the ownership of Antti Ahlström in the year 1870 (RKY 2009).

Villa Mairea was designed by the world famous architect Alvar Aalto and his wife Aino Aalto and was completed in 1939 (Gullichsen 2009). Villa Mairea is open at certain times for special guests and otherwise used for family accommodation and for culture visits. Villa Mairea is one of the most important works of functionalistic architecture in the world.

Ahlström Voyage is a company museum that provides the visitor a tour to the innovative and productive history of the Ahlström family. Starting from the 19th century, it is an explorative journey through the birth of entrepreneurship and wealth in the company.

The Makkarakoski Sawmill was constructed in 1875 by Antti Ahlström. It is a nationally valuable building and the best preserved water-driven sawmill in Finland. (RKY 2009)

3.5 Sports and activities

A. Ahlström Real Estate Ltd's properties offer endless possibilities for sports and activities. From paddling to organized fishing trips, the customer can get a refreshing

and relaxing journey into the Finnish nature, with experienced guides to lead their way. The long river, Noormarkunjoki flows through the properties of A. Ahlström Real Estate Ltd. It provides great possibilities for multiple sports and activities. So do the forests surrounding the company head quarters.

3.6 Celebrations

A. Ahlström Real Estate Ltd is known for their elegant weddings. The kitchen offers the best possible local ingredients from which the chef conjures his gourmet masterpieces. There are areas for bigger and smaller receptions. Depending on the customer's style and demands, the staff creates a detailed event according to the quest's wishes.

A. Ahlström Real Estate Ltd's main customer groups are:

- Companies
- Associations
- Local and foreign tourists (groups and individuals)
- Wedding couples
- Hosts of family celebrations

4 ONGOING ISSUES

Currently majority of A. Ahlström Real Estate Ltd's customers consist of small or medium sized companies. Their business customers strive to organize successful meetings or company get-togethers that increase motivation of their staff members. A. Ahlström Real Estate Ltd offers exquisite conditions for these kind of events, having several different areas and options to choose from. However the problem at the moment seems to be that not enough people are aware of all the services and possibilities that A. Ahlström Real Estate Ltd offers.

A. Ahlström Real Estate Ltd's sales activity varies a lot during different seasons on the part of the Services. From spring to fall A. Ahlström Real Estate Ltd has their busiest time period. This can be explained by multiple popular events happening nearby and by the beautiful outdoor settings that the seasons offer. A. Ahlström Real Estate Ltd offers a large variety of activities and is a popular place to hold company meetings during these times. However, the winter season caters some issues for the company as there is less sales activity on the part of accommodation and events. Winter weddings haven't been as popular as summer weddings and people are not going for vacations so much anymore. Business meetings are still an ongoing function, but not in such volume. Other attractions should be highlighted and brought to the customers knowledge to increase the clientele in this slower time period.

Another issue was brought up by Tiina Rajala, the Guest Relations Manager at Noormarkku. She explained that they would like to be able to expand their foreign customer base as it is lacking clientele at the moment. This being what she suggested, part of this thesis will concentrate on providing them options to increase A. Ahlström Real Estate Ltd 's brand awareness among this target group.

A. Ahlström Real Estate Ltd is not very noticeable in social medias at the moment. They have a page on Facebook, but it needs more connectivity and more followers to draw more attention. Potential customer can find them through Porin Seudun Matkailu OY Maisa and from A. Ahlström Real Estate Ltd's own websites, but it would be preferable to offer more channels for their customers to reach them. Social media is a powerful platform for business to gain visibility and it is almost a necessity in today's world. This is the reason that led to the suggestion that A. Ahlström Real Estate Ltd should utilize social medias more in their marketing efforts to raise brand awareness of their Services.

5 NEW SERVICE PROPOSALS AND FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

This thesis proposes two new service concepts and a some developmental ideas to the Services of A. Ahlström Real Estate Ltd in addition to suggesting ways to utilize social media. This chapter concentrates on finding new service concepts.

