



Improving the Brand Image of an Event Company: Case Intercom De- sign

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The objective of this thesis was to create a plan for improving the brand image of the commissioner, a Helsinki-based event company called Intercom Design. The purpose was to study, what images and associations the customers of Intercom Design currently have of the company and to give realistic and feasible suggestions for improving the brand's image. The benefits for the commissioner are that they receive up-to-date information about their customers' experiences and images, and they are provided with examples of action that they can implement to improve their brand image.

The theoretical framework includes a definition of brand and it also reviews the concepts of brand image and brand identity, the role of brand in business, brand and communication, customer understanding and the process of developing and maintaining a brand. Three research methods were implemented in this thesis. Those research methods were online survey, semi-structured interview and net scouting. The online survey was directed at the customers of the commissioner and its focus was on the customers' images and opinions of the company. The semi-structured interview was directed at an employee of the commissioner, and it focused on communication, values and practises of the company. Net scouting was directed at four Helsinki-based event companies, and it focused on the websites of the companies.

The key results of this thesis were recent data of the images and opinions of the commissioner's customers, net scouting results of other companies' websites and the plan for improving the brand image of the commissioner. The commissioner was provided with realistic suggestions, that were based on theory and the results of the research, for improving the brand image. The suggestions were categorized and supported by figures. In addition, others than the commissioner can also benefit from the information gathered in this thesis when developing and maintaining a small company's brand and brand images.

Keywords: brand development, brand image, event company

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1 Introduction

In today's world, the role of a brand's image is significant. Customers are more demanding not only about the products and their quality, but also about the values, behaviour and attitudes of the company. Stable and positive brand images are beneficial for both the company and the customer. Strong brand makes it easier for the customer to make the purchasing decision, while the company benefits from the strong brand with less competition and more assurance of customers' loyalty. (Sandbacka 2010, 6.) In the event industry, where there's a lot of business-to-business operations and continuous usage of same companies' products and services, a good brand image is something that makes the customers come back repeatedly and also attracts new customers, but a bad brand image makes the company the last option in customers' minds for buying products and services. That's why it is beneficial for companies to invest time and money on reaching a good brand image.

The objective of this thesis was to develop a plan for improving the brand image of the commissioner, an event company Intercom Design. The plan is based on theory as well as on research of the current general image of Intercom Design as a brand. Intercom Design is a Helsinki-based company that operates in two different areas of business. One part of the company's business is a party venue, Agrokseenmäen holvikellari, which is rented for weddings, seminars and other events. The other part of the business is a short-term rental service for furniture, decoration and props. This thesis focuses on the rental service's customers and on their image of Intercom Design's brand and in particular, improving the brand image.

The main theory topics of this thesis are the role and significance of a brand in business and how to improve and maintain a good brand image. The research part of this thesis was implemented by performing an online survey to representative people of companies, that are Intercom Design's customers. A semi-structured interview, as well as net scouting were implemented for gaining additional information based on the survey results, after the results had been analysed. The purpose of this thesis was to deliver the commissioner a realistic and feasible plan for improving the brand image.

This thesis consists of three parts: the theoretical part, where the key topics and concepts are defined, the research part, where the planning and implementation of the three research methods are described and the collected data analysed, and finally the plan for improving the brand image of the commissioner is created. In the conclusion, the whole content of the thesis is summarized.

2 Company background of Intercom Design

This chapter introduces the commissioner, an event company called Intercom Design. The objective of this chapter is to outline the starting point and to give background for the research. Intercom Design is an event company based in Hermannin, Helsinki. It was founded in 1990 and it employs permanently 3-5 people. In addition to that, there are approximately ten temporary workers that are called to work when it is needed. Intercom Design's office is located in Hermannin, Helsinki and in the same address there is a party venue, that Intercom Design operates. Intercom Design also has a storage in another address, which is located in Viikki, Helsinki. The clientele of Intercom Design consists of both private customers and companies. (Intercom Design 2021.)

2.1 Agroksenmäen holvikellari

Intercom Design has two main business areas. The first main business area is a party venue, Agroksenmäen holvikellari, which is rented for weddings, company parties and other events. The booking calendar is open for the current year and for the next two years. In other words, in January 2021, the venue is bookable for the year 2021, as well as on years 2022 and 2023. The venue itself is a 150-year-old vault that was originally used as a brewery storage. It was renovated into a party venue and has operated in that purpose since 2005. Figure 1 shows the venue pictured from outside. The appearance of the venue plays an important role, since it's very unique regarding the environment and the location of the venue. The venue's main space is the ballroom, which is a wide rectangular-shaped hall with stone walls. The lobby leads from the main entrance to the ball room. In addition to these spaces, the venue also includes a kitchen, several toilets, a cloak room and a rear, as well as a small meeting room. In the venue, there are two storage rooms that are in Intercom Design's use only. The other spaces mentioned above are in customer's use during the rent period. (Intercom Design 2021.)



Figure 1: Agrokseenmäen holvikellari venue from outside

One rent period is from 9 o'clock in the morning until 6 o'clock in the next morning. This allows the venue to be rented for different customer on each day of the week. During the three hours between the rent periods in the morning, cleaning and other necessary actions are carried out in the venue. It is also possible to rent the venue with an hour price: for Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays the hourly establishment is bookable by the hour at any point. On Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays booking can be made up to one month before the date. The Covid-19 pandemic has caused a lot of cancellations and quiet weeks in the venue, but in November 2021, Agrokseenmäen holvikellari venue was rented for different events approximately four days a week. Thursday, Friday and Saturday are the most popular days for rent. The venue provides a specific set of furniture and technology equipment for every rent period and customer. This set includes rectangle tables and folding chairs for 120 people, a projector and a screen, a sound system and a party lighting system. However, the customers of Intercom Design that plan parties in the Agrokseenmäen Holvikellari venue are usually interested in additional decorations and furniture, which leads to the second main business area of Intercom Design. (Intercom Design 2021.)

2.2 Intercom Design rental service

The second main business area of Intercom Design is a short-term furniture, decoration and props rental service for events. The office of Intercom Design is located in the same address as the Agrokseenmäen holvikellari venue: the office is on the second floor of the venue building. In the same location, there is also a storage. Another storage is located in Viikki,

Helsinki. The selection of Intercom Design's rental products focuses on more unusual decoration and props rather than conventional furniture, since there are several companies on the market, that offer event furniture for rental. (Intercom Design 2021.)

There are two typical ways for customers to order products from Intercom Design's rental selection: the first way is that the customer either sends an email or fills a form on Intercom Design's website, which creates a list of products that the customer would like to rent. The customer is asked to tell, if they want to order a delivery, or will they pick up the products from the office. The normal rent period is three days, including the pickup and return days. However, it is possible to rent products for a longer period as well: in that case the price of extra days is 10% of the price of the products. The other typical way to order products and services from Intercom Design is to order a full decoration package, that includes the planning of the decoration according to the event's theme and the features of the space that is going to be decorated, the products, deliveries and setting the decoration before the event as well as taking it down after the event. (Intercom Design 2021.)

3 The definition, aspects and development of brand

Before a plan for improving a brand image of Intercom Design can be developed, the definition of a brand and the theory, how a brand is created and maintained, must be studied first. This theory will be applied to the commissioner's situation later in this thesis in the section where the plan for brand image improvement is developed. This chapter introduces the theoretical background of this thesis. The objective of this chapter is to answer questions such as, what is the definition of a brand, what is the role and significance of a brand in business and how a brand is build and maintained. The chapter starts with describing the concept and the definition of a brand. After that, the role and the significance of a brand in business is studied.

3.1 The definition of a brand

The history of branding started thousands of years ago in a form of marks and signatures that could be found in weapons and armour. When new territories were conquered, a recognizable sign was usually left on the location as a mark of triumph. Later the concept of brand changed to be more related with industrial context - manufacturers wanted to mark their products. After that, branding has slowly taken shape into how it's known today: one component of business that is separated from the production and aims to separate the company from its' competitors. (Rosenbaum-Elliot, Percy and Pervan 2015, 4-6). Johansson and Carlson (2015, 3) define a brand like this: "A brand is a name attached to a product or a service." Outlining the definition of a brand within one sentence can be difficult, since anything with a name can become a brand, even people or cities. However, the key fact of a brand is that a brand distinguishes the product or service from others. Customers associate different things

with different brands; with many brands it can be a logo or the category of the product or service. The associations can also be more emotional; a good brand raises trust and reliance towards the product or service in customer's minds and attitudes. (Johansson and Carlson 2015, 3-7.)

Ruokolainen (2020) defines brand differently. According to him, brand is not just a name or a logo, but it's a summary of everything that a person has experienced in one way or another related to the company. Brand forms in customer's mind and because of that, companies aren't able to decide, how consumers see their brand. However, what companies can and should do, is to influence the customer's experience related to the company and that way aim to create a good brand. (Ruokolainen 2020, 16-18.) For reaching a good brand image, the consumer's experiences related to the company should be positive. Experiences can be formed in different kind of channels and situations: in marketing, customer service, using the products and services or in reading or hearing about the company from a friend. (Ruokolainen 2020, 48-51.) Gronlund (2013) is on the common ground with others with the fact, that giving an unambiguous definition for a brand is difficult. He suggests some alternative definitions for a brand: a brand could be a promise, an expectation of performance, a reputation or a mark of trust. An important aspect to remember is that branding is not the same as marketing - even though they are related to each other - but branding is a pursuit to build a trustful relationship with the customer. (Gronlund 2013, 2-3). While Gronlund (2013) among many others emphasizes the significance of separating branding and marketing from each other, Chunawalla (2008) claims that the main tool for creating a good brand image is advertising (Gronlund 2013, 2-3, Chunawalla 2008, 166). Also, the size of the enterprise matters: small and medium-sized companies benefit more on building relationships with customers than on massive marketing campaigns (Sandbacka 2010, 8).

Branding can be related to other businesses than just products and services. Place or nation branding is done to attract tourists, investors, and expatriates. In place or nation branding, aspects that should be focused on are exports, governance, culture, people, tourism and immigration. The better the situations with these aspects are, the more attractive the place is. Typically, the nation brand is built around something that has been associated with the country for a long time. (Johansson and Carlson 2015, 221-224.) For example, Finland's brand focuses on functionality and wellbeing, nature and sustainable development, education and know-how (Finland Toolbox 2020). Personal branding is a rather new phenomena that is used by for example celebrities, influencers and politicians. Personal brand can be built on for example four of five personal characteristics that makes the person stand out from others and these characteristics are emphasized in the branding. In addition to that, the person's online profile and performance should be managed. The personal brand can be very calculated, but it still may differ from the person's actual personality. Service branding aims to a positive experience: in services that are related to products - for example in restaurants or stores - the

service plays a significant role in the customer's experience. Therefore, the service and experience are directly related to the brand. (Johansson and Carlson 2015, 225-228.) The purpose of creating and maintaining a brand is to build trust between the consumer and the company (Slade-Brooking 2016, 14).

3.2 Brand image, brand identity and brand personality

Regarding the objective of this thesis, which is to develop a plan for improving the commissioner's brand image, it is important to define the differences between brand image, brand identity and brand personality. Brand image is a perception of brand's quality, values and reputation, that is based on customer's experience and their interactions with the brand. Customer develops the brand image based on brand associations and brand personality. Brand associations that the customers might have about the brand or product, can be related to e.g. pricing, availability, lifestyle, geographic area or a celebrity that has promoted the brand or product. If it appears to the company, that the associations that consumers have related to the brand are negative or otherwise unwanted, it is possible for the company to influence these associations and to change them. It's beneficial to create a strong image for not only the products and the brand, but for the whole company. Companies with strong image and brand are more likely to be forgiven if they fail. (Chunawalla 2008, 166-169.)

Brand identity is something palpable that a consumer can hear, see or touch (Wheeler 2017, 10). Baisya (2013, 79) compares brand identity to a person's identity card: it holds information, facts about the person or a company, features that the company can be identified with, features that never change. Brand identity consists of for instance following facts: the vision and the mission of the brand, why the company exists; the needs that the brand aims to fulfil; the core values of the brand; what makes the brand different from others. It is crucial for the employers who work with communication in the company, to know the brand identity thoroughly to ensure that the communication is aligned with the brand identity. (Baisya 2013, 79-81). Johansson and Carlson (2015) highlighted, that brand image and brand identity should not be confused: brand identity is the elements and the facts of a brand, and a brand image is what consumers think about the brand (Johansson and Carlson 2015, 8).

