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University of Applied Sciences

Bachelor's Degree programme in International Business / International Marketing

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GAMIFICATION AS A PART OF A LONG-TERM MARKETING STRATEGY FOR SAAS  
COMPANY ON THE EXAMPLE OF AZAVISTA.COM

Bachelor's Thesis 2014

## ABSTRACT

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MOROZOV, ANTON      Gamification as a part of a long-term marketing strategy for SaaS company on the example of Azavista.com

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The aim of this thesis was to study possible ways of promoting SaaS Company on the Russian event management market, by educating people through using the Gamification module.

During the research I found a way to implement Azavista's Educational Module in order both to teach future industry professionals more about event management, and also show them how it all can be done in a cost-effective and less time-consuming way with the help of Azavista and other technologies in general. My research was practice-based, which means that all the collected data was gathered by me personally, during my work for Azavista. Some names of companies or Universities are not stated due to business confidentiality or pending status of those entities as our official partners.

The results of this research show the possible impact and need of launching a Gamification module in Russia, especially now, when Azavista is just entering the market, and while all our main domestic and foreign competitors are not active. In a line with this, the general research of the market and industry itself shows the current state of its development in Russia, as well as its possible future trends. The third main result was practical: I managed to establish plenty of contacts with the universities of Moscow and St. Petersburg. Turn some of them to hot leads for Azavista and foster partnerships and friendly relationships.

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Azavista is a Software as a Service (SaaS) event management company, which was founded in 2010 and is headquartered in Amsterdam, The Netherlands. It is the brainchild of Web and IT specialists, as well as a team of travel and tourism industry professionals.

Azavista is a free, online Request for Proposal (from now on RFP) and booking platform that allows users to arrange meetings, conferences and hotel accommodation for group travel (<http://www.azavista.ru/eng/about>).

In the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter of 2013, the company's management decided to enter the Russian market (van der Kuijl, de Geus 2013).

Prior to this significant step, I was responsible of providing a detailed Marketing Research in order to find information about the current state of the market, its possibilities, trends and opportunities.

The result of my research showed that the Russian market is very promising for a company such as Azavista, because currently the IT support for the event and travel industry is very amateur. At the same time the market is growing and it's supported by governmental and foreign investments. That data gave us confidence to start the marketing campaign in Russia.

"We believe that the future of travel and event planning is evidence-based. Our mission is to provide a tool that will help industry professionals around the world make bigger and better decisions. We aim to facilitate travel and event planners in successfully overcoming budgetary and organizational challenges by using technology and data combined." – Azavista's mission, according to the official website (<http://www.azavista.ru/eng/about>).

### 1.2 Research scope

As I mentioned at the beginning, my marketing research on Russian Travel and Event industry development gave Azavista enough

justifications to make a final decision on entering the market.

Nevertheless, already during our first steps we noticed that not only the IT support for the industry is lagging, but also a lot of companies are still not familiar with modern possibilities of complementing their work and working processes by the use of automatization. Of course, there are some big and technology-advanced companies, which understand the benefits of such platform as Azavista, but, usually, they are happy with their own developments and instruments to support their workflow.

The following question was formulated:

How to teach industry professionals not only to apply modern technologies on their workplaces, but also use Azavista's solutions for this? (Michael, 2014)

As an answer to this challenge, Azavista started to develop a Gamification Module, will help professionals to get to know the platform, realize its benefits and learn how to use it, by completing tasks with progressing difficulty.

Therefore the following aim for the research appeared:

*How to increase the amount of hot leads using Azavista's gamification module?*

Based on this question, the following objectives for the thesis were formulated:

1. How to educate companies to use modern technologies in their workflow?
2. How to motivate companies to choose Azavista as a solution?

To accomplish this work I did the research on Russian Educational Institutions, which are related to Tourism and/or Event Management Industries. I did not only find the official information on open sources, but

also contacted Universities' officials, met them and discussed with them the future of our Gamification Module on the Russian market with them.

### 1.3 Research method

My research was practice-based. I acquired substantial experience and insight of the market during my internship and working period to define problems and provide an analysis.

Practice-based research is an original investigation undertaken in order to gain new knowledge partly by means of practice and the outcomes of that practice. Claims of originality and contribution to knowledge may be demonstrated through creative outcomes in the form of designs, music, digital media, performances and exhibitions. Whilst the significance and context of the claims are described in words, a full understanding can only be obtained with direct reference to the outcomes. (Candy, 2006)

### 1.4 Limitations of the research

As we are talking about long-term strategy for our company, we cannot correctly measure the effect, received from suggested advices and received results. Also, in the mean of monetization it is hard to calculate the influence of certain established partnerships as the financial profit depends not only on the development of those partners, but also on development of market itself.

Nowadays the unstable currency exchange rate and the political situation in Russia make outbound tourism and event industries fluctuate. In that sense it doesn't mean that any risks could appear for Azavista as SaaS Company, because if the demand on outbound tours and events will decrease it means that domestic business tourism will be increasing and companies and partners will still be able to use our tools.



## 2. COMPANY OVERVIEW

Azavista is an online platform that provides a complete data-driven solution for group travel and event management. It handles all aspects of a tour or event, from group accommodation and transportation to registrations, event ROI, reporting, and taxes refunds. It also provides live travel market analytics, forecasting, and data visualization. (Toltech 2014).

### 2.1 Azavista's products and services

Azavista.com platform combines 4 modules, which consist from a lot of different features:

#### 1. Analytics

Azavista processes more than 60 million hotel prices daily and provides planners, as well as suppliers with valuable live market data that can facilitate cost effective planning, business and marketing decisions. Azavista currently analyzes information from 143 capital cities, tourist hubs and hot-spots around the world. Gain access to this advanced tool completely free of charge. (Azavista 2014).