5.1 Weddings of Winter Elegance

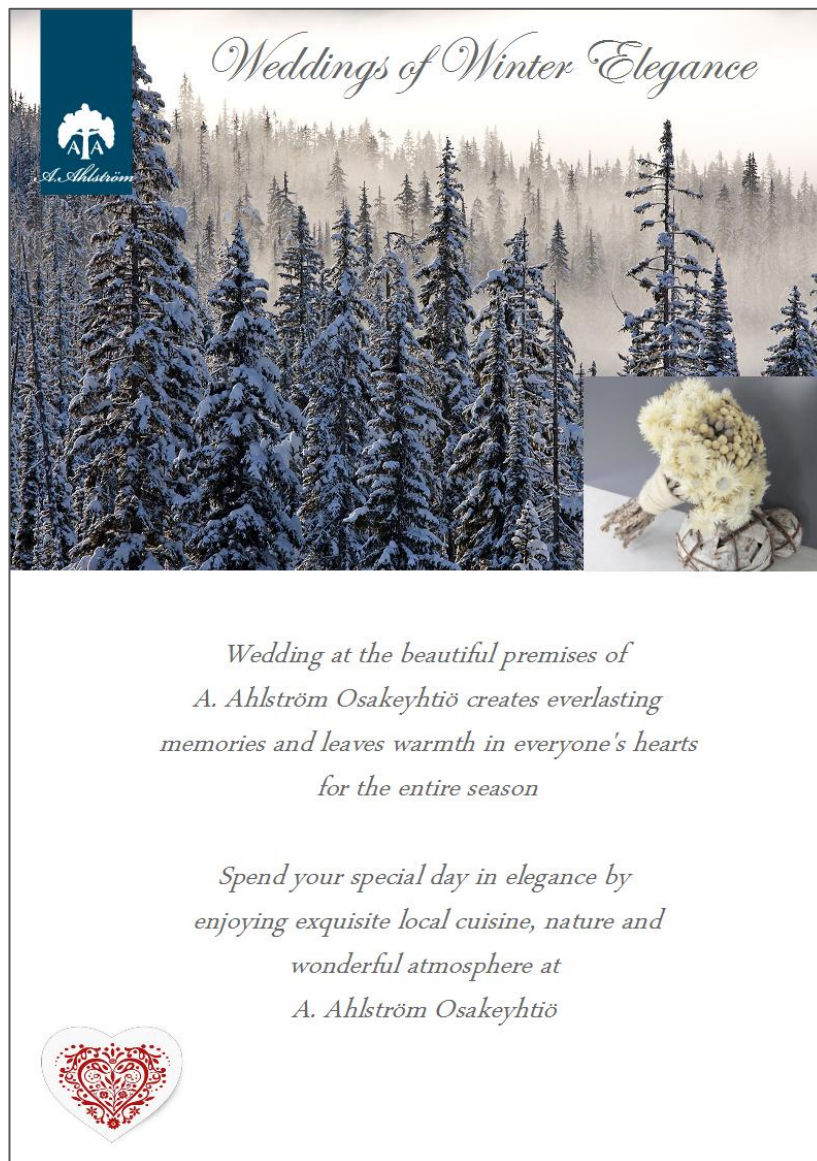
When a snow glittered day turns into an atmospheric evening, it offers a possibility to use soft lights, candles and lanterns to create a romantic feel to an event. This is one of the chances the darker days of winter offer and can be used as an advantage. What better way to prevent seasonal melancholy and bring a little joy to the winter, than to organize a memorable and unique celebration, turning the season's characteristics into positive possibilities. A chance to bring relatives and friends together to celebrate in an unforgettable way. The Weddings of Winter Elegance would have a winter theme, crafted from seasonal decorations and flowers, elegant winter themed colours, special menus, and atmospheric lighting.

Weddings are a very profitable business if executed properly. They require quality food, external business partners and a lot of organizing. The staff and resources of A. Ahlström Real Estate Ltd possess all the required means for executing a flawless wedding.

A. Ahlström Real Estate Ltd is very busy organizing weddings at summertime, but what about the winter season? Introducing fairytale-like winter weddings to the potential customers of A. Ahlström Real Estate Ltd would be a possible solution to increase sales during the slower, winter season. This would require a small marketing campaign including a photo-shoot where the beautiful environment and surroundings of their company would show its advantages. A. Ahlström Real Estate Ltd could also use some of their already existing photo material.

A. Ahlström Real Estate Ltd could have brochures about these winter weddings, both paperback and virtual, with photo examples of the possibilities the company could

create for events, including a small sales pitch. Some of the menu options could be winter themed for these occasions and be printed on the backside of paper brochures.



Example of a virtual brochure

A. Ahlström Real Estate Ltd should market Weddings of Winter Elegance especially through Facebook, considering that wedding couples consist of a large variety of different people, most easily reachable through this channel. Wedding fairs are another possible marketing place for Weddings of Winter Elegance. Besides other cities, they are also organized locally every year in Pori.

Timing the launch of this campaign is also important. The winter season would be the best time period for this, because the customer can visualize the evening of their possible wedding day just by looking outside. Booking the wedding for the next year's winter season would also give enough time for planning and organizing the event.

5.2 Culture Tours Noormarkku

Offering "The Finnish experience" to foreigners

The concept of Culture Tours is that it is a catered, luxury activity and holiday package for foreign customers crafted according to their demands. A. Ahlström Real Estate Ltd has access to many possibilities that the beautiful nature of Finland offers. They have their own forests where there's an opportunity to hunt, hike and do all sorts of outdoor activities. They have close access to running tracks which provide the scent and feel of the beautiful Finnish nature while the customer can do their daily exercise. Swimming in the land of the thousand lakes is another treasure that comes as a possibility when a guest visits the Services of A. Ahlström Real Estate Ltd. During the winter, the more daring visitors can try ice swimming, which is one of the many healthy traditions of the Finns. The river that runs through the lands of A. Ahlström Real Estate Ltd offers a possibility for canoeing and fishing. Taking a few hours to row across the Finnish landscape or familiarize to the unique specimens of Finnish fish will guarantee serenity and a peace of mind for the visitor.