Brand personality is also something that a brand can develop, but it isn't always beneficial or necessary. Brand personality aims to define which kind of human characteristics the brand might have, the characteristics usually being similar to the customers' characteristics. However, sometimes it's more beneficial to avoid developing a narrow brand personality, but rather aiming to reach different kind of customers. (Johansson and Carlson 2015, 9-10).

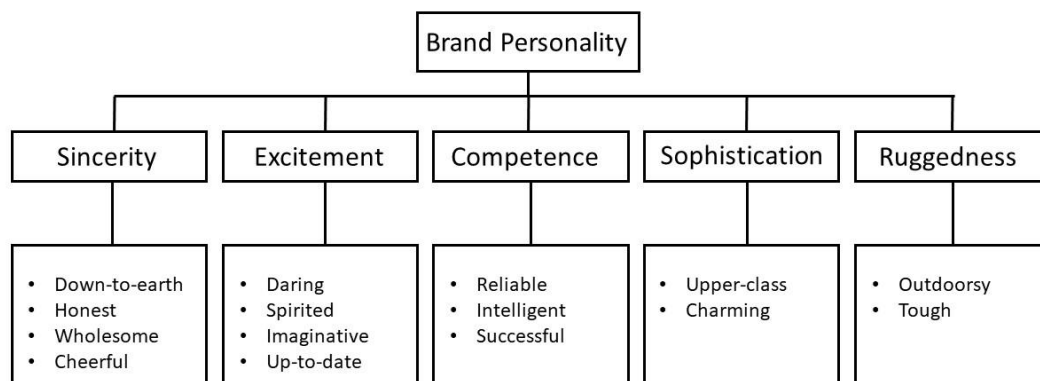


Figure 2: Five Brand Personality Dimensions (Aaker 1997.)

Aaker (1997, 347-356) listed five brand personality dimensions which are similar to human characteristics, that can be seen in figure 2. These five dimensions are in accordance with the purpose very different from each other, to maximize the benefit brands can reach from them. Slade-Brooking (2016) discusses these dimensions and according to her, the dimensions can be used to differentiate for instance brands in the same category from each other. She mentions as an example two car brands Land Rover and Ferrari: in the brand personality dimensions Land Rover is associated to be in the Ruggedness-category, while Ferrari is associated to be in the Sophisticated-category. In other words, Land Rover's brand aims to be tough and outdoorsy, while Ferrari's brand aims to be upper-class and luxurious. Identifying the brand's characteristics helps connecting with potential customers. When the brand identity is defined, it's clearer to see, what kind of customers should be reached. (Slade-Brooking 2016, 15.)

3.3 The role of a brand in business and brand equity

As Park, MacInnis and Eisingerich (2016) state, "brand choices are largely driven by perceptions of what brands do for customers." Company's benefits of a strong and admired brand are related to for example growth and costs. While the brand becomes stronger, the company is able to extend the business with new products or business areas. A strong and well-known brand can be more cost-efficient with the help of word of mouth. It also attracts talented employees, and employees, that are confident and proud of what they do and of who they work for, are also more committed to their employer. Strong brands can also dominate the market: for a new company or a product, it can be difficult to enter a market that already

has strong brands operating in it. Strong brand is beneficial for not only the company, but for the customer as well. Customers save time and effort when they don't have to do research but rather, they can rely on the brand they know. (Park et al. 2016, 5-10.)

Park et al. (2016) state three E's of a strong and admired brand that provide happiness to the customers. These E's are Enablement Benefits, Enticement Benefits and Enrichment Benefits and each of these E's provide different kind of happiness. Enablement Benefits create a feeling that customer can rely on the brand, that the brand makes life easier, creates peace of mind. Enticement Benefits create positive feelings such as excitement and gratitude. Enrichment Benefits makes the customer feel good about themselves, feel inspired and supports their identity. A successful, strong and admired brand does not only focus on one of the three E's, but provides all the three benefits to the customer. (Park et al. 2016, 10-14.) A brand strategy includes a plan of how all the communication, behaviour and actions are implemented (Wheeler 2017, 10).

In the long run, it can be profitable for a company to invest in things that do not directly generate money for the company but helps in creating a certain image of the company. Red Bull is a globally known energy drink company based in Austria. It is one of the most popular energy drinks in the world along with Monster, which is distributed by the Coca-Cola Company. Red Bull's slogan is "Red Bull gives you wings" and the distinctive visual style in the advertising has stayed the same for years: short, animated advertisements usually include a small story and can be even a bit provocative. However, the message is clear: with a can of Red Bull, only the sky is the limit. In addition to energy drinks, Red Bull is also strongly associated with many different sports: Red Bull owns several sport teams, such as ice hockey teams, two Formula 1 teams, with one of them being the most successful team during the 2022 season. Red Bull organizes a lot of extreme sports events - such as Red Bull 400, a competition where the competitors sprint up top of a ski jump tower, and Red Bull Flugtag, where the competitors aim to fly with their self-built vehicles. Red Bull also sponsors some extreme sport stunts, such as Red Bull Stratos, where an Austrian skydiver, Felix Baumgartner skydived down from the stratosphere. The stunt was the highest altitude jump of all time, breaking many other world records in the process. (Red Bull 2022.)



Figure 3: Felix Baumgartner skydiving from Stratosphere (Red Bull 2022.)

The world-record skydive was live-streamed via Youtube. Figure 3 shows Baumgartner starting the skydive. While the energy drink distribution is profitable for Red Bull, the extreme sport events, teams and stunts don't necessarily increase the revenue. Red Bull is an example of a brand with actions, that aren't directly profitable, but strengthens the brand and the image in a long run. The fact that Red Bull focuses precisely on extreme sports and welcomes even the craziest ideas to their events, is in line with their message: Red Bull gives you wings, only sky is the limit.

As for brand in general, there are many variable definitions for brand equity. As simplified, it means the net value of the brand: how much money is the brand worth or how much money does the brand bring for the company. Consumer attitudes are strongly related to the brand equity. As Rosenbaum-Elliot et al. state "with strong positive brand attitude, key preference and loyalty results." (Rosenbaum-Elliot et al. 2018, 107.) The importance of communication is emphasized in this occasion as well. Attitudes form over time based on knowledge and experiences of the brand. It can be difficult to change these attitudes, and that's why it is important to aim for as positive attitudes towards the company as possible from the very beginning. (Rosenbaum-Elliot et al. 2018, 206-112.) However, strong brand equity alone does not mean that the brand is trustworthy (Peppers and Rogers 2016, 93).

3.4 Visual identity of the brand and communication

Salinas (2009) gives a definition for the visual identity of a brand: it's "the sum of the individual elements that characterize a brand (name, logo, graphic symbols, slogan, characters, packaging etc.)" (Salinas 2009, 11.) Visual appearance is a significant part of the brand and

creating a visual identity is an effective way to strengthen the brand and the message that the brand aims to deliver. Visual identity plays a significant role in creating images of the brand. Visual identity consists of symbols, logos, colours, shapes and materials that repeat in all forms of the brand's communication. The key is to compound the same visual ingredients in changing communication situations, such as emails, web pages, social media channels, products and so on. As a brand in general, also the visual identity aims to create a desired image. (Pohjola 2019, 15-20.) Since people generally remember pictures better than words or details, a visual identity is an efficient way to make the brand stay in people's minds. The company should carefully consider, what kind of a message they want to deliver and what kind of an image they want to build, and create a visual identity based on that. This includes for instance using colours, fonts, slogans and approaches that support the message that the company aims to give. Dividing the visual identity of a brand into segments helps to understand the customer's point of view in today's customer-centric service models.

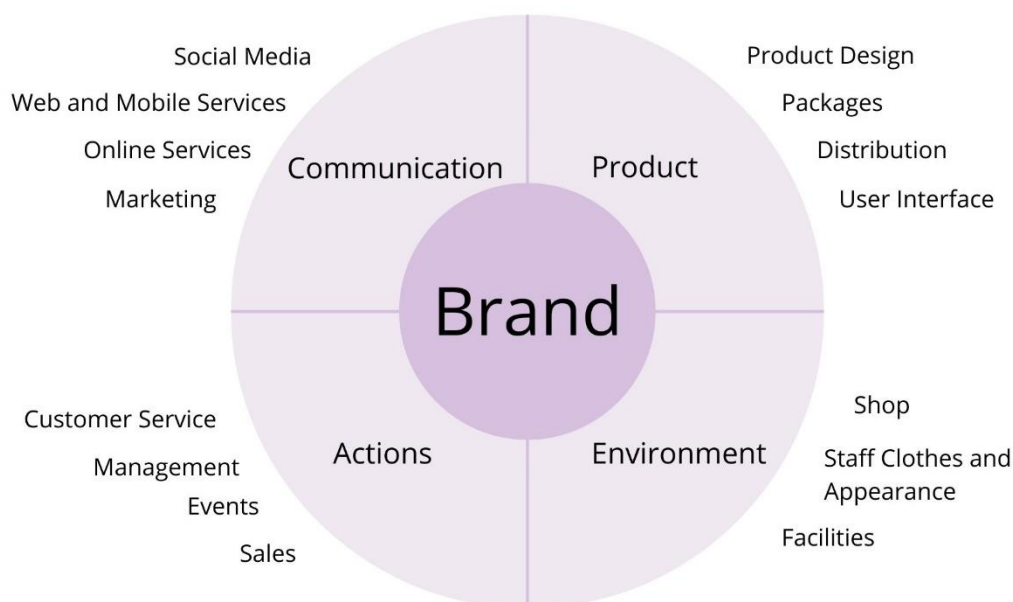


Figure 4: Segments of brand's design management (Pohjola 2019, 21.)

Brand's visual design management can be divided into four segments: product, environment, actions and communication. Figure 4 shows the four segments divided. Each of these segments play a significant role in the visual brand identity. All four consists of different elements. Product segment includes things such as the product and package design, distribution and the user interface. Environment segment includes shop, facilities, staff clothes and appearance. Actions include customer service, management, events and sales and communication includes social media, web and mobile services, online services and marketing. Even though the design management is divided into four segments, they are continuously mixed.

For instance, high-quality web pages can be a part of the customer service, and good customer service can include also accessible facilities (Pohjola 2019, 21).

It is crucial to remember, that communication is not only the emails or web pages, and since the communication should be consistent, it's important to understand and recognize all types of communication: planned marketing communication, product messages, service messages, unplanned communication and missing communication. Planned marketing communication includes marketing, selling, advertisements and other forms of marketing that has been planned in advance. Product messages mean the message that the product gives: the materials, design and usability. Service messages include interaction, distribution and processing feedback. Unplanned communication includes word-of-mouth, news and recommendations. Missing communication includes silence after bad, failed or unsuccessful service and lack of information. Communication should be implemented with same style in every type of communication, also in unplanned communication. Naturally, the missing communication is something that the company should aim to avoid. (Pohjola 2019, 22-23.)

In today's digital world, people are more and more used to receive content from the internet quickly. While people might spend hours reading a magazine, only minutes are used reading a web page. Therefore, it's crucial to summarise the information and create something compact and visual to stay in customer's minds. If the customer doesn't find the information easily and quickly, they will change to another website and look for the information from somewhere else. The message must be short, clear and memorable. Congruent brand building is more effective than variable individual marketing campaigns and the style in communication should always support the message of the brand. (Pohjola 2019, 39-40.) According to Pohjola (2019), the role of visuality is different with different products. In this case, products can be divided into two groups: consumer products and production commodity. With consumer product - when the product goes directly to the use of the customer - the role of drawing attention and attracting customers with associations is significant, while with production commodity - when the product works as a material for creating another product - highlighting the quality and expertise and making information easily accessible is important (Pohjola 2019, 28.)