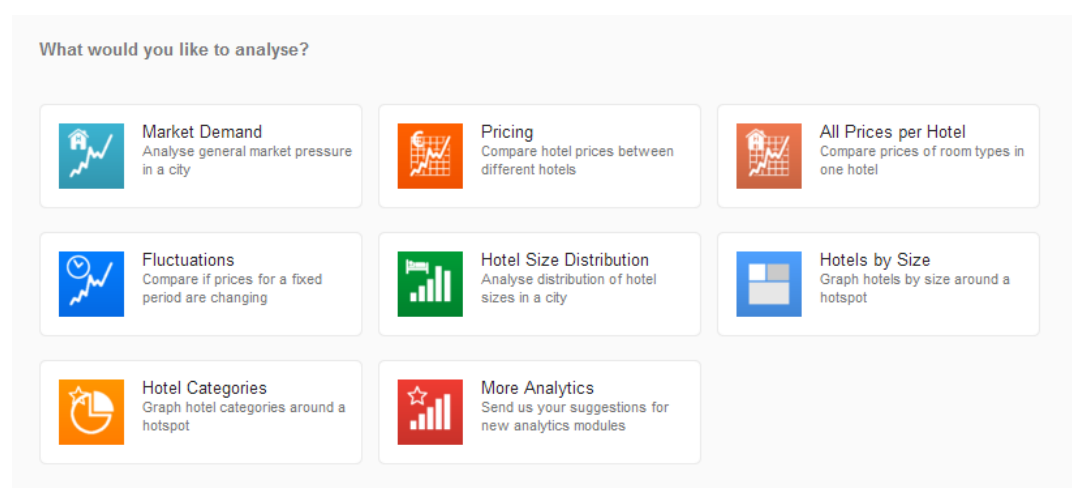


Figure 1 Azavista Analytics

Planners can identify and track the market demand in a wide range of cities. This data set gives them insight into which dates are more cost

effective for their next tour or event. Planners can compare specific hotel prices in the same or different cities, during a specific period of time. It can help to find the most appropriate suppliers and send out targeted RFPs, only to those who could be accepted within the budget. Before determining a city for future tour or event, planners also can use special data set to confirm whether or not the specific location is suitable capacity wise and if it can cater all needs. (Azavista 2014).

## 2. Group Travel Planning

This tool gives access to over 50.000 suppliers worldwide. A planner can send multiple e-RFPs in just a few minutes. Organize group accommodation, meeting space, dining and transportation. Receive all incoming offers in one overview. The tool helps to keep the communication direct between planner and the supplier. (Azavista 2014).

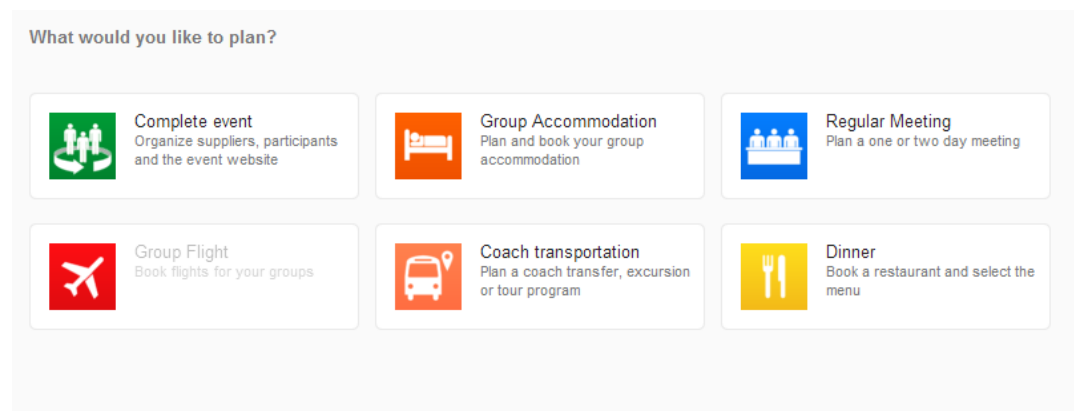


Figure 2 Group Travel Module

With Azavista planner can get the best deals for next group or event. Planners can easily receive multiple offers, do extensive market research, compare, negotiate and book. Azavista customer support team provides free assistance with the follow-up process regarding the response of suppliers. This way company ensures that all offers are delivered according to the planner's pre-defined deadlines. Also, Azavista offers advanced contracting technology that allows to receive and sign supplier contracts online. Azavista also notifies when a payment is due. All contracts are stored on the account for easy access (<http://www.azavista.ru/eng/group-travel-planning>).

Another important feature helps to avoid rooming list mistakes. With dynamic drag and drop rooming editor, planner can create rooming-lists quickly and easily avoiding double listings or mistakes. Planner can then send list directly to supplier through Azavista, or export it in excel. This feature can also be synced with event management module. (Azavista 2014).

### 3. Event Management

With Azavista's online event registration software, planner can create custom event websites and registration forms in just a few minutes. Using drag and drop interface, it enables non-technical users to seamlessly create the ideal registration page for their next event. (Azavista 2014).

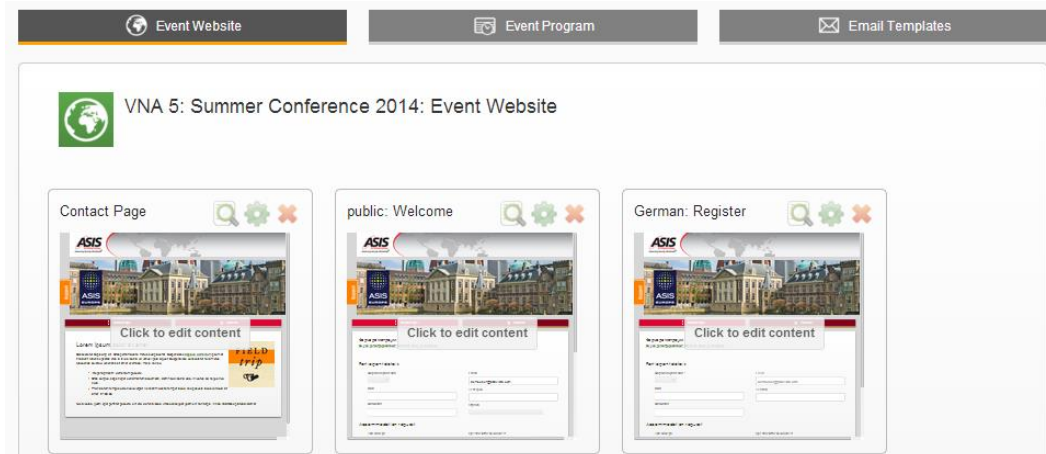


Figure 3 Event Website Editor

Quantitative and qualitative high level reporting is also possible to make within this module: generate reports for event budgeting, registrations, delegate feedback, contracted suppliers, Event ROI and more. Users get access to over then 30 pre-loaded reporting templates or can create their custom report. Next feature is the possibility to send emails, notifications and updates to all participants through advanced email campaign manager. Azavista is a web-based solution, therefore no installation is required. You can access the system online at any time. Also, platform is mobile responsive so planner won't miss out on any participants that want to register on the go. (Azavista 2014).