The accommodation of A. Ahlström Real Estate Ltd offers exquisite examples of Finnish design, varying from classic modern to cosy and romantic. The purpose is to have a variety of room options that offer the customer the possibility to choose according to their personal style.

Finnish culinary kitchen isn't too familiar for most foreigners. The kitchen of A. Ahlström Real Estate Ltd prepares great examples of Finnish culinary traditions from fresh, local ingredients. With the hint of elegance and a taste of luxury, the dishes create a variety of memorable culinary experiences.



An example of a campaign photo (Original photo: <http://mikkolo.kuvat.fi/>)

The picture above is from the lands of A. Ahlström Real Estate Ltd. It is powerful because it shows the nature and architecture besides visualizing a beautiful natural phenomenon that is sometimes possible to see in Finland. This picture could be shown on Facebook and on other marketing channels as an advertisement of Culture Tours. This could be introduced with a slogan "Culture Tours Noormarkku- experience an expedition to Finnish specialties".

5.2.1 Market research

For the preparation of this thesis, I conducted a research on Facebook that I executed on the website SurveyMonkey.com. The website offers free basic services for creating your own surveys. Once I had done the questionnaire, I created an event on Facebook to which I invited my foreign friends and acquaintances. The purpose of this survey was to find out a foreigners perception of Finnish traditions and what they would expect from an expedition to Finnish culture. This research helped me to find out the expectations and the interests of the non-native customers. The content of Culture Tours should be conducted based on the demand of the foreigners.

Besides concentrating on Finnish culture, I also asked the participants about their activity on social media and which tourism sites they use. If this kind of service will be provided in the future, it is relevant to know how to reach the foreign customers and through which channels.

Meeting the demand of the customer should be the objective of every company. In this case, considering the service model from the perspective of the foreign customer makes it more likely to meet the demand of the possible clients and create a successful venture.

Research validity:

My market research involved participants between the ages of 20-35 from all over the world, however, mainly from Europe. I received 22 answers, from both female and male participants. Most of the respondents were students and fairly active travelers. These factors I could easily find out from their Facebook pages as the names of the survey participants were visible for me.

The validity of the research suffered due to the lack of responds. More extensive study, involving a larger amount of participants would lead to more useful and collective data.

However, the research was used more as a tool for viewing the Culture Tours concept from a foreign perspective and for finding which type of services/activities the customers would desire. It also helped to find out the proper channels to reach foreign customers. The research wasn't meant for proving a hypothesis, but rather for collecting usable information to further develop the concept.

I asked the following questions in my survey:

Research for Thesis

1. How do you perceive the characteristics of Finnish people?

2. What is familiar to you about Finnish traditions and culture?

3. What activities do you recognize as Finnish?

4. What Finnish culinary traditions or foods do you know?

5. What kind of things would you expect from a truly Finnish experience?

Survey results from part 1

According to the data I collected from my survey, most foreigners see Finnish people as shy, introvert and honest. Showing the warm heartedness and genuineness of Finnish services would be the style to go with the Culture Tours, offered to foreign customers. Giving a memorable tour of Finnish hospitality and traditions would be the objective of Culture Tours. With a successful service like this, word-of-mouth advertising from satisfied customers would be a powerful marketing tool.

From Finnish traditions the participants of the survey mentioned sauna, summer cottages and ice hockey. I was surprised by the lack of variety in the answers. This means that most foreigners are not so familiar with all the great traditions that Finland has to offer. Ice swimming, skiing, berry picking, fishing, cultural experiences involving Finnish architecture and art, hikes in the nature and some friendly spirited

Finnish games would be a great way of providing memorable experiences for the foreigners. From a truly Finnish experience the foreigners expected snow, sauna, northern lights, swimming in the lakes, cottages, karaoke and long walks in the forest. Most of the participants saw these things as pleasant, but also slightly humorous.

Higher-end Finnish culinary traditions were quite unfamiliar with the participants. Most of the people recognized more common-day foods like mämmi, salmiakki, rye bread, sausages, pea soup, meat pies, Karelian pie, Karelian stew and reindeer. Providing more luxury items from local ingredients would be a great way for the foreigners to get to know the other side of the Finnish culinary traditions. For example dishes created from local moose or salmon.

Research for Thesis

Social media

6. Which social medias do you actively use?

7. What is your opinion about marketing in social media?

8. Which social medias do you perceive as the best for marketing and creating brand awareness?

9. What travelling sites you choose when planning a trip?

10. Which websites do you use when booking a hotel?

Survey results from part 2

In the second part of the survey I asked the participants which kind of traveling sites they use and how they utilize them. The most popular sites were TripAdvisor, Ryanair and Momondo. Considering that TripAdvisor was by far the most popular one of above mentioned, it suggests that using TripAdvisor as a marketing tool would be a good platform to reach potential customers. TripAdvisor is almost certain to pop up on the front site of Google no matter what kind of search results about travelling the customer is looking for. That means this channel is very visible for this target group of customers.