Visual image consists of several elements, such as logos or symbols, colours, fonts, graphic elements, and finally combining all of these elements. The goal is to build a visual image that corresponds with the desired brand image. Individual visual elements always message something, therefore each of the elements should be chosen carefully, so that the final message becomes persuasive and gives the desired message. (Pohjola 2019, 134-136.) One visual tool for creating associations for the brand is colours. Different colours symbolize different things. In Western European culture the colour white represents innocence, cleanliness and quietness while the colour black has more negative associations, such as darkness and death, but it can

also be considered as a symbol of strength and differentiation. Other colours have very different meanings: red - emotions, fire, attention; blue - sky, infinity, calm; grey: loneliness, modesty; green - life, youth, money, growth; yellow - gold, sun, inspiration. While creating a visual identity for the brand, the company should carefully choose, which colours to use and how. Also, the tones of the colours matter: lighter tones usually give more delicate image and darker tones create stronger images. (Pachler 2013, 44-48.)

Many brands have some specific elements that have reached even an iconic position. One example known worldwide is the Coca-Cola bottle design. The bottle design known as “contour bottle” was introduced in 1916 and is one of the most recognizable bottle designs in the world. (Coca-Cola Great Britain 2022.)



Figure 5: The Coca-Cola bottle design through the years (Coca-Cola Great Britain 2022.)

While the brand wants to keep the signature design, the visuality can still be renewed and update time to time. This has happened also to the famous Coca-Cola bottle, as can be seen in the figure 5. As the curvy shape of the bottle has been kept in the design since it was first taken into use, the detailed design has changed through the years. (Coca-Cola Great Britain 2022.)



Figure 6: Tanqueray gin bottle with its' recognizable design and the red T-seal (Tanqueray 2022.)

Another example of unique bottle designs is liquor bottles, that aim to differentiate and stay in customer's minds not only with the taste, but also with the bottle design. For instance, different gin brands can easily be told apart from each other just by looking at the bottles.

Tanqueray has a unique green style in their bottles even though the shape of the bottle varies in different gin products, the style stays the same and the signature red T-seal (figure 6) can be found in every bottle. (Tanqueray 2022.)

3.5 Brand's website

According to Zahay (2015), Wheeler (2017) and Rickman (2012) the most important thing in a company's website that it's easy and fast to use and it looks fresh (Zahay 2015, 27; Wheeler 2017, 172; Rickman 2012, 112). While businesses put more and more effort to different social media channels, websites are still the main channel for companies to provide information about themselves. A good website also engages customers. For creating a well-functioning website, the customer's perspective must be understood. This includes also knowing the customer lifecycle. This means gaining knowledge on the customer's path from target market to responder - a customer that asks for more information - to new customer and possibly a retained customer - a customer that purchases regularly. (Zahay 2015, 28-30.)

For creating an efficient website for the brand, the company should first define the website's goal and target audience. The goal may be, for example, to get the customer to register or to get the customer to make purchases. In defining the target audience, it should be considered, if the target audience consists of for instance businesses or private person. Also, a customer persona can be made for outlining the target audience. An important thing to remember is, that even though the target audience for the website is defined, it doesn't exclude customer outside of the target audience, but helps to market the business to the key target audience. A good website also serves customers from outside the target audience. (Zahay 2015, 33-34)

After the goal and target audience are defined, the website's layout should be designed. While the layout and design are important aspects of the website, the importance of the content on the website should never been forgotten. Key rules for designing the website are that people tend to start watching a website from the upper left corner and that it should take two to three clicks for the customer to get the information they need. Other basic rules are to ensure good navigation, use easy-to-read dark font on light background or vice versa, fast loading and logical organizing of the website. The website design should correspond with other parts of the brand's visual identity. (Zahay 2015, 35-38.)

The content of the website should be considered carefully. As Zahay (2015) also Rickman (2012) emphasizes that while the visual layout of the website is crucial, the content of the website is the most important part. To get the most out of a website, the content should be engaging and up to date. Up to date content also boosts the websites visibility on the search

engines, but search engine optimization includes also other things, such as considering which words to use. One of the websites roles is to inform the audience about the expertise of the company. Customers can be persuaded with for instance references, portfolio and reviews. A useful feature for websites is shareability: one way to interact with the audience is that they share the websites content on for instance social media. (Rickman 2012, 113-118.) Using analytic tools to is a cost-efficient way to follow the traffic on the website (Zahay 2015, 33).

3.6 Developing a brand

Creating a brand requires time, resources and professionalism. Brand creation and development process is not a task that company completes once and can then move on, but a continuous process that has to be maintained. While there are multiple ways to develop a brand, a typical way is to divide the process into several steps. Usually, the first step is to define the key idea and the values of the brand: the company should be able to tell customers what the company does and how, so it has to be able to define it to itself first. The size of the enterprise matters: small companies have different structures and operating models than big enterprises. Additionally, communication inside the company is works very differently in small and big companies. (Sandbacka 2010, 12.)

Ruokolainen (2020) defines three steps for clarifying a brand. The first step is to define, what the message is. The second step is to create content and form for the message. The third step is to decide the most significant meeting points and how they are used for delivering the message (Ruokolainen 2020, 57.) In Ruokolainen's brand clarifying model, the whole team participates the process. That's how different departments of the company can understand better how the company works and recognise weaknesses. He emphasizes communication and participation of the whole team, as well as the significancy of the ability to cooperate within the team. As mentioned above, the first step of the brand clarifying process is to define the message. There are nine cornerstones that help to define the message of the brand: purpose, vision, mission, strategy, values, customers, competitors, positioning and proposition. By defining these nine cornerstones, the company is able to define its core message. These cornerstones should be considered carefully, and the company should be able to justify them. The second step is designing the brand. This means that essence of the brand is designed to matches the message of the brand. During this step, the visual image of the brand is developed. It's also useful to create an elevator pitch and a background story for the company.

Sandbacka (2010) defines five steps for branding of a micro enterprise. As can be seen in the first blue box in figure 7, the first step of the brand developing process is to define the values of the company. When defining the values, following subjects should be considered: the values should be realistic and reachable, they should be similar with customers' and stakeholders' values, and they should stand out from competitors' values. By defining values, the company is able to create a brand personality and therefore define what kind of customers does

the brand aim to reach and an image of what customers can expect from the company. Another thing to do in the beginning of the brand development process is to define a business concept - why does the company exist. (Sandbacka 2010, 12-14.)

Second step of the branding process is planning the service process and productization. Since customer service plays a significant role when customer forms an image of the company, the company should pay attention to the service as well. Employees are in a central role in developing and maintaining a brand. In small and medium-sized enterprises a small work force can be a strength: it is easier to control the behaviour of a small staff to a direction that is beneficial for the brand, than a massive staff. Also conflicts and contradictions are typically easier to solve in small companies. (Sandbacka 2010, 8, 14.)

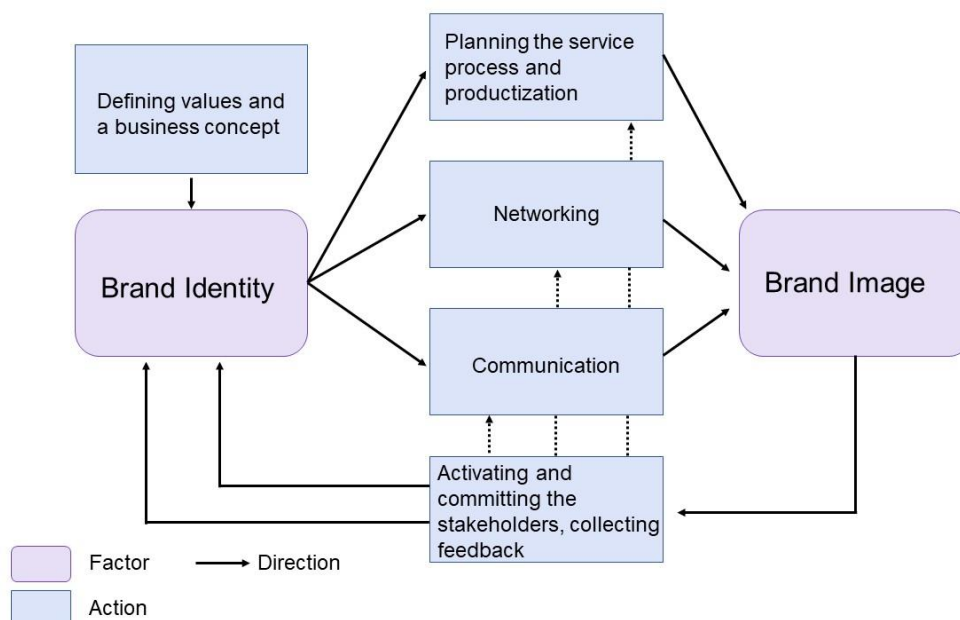


Figure 7: The five steps of branding (Sandbacka 2010, 13)

The third and the fourth steps of the branding process are communication and networking. This means that the communication should be coherent and represent the company values and this should be paid attention to in all communication. In this context, communication includes for instance customer service, website, blogs, marketing and business cards. Networking is an effective way to spread knowledge of the brand. In networks, the knowledge of the brand spreads with the word of mouth: one person recommends the company for their colleague and so forth. (Sandbacka 2010, 15-16.)

Networking and communication together with service process and productization affect the formation of the brand image; how customers see the brand, whereas brand image has a role in the fifth step: activating and committing the stakeholders and collecting feedback.

Creating relationships with stakeholders is highly beneficial. Since developing and maintaining the brand continues throughout the company's life, collecting feedback continuously is important for keeping the brand updated. A good way to do this is to ask for feedback from the stakeholders regularly. One of small business' benefits is that it's possible to collect feedback in real time. (Sandbacka 2010, 17.)

4 Research methods, implementation and results

This chapter describes the research methods used for this thesis as well as the process of the research. Generally, research methods can be divided into two groups: qualitative methods and quantitative methods. In qualitative research methods, a large amount of information is collected from a small amount of people, while in quantitative methods, a smaller and more specific information is collected from a large group of people. (Saunders 2015, 4). The research methods for this thesis were online survey, which is a quantitative research method, semi-structured interview, which is a qualitative research method and net scouting which is a qualitative research method. However, qualitative data can be collected also from a quantitative research, if there are for instance open-ended questions included in the research (Ekinici 2015, 4).

4.1 Online survey

The first research method for this thesis' research was an online survey. The online survey method was chosen for this research because it's an efficient way to collect data for creating an image of what customers currently think about the brand of Intercom Design. As any research method, a survey method has its strengths and weaknesses. The strength of the survey method is that with one survey form, a rather wide collection of data can be gathered from a large amount of people. With an online survey, a rather wide group of people can be reached, and it doesn't require anyone's physical presence, compared to for instance survey forms that are handed to a customer in the office or store when they visit, but the respondent needs only a mobile device or a laptop with internet connection. The weakness of the survey method is that it is more difficult to go into detail and some important information is not being received, if the respondent doesn't have the possibility to tell it.

Objectives of the online survey

The objective of the first part of the research was to use an online survey to find out what kind of perceptions customers have of Intercom Design's brand, i.e., what is the current brand image of the company. The purpose of the online survey was to find out what associations customers have of the company, which values they associate with the company and what possible deficiencies the business has regarding the brand subject. By collecting the data and analysing the results, an overview of the customers' perceptions on the company can be made. By combining the analysis of the research with the theory, the current stage of the brand

image can be evaluated. This can then be used to assess which aspects of the brand could be strengthened, and perhaps changed, and how this could be done. The structure and design of the questionnaire was guided by the need to make it as easy as possible for the respondent to understand and not to take an excessive amount of time, so that the questionnaire would provide the most truthful answers possible, while at the same time gathering as much useful information as possible.

Target group of the online survey

The link to the survey was sent to 254 Intercom Design's customers, that have used the company's furniture and decoration rental in the last year, more specifically during 14.9.2021-14.9.2022. It did not matter how many times the customer had used the service. This meant that the target group could include customers who had been using the service for years, as well as customers who had only used the service once. The target group included customers that have used the services by renting individual products and picking them up from the office of Intercom Design, customers that have used the services by renting individual products as well as delivery service, and customers that have used the service by ordering a package, that includes the planning, delivering and assembling the furniture and/or decoration.

Online survey implementation

The online survey was created in Google Forms survey platform. This platform was chosen, because the author has used it in previous school projects, which means that she was familiar with the platform. The survey was sent via email to those customers of Intercom Design, that have used the furniture and rental service in the last year. Before sending the survey link to customers, the survey was pre-tested on two people who were not familiar with the subject of the survey. In the pre-testing, there didn't appear any problems and according to the two people who pre-tested the survey, the form worked well and was clear. The responses of the two pre-testers were deleted from the survey results before sending the survey to the target group, which means that the upcoming analysis of the survey doesn't include the pre-testers' responses.