AZAVISTA

## Detailed Expense

**Name** VNA 5: Summer Conference 2014  
**Start date** 6/28/14 12:00 AM  
**End date** 6/30/14 12:00 AM  
**People** 40

Product	Quantity	Units	Unit price	Discount	Total
<b>Accommodation</b>					
Sgl	60	3	€ 120.00	€ 1000.00	€ 20600.00
Dbl	15	3	€ 150.00	€ 500.00	€ 6250.00
Suite	2	3	€ 250.00	€ 500.00	€ 1000.00
Crew & cast	10	5	€ 80.00	€ 0.00	€ 4000.00
Complimentary	5	5	€ 0.00	€ 0.00	€ 0.00
8 days	20	0	€ 70.00	€ 10.00	€ -10.00
<b>Subtotal</b>					€ 31840.00
<b>Audio Visual</b>					
Technical equipment	3	3	€ 200.00	€ 0.00	€ 1800.00
Projectmanagement	1	3	€ 110.00	€ 0.00	€ 330.00
<b>Subtotal</b>					€ 2130.00
<b>Built Out</b>					
Category rooms	3	2	€ 60.00	€ 0.00	€ 360.00
Generic Graphics	6	2	€ 45.00	€ 0.00	€ 540.00
<b>Subtotal</b>					€ 900.00

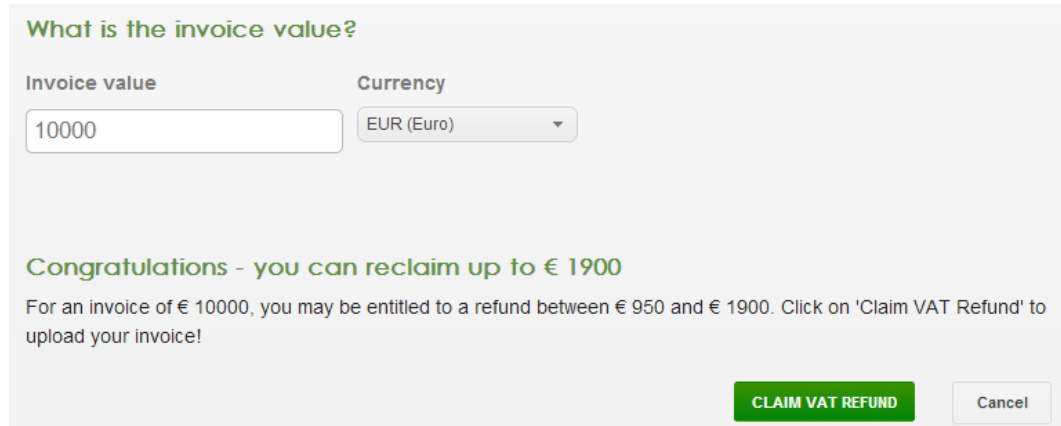
Figure 4 Example of Detailed Expense Report

Creating custom ticket shop is also doable with Azavista. Using customizable payment options and take advantage of automated invoicing technology is a helpful feature for any event-planner. Azavista's payment solution covers all major credit card companies, as well as Paypal. (Azavista 2014).

#### 4. VAT Refunds

Azavista has established global partnerships with authorities and tax specialists around the world. Utilizing efficient technology platform, Azavista is able to assist clients with VAT and foreign tax reclaim. With strong expertise and market insight, Azavista offers to clients unrivaled service in Tour Operator Specific Refunds as well as the recovery of VAT incurred on internal company expenses. Depending on the nature of the claim, the refund process may range from 2 weeks up to 6 months.

Azavista handles tax recovery claims based on a no-cure no-pay basis. This means that Azavista only takes a percentage of the VAT successfully refunded. In the event that a VAT reclaim is not successful, there are no other costs for the service and no financial commitments. (Azavista 2014).



**What is the invoice value?**

Invoice value:  Currency:

**Congratulations - you can reclaim up to € 1900**

For an invoice of € 10000, you may be entitled to a refund between € 950 and € 1900. Click on 'Claim VAT Refund' to upload your invoice!

[CLAIM VAT REFUND](#) [Cancel](#)

Figure 5 Example of VAT Refund counter

### 3 MARKET OVERVIEW

Russia is known as the biggest country in the world with huge variety of nationalities, mentalities and micro-economics. According to Urbanika, a total of 250 industrial centers with more than 10 billion rubles industrial output are located in Russia and this make it one of the most prospective countries worldwide. The Russian outbound travel market grows in average by 10.5% every year. About 15 million Russians travel abroad and spend over 8 billion euros annually.

#### 3.1 Industry overview

According to the data gathered by R&C Market Research Company, event industry is one of the most rapidly growing industries of modern Russia:

- Almost 0.8 bln euros: the meeting industry income in 2011
- 1 bln euros: meeting industry income in 2012
- 1.5 mln sq. m: total volume of modern, international class venues and facilities
- 20-30%: growth in the industry in 2011
- 13 mln: approximate number of visitors annually coming to Russia

Nevertheless, the general development level of companies providing MICE (abbreviation for Meetings Incentives Conferences Events) remaining low and the quantity of professional event management companies is still miserable comparing to amount of other business travel related companies. Practice shows, that market is mostly dominated with a big well-known tour operators with MICE Departments. It also proved in a poll of the Moscow International MICE Forum, where more than 1300 representatives of the industry were interviewed, and an interesting overview of the industry was given about market players:

- 37% Large Operators with specialized MICE departments
- 29% Specialized MICE companies
- 24% Small (non-specialized) agencies
- 10% Events organizers

And about their profile and opinion on the industry:

- 37% of those polled organize 10-12 MICE events abroad each year
- 52% organized events with 40-100 participants
- Incentives and Seminars are the most popular MICE events with 66%
- 63% anticipate that clients will increase MICE spending by more than 35%
- 55% said MICE turnover this year will be in the €100,000-500,000 sector

In the report on the Russian International MICE Forum 2012, its organizer Kim Waddoup says, that the market has become extremely competitive with larger players consolidating their positions while smaller companies continue to grow in numbers. Specialized round tables happen more often providing leading industry personalities with the opportunity to discuss the challenges and problems facing their profession.

All this numbers and expert opinions give me a right to say, that meeting industry in Russia has been already born and now it is rapidly growing. Economic stability gave people confidence in their financial aspects of life. Citizens and companies started to spend more money, inflation is more or less under the control of government and number of SMEs is growing as well as the competitiveness on the market. Nowadays, to have a competitive advantage among others, company should own a technology, which will not only be able to speed-up decision making process by automatization of the workflow, but also will be able to give data-based advices to make cost-effective decisions. To develop those tools independently will take a lot of time, financial and human resources, which usually either not affordable for the most of the companies, either a company is not aware of the possibility to adopt such technologies in the working process. Here is where Azavista come to help.

### 3.2 Competitors overview

As it was mentioned before, the level of technology penetration in the Russian event industry remains low. It's caused also by amateur IT industry and low awareness of the possibilities, which brings those kinds of technologies to event management companies.

During my research I found out that there are just a few amateur domestic competitors for Azavista on the market. Nevertheless, there are several big companies, which have similar tools to use for their own (MAKO International Agency of Congress Management, Restec Exhibition Company and others).