Question 7 in my survey: What is your opinion about marketing in social media?

“I think it's a MUST in today's world! If you're not using social media, you're definitely losing money.”

Social medias would work as a great marketing platform for Culture Tours. A. Ahlström Real Estate Ltd should link this service to TripAdvisor and combine it to Facebook by adding “Rate us on TripAdvisor” to their Facebook page. There the customers could not only evaluate the Culture Tours, but accommodation and other services too, so that both international and domestic customers have the possibility to share their opinions. The more reviews a company gets on TripAdvisor, the more visible it is there, so encouraging customers to give their opinion would ultimately lead to more visibility and increased brand awareness. The other plus side to this suggestion is that it’s combining social media marketing with word-of-mouth, which is one of the most effective ways to get acknowledged. People basically believe in other people’s opinions more easily than to straightforward advertising.

Recommendations based on research:

- Market service as an exotic expedition to Finnish traditions/specialties
- Guides social, calm, humble and traditional
- Appeal to adventurous, cultural, worldly-wise individuals and groups
- Offer higher-end Finnish cuisine and local ingredients

- Emphasis on nature, locality, traditions, culture, relaxing, new experiences and adventure
- Utilize TripAdvisor

6 BRAND

Brand is something that identifies a company. It is the designed symbol of a business, which includes their products, services and everything that relates to the company. Brand is something that a company strives to improve, to attract customers with and to use as a tool to differentiate themselves from the other service providers. Once a brand is created, the next step is developing it further, choosing a signature style and trying to create awareness for the wanted target groups.

6.1 Building a brand

Building a brand requires an established company, determination and a clear way of direction. You have to create a strategy, which involves the phases and the objectives of your progress. Your brand determines the style and appearance of your company, so the process of building a brand requires a well thought out plan and a solid image you are striving forwards.



(Photo source: <http://crenshawcomm.com>)

Tips for building a successful brand:

- Choose your main focus
- Keep in mind your objectives
- Research similar companies to avoid pitfalls and plagiarism
- Strive for creating something original and distinguishable
- Keep it simple so your customers understands what it is your offering
- Choose your style and stick with it
- Decide your target group
- Keep your brand consistent, that makes it more memorable
- Protect your brand from plagiarism by creating a strong identity that stands out from the others
- Make sure your website is clear and affects to the right public

6.2 Creating brand awareness

Brand awareness is the primary goal of advertising. Creating brand awareness requires forming a marketing strategy. First you need to find the right questions to ask yourself, and then you can move towards getting the answers you desire. Which channels to use for promotion, which advertising styles to apply and what audiences to target it to, are all important questions that you need to ask yourself. Is there a niche in the market or can you create demand for your brand?

Social media has become an important platform for creating brand awareness. Companies without any online activity are a dying breed and are considered old-fashioned and outdated. Whether your customers consist of generation Y or X, nowadays it is an undeniable necessity to be virtually visible.

Brand awareness is the primary goal of advertising and advertising can be done in a million different ways. Again at this point you have to consider your potential customers and what affects them. How and where can you reach your target group and with what strategy?

In A. Ahlström Real Estate Ltd's case advertising has to be subtle to maintain their sophisticated image. More effort has to be put into other marketing strategies than straightforward advertising. This thesis is suggesting ways to increase brand image through new campaigns, social media implementations and developments to event management, rather than by measures of direct advertising.

7 MARKETING VIA SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media has become an inevitably important marketing channel in today's world. Every smart and innovative entrepreneur from hairdresser to baker is utilizing social media. There is plenty of advantages in utilizing social medias that cannot be left unnoticed.

Benefits of utilizing social media:

- Increased visibility
- Appearing as a modern-day company
- Networking possibilities
- Fast communication
- Accessibility
- Cost efficiency
- Sales growth
- Customer retention

7.1 Different social media strategies and channels

There is a lot of different social medias available today. Some are for a more general use and others for a more specific purpose. The most popular sites for general public are Facebook and Twitter. Then there are sites for a more specific purpose like TripAdvisor, which is used by travelers and companies to rate, discuss and promote services concentrating on tourism. Then there is LinkedIn that offers possibilities for

creating professional contacts and finding jobs. It is crucially important to recognize your target group and find the right social media platform for creating visibility. Each target customer group has to be considered separately and each need applying of a different social media strategy.

7.1.1 Facebook

Ash Rishi, the CEO of a digital marketing and creative communications agency tells on his blog that *“If you’ve got something to talk about, use social media to get your message out there. Whether you have won an award, launched a new product or have a product recall, the ability to not only post information immediately, but to respond to it immediately keeps you in contact with your customers.”* (Rishi 2013) Facebook is a great social media platform for getting visibility for a company, considering that Facebook users share 684,478 pieces of content every minute.