The structure of the survey was divided into four sections. The first section identifies the respondent's background and relationship with the company. In the second section, respondents rate the given questions on a scale of 1 to 5. Option 0 was also available in case the respondent felt that they could not answer the question or that the question did not concern them. In the third section, the respondent's perceptions of the company are explored through a series of questions and statements and in the fourth section, the respondent is asked to share more freely their experiences and thoughts about Intercom Design. The survey consisted of 25 questions. 23 questions were close-ended questions, which means that the response options were pre-set, and two questions were open-ended questions, which means that the respondent

answered with their own words. The close-ended questions were obligatory, and the two open-ended questions were optional. The questions of the survey are discussed in more detail one by one in the next subchapter.

During the 2-week period, when the online survey was open, in total of 27 people responded to the online survey. This means that approximately 10% of people who received the email, that contained the link to the online survey, responded. The link to the online survey was sent to the target group on Wednesday, October 5th, 2022, and it was open for two weeks. Halfway through the survey period, a reminder email was sent to the target group about the survey. In addition, the survey was posted on the company's social media channels and website towards the end of the survey period, to gather more responses. The email in which the link to the survey was sent, contained a cover letter, that described the survey, its objectives, purposes and target group as well as information about the thesis and the author. In addition, it contained the contact information of the author, and in case there would be some questions or concerns about the research or the thesis, the respondents were asked to directly contact the author. The whole online survey, as well as the emails and the cover letter were both in Finnish and English.

4.2 Online survey questions and results

In this subchapter the survey questions and results are discussed in detail, question by question. The full survey can be found from the appendices. The survey questions were based on theory that is discussed earlier in this thesis, as well as on discussions with the representatives of Intercom Design. This means that the commissioner also told themes and topics that they are curious to find out more about. The first three questions were to outline the respondent's background and relationship with the company. After that, there are 14 questions that are based on the segments of brand design management. There are four segments: product, communication, environment and actions.

The first question is used to find out whether the customers that use the services are mainly private persons or representatives of a company, and by comparing with other answers, it can be assessed whether something in the operation should be changed to better serve e.g. private persons in particular.

Oletko vuokrannut Intercom Designilta tuotteita yksityishenkilönä vai yrityksen käyttöön? Have you rented products from Intercom Design for personal or business use?

27 vastausta

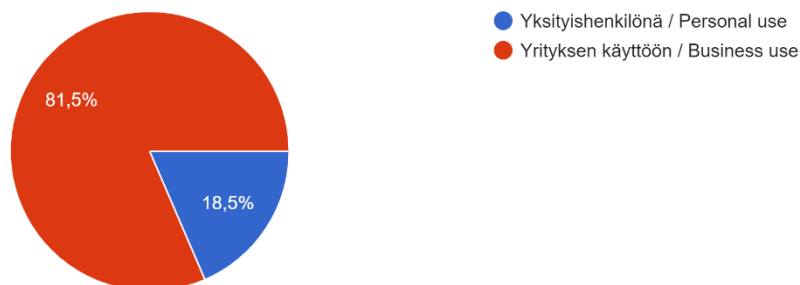


Figure 8: Have you rented products from Intercom Design for personal or business use? (n=27)

In the results of the first question (figure 8) 81.5% of the respondents have used the rental services for business use and 18.5% of the respondents have used the services for personal use.

The second question was to find out how many times the respondents have used the rental services. The results of this question can be used to identify, for instance if there are connections within the amount that customers have used the services and their satisfaction with the service.

Kuinka monta kertaa olet vuokrannut tuotteita Intercom Designilta? How many times have you rented products from Intercom Design?

27 vastausta

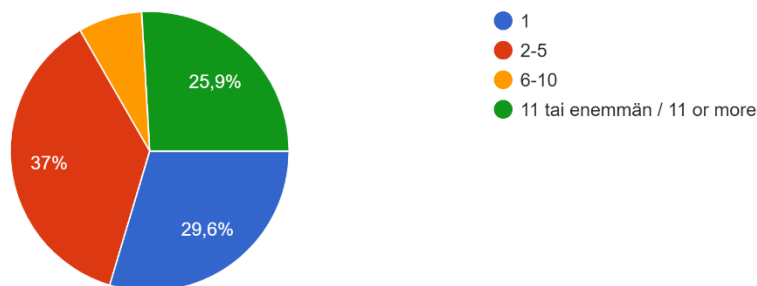


Figure 9: How many times have you rented products from Intercom Design? (n=27)

This question (figure 9) shows that 29.6% of the respondents had rented products only once, 37% of the respondents had rented products 2-5 times, 7.4% of the respondents had rented products 6-10 times and 25.9% of the respondents had rented products 11 times or more.

The third question was to find out, what purpose were the products rented for. The question can be used to see if potential problems or strengths are concentrated in a particular type of event, and then the causes and solutions can be considered. In this question the respondents could choose several options. The respondents had also a chance to write their own answers if the given options didn't match with their experience.

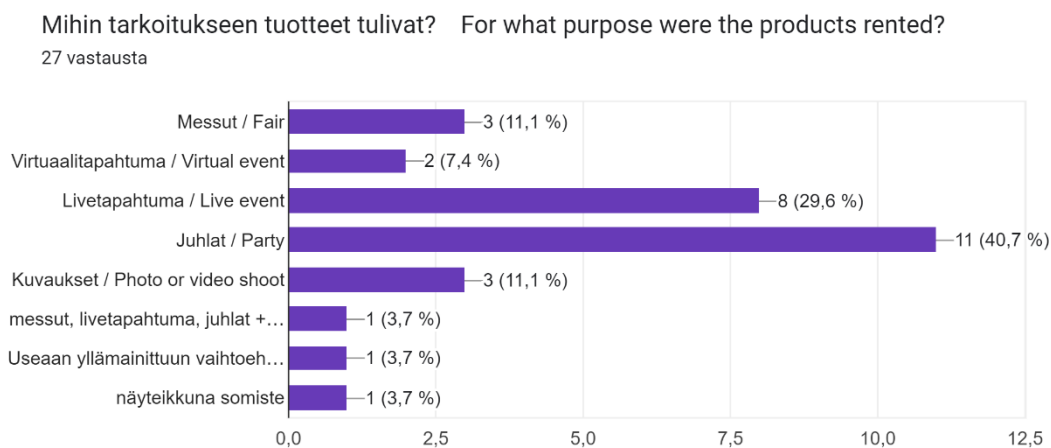


Figure 10: For what purpose were the products rented? (n=27)

Figure 10 shows, that the most popular answer was party (40.7%), and the second most popular was live event (29.6%). Fair and photo or video shoot was chosen by 11.1% of the respondents and virtual event by 7.4% of the respondents. Two respondent mentioned separately that they have rented products for several purposes and one respondent added their own answer, which was a shop window.

Segments of brand design management

From here starts the second section of the survey, in which the respondents rate the questions on a scale of 1 to 5. Another option, 0, was given in case the respondent feels that the question does not concern them, or the respondent doesn't know what to answer. There are 14 questions for the respondents to rate. These 14 questions are divided into four categories, according to Pohjola's (2019) theory, the four segments of brand's design management. These four segments are product, communication, environment and actions. The figure of these segments is on page 14 of this thesis. The core idea of the theory is, that the customer experience is the base for product and service development. The four segments of the brand design management - product, environment, communication and actions - form an entity, in which every segment is somehow connected to each other, and that's why it is important to be able to manage all of them.

Product

Hinta-laatu-suhde on sopiva. The quality-price ratio is appropriate.

27 vastausta

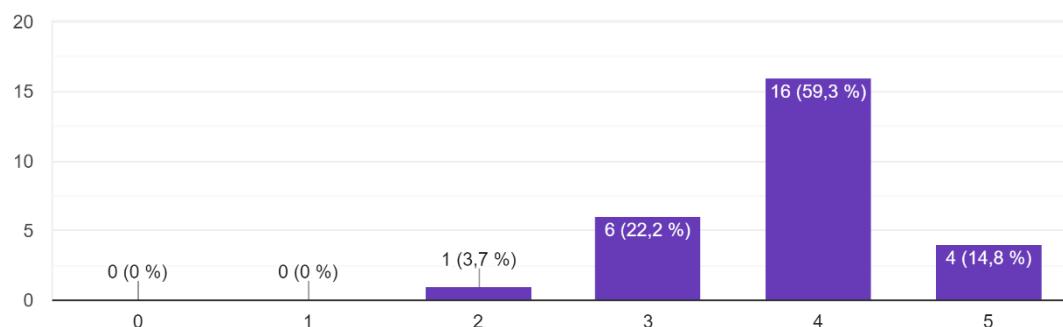


Figure 11: The quality-price ratio is appropriate. (n=27)

For the first question (figure 11), the most popular option was 4, which was chosen by 59.3% of the respondents. 22.2% chose option 3, 14.8% chose option 5 and 3.7% (one person) chose option 2. None of the respondents chose option 1.

Tuotteet ovat hyväkuntoisia. The condition of the products is good.

27 vastausta

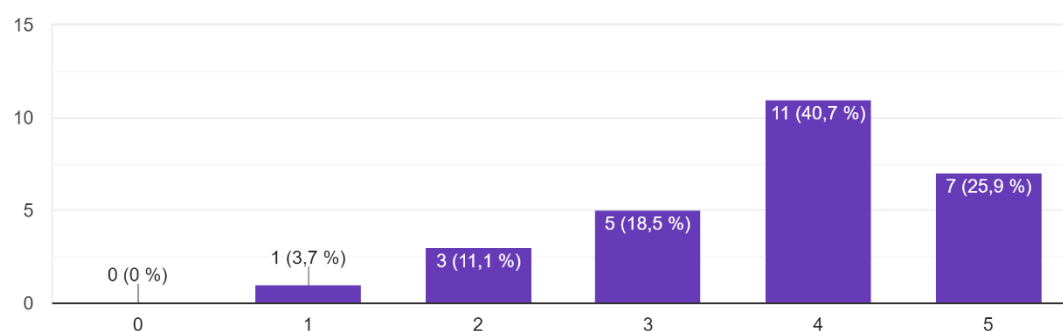


Figure 12: The condition of the products is good. (n=27)

This question (figure 12) had more dispersion. Most of the respondents chose options 5 (25.9%) or 4 (40.7%). The rest of the respondents chose options 3 (18.5%) and 2 (11.1%) and 1 (3.7%). None of the respondents chose option 0.

Vuokrausehdot ovat selkeät, helpot ja tasapuoliset. The rental conditions are clear, easy and fair.

27 vastausta

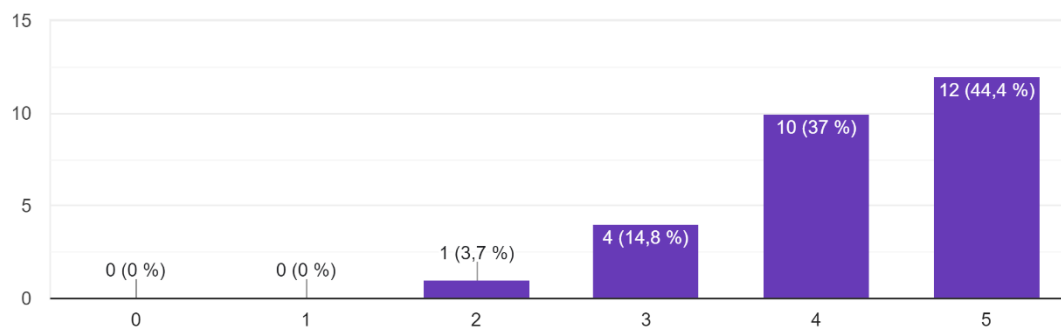


Figure 13: The rental conditions are clear, easy and fair. (n=27)

For this question (figure 13), 44.4% of the respondents chose option 5. 37% of the respondents chose option 4 and 14.8% of the respondents chose option 3. 3.7% of the respondents chose option 2 and none of the respondents chose options 1 or 0.

Communication

Nettisivut ovat selkeät. The website is clear.