All of them are big companies with a lot of human and financial resources, as well as long experience history on the market. They are using their own tools for event management. Despite this fact none of those companies have a tool for group travel planning. Most of them are doing suppliers procurement manually or via individual travel planning tools.

As for VAT Refund services, most of the companies are not aware of those possibilities, but when they do, they using services of other foreign companies.

As practice shows there are no domestic competitors for Azavista in Russia, so we will take a look on foreign companies, which approach Russian event industry market: Cvent and Podio.

Each of them has smaller range of services and limited functionality. Webpages are not localized in case of Cvent and translated unprofessionally in case of Podio.

Otherwise domestic competitors, like TicketForEvent and TimePad, have much more limited functionality comparing to Azavista's Event Management Module. Also, their targeting and main ways of monetization are different. Also our module is complimented by free Group Planning



tools and Analytics, which gives an advantage for professional and corporate planners.

This amount and quality of competitors is not the threat for Azavista's activity in Russia.

### 3.3 Azavista pricing strategy on the market

Leads of Azavista are divided in 2 main groups, each of which has its own marketing approaches, tools and price strategies.

According to Ruth P. Stevens, a lead is a prospect that has some level of potential of becoming a customer. It means that inquiry that has met agree-upon qualification criteria, such as having the right budget, decision-making authority, need for the product or service, and readiness to make the purchase in a suitable amount of time. After an inquiry has become a qualified lead, it is ready to be worked by a sales person.

First lead group is Suppliers. In Azavista Database there are over 50 000 companies registered as supplier of travel or event services, such as hotels (only those, which are able to serve groups for accommodation or events and have 3 or more stars), venues, restaurants and coach services (only those, which have fleets able to transfer groups). Those are our prime Suppliers, but recently Azavista launches the possibility to add any supplier, who offers meeting related services (decorators, florists, translators, etc.).

With suppliers we apply with a standard pricing strategy in such cases: to be listed in the database costs nothing for the Supplier, but as soon as Azavista brings more and more RFPs (abbreviation for Request for Proposal) and revenue we negotiate about possible Agent commission from successful deals. In case if supplier wants to be promoted by prior listing in our database or in Azavista's Blog Review we charge them 8% commission from successful deals as well. This strategy attracts suppliers'

attention, because they need to pay only in case of getting more revenue thanks to Azavista.

Second group called Planners, and it's divided on two sub-groups: Professional Planners (Tour Operators, Tour Agencies, Event Agencies, DMCs, PCOs) and Corporate Planners (usually big companies, who do not outsource travel- and event- management organization to Professional Planners, but have their own Departments for such needs).

Pricing for this group is based on individual indexes:

- Amount of events and group travels per year
- Average amount of participants per event or group travel
- Desired customized services and support
- The general revenue per event

Flexible pricing gives to planner opportunity to fit our services and solutions into any budget.

### 3.4 SWOT Analysis

SWOT is a technique for analyzing the internal and external environments of an organization through the identification and assessment of its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT). SWOT analysis entails a distillation of the findings of an internal and external audit that draws attention, from a strategic perspective, to the critical organizational strengths and weaknesses and the opportunities and threats facing the organization (Kotler, Armstrong 2011).

During my work for Azavista I gain decent expertise to make a SWOT analysis for it on Russian market. You can see the result of this analysis in the Table 1 below.

Table 1 SWOT Analysis for Azavista.com in Russia

<b>STRENGTHS</b>	<b>WEAKNESSES</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Wide range of services</li> <li>- Flexible prices</li> <li>- Individual approach</li> <li>- Customization and integration opportunities</li> <li>- Multi-lingual access</li> <li>- Friendly intuitive Interface</li> <li>- Fast-growing market</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Low brand awareness</li> <li>- Low demand on SaaS</li> <li>- No on-site development department in Russia</li> </ul>
<b>OPPORTUNITIES</b>	<b>THREATS</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To be the first SaaS in industry</li> <li>- Educate industry professionals to use technologies</li> <li>- To beat competitors on the market entrance stage due to better localization and wider services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Currency exchange rate</li> <li>- Economic stagnation</li> <li>- Political instability</li> <li>- Appearance of new competitors on such an attractive niche</li> <li>- Activity of current competitors will become higher</li> <li>- Copying of the product and services by another company</li> </ul>

SWOT analysis shows that now is the best time to enter the Russian market in order to become a strongest player on the market, while it's still developing. The high level and wide range of services plus possibilities of customization and flexible prices give us a vital benefit comparing to local developing companies and foreign giants.

#### 4. COMPANY'S ACTIVITY

To provide a successful market penetration we should create a clear step-by-step plan. But first, we should set our goals and targets. I used the system of SMART goals, which was firstly described by Doran:

*Specific* – target a specific area for improvement.

*Measurable* – quantify or at least suggest an indicator of progress.

*Assignable* – specify who will do it.

*Realistic* – state what results can realistically be achieved, given available resources.

*Time-related* – specify when the result(s) can be achieved.

Of course the main target for any commercial institution is gaining maximum profit, but based on those criteria above I was able to define and specify more concrete objectives for Azavista on the Russian market:

- Boost brand recognition
- Generate leads
- Increase the Azavista supplier network by subscribing Russian suppliers

To develop those objectives, split them on sub-objectives and generate the action plan I need to understand its niceties and service specification.

##### 4.1 Azavista preparations to enter the Russian market

As soon as I studied the services and products of Azavista and set 3 main objectives, I can generate an action plan for entering the market.

On the first stage the Azavista's HQ didn't want to start with establishing economic entity in a Russian law field. We firstly decided to try to generate leads and check market possibilities on practice, before taking extra responsibilities in front of the Russian system. Luckily, since our company

is SaaS Company and its products and services are not violating Russian Laws, we can operate and communicate with companies legally.

Anyway, the localization of the platform is needed. According to the Analytical Center Levada, there are only 30-35% of people who speak foreign languages in major cities, like Moscow. And only in 80% of those cases, respondents meant English language.

That is why localization is the first and the most important thing to do, if I want to cover as more potential clients as possible. Plus it will become a big advantage in comparing with our foreign competitors. Also, multi-linguality of Azavista helps the platform to be fully automated and avoid any miscommunications between two parties with different mother tongues.

After full translation of the website, commercial materials and platforms itself the list of my main tasks to achieving 3 main objectives was created:

1. In order to boost brand awareness I had to:

- Increase Azavista presence in Russian social media.
- Create and approach the list of industry media.
- Translate and develop Azavista's Event Management Blog.
- Put Azavista to online industry-related business directories.
- Find speaking opportunities on industry-related exhibitions, forums and seminars.