Especially new campaigns should be promoted on Facebook, together with pictures and a sales pitch, this meaning a kind of virtual brochure consisting of only one, succinct page to keep it simple for the customer. People are prone to give a lot more attention to pictures, especially to people's faces. This is the main reason why campaigns like Weddings of Winter Elegance and Culture Tours should be launched on Facebook by applying short and simple virtual brochures.

A. Ahlström Real Estate Ltd could also apply small tricks to attract more Facebook followers. For example announcing that each month they randomly choose one of their followers and give that person a surprise gift. A. Ahlström Real Estate Ltd could announce the winner and the monthly price on their Facebook page. The prices could vary from a lunch ticket to reindeer meat cans, however being under 30 euro each. The company should post one week ahead before the monthly winner is chosen something like; *“In one week we will choose a winner for our monthly surprise price again. Tell your friends!”* By doing this A. Ahlström Real Estate Ltd could attract more followers and potential customers to their Facebook page.

Every now and then, A. Ahlström Real Estate Ltd should engage their followers to conversations on their page. This would show activity on their side and each of their

followers could see it on their newsfeed on Facebook. This could be executed by asking questions such as; “What is your favorite thing about Noormarkku ironworks? Share your thoughts.”

7.1.2 TripAdvisor

“More than 60 million consumers each month research their travel purchases using TripAdvisor. You can introduce your travel products and services (hotel, B&B, attraction, tour package, restaurant, etc.) to millions of qualified travel buyers.”
(TripAdvisor 2014)

A. Ahlström is not visible in TripAdvisor at the moment. There has to be a channel for foreign customers to reach the service offerings of A. Ahlström Real Estate Ltd, especially if the Culture Tours campaign is launched, and TripAdvisor is a popular platform for finding travelling options.

How to utilize TripAdvisor

The first thing a company has to do is manage their listing – register themselves as the owner of the page, verify ownership, ensure all information fields are populated with the correct information and add photos to attract customer attention. Companies need to strive to review and update content regularly. Criticism is always good, it means the company have been noticed. Even negative feedback can be used as an advantage. Companies should respond politely to the given feedback and take it as a suggestion for future developments. If the issue that the customer mentioned has been fixed, it should be notified on TripAdvisor, with compliments to the customer who pointed out the problem. This would show the customer and others that the company is not avoiding problems and takes customers seriously and appreciates their opinions.

As mentioned earlier, A. Ahlström Real Estate Ltd should integrate “Rate us on TripAdvisor” option to their Facebook page, so that the customers can find it easier to review them. This would help increase visibility of their Services.

7.1.3 LinkedIn

Facebook works to some extent for each target group, business customers being the most difficult ones to reach through this channel. This is why a separate marketing strategy needs to be applied for business clients.

LinkedIn works as a great networking tool for companies small or big. Among other things, registering to LinkedIn gives you the option to share your company information and attract attention from other businesses.

LinkedIn is often viewed only as a place to share professional information about an individual and as a platform to seek a job. However, Josh Graff, head of LinkedIn Marketing Solutions across Europe, argues otherwise on an interview for The Guardian; *“Six times more impressions flow from people seeking information about companies than those specifically looking for a new job.”* (Benady 2013)

An article by the author Nancy Davis Kho tells us about the importance of LinkedIn as a sharing platform for professional contacts with the following statement; *“A spate of social media tools designed from the ground up to meet enterprise needs are enabling faster and more accurate information sharing within the corporate environment, facilitating fast response to customer feedback, and uncovering information that was difficult to gather using traditional methods.”* (Kho 2008) With 3 million companies registered to LinkedIn, this social media platform cannot be overlooked when planning a B2B social media marketing strategy. Like the author Nancy Davis Kho mentioned, LinkedIn is a site where professional information can be shared and received faster than with traditional methods.

A. Ahlström Real Estate Ltd should register their company to LinkedIn to gain fast visibility for their company and to attract attention from other companies. This is one of faster solutions for increasing brand awareness on the B2B side of the Services.

Notes

Each target group of customers should be approached by a different social media marketing strategy. Foreign customers with TripAdvisor, Business customers with LinkedIn and the more general population with Facebook and Twitter.

7.2 Examples of successful social media marketing strategies

The internet is full of examples of well-executed social media marketing strategies and the return on investment they brought to companies. Many authors swear by the importance of implementing social media.

On the website sociamediatoday.com, Pam Dryer - the marketing manager at Solutions IQ, listed 10 examples of successful social media marketing. One great example of success was Kraft/Toblerone, who were able to drive 500,000 website visits and increase sales of Toblerone by 132% by utilizing social media. They used multiple different channels and their own website for marketing. (Dryer 2013)

Another good example was a Commune Hotels & Resorts company called Joie de Vivre, who marketed their offer through Facebook and Twitter and was able to book a thousand rooms that otherwise would have been vacant. (Dryer 2013)

This just shows the power of social media in today's marketing. If implemented properly, utilizing social media can increase brand awareness and sales of almost any kind of company.