27 vastausta

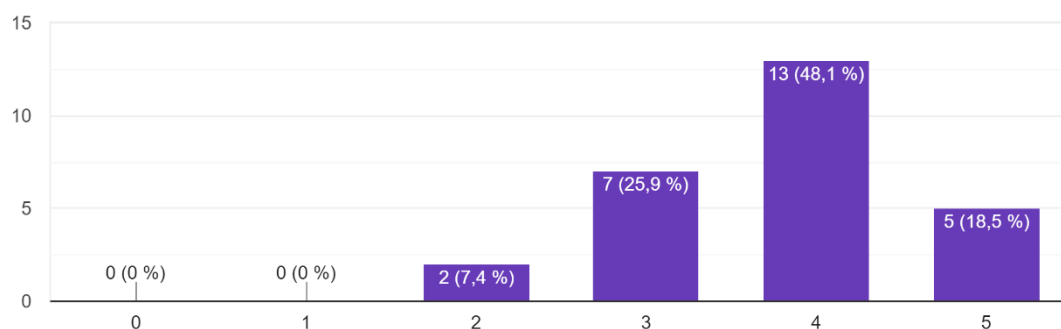


Figure 14: The website is clear. (n=27)

This question (figure 14) as well as the next two questions after this are part of the communication-category. For this question, almost half of the respondents, 48.1% chose answer option 4. 18.5% of respondents chose option 5. 25.9% of the respondents chose option 3 and 7.4.% of the respondents chose option 2. None of the respondents chose options 1 or 0.

Kommunikointi on selkeää ja helppoa. Communication is clear and easy.

27 vastausta

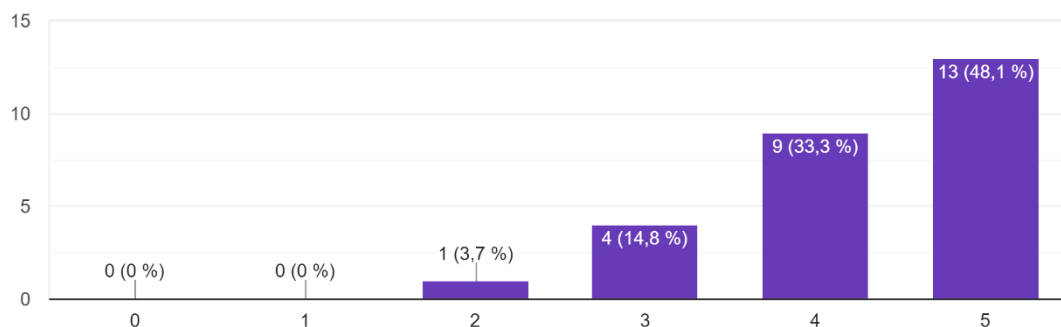


Figure 15: Communication is clear and easy. (n=27)

For this question (figure 15), 48.1% of the respondents chose option 5 and 33.3% of the respondents chose option 4. 14.8% of the respondents chose option 3 and 3.7% of the respondents chose option 2. None of the respondents chose options 1 or 0.

Yhteydenotto on helppoa (esimerkiksi yhteystiedot ovat helppo löytää). Contacting is easy (for instance the contact information is easy to find).

27 vastausta

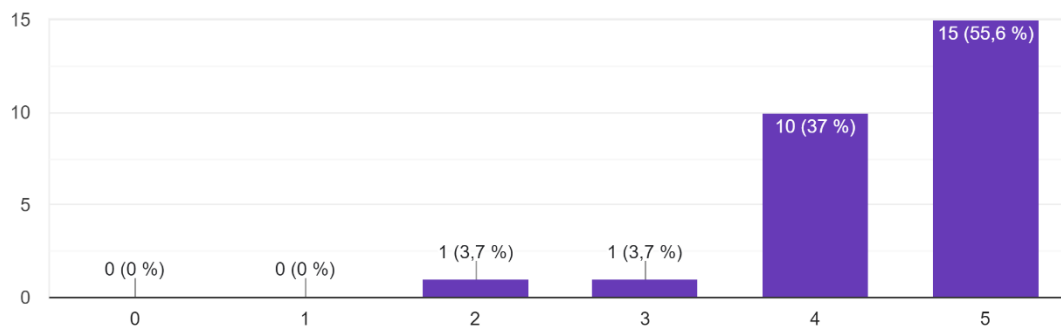


Figure 16: Contacting is easy (for instance the contact information is easy to find). (n=27)

As figure 16 shows, more than half of the respondents (55.6%) chose option 5 and 37% of the respondents chose option 4. 3.7% chose option 3 and 3.7% chose option 2. None of the respondents chose options 1 or 0.

Environment

Henkilökunnan olemus ja käyttäytyminen on ammattimaista. The appearance and behaviour of the staff is professional.

27 vastausta

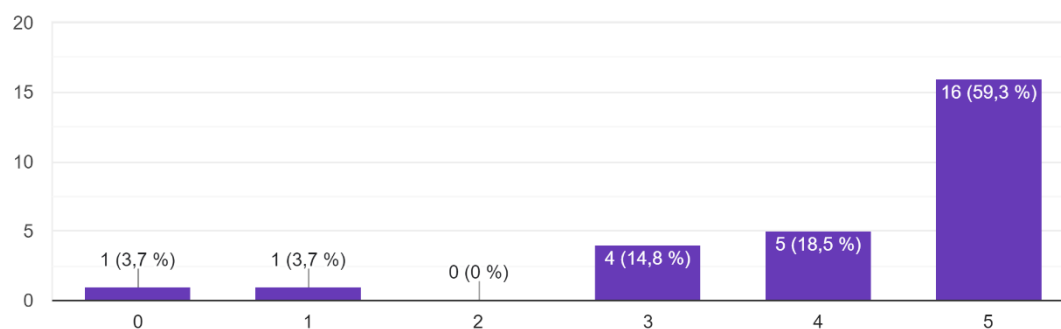


Figure 17: The appearance and behaviour of the staff is professional. (n=27)

This question (figure 17) is the first of two questions of the environment-category. More than half of the respondents (59.3%) chose option 5. 18.5% of the respondents chose option 4 and almost as many, 14.8% of the respondents chose option 3. None of the respondents chose option 2, but 3.7% of the respondents chose option 1. 3.7% of the respondents chose option 0, which means that they didn't know what to answer or felt that the question doesn't concern them.

Tuotteiden pakkaus ja suojaus on hyvin tehty. The products are well packaged and protected.

27 vastausta

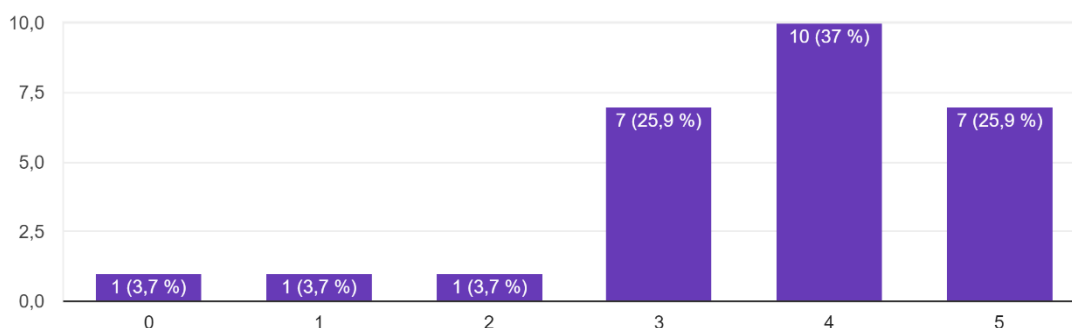


Figure 18: The products are well packaged and protected. (n=27)

This is the second and last question of the environment-category (figure 18). 25.9% of the respondents chose option 5. The most popular option was option 4, which was chosen by 37% of the respondents. 25.9% of the respondents chose option 3. Also, 3.7% chose option 2 and 3.7% chose option 1. Also 3.7% of the respondents chose option 0.

Actions

Saan hyvää asiakaspalvelua. The customer service is good.

27 vastausta

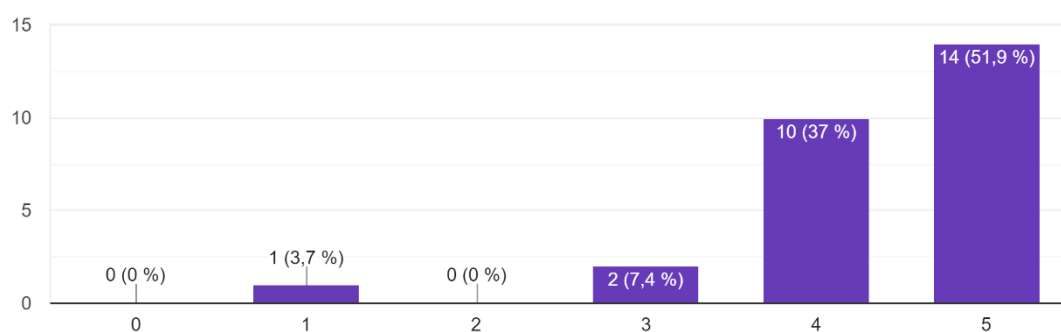


Figure 19: The customer service is good. (n=27)

This is the first question (figure 19) of the actions-category. 51.9% of the respondents chose option 5 and 37% of the respondents chose option 4. 7.4% of the respondents chose option 3, and 3.7% of the respondents chose option 1. None of the respondents chose options 2 or 0 for this question.

Palvelu on nopeaa. The service is fast.

27 vastausta

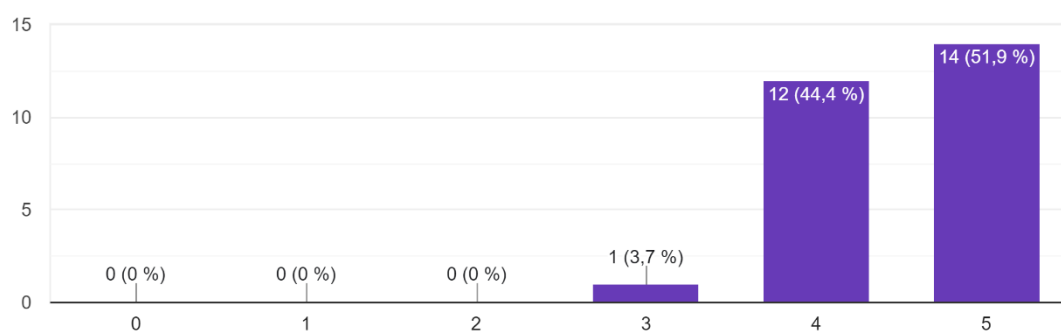


Figure 20: The service is fast. (n=27)

For this question (figure 20) more than half of the respondents (51.9%) chose option 5 and 44.4% of the respondents chose option 4. Option 3 was chosen by 3.7% of the respondents and none of the respondents chose options 2, 1 or 0.

Voin luottaa siihen, että palvelu toteutuu sovitulla/odotetulla tavalla. I can be confident that the service will be delivered as agreed/expected.

27 vastausta

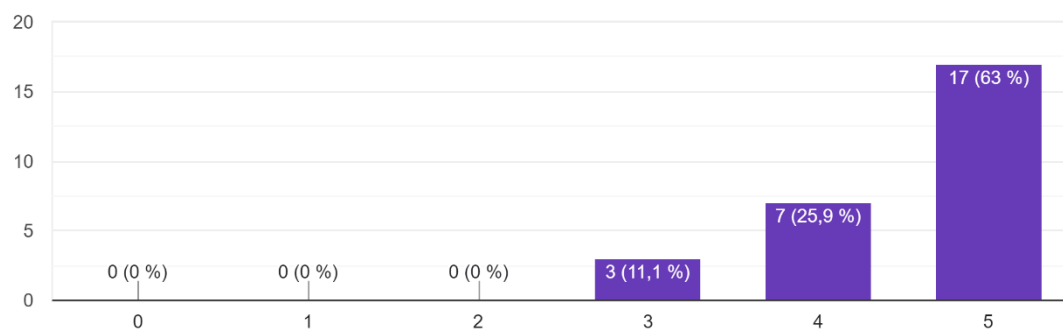


Figure 21: I can be confident that the service will be delivered as agreed/expected. (n=27)

For this question (Figure 21) 63% of the respondents chose option 5 and 25.9% of the respondents chose option 4. 11.1% of the respondents chose option 3, and none of the respondents chose options 2, 1 or 0 for this question.