2. To generate leads I suppose:

- Work with direct ads at Yandex.ru– searching engine number one in Russia.
- Make direct calls to our lead-base.
- Organize product-presentations for leads online and on-site.
- Participate in exhibitions and forums.
- Organize mailing-campaigns.

3. To increase the supplier network:

- Find hotels, venues, restaurants and coach-companies, which are answer to our requirements.
- Subscribe them to our website.
- Promote our premium features for them.

The combination of results for those tasks should be a growing revenue and market share in Russia. Nevertheless, basing on our pricing strategy and free trial periods for using the platform I can conclude that getting profit is a long-term objective, when growing the client and lead bases and increasing their turnover operated with Azavista is a prime short-term objective. As soon as Azavista will become an important part of companies' workflow, we will be able to grow our revenue significantly.

## 4.2 Activity of Azavista on the Russian market

In this part I will concentrate on the actual activity of Azavista in Russia and obstacles which could influence on the expected results and primal objectives.

### 4.2.1 Brand awareness activities

As Scott claims, the world of marketing is dominated by two disciplines: brand awareness marketing and lead-generation marketing. These two disciplines are “the big brothers of marketing”, and they have a kind of yin/yang relationship with each other.

Brand awareness marketing (commonly known as brand marketing) is all about making people aware of your product and/or your company. It's about creating an impression of what your brand stands for in people's minds, and repeating that impression until they have an explicit or implicit awareness of your brand. (Scott 2013).

The first step, to highlight the company's presence in Russian, was creating a community in Russia's biggest social network – VK.com,

according to the research of TNS Web Index for May 2013. The overview of VK.com comparing to other famous social networks in Russia, you can see in Figure 1 below.

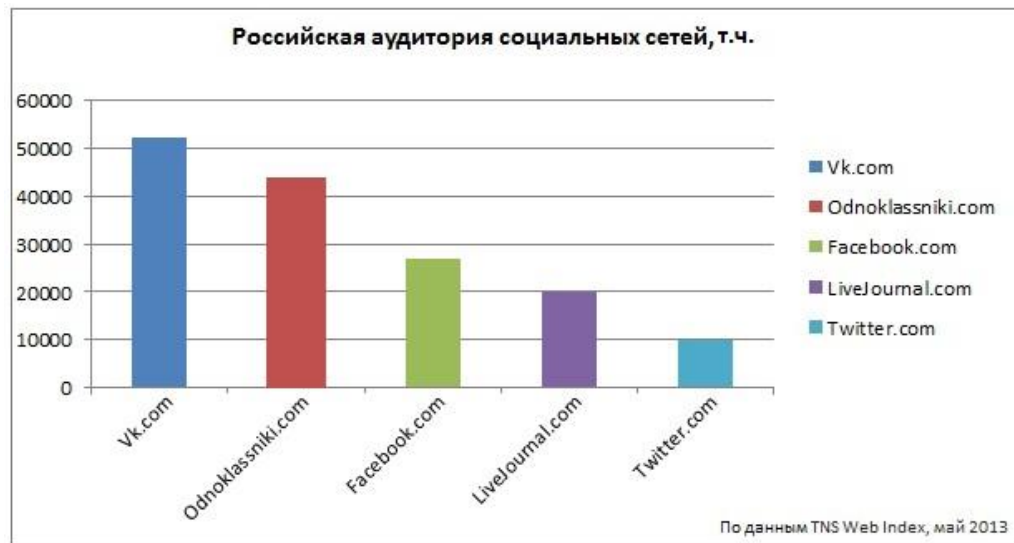


Figure 6 Russian social network audiences, thousands people (TNS Web Index 2013)

As you can see on the Figure 2, the demography of this social network is not making VK.com our target social media, because of the audience's young age, but company's appearance there and regular updates help Azavista to be listed higher in Russian searching engines results. As well as the registration in different online business catalogues helps us to get upper lines in the results lists.

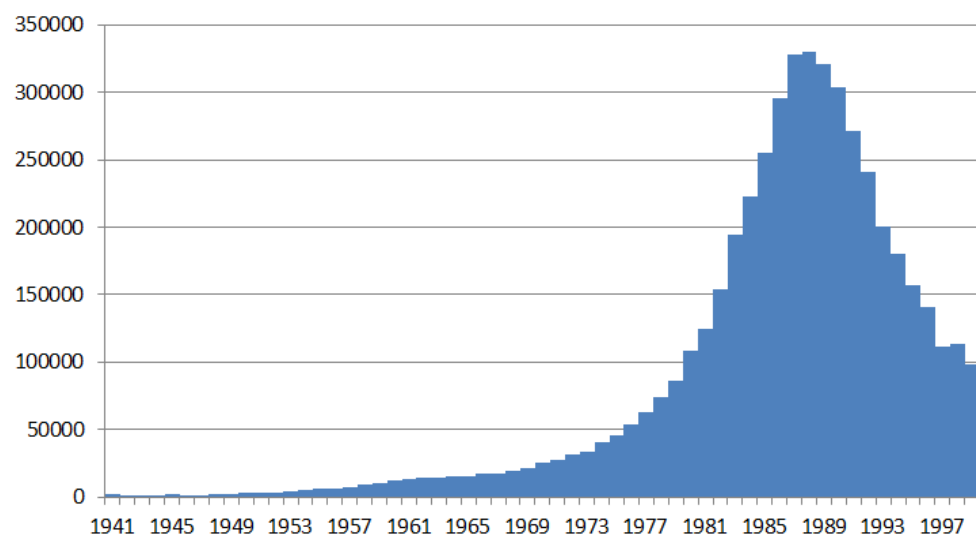


Figure 7 Age statistics for VK.com users, 2011 (Habrahabr.ru 2011)

The content for VK community as well as for Russian-speaking communities of more professional networks, like LinkedIn, was taking from Azavista's Event Management Blog. Of course, blog was also localized for Russian audience and updated weekly with new industry-related posts.

Nevertheless, the respond and interaction with content remains low, comparing to audience interaction with original English-written blog.

Approaching the industry-related press and media was also a hard task. Due to my research only few of them are allows free-of-charge publications from companies. And to get this opportunity you also need to have interesting materials to publish. We chose Azavista white papers to be translated and send out to those media. Interesting statistics and different questionnaire results helped us to arrange several publications in an online media:

Figure 8 Publication in TRN-News



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ПЕСОЧНИЦА



**Кризис на Украине:** наблюдения интернет-маркетолога



**Не надейтесь продать** дорогой товар через сайт!

Figure 9 Publication in Cossa.ru

EVENT КАТАЛОГ Все для организации мероприятий! Выберите город


[подрядчики](#) [площадки](#) [артисты](#) [агентства](#)

▼ Портфолио резидентов [Новости резидентов](#) [События индустрии](#) [Последние добавления](#) [Event календарь](#)

Новости резидентов	714
Все новости	281
Новости подрядчиков	141
Новости площадок	93
Новости артистов	7
Новости агентств	199

**AZAVISTA.COM запустит игрофицированный модуль обучения для студентов туристских специальностей уже в этом году**

Новость подрядчика: [Azavista.com](#)  
7 Февраля 2014



AZAVISTA.COM – голландская компания, активно завоевывающая рынок IT-решений для специалистов занимающихся ивент-менеджментом и организацией групповых путешествий, обратила внимание на российский рынок только в прошлом году, а в 2014 уже готова запустить бесплатный обучающий игрофицированный модуль для ВУЗов.