8 B2B EVENT PLANNING & SUGGESTIONS

Like mentioned in earlier chapters, business clients need a different approach than other customer groups when it comes to crafting a marketing strategy. Besides utilizing social medias like LinkedIn, it is preferable to put more effort on B2B events, with the focus of improving A. Ahlström Real Estate Ltd's brand image in this sector and increasing sales through customer retention and formation of new business relations.

There are many different possible business to business functions. Underneath are a few suggestions that would with careful planning and execution improve the brand image of A. Ahlström Real Estate Ltd and help build their reputation among this target group of customers.

Charity events are a great way of boosting the positive image of any company. It is important to carefully decide on how to be perceived before tying your company name to an event. The philanthropic cause of a charity event should be chosen carefully (Allen 2009). Every charity organization is important, but for A. Ahlström Real Estate Ltd, a recommended cause would be art, culture or environment. The reason behind these selections is that they are areas that A. Ahlström Real Estate Ltd is especially familiar with.

The goal of a charity function is helping the non-profit sector and meeting event objectives which have to be defined beforehand (Allen 2009). Organizing this sort of event would help A. Ahlström Real Estate Ltd to promote themselves as active on the matter of corporate social responsibility and encourage other businesses to do so as well by inviting company representatives to their charity events. This would put pressure on client and competitor companies to attend for maintaining their own CSR image. Involving retailers and partners as sponsors might also be a smart decision to cut down A. Ahlström Real Estate Ltd's costs and increase the awareness and brand image of their associates in exchange.

Organizing *seminars* for companies working in common fields of business would be preferable as well. Held in the estates of A. Ahlström Real Estate Ltd, company representatives would have their short presentations and afterwards discussion about the subjects in hand. Clients would have the chance to mingle with similar minded people, share their wisdom, gain ideas and possibly even create new business partnerships. Flawlessly executing these kind of corporate events would show professionalism. The main objective would be to share knowledge and create new connections while increasing the awareness of A. Ahlström Real Estate Ltd's Services.

At the moment A. Ahlström Real Estate Ltd is organising *client appreciation events* for companies to take notice of their services. The current pattern is that A. Ahlström Real Estate Ltd organizes an event and sends invitations to company representatives that are considered relevant for their offers. In these events Ahlström provides food, varying happenings and an information package of their services. At the beginning of these events they give folders for the representatives to take with them once the event is over. These folders included brochures, business cards and short introductions of their services with prices included.

This is an effective and memorable way of increasing awareness. The representatives will see the possibilities for their company happenings first hand, and are introduced to the beautiful surroundings of A. Ahlström Real Estate Ltd.

Developing client appreciation events further

At the end of these client appreciation events A. Ahlström Real Estate Ltd's sales team should give out customer review spreads, where the people that attended can rate what kind of image they got out of the happening and what were the most positive aspects for them. They should also be asked how much they knew about A. Ahlström Real Estate Ltd beforehand and how are their views about the company now after the event. This would serve the company in two ways; they would get market research information about what is lacking in their advertising at the moment, and they could ask for the customers if they can publish their comments about the event on their Facebook page and in other marketing channels to show interest on the customers opinions. This way after every event, people could read about how the ser-

vices and environment appears from the customers perspective and make the once that didn't attend want to come next time. A slight sense of exclusiveness might create curiosity among customers.

For the client appreciations events meant for more general public, A. Ahlström Real Estate Ltd should have these events created on their Facebook page and after a happening, the ones that have read the comments could press a button that says I want to attend the next client appreciation event or information seminar. The customer would request an invitation and give out information after pressing the 'I want to attend' button. After the information is sent the page would thank for the customers interest and say that they will send an invitation via e-mail if the customer is chosen as a guest. This way A. Ahlström Real Estate Ltd would know beforehand how many people are willing to attend the next event and how soon it should be organized. This is a great marketing tool and it would keep up the high end image of A. Ahlström Real Estate Ltd.

Tips & tools for creating successful client appreciation events:

- Make the event fun, memorable and make the customer want to stay on the attendee list for future happenings
- Make client appreciation events your company's signature style, a trademark of some sort
- At the end of each client appreciation event, pronounce a winner of a selected service package. For example a relaxing hotel night for two, gourmet Sunday lunch or a canoeing trip. This will make the customers want to wait until the end of the event and join the ones in the future as well
- Strive to create educating, entertaining and exciting corporate events
- Make sure there is enough time before and after the presentations to network and create connections
- Organize a salesperson available for the customer's questions
- Make it pleasant and effortless for customers to do business with your company

9 PROPER EXECUTION OF B2B EVENTS

Throwing a successful event for the right group of people may create long and meaningful business relations and improve the brand image of a company. Word-of-mouth marketing is with no doubt one of the most effective ways of advertisement. Satisfied customers will tell others about the positive experience and therefore promote the service provider. It is one of the most credible ways of advertising because the person promoting the company is receiving no compensation for their kind words.