Asiakkaan mielipiteet ja tarpeet huomioidaan. The opinions and needs of the customer are noticed.

27 vastausta

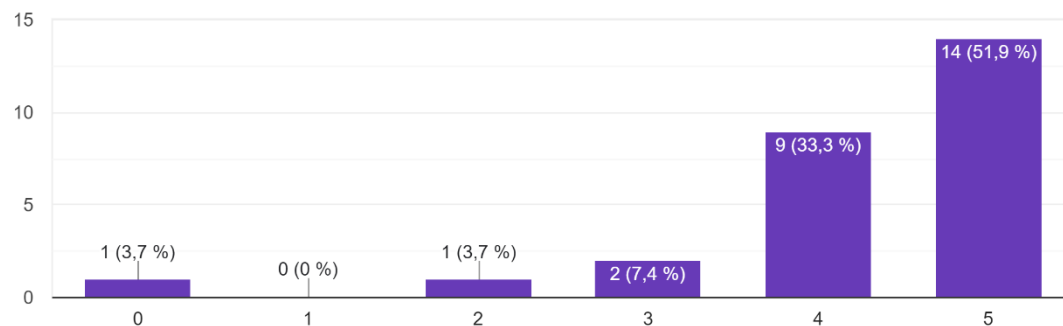


Figure 22: The opinions and needs of the customer are noticed. (n=27)

This question (figure 22) raised again some dispersion. While more than half of the respondents (51.9%) chose option 5 and 33.3% of the respondents chose option 4, 7.4% chose option 3 and 3.7% chose option 2. Option 0 was chosen by 3.7% of the respondents.

Lopputulos on siisti ja huolellisesti toteutettu. The end result is immaculate and carefully executed.

27 vastausta

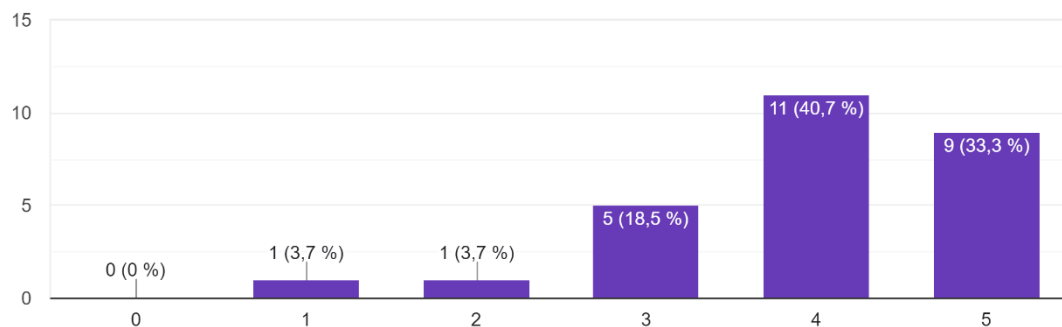


Figure 23: The end result is immaculate and carefully executed. (n=27)

For this question (figure 23), one third of the respondents (33.3%) chose option 5. 40.7% of the respondents chose option 4. 18.5% chose option 3, 3.7% chose option 2 and 3.7% chose option 1.

Intercom Design jäi yrityksenä mieleeni. Intercom Design was memorable as a company.

27 vastausta

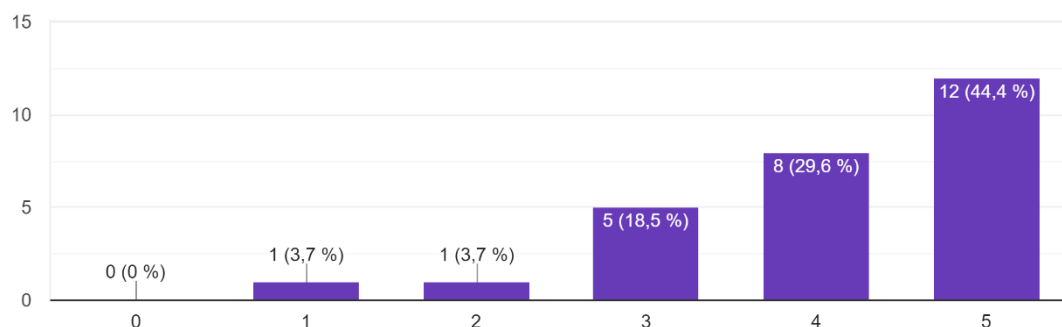


Figure 24: Intercom Design was memorable as a company. (n=27)

This is the last question of the actions-category (figure 24). Almost half of the respondents (44.4%) chose option 5. 29.6% of the respondents chose option 4. 18.5% of the respondents

chose option 3, 3.7% chose option 2 and 3.7% chose option 1. None of the respondents chose option 0.

In the next question, the respondents were asked to choose four words from the list that describe Intercom Design most accurately in their opinion. There wasn't any specific order for the chosen words, so the respondents didn't have to rate the words they chose. The purpose of this question was to see what kind of images and perceptions customers have about Intercom Design.

Valitse seuraavista neljä mielestäsi parhaiten Intercom Designia kuvaavaa sanaa: Please choose four words from the following that describe Intercom Design most accurately in your opinion:

27 vastausta

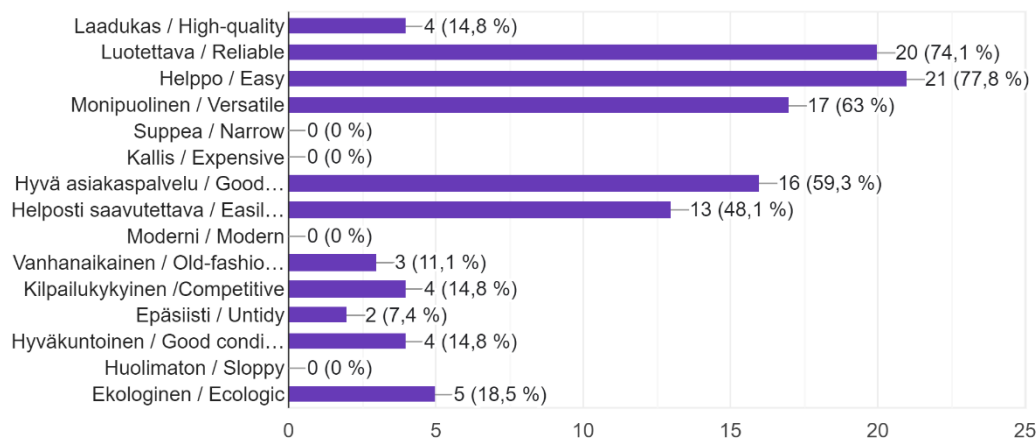


Figure 25: Please choose four words from the following that describe Intercom Design most accurately in your opinion. (n=27)

Despite the instructions, two of the 27 respondents choose five words instead of four and one respondent chose three words instead of four. As the figure 25 shows, the most popular word was 'easy' which was chosen by 77.8% of the respondents. The second most word was 'reliable' which was chosen by 74.1% of the respondents. The third most popular word was 'versatile', chosen by 63% of the respondents and the fourth most popular word was 'good customer service', chosen by 59.3% of the respondents. These four most popular words were chosen by more than half of the respondents. The next most popular word was 'easily accessible', which was chosen by 48.1% of the respondents. 'Ecological' was chosen by 18.5% of the respondents. 'High-quality', 'competitive' and 'good condition' were all chosen by 14.8% of the respondents. 'Old-fashioned' was chosen by 11.1% of the respondents and 'untidy' was chosen by 7.4% of the respondents. The following words were not chosen by any of the respondents: narrow, expensive, modern and sloppy.

The next question is based on brand personality theory by Aaker (1997) that is discussed in the theory part of this thesis. In the theory, there are five brand personality dimensions defined. In the question, the respondent plays with the idea that the company is a person, and they are asked to choose, which one of the options describe the brand's personality best. The options are Sincere, Exciting, Competence, Sophisticated and Rugged. Again, the answers provide insight into the brand personality that respondents perceive the brand to be and allow us to consider whether this identity is what we are trying to achieve.

Jos Intercom Design olisi henkilö, mikä seuraavista kuvaisi hänen persoonaansa parhaiten? If Intercom Design was a person, which of the following would describe their personality?

27 vastausta



Figure 26: If Intercom Design was a person, which of the following would describe their personality? (n=27)

As can be seen in figure 26, the results are rather unanimous: 77.8% of the respondent chose the Sincere personality, which means that in their opinion the sincere (down-to-earth, honest, wholesome and cheerful) describes Intercom Design's brand best in their opinion. 14.8% of the respondents chose Competence (reliable, intelligent and successful), 3.7% chose Exciting, 3.7% chose Sophisticated and none of the respondents chose Rugged.

In the next question the respondents were asked to choose values from the list, that they associate with Intercom Design. Intercom Design hasn't publicly defined their values, but even if the company has not listed its values, some values do exist and guide the company's actions, even if it is not consciously aware of them. This makes the responses even more interesting, as the responses show the values that customers associate with the company when the values are not present as such. This may also prompt the company to reflect on its values. The respondents were able to choose as many values from the list as they wanted.

Mitä seuraavista arvoista liität Intercom Designiin? Which from the following values do you associate with Intercom Design?

27 vastausta

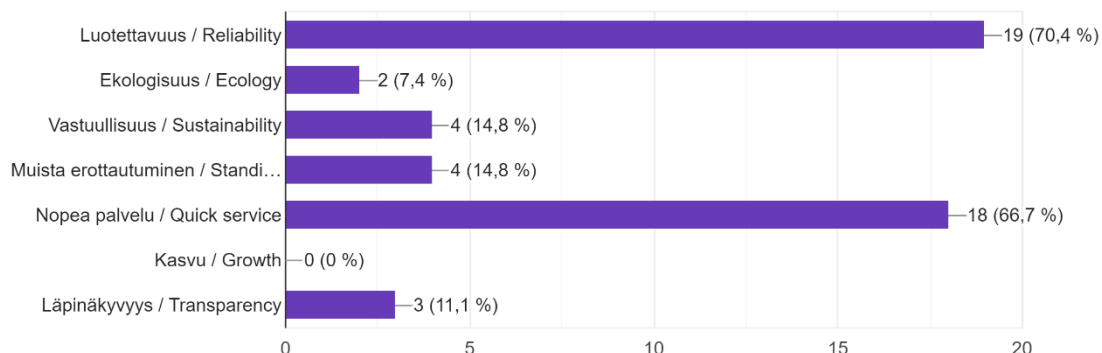


Figure 27: Which from the following values do you associate with Intercom Design? (n=27)

The average amount of words that each respondent chose was 1.85. As the figure 27 shows, the two clearly most popular answers were Reliability (chosen by 70.4%) and Quick service (chosen by 66.7%). Both Sustainability and Standing out from others were chosen by 14.8% of the respondents, Transparency was chosen by 11.1% of the respondents and Ecology was chosen by 7.4%. None of the respondents chose Growth.

In the next question the respondents were asked to rank the three most important things that affect their decision to rent products from Intercom Design. The purpose of this question was to find out, what things the respondents prioritise when they rent products for events.

Laita seuraavista tärkeysjärjestykseen kolme tärkeintä asiaa, jotka vaikuttavat vuokrauspäätökseen. From the following, rank the...important things that affect your rental decision.

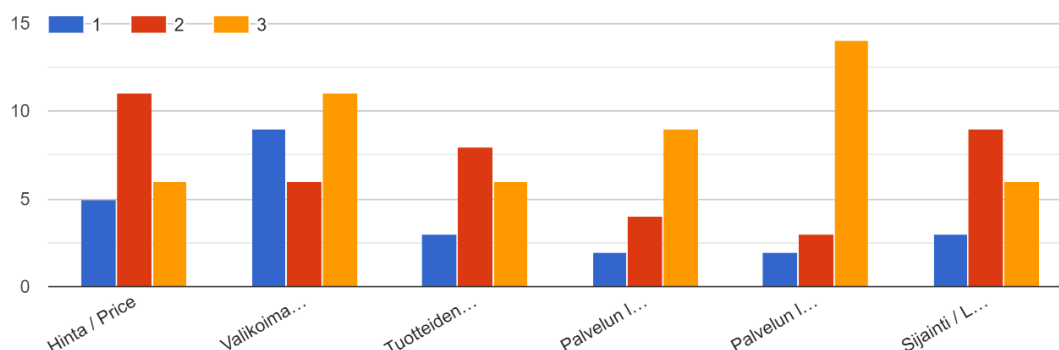


Figure 28: From the following, rank the three most important things that affect your rental decision. (n=27)

The most popular option for the most important thing was the selection. This can be seen in figure 28. The most popular option for the second most important thing was price and the most popular option for the third most important thing was the reliability of the service.