Figure 10 Publication in Event Catalogue

## Организаторам MICE требуется все больше обоснований для утверждения бюджета

20 Марта 2014

Организаторы MICE уделяют мало внимания оценке возврата инвестиций в мероприятие, однако вскоре им придется пересмотреть отношение к этому показателю. Такой вывод содержится в докладе «Ивент-менеджмент: Бюджетные трудности и рентабельность мероприятий» нидерландской компании Azavista. В опросе приняли участие 400 event-организаторов из агентств и предприятий со всего мира.

Эксперты Azavista отмечают, что измерение рентабельности мероприятия (ROI) может помочь менеджеру в обосновании бюджета и станет залогом успеха мероприятия в целом. При этом 70% опрошенных этот показатель не вычисляют.



MICE
Авиация
Наземный транспорт
Отели
Технологии
Тревел-менеджмент

СОБЫТИЯ	ОПРОС
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>РБК приглашает на Форум административных директоров 17 апреля (10 Апреля 2014)</li> <li>ОТДУКН MICE – новое имя известного проекта (07 Апреля 2014)</li> <li>Требуй от себя невозможного и...</li> </ul>	

Figure 11 Publication in BBT Russia

But all this activities are not enough to become noticeable for industry professionals. Participating in exhibitions and business events is vital for any company. The research on this subject shows that the most important and biggest events are taking place in Moscow:

- Antor MICE WORKSHOP.
- Moscow International MICE Forum.
- INTOUR MARKET.
- Moscow International Exhibition TRAVEL & TOURISM.

Speaking opportunities on those events gives an opportunity for networking and direct communications with leading companies and industry professionals. Having a speaker from foreign company is always interesting for Russian event-organizers, especially when the topic of speech is technologies and innovations. Azavista is satisfying this demand successfully on some of the events. Nevertheless, the biggest part of listeners and participants still think about SaaS as something unnecessary and too complicated to implement in their workflow.

#### 4.2.2 Lead-generation activities

Lead-generation marketing has long been considered the underbelly of marketing. Lead-generation marketers ask this question: Once you have established an awareness of your brand and/or product in the marketplace, how do you get the customer to move from considering your product to actually buying it? This is the art of lead-generation marketing. (Scott 2013).

The perfect way to gain a lead is to make an offer for potential clients at the right stage of its buying process (see Figure 3) – the moment when they already recognized a need and just started to search for the information on how to solve it.



Figure 12 Buying process (Maher 2013).

Nowadays, Internet search is the easiest and most responsive way to get information on any subject.

Since Yandex.ru is the biggest search engine in Russian internet, according to LiveInternet with 53,8% share comparing to Google 34,2%.

We need to approach it firstly. To do this we already registered Azavista in different business directories (as well as in Yandex Business Directory), created enough of Russian content to be noticed by search engine's bots. Other steps for our SEO (abbreviation for Search Engine Optimization) included:

- Research on the mostly used event-management related key words in Yandex.
- Based on previous research - creating Yandex.Direct ad campaign (analogue of Google AdWords, context advertisement platform), which consist on 3 ads, each for our main services (Group Planning, Event Management, Tax Refunds)

Due to the forecast, based on Yandex analytics of the specified key-words, ads will be shown more than 6000 per month and our website traffic will be increased on 700 unique visitors per month.

This traffic and also participating in industry-related events, like those which were mentioned above, giving Azavista enough inquirers to communicate with them and converting them to leads.

The best way to do so is organizing product and service presentations, where I can show benefits and easiness of using Azavista on a daily basis. My practice shows that every company, which participated in presentation, then gets an account for using Azavista at least as a trial. Practice also shows that not all of them are ready to change their workflow and use Azavista on a daily basis as a tool, most of companies just consider platform as a place to get more sales.

#### 4.2.3 Growing the network of suppliers

Growing the base of Azavista suppliers is a vital part of work not only in perspective of monetization throw premium features and commissions, but also in a sense of development: as more suppliers we have, as more

interested it is for planners, as more planners we have using the system, as more interested it will be for suppliers to register. It's an endless circle where Azavista can get profit from both parties: planners and suppliers.

The prime supplier group which is under biggest demands from the planners' side is hotels and venues. Manually we have most of them pre-registered in our system and available for search. As soon as planner chooses the supplier to send RFP, hotel's Group Reservation Department will get an email notification with commercial offer from planner to arrange the group through Azavista platform. If the notification will be ignored, Azavista's customer support team will personally contact the hotel and pursue them to send planner an offer before the specified deadlines. Nobody wants to lose extra business and revenue, especially if it also gives you free-of-charge tools to handle this business. That makes this strategy so easy and self-developing.

To speed up this process I also generated the list of most famous hotels for groups and events in Moscow to approach them in advance. The strategy here is to make a presentation of our possibilities to Group and Events Departments and give them free accounts. As soon as they fulfilled the account with all required information, contact details and pictures, I'm starting the second stage of offering Premium Features for promoting the hotel, for analyzing the market and competitors, etc.

Those two strategies allow me efficiently grow our suppliers network. But the main objective here is not only giving suppliers an account and extra-business. The main target is to make them use Azavista on a daily basis as a tool and technology solution. Only in this case the turnover which is coming through Azavista will grow significantly, as well as company's revenue.

#### 4.3 Problems occurred during first activities on Russian market

The taken activities showed their efficiency in attracting attention of chosen leads and suppliers, but most of them considering Azavista only as

a source of new offers and businesses. It is not enough for receiving planned revenue. We need to make them use Azavista also as a tool, business-solution, which helps to save time and money while handling groups of travelers and events.

Current Russian market stage of the development shows that the trust for technology is low, and most companies are not ready to revolutionize their normal manual work-flow.

Based on this conclusion, Azavista has formulated the question: How to educate industry professionals on implementing modern technologies in their daily work-flow?

Obviously, given presentations were not enough for provoking a big demand, but every day's growing challenges of an event-planner will make it happen and Azavista needs to show their solution in right time.

## 5. EDUCATING

With the first part of my research we tried to answer on the questions how and where we need to educate specialists in order to solve our stated problem.