According to Judy Allen, the author of *The executive's guide to corporate events & business entertaining*, as a company grows, so will its business function requirements (Allen 2007). Especially in B2B marketing, effort put into flawless execution of a business event is the best way of creating positive visibility for your company. First step in a proper execution of a business event is recognizing the target group, characterizing the upcoming function and defining the objectives of the event. The happening has to be memorable for the customer so exceeding their expectations would be to optimal goal.

The strengths of A. Ahlström Real Estate Ltd as an event organizer:

- Unique settings
- Culturally valuable and traditionally aesthetic milieu
- Esteemed brand
- High end services/products
- Possibilities for variety of events
- Events for up to 130 people
- Own catering
- Professionally capable and educated staff

10 RETURN ON INVESTMENT (ROI)

Return on investment (ROI) means the benefit or value a company receives in return for the investment they put on a method of doing business. This thesis suggests different methods to increase the brand awareness of A. Ahlström Real Estate Ltd so introducing different ways to track return on investment is necessary.

10.1 Social media return on investment

Tracking return on investment of social media marketing is bit tricky because the factors measured are mostly intangible. The reason for this is that with a normal advertising campaign, it is simple to evaluate expenses based on the cost of the labour, consulting fees, advertising space and resources spent on it. With evaluating social media return on investment you need a different perspective. Besides calculating your initial investment you have to consider the effort that goes to being active on the social media platform. Somebody needs to be responsible of this job.

First you need to have your objectives clearly determined and the time period in which you evaluate the success of your developments or campaigns. The thing that you want to ask yourself is; have perceptions of the brand increased in a determined amount of time? (Romero 2011)

Social media ROI can be evaluated by tracking the following factors:

Short-term ROI

Viewtroughs

How many people have visited your social media pages is a clear indicator to your company's online visibility. For Facebook there is an app called the Facebook Insights. It allows company sites and fan pages to track their visitor activity. Facebook insights is a very easy tool to track daily activity on your company's page. Basic metrics of a Facebook page will be visible at the Insights Dashboards. It counts your

daily new users, daily active users, daily shared content and comments to shared content.

Likes/Followers

This is probably the simplest way to evaluate success in social media strategy. Follow how many more likes on Facebook or on other platforms your company got in a certain amount of time to estimate how your online activity has developed.

Online discussions, conversations

Tracking online activity is a great way to see how visible your company is. How many discussions or conversations are started daily in your Facebook page, how many comments made on other social medias. This all tells how interesting your company is.