After the previous question, there were two open-ended questions, which means that the respondents were able to tell their ideas and opinions in their own words. These two open-ended questions were not obligatory. The first of the two questions was: "Please describe examples of good and bad experiences with Intercom Design" and 15 respondents answered to the question. As the respondents were asked to describe both positive and negative experiences, the positive and negative comments are gone through in this part of the thesis separately. Overall, there were in total of eight positive comments and seven negative comments and most of the respondents wrote both positive and negative comments.

"Good website, quick and friendly responses. The staff managed well when I told that the products I rented were dirty and that they shouldn't rent products like that, if they are not checked before-hand."

"Reliable service for 15 years. Fast reactions and quick service and the end result is always as promised or even better."

"We have arranged two parties during the pandemic easily with the help of Intercom Design's rental furniture."

"No bad ones in 15 years. Good overall relationship."

"Good service."

Figure 29: Examples of comments (n=15)

Examples of comments are seen figure 29. One of the examples was originally written in English and four of them are translated from Finnish. Two respondents mentioned that they have used the service for many years. Positive comments also included satisfaction that the company offers services for even the smallest events and personal thanks to a long-time employee of the company. Confidence that the service will be delivered as agreed and that problems will be resolved fairly was also mentioned in many comments.

"If the customer service would be more active and interested in the customer's needs, they could easily sell some additional products."

"The condition of the product is not as good as was expected."

"The location is challenging."

"The service could be more active."

Figure 30: Examples of comments (n=15)

Three themes emerged clearly in the negative comments: location, service and the condition of the products. Examples of comments can be seen in figure 30. All of the examples are translated from Finnish. The location of the office, where the products to be rented are picked up, was mentioned as being challenging and difficult to find. The service was sometimes mentioned as passive, and more interest in the needs and desires of the customer was requested. The condition of the products was also mentioned in negative comments. In addition, one respondent mentioned the availability and cost of the delivery service and the early closure of the office from which the products are collected.

The second question of the two open-ended question was "If Intercom Design was your company, what would you do differently?" In this question, the respondents are asked to openly tell, what they would do differently. If many of the answers are similar, clear areas for improvement can be identified. If all the answers are very different, perhaps no clear conclusions can be drawn, except that there may not be clear areas for improvement in this respect. This question gathered 13 responses in total. Examples of the comments can be seen in figure 31. All of the examples are translated from Finnish.

"I'd put a lot of emphasis in customer service on brainstorming and active suggestions; not in depth, but asking what you're looking for and making suggestions. An enthusiastic, motivated customer service person stays in your mind."

"Improving search engine visibility: your company didn't come up in a google search when I searched for decorations and decoration rental, a new colleague tipped me off to your existence."

"I would renew the website"

Figure 31: Examples of comments (n=13)

Two of the comments said that respondents did not want to say what they would do differently. Three comments highlighted the lack of clarity of the website. One respondent said that the 'offer basket' function on the website was confusing and instructions on how to use it were difficult to understand. Three respondents also mentioned search engine optimization, as it had been difficult to find information about the company and the service, for example on Google. One respondent also commented that the service should be promoted in various wedding communities. Two respondents mentioned the need to renew and extend the range and to make the products more in line with what is described on the website. Two respondents also mentioned facilitating the delivery service and clarifying its price list. In addition, comments were made on improving customer service, with the customer service employee suggesting more suitable products and participating in brainstorming, which would also make the service more personalised. One respondent also suggested moving the location closer to the ring road.

The last two questions of the online survey were again close-ended questions. The purpose of the next question was to find out, how likely would the respondents recommend Intercom Design to their friend or colleague. For this question, it wasn't possible to choose option 0.

Kuinka todennäköisesti suosittelisit Intercom Designia ystävällesi tai kollegallesi? (1: en suosittelisi, 5: suosittelisin todennäköisesti) Ho...dn't recommend, 5: I would most likely recommend

27 vastausta

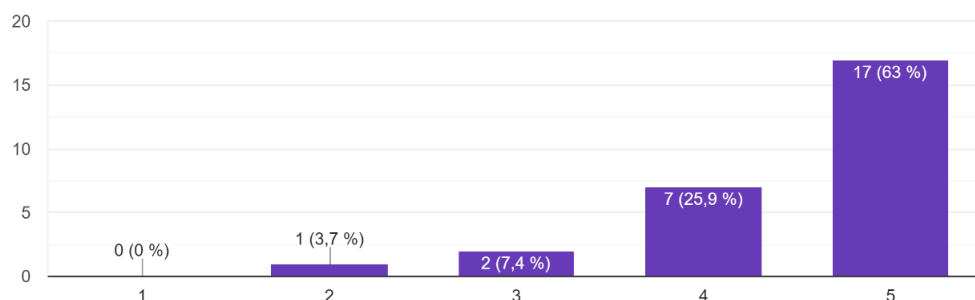


Figure 32: How likely would you be to recommend Intercom Design to a friend or colleague? (1: I wouldn't recommend, 5: I would most likely recommend) (n=27)

For this question (figure 32), 63% of the respondents chose option 5. 25.9% of the respondents chose option 4 and 7.4% chose option 3. 3.7% of the respondents chose option 2 and none of the respondents chose option 1.

For marketing Intercom Design uses their web page, social media channels Facebook and Instagram, a mailing list (not regular), and individual marketing campaigns that focus on specific groups. The purpose of the last question was to find out, which channels did the respondents use to find out information about the company. The respondents chose from the four given options their main channel to find information about Intercom Design. The given options were Facebook, Instagram, Website and Printed advertising.

Mistä kanavasta sait tietoa Intercom Designista? Which channel did you use to find out about Intercom Design?

27 vastausta

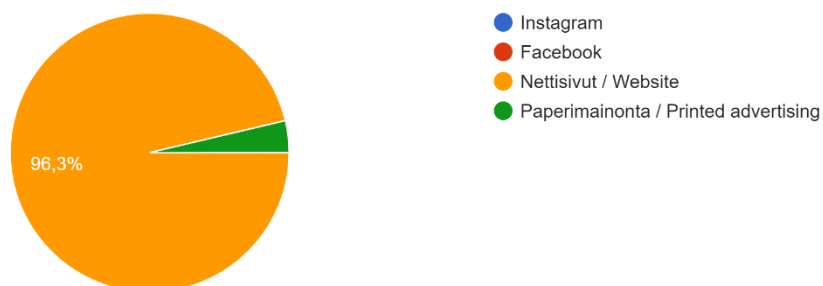


Figure 33: Which channel did you use to find out about Intercom Design? (n=27)

In the last question of the online survey (figure 33), 96.3% of the respondents answered, that the website is the channel that they mainly use for finding information about the company. 3.7% of the respondents chose printed advertising.

Summary of the online survey results

Based on the online survey results, it can be concluded that while private customers are a significant customer segment of Intercom Design, most of the customers are other companies. Also, there was a lot of variation within the number of times that the respondents have rented products from Intercom Design: 29.6% of the respondents had used Intercom Design's rental services once and almost as many, 25.9% of the respondents had rented products 11 times or more. Parties were the most popular option for the purpose of the rental, and live event was clearly the second most popular option. However, all of the options (fair, virtual event and photo or video shoot) were chosen by at least some respondents.

Based on the online survey results, it can be concluded that the overall quality-price ratio is rather good, but not perfect. The respondent who chose option 2, chose option 2 also in the next question, that was about the condition of the product. Based on this, a conclusion can be made that this person feels that the products are too expensive regarding their condition. The same respondent had used the rental service 2-5 times for a live event, which means that the experience can't be explained with one unlucky coincidence.

Since one third of the respondents think that the condition of the products is not what they expected, there might be a need for action. For improving this situation, there are two options: either improving the condition of the products or lowering the expectations of the customers. For instance, there could be a quality rate on the website, where for each product, there is a mention about the condition of the product. If this question's results are compared to the previous question's results, a conclusion can be made that while the condition might not be perfect, the price is satisfying.

The study doesn't show if the respondent experiences, that the problem is in rental conditions not being fair or not being clear or easy. Four of the five respondents of the rental conditions-question, that chose options 2 or 3, had used the rental service only once. The fifth respondent had used the rental service more than 11 times, but still chose option 3. A conclusion can be made, that the image of rental conditions not being fully clear or fair, is somewhat connected to using the service for the first time. However, of all the respondents, eight answered, that they have used the rental service once, which means that not all of the first-time users feel that the rental conditions aren't clear, easy and fair. While it's not the most critical issue, it is a topic that could be paid attention to.

In later questions, where the respondents were asked to share their experiences and opinions more freely, the website came up several times. There seems to be some confusion in using and understanding the website. A well-working, easy-to-use website is crucial for the Intercom Design's business, since - as the last question of the survey shows - 96.3% of the respondents use the website as their main channel to use to find out information about Intercom Design. While more than half of the respondents think that the appearance and behaviour of the staff is professional, this topic is something that could be improved in the company. Also, according to one third of the respondents, packaging and protecting the products could be improved. Also, conclusion can be made, that the customer service is overall very good, but there are some occasional cases, when the customer doesn't experience good customer service. For creating practical solution for this, more information about the issue would be needed.

The fast service seems to be a clear strength of Intercom Design. This is something that the company can take advantage of. The respondents also mostly think that they can be confident, that the service will be delivered as agreed/expected. Also, the reliability can be considered as a strength of Intercom Design. Another topic - the opinions and needs of the customer are noticed - is something that could be improved. This could be done by improving the communication between the staff and the customer. In the very last question, the respondents were asked to choose one channel, which they use the most to get information about Intercom Design. The clearly most popular option was the company's website.

4.3 Semi-structured interview, implementation and results

Another research method used in this thesis was semi-structured interview. Semi-structured interview is an interviewing method, in which the themes and questions are defined in advance, but the interview itself does not have to go completely according to them. In other words, some questions might be left out or asked differently, depending on the interview situation. Also, some additional questions can be added to the interview. It is important, that the interview follows the defined themes, but otherwise it's more free-form method. (Saunders 2015, 391.)

The semi-structured interview of this thesis was done to an employee of Intercom Design. The purpose of the semi-structured interview was to complement the research of the thesis and to gain a different point of view for the research. The interview questions focused on customer feedback, the responding and communicating with customers, as well as the values and practices that guide the company's actions. The semi-structured interview was implemented as a phone interview on 7th November 2022. The interview was recorded with the interviewee's permission to make it easier to review the results.

Product	What kind of feedback do you usually receive from customers? Are there any particular themes that tend to recur in the feedback?
Communication	In which channels does feedback usually come in? How often do you receive feedback from customers? How do you respond to feedback? Is there a common approach, or is everything considered on a case-by-case basis?
Actions	Do you feel that your work is guided by some of the company's values or, for example, by certain service propositions? What are these?
Environment	Do you feel that there are any specific guidelines for customer service or customer encounters? Is there some idea of how the company wants to look like to customers? If not, would you like to have ones?

Figure 34: The themes and the questions of the semi-structured interview

The semi-structured interview consisted of four themes, that were used in the online survey as well. The themes were product, communication, actions and environment. These themes are based on the Pohjola's theory: four segments of brand's design management (figure 4). Each theme included 2-4 questions, and the questions as well as the themes can be seen in figure 34.

Results of the semi-structured interview

The results of the semi-structured interview are gone through next. Since the semi-structured interview was executed as a phone interview and the interviewee could freely tell their answers, some simplification of the answers is needed for efficient analysis. The answers are also translated to English from Finnish. The results of the semi-structured interview are gone through by the categories.

Product

The purpose of the questions of the first theme - product - was to find out, what kind of feedback does the company typically receive and if there are some particular topics or themes that raise in the feedback continuously. According to the interviewee, the feedback is typically about a specific product working particularly well or conversely if there have been some issues with the product, for instance that it's not working as expected. The employee added that typically if some product has worked very well for the customer's needs, they are likely to rent the same product again.

Communication

The second theme of the semi-structured interview was communication. The purpose of the questions in this theme was to find out, how often and in which channels does the feedback come in and how the feedback is responded to. According to the interviewee, the feedback comes in typically via email and face-to-face when the customer returns the products they have rented. The feedback comes in via email especially when the service has included the whole decoration package including delivering, organization and the taking off of the decoration and the customer hasn't been met afterwards. Feedback comes in at least weekly. There are several employees who communicate with the customers and therefore also receive the feedback, which causes that the received feedback doesn't always reach all of the employees. The employees also aim to inquire customers, if they are happy with the products, which allows them to react fast if there are some issues. The responses to feedback are considered on a case-by-case basis, but the guideline is that the feedback is taken into consideration immediately. Emphasis is on fast reactions and if there are any issues, they are to be fixed or for instance a refund for the customer is considered.

Actions

The third theme of the semi-structured interview was actions. The purpose of the questions in this theme was to find out if the work and actions in the company is guided by some values or service proposition. According to the interviewee, there are no specific listed values that guide the actions, but they aim to develop the business, take appearing issues into consideration and encounter each customer individually, even though different customers' wants and needs would seem to be very similar to each other. After a busy season the company has internal meetings where the employees discuss about the season, what has gone well and what is there to improve and according to the discussion they develop the business.

Environment

The fourth and last theme of the semi-structured interview was environment. The purpose of this theme was to find out if there are some guidelines for customer service or customer encounters and if there is some core idea of what the company wants to look like to customers, in other words, is there some core message that they aim to deliver with their environment. According to the interviewee, there are no specific guidelines. They focus on responding to customers' inquiries with consideration and avoiding unnecessary rushing. The available resources of the company are considered before making offers to customers. They aim to act professionally and treat every customer with respect. The interviewee said that in their opinion, there is no need for any specific guidelines, because the inquiries of the customers are either possible to implement or not.

Summary of the semi-structured interview results

As a summary of the semi-structured interview, there are conclusions that can be made. The summaries are gone through theme by theme. In the product theme, it can be summarized that the feedback that the company receives, is typically either positive feedback of the products working particularly well or negative feedback of some issues with the product. The interviewee also mentioned that there have been situations, where the product has not worked as the customer has expected and this has been noticed only when the customer is already about to use the product. A conclusion can be made there has been some miscommunication about the products' features in the product rental. In the communication theme a summary is that firstly, the feedback comes in usually when the customers return the products they have rented and via email, if the employees have not met the customer in presence when the products are returned. Feedback comes in at least weekly, but the employees are not aware of all of the feedback, because there are several employees who receive the feedback and it's not always commonly discussed. This situation could be improved by collecting all of the feedback to one place, so that every employee can be informed about the feedback. While all of the feedback is responded to on a case-by-case basis, a general guideline is that the reaction to the feedback should be fast.

In the actions theme a summary can be made that even though the company has not listed any specific values neither publicly nor inside the company, there are some aspects that they emphasize on. These aspects are; to develop their business; treat each customer individually; take issues into consideration. According to the online survey, fast and easy contacting was something that the respondents were really satisfied with, so fast reactions and easy contacting could also be one considered as one of their values. They also seem to actively review their own actions and look for aspects that could be improved. From the fourth and last theme - environment - a summary can be made that there is no conscious decision about what images to evoke in customers, except for behaving professionally and treating customers with respect. They respond to customers' needs and wants with the resources that they currently have.

4.4 Net scouting, implementation and results

Net scouting is a method where information is searched from the internet. The purpose of net scouting is to collect data on different ways to resolve issues, statistics and other useful information. An important thing in net scouting is to evaluate the reliability of the sources and the point of view of the sources, to ensure that the collected data is relevant and useful for the intended use. (Moritz 2005, 194.)

In this thesis, the net scouting was done to four companies' websites. The net scouting was implemented on November 10-11, 2022. The companies for the net scouting were found by

searching from the internet for different event companies, that operate in the Helsinki metropolitan area. The author aimed to find companies, whose businesses are similar to Intercom Design's business. Two of the companies have event furniture rental as their main business area and two of the companies have event production as their main business area. The key points of what were observed in net scouting were based on the theory chapter 3.5 which consisted of theory on brand's website, and the results of previous research methods, online survey and semi-structured interview. In the net scouting, following features of websites and other information available on the internet was paid attention to: product and service proposition of the company, website's visual appearance and features, available information, functionality of the website, references or other showcase of expertise and additional services.

Results of net scouting

The data of the net scouting was collected to a table (table 1), to make the analysis of the findings easier.

	Company C1	Company C2	Company C3	Company C4
Product	Rental of furniture, stage solutions, fencing and other event products especially for large events	Rental of stages, event furniture, lights and tents, also for small events	Production of live, virtual and hybrid events, also a full-service including logistics, marketing etc. available	Production of live, virtual and hybrid events, specialized in corporate events
Service proposition	"We are one of the event industry's oldest and biggest businesses in Finland"	"Our aim is to make high-quality event technology available to consumers and enable the use of rental products even for smaller events."	"We design and execute concepts, that impress with their authenticity, are visually stunning and leave a lasting impression."	"We are a bold and agile event agency specialising in corporate events, with a passion for event production and a mission to make every event a growth story."
Website's visual appearance	Looks old-fashioned, not very modern	Clear and simple, lot of text, not many pictures	Creative, lot of visual effects, videos of productions. Clear logo and theme	Clear theme (dark and purple), logo appears several times
Website features	Very clear and easy to use, lot of information, "shopping basket" for rental products	Pop up contact bar on the right side, not too easy to spot	Inspiration-page, chat bot, contact-side bar on the left side	Chat bot
Information	Everything is clearly explained, team is introduced	Contact info and opening hours on the upper bar, can be spotted immediately	Contact info well available, team presented	Titles for pages are illogical, team introduced

Website functionality	Easy to use, very small font, lot of info but also even too much text	Simple, easy to navigate, slightly unclear titles	Good functionality, lot of info available but still easy and quick to use	Slightly incoherent functions, navigation not very logical
Portfolio / References	Gallery with a lot of pictures of previous works	No references or info about previous works available	A lot of pictures, videos and texts of their productions	References by categories
Additional services	Event photography, personalisation of rental products, delivery	Delivery, “Other professional services” which leads to another company’s website	Podcast, studio for virtual and hybrid events, blog	Networking service “Meeting Manager”
Other findings	Sales page for products that are removed from the rental selection		Sustainability-tab	

Table 1: Net scouting results

All of the companies had a clear service proposition on their website, some of them had even several of those. They describe their brand identity, for instance “bold and agile” or “one of the biggest and oldest on the field”. They also describe their aims, for instance making every event a growth story and to make high-quality event technology available for everyone. All of the companies mention that they are specialized on something, for instance small events, corporate events, big scale events or event production that covers every aspect of the production. What comes to the websites and their visual appearance, there’s variation. Company C1 has a website, that is full of detailed information, but the visual appearance is old-fashioned. The text has also a small font, which is not too easy to read. Company C2 has visually clear website, but no pictures. Company C3’s website is visually impressive, consisting of videos, visual effects and a lot of pictures. Company C4 has a website with dark and purple visual theme and the logo appears many times and is creatively combined to the functions of the website.

The website features also differ within the companies. Company C1 and C2 are event furniture and technology rental companies. C1 has a “shopping basket” on their website, which allows the customer to add products to the basket and send the order to the company. However, this is not a confirmed order, but an order to be confirmed by the company. This is clearly explained on the website and seems like a system that works well. Another company, C2, that also rents products, doesn’t have this shopping basket function, but instead all of the orders or inquiries are to be done by contacting the company. Company C1 has also detailed information about all the products. All of the companies had the contact information available on the front page and companies C2 and C3 had also pop-up bars for contact information on the sides of the page. However, on company C2’s contact bar was on the right side, which

made it harder to notice. Three of the companies also had their team presented on the website, which creates an image of transparency.

Website's functionality was also one topic of the net scouting. Company C1's website was simple and easy to use, the front page contained a link to different product categories, contact information, delivery options and other information. However, the font was small, and the pages contained a lot of text, so to find needed information, the customer has to go through a lot of text. Company C2's website was simple and easy to navigate, but the titles of different pages didn't fully correspond with the content of the pages. Company C3 had a well-functioning website, and while it contained a lot of texts, pictures and videos, it was still easy to follow. Companies C1, C3 and C4 had references or descriptions of their previous works on their websites. Company C1 had a mention that they have worked for certain events as well as a gallery of pictures of their previous works. Companies C3 and C4 had own pages titled for references. Having a portfolio or references presented on the website is a showcase of company's expertise. Company C2 had no references on their website.

All of the companies offered also some additional services. Company C1 offered a customization for their rental products and event photography. Company C2 had a link on their website for other event services, which led to another company's website. This company has an event venue. Company C3 had a studio for virtual and hybrid events, a blog and a podcast about event industry. Company C4 had a networking service called Meeting Manager, which is a coaching service for networking. Of all the companies, C3 was the only company that had defined something about their corporate responsibility; they had a page titled "Sustainability" and it consisted of information on their actions regarding sustainability.

5 Suggestions for improving the brand image

In this part of the thesis, the theory and the results of the three different research methods are combined for creating brand image improvement suggestions for the commissioner, Intercom Design. The purpose of this chapter is to give clear and practical suggestions of acts that can improve the brand image of the company. The suggestions are gone through topic by topic. The topics of improvement were divided into categories. First the improvement suggestions are discussed based on Pohjola's (2019) segments of brand's visual design management, that can be seen on page 14 of this thesis. In this model, the brand is divided into four segments which are product, environment, actions and communication. The same model was used in the structuration of the online survey and the semi-structured interview. Visualization of the model can be seen in figure 35.

Product

Results of the online survey show, that most of the respondents that felt that the rental conditions are not clear or easy, had rented products from Intercom Design only once. Based on this it can be concluded that either the ones who find the conditions unclear won't use the rental services again, or that the rental conditions become more clear when the customer uses the services more. Either way, this is a topic that could be improved by making the rental conditions more clear and easier to find. A solution for this could be, that the rental conditions page would be inserted somehow on the front page of the company's website, so that the customer would detect them faster. This is also related to another topic within the product category, that came up in the research, which is the condition of the products. The results of the online survey showed that one third of the respondents think that the condition of the products doesn't fully correspond with what they have expected. In the semi-structured interview, it came to light that a typical topic of feedback from customers is that the product hasn't worked as they have expected. As a solution for this, there could be more clear descriptions on the websites about the products. One of the companies of the net scouting, that also rent products for events, had detailed information about each product on their website and Intercom Design could do the same to avoid misunderstandings. This company had also a mention, if there are some specific details that the customer needs to know about the use of the product, for instance about the packaging of the product. By mentioning details like this, as well as describing the products more precisely, misunderstandings about the product's condition could be avoided.

Communication

Intercom Design's clear strength is well working communication and reachability, as most of the respondents of the online survey found communication with the company clear and easy. Also contacting was easy, according to the online survey. According to the semi-structured interview, the company aims to react quickly but professionally to inquiries, which could be also seen in the results of the online survey. However, there is room for improvement as well. In the online survey results, it came up that the respondents tend to find the website slightly unclear and difficult to understand. For instance, the shopping basket tool on the website is in some parts called "offer basket" and later "shopping basket." This might raise confusion and could be fixed to be clearer. The website could also include more regular updates about previous works and upcoming seasons and themes. This could help keeping customers informed and a regularly updated website would also work as a showcase of what Intercom Design does.



Figure 35: Suggestions for improving the brand image in segments

Environment

In the online survey results, it came up that the physical location of Intercom Design's office where the products are picked up from, is hard to find for some customers. As a solution for this, some inspiration can be adopted from the results of the net scouting. One of the companies, that were observed in the net scouting, had very clear instructions about their location on their website. The instructions also included a picture of their office. Intercom Design could add precise details about their location to their website, that would also include a picture. In addition, the same location directions could be even added to the Instagram profile of the company, as a pinned post to the profile. This way the Instagram post would always be the first post of the Instagram profile. Another topic that came up in the results of the online survey, was difficulties to discover Intercom Design from the internet. This could be improved by improving the search engine optimization (SEO).

The results of the online survey showed that one third of the respondents didn't fully agree, that the packaging of protecting of the products is well done. As a solution for this, it should be evaluated first, what is the problem with packaging