### 5.1 Target Universities

To have more chances to cover the biggest amount of entry-level specialists we need find the most popular places of their studying. Logically, it is Universities with Specialization in Tourism, Travel, Event Management, or those, which have specialized faculties. Since we are concentrating our attention on Moscow and Saint-Petersburg, as biggest economic and industrial centers, we will approach Universities from those cities.

My online research gave us the list of 18 Universities for both cities. Which I need to approach during suitable period of time before rectors approving the study plan for future graduates. So we will have chance to be added in a program as a part of topic-related course or as an extra study hours.

### 5.2 Game Module content

Before approaching the universities, we should execute a plan of how exactly we want to provide education to the students.

Current trends of teaching methods are mostly base on practice and games. That can be also said about working life. For example, Kapp states, that people like playing games, because they are fun and engaging. In fact, a recent survey showed that 55% of people would be interested in working for a company that offered games as a way to increase productivity.

With Azavista's development team, we are able to create a separate gamification module, where students can take challenges and complete different working life-related event-management tasks and earn points for

them. Those points could not be only used for ranking students in their student group, university or even worldwide, but also as a base for grading them by teacher.

But what is gamification exactly?

Gamification has been defined as a process of enhancing services with (motivational) affordances in order to invoke gameful experiences and further behavioral outcomes. In defining gamification, Huotari and Hamari highlight the role of gamification in invoking the same psychological experiences as games (generally) do.

Deterring on the other hand, emphasize that the affordances implemented in gamification have to be the same as the ones used in games, regardless of the outcomes.

However, it is unclear which affordances are unique to games as well as which psychological outcomes can be strictly considered to stem from games. From the perspective of these definitions, there is room for a large variety of studies that could be framed as gamification. (Hamari, Koivisto & Sarsa 2014)

Tasks will consist of executing typical operations which event- and travel-managers face every day. For example, find and make a deal with suppliers in order to organize a conference in Paris, where people from all Europe will participate. This task is divided on multiply subtasks which are very difficult and time-consuming (booking flight to each participant, organize their transfer to hotel, work with rooming lists, etc.).

Azavista's game is divided into two interfaces: teachers' and students' (see Figure 4). Teachers will have access to the management tool, where they can handle their students and review their progress.



The screenshot displays the Azavista dashboard for a student named Gergely. The interface includes a navigation bar at the top with links for Dashboard, Clients, Marketing, Knowledge, and Contact. The main content area is divided into several sections:

- Revenue:** A section indicating that the user has earned \$7689 so far.
- Achievements:** A section featuring logos for 'Site' and 'imex 2014'.
- Badges:** A section showing four different badge icons.
- Mission:** A central mission card for 'John Smith Inc.' with a search bar for hotels in Paris and a 'CONTINUE MISSION' button.
- Leaderboard:** A table on the right side showing the top 10 players with their ranks and names.

RANK	PLAYER
1	luketd88
2	Vandellizm187
3	jessup720
4	Chantorboy
5	SMITH1601
6	dark_james
7	MaxPayneDev3
8	TheCanibusCircuit
9	MaxPayneDev2
10	chiquili

At the bottom of the dashboard, there are social media links for Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and RSS, along with a footer containing links for Dashboard, Clients, Marketing, Knowledge, Contact, Terms, and Privacy.

Figure 13 Students' interface

Students will have access to tasks, which will become available one by one (see Figure 5). Their difficultness will increase progressively, as well as teacher will have a possibility to add more obstacles (current flight is cancelled due to the storm or conference-room is not available due to flood) and sometimes change the task (now there will be only 500 participants, not 700), so it will be more realistic, because everything could happen in real life and clients are also changing their minds very often.

All these kinds of cases will show students how it could be difficult to do it all work manually, and how handy and easier it is with using Azavista's technologies.

The screenshot displays the Azavista web interface. At the top, the logo 'AZAVISTA' is accompanied by the tagline 'Group travel made easy.' and a user profile 'jose+player5@azavista.com | User Info'. A navigation menu includes 'Dashboard', 'Clients', 'Marketing', 'Knowledge', and 'Contact'. Below this, a breadcrumb trail shows 'Home » Game Levels » Novice'.

The main content area features a 'Current Mission' card on the left, which includes a 'help' button, a mission icon, the text 'Search for hotels in Paris', a star icon, and a progress bar showing 'Progress: 0 %'. To the right, the 'Client: John Smith Inc.' is identified, with a challenge: 'Search for hotels in Paris. Send requests to multiple hotels in Paris.' The 'Mission requirements' section states: 'Let's find several hotels in Paris (France) and send them a request for proposal', followed by a checkbox and a link 'Search for hotels in Paris'. The 'Budget' section lists three items: 'Around € 3200 for hotel', 'Around € 1400 for the restaurant', and 'Around € 400 for the photographer'. An orange 'GET STARTED' button is positioned below the budget. At the bottom right, there are social media icons for Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and RSS, with the text 'Follow Azavista' above them. A footer navigation bar at the very bottom contains links for 'Dashboard', 'Clients', 'Marketing', 'Knowledge', 'Contact', 'Terms', and 'Privacy'.

Figure 14 Mission example

Of course the job of event manager is much wider than just planning events themselves. To help students realize that, we are offering additional functions and possibilities in the game, like marketing activities, memberships in different associations, etc. It will show students, this profession from new angles, because implementing of those possibilities will directly influence on their success in completing tasks (see Figure 6).



Figure 15 Additional possibilities

But of course studying is not only playing games. Student should also gain knowledge and theory in order to become professionals. For this matter our gamification module is connected with theoretical base, which could be completed by any teacher with their own materials, which they found useful.

Figure 16 Knowledge base and quizzes

This database is consolidate, which means that all materials, added by any teacher in any country will be available for all users in the system. Also, each theme or chapter will have its own quiz (see Figure 7), which should be completed before starting the next level of the game. It will be also used as other criteria for grading students.

### 5.3 Work with Universities and Feedback

During my university lead generation period I established several partnerships for Azavista. In following chapter I will try to describe Universities' needs, conditions, suggestions and our mutual strategy for educating students on the example of State University of Management in Moscow (from now on SUM; <http://guu.ru/>), as out most high-ranked and biggest lead among Russian Universities.

My first approach to them was pretty basic for those cases. I was looking for the person responsible for tourism and event-management programs

online. It was not very difficult to find on the official website, where I found out about Zhukov.

I have described him our vision of cooperation with the university and our module functionality. As the first step to cooperate, on-site lecture for the students with me and one of Azavista's co-founders were offered for free. During this lecture we were planning to evaluate students' knowledge level of event management theory and their interest to those topics and interactive education as well.