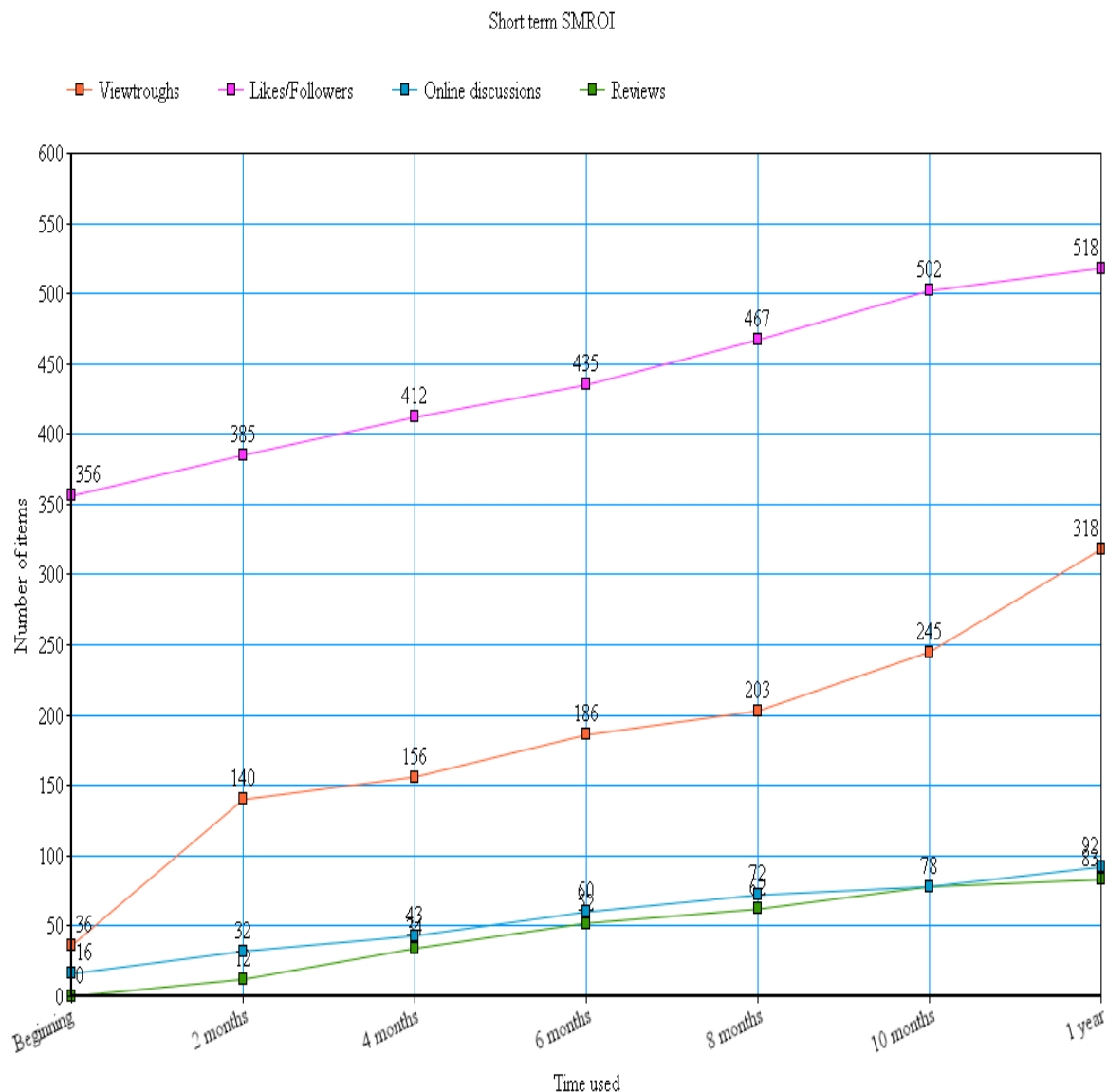
Reviews

The amount of reviews customers make on Facebook and TripAdvisor tells a lot about whether or not they think their comments are being noticed. If your company is active online, customers will feel more important. Reviews are a great way to get brand awareness. Potential customers have better access to them if their available on social media. The successfulness of a social media strategy can be indirectly determined from the amount of reviews on the company's pages.

Customer reach

This means the amount of customers and locations your online activity can reach. If your target group have expanded nationally, internationally or by numbers, your customer reach have grown.

Underneath is an exemplar chart for tracking short term SMROI:



Long-term ROI

Growth in sales

This is of course one of the main objectives of creating brand awareness. It might be difficult to separate which sales are from the result of social media developments and campaigns. This is the reason why customers should be asked to write reviews after their visit and tell where they heard about the company.

Customer retention

Customer retention can only be possible with investment in long-term customer relations and successful services. Responding quickly on social media to customer questions and feedback is one way to ensure that they feel appreciated.

10.2 Business to business event return on investment

The other marketing strategy involved developing the B2B events of A. Ahlström Real Estate Ltd. Tracking ROI on B2B events organising from the perspective of increasing brand awareness demands monitoring both tangible and intangible returns, short- and long-term. Organizing B2B events requires financial expenditures and investments in time and energy.

The author Judy Allen mentions in her book; *The executive's guide to corporate events & business entertaining*, that receiving the highest possible ROI from Business to Business functions requires not only meeting the participants expectations but exceeding them (Allen 2007). The goal is to reach long-lasting and long-reaching benefits instead of getting immediate short-term ROI. Assessing each event element and keeping in mind the company objectives is necessary.

Like mentioned, the ROI of B2B events can be assessed short- and long-term. The short-term ROI can be already monitored at the site of an ongoing event.

Assessing the outcome of an event onsite can be done by monitoring:

- Amount of attendees
- Staff helpfulness
- Event atmosphere and participant mood
- Catering success
- Event time management
- Success of event program
- Feedback from participants
- Meeting event objectives

A simple tool for assessing these factors would be to give one of the attending employees a notebook where they mark their opinion about the success of each of the above mentioned on a scale of 1-5, 5 being the best possible outcome. This would enable noticing which parts of the events need improvement and which parts are successful as they are. Measuring the success of events on site would also be help to track how their event organising develops within time and compare the success of different functions to one another.

Long-term assessment of B2B event ROI requires more effort from a company. Meeting the company objectives is the most important thing to keep in mind and in this case the goal is to increase the brand awareness of A. Ahlström Real Estate Ltd.

Long-term ROI of B2B events can be measured by:

- Reviews and feedback
- Increased demand for events
- Growth in sales
- Financial return
- Customer retention
- Improved business relations
- New customers
- Increased visibility

11 CONCLUSION

The goal of this thesis was to introduce new strategies for increasing A. Ahlström Real Estate Ltd's brand awareness and for expanding their clientele. There were proposals for 2 new service concepts; Weddings of Winter Elegance and Culture Tours Noormarkku. These two are mostly meant to increase sales during the slower, winter season.

New strategy was also created for utilizing social media, each channel being specified for their best purposes and target groups. Social media platforms are an efficient and visible way to seek new customer groups and increase brand awareness.

Putting more effort on B2B events is also important, considering that the largest part of A. Ahlström Real Estate Ltd's customers are other companies. New ways of executing client appreciation events and developing the B2B event management would increase the brand awareness on this sector.

In conclusion, A. Ahlström Real Estate Ltd already has a known brand, but the knowledge of exactly what their Services are and what they can offer is lacking among certain customer groups. Developing their already existing services, creating new ones and making them more visible and accessible on social media platforms would ultimately lead to increased brand awareness of A. Ahlström Real Estate Ltd.

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