During our communication with student and university's officials, like Zhukov and Kutepova, we found out following information:

- There is no separate course about event management, because industry is still amateur in Russia; there are no clear definitions and legislation for the industry as well.
- Teachers understand the need in this subject as well as they face lack of theoretical base and event management professionals to teach students.
- Teachers see the benefits of our program for all parties – students, university and Azavista.

Our consolidate theoretical base is the biggest benefit for the University, because it also includes expert opinions and practice of other partner Universities of Azavista all over the Europe, which are teaching event management.

Other feedback from SUM includes:

- User friendly environment of the platform is a plus, because it means less time-consumption for training period for teachers and students on using the game.
- Moment of competitiveness not only between local students but also between students from other universities should encourage for studying.
- Multilingual access will also improve students' English language skills required for be being a modern professional.

- Possibility for teachers to influence on the tasks gives the opportunity to make game closer to a real life on local market.
- Conditions of using are not require any complex paper-work procedures or payments.
- Access from any mobile device, connected to the internet.

For the current stage we decided to offer using this module for free. In that case it will be easier to gain the interest and connect maximum amount of the universities as possible. This stage is not meant to be monetized immediately. Monetization will come after the loyalty of students, as future industry professionals and potential Azavista users, will be established. And they will come on the working places with the pre-made decision on which technology to use.

Also, we can offer guest lecturing from our management for the universities for an extra charge. Organizing workshops or even educational trips to the Head Office of Azavista, could be another way to monetize and also rise our brand loyalty.

After all parts agree on using the platform, we developing the study plan. As universities do not have its own event management course, it's recommended to include it as part of other course with estimated length of 8 weeks, where 2 classes are taking place per each week, filled with materials from consolidate theoretical base and game itself is left for individual practical studies and homework.

For an extra encouraging and loyalty growth, I suggest creating an official certificate for each student who successfully passed the program. Signed by the CEO and co-founders of Azavista, who are foreign experts of the industry, this certificate can become something to be proud of.

## 5.4 Expected results

As expected results, I am setting up two main goals:

- Strengthen the brand equity on the Russian market.

The official Marketing Science definition of brand equity is 'the set of associations and behavior on the part of brand's customers, channel members and parent corporation that permits the brand to earn greater volume or greater margins, than it could without the brand name' (Leuthesser 1988).

Based on our partnership with the biggest and most prestigious universities of Russia a great promotional campaign should be based. It will help our potential clients to see Azavista not only as a product of IT-professionals, but also as a product of people who really know what is Event Management and have experience and knowledge to share, as well as a tool to help.

- Increasing our lead and client bases.

Educating and certifying students will give us more chances to be chosen as a technological solution, when those students will come to work places in the industry. They will be able to prove to their managers that technology could be really great time and money savior, based on their own knowledge and experience, and Azavista will be the one which is already familiar to them.

The impact of all these results, after achieving, will be impossible to measure in sense of monetization, because all factors of influence make it unpredictable at all, but it is possible to make a forecast for lead generation.

If we will take in count all Universities, which are interested in our program in Moscow and St. Petersburg, it will give us the number of 6. Average amount of student for whom our program can be implemented according to our requirements is 40 per one University. That means that at least 240

students will get to know the program and will get a certificate from Azavista, proving their expertise.

Official Russian Federal Service of State Statistics says that only 42% of people go to work as a professional, according to the specialization which they received at the University. That means only 140 people out of 240 will be able to use their knowledge of our platform in real life. Potentially, that gives me a right to say that we will have around 140 new leads from suppliers, corporate planners and agencies after the first year of launching program in Russia, strictly from our gamification module.

That can become not only breaking point in our period of penetration the Russian market, but also a good possibility to spread the network of our partner Universities, promoting the success of previous partnerships.



## 6. CONCLUSIONS

### 6.1 Main findings

The main question for this research was how to increase the amount of hot leads using Azavista's Gamification Module. The research shows the immaturity of the event management industry and technology penetration into it, which proves the necessities of educating professionals to implement modern software and other technological tools in their working processes.

Research also shows us that now is the best period for market invasion since the industry is starting to grow rapidly, as well as no serious competitors were created on domestic market and foreign competitors are still not here also.

This thesis gives decent reasoning for launching the product as well as shows how big the interest is for it in Russia.

In line with that, plenty of contacts were established with companies, several partnerships and friendly relations were started. I got a chance to interview and discuss industry trends and development with representatives of biggest Russian event management companies, like BSI Group (in a person of Grebennikova), MaxiMICE (in persons of Trofimova and Chernyshev).

Also, my calculations in the last part are giving an approximate impact of launching the Gamification Module. Based on a real numbers, they show the significant increasing in the number of possible leads after the launch, however the calculation of increasing the revenue cannot be done yet, because of lack of the information and big depending on unpredictable factors.

## 6.2 Implications for the commissioner

First of all, the proper implication for the commissioner, which will complement the main objectives of this thesis written above, will be positioning the Azavista not only as a technology, but also, as source of knowledge and foreign expertise from professionals experienced in the event management.

It will not only attract more leads, who are searching for more experienced partners, but also will help us to gain more universities as our partners.

Second of all, certifying successful students, as future professionals and engaging them with Azavista, also, through lecturing and workshops will increase brand loyalty and awareness. From one side, it will help students to shorten their decision making process to choose a technology to implement in their work life, and, from the other side, will help future professionals to be more persuasive while promoting these technologies to their supervisors, having an experience and proves it to be more cost-effective.

## 6.3 Self-evaluation of the thesis

The topic and its objectives were hard to research due to lack of information and theory available, because gamification is a totally new concept, which is trending during last few years.

Nevertheless, I managed to provide decent information about its value on Russian market in the perspective of education. Of course, it won't be possible without deep expertise of Azavista's developers and our mutual brainstorming on that topic during approaching Russian Universities.

During the research I was in touch with numerous officials from universities of Russia and gain priceless experience and knowledge on the state of event management industry in general.

Developed results, measures and recommendations may seem to be obvious, but I proved them practically and showed the necessity of launching this project as soon as possible.

#### 6.4 Proposals for further studies

As a continuation for this thesis, the follow-up analysis of the results received after implementing of suggested strategy is advised. This analysis should be concentrated not only on the financial aspects, but also on the level of penetration Azavista tools, and technologies in general in the industry of event management.

To analyze the impact of gamification, the following numbers should be taken in the consideration:

- Level of market penetration.
- Growth of the amount of hot leads comparing to the previous year.
- Volume of operations executed with the help of Azavista.
- Growth of income.
- Growth of the partner-universities network.

According to the results, certain changes or/and activities should be done to correct the Gamification module and Azavista platform itself, for implementation on the Russian market, so it would be more responsive to the needs of local professionals.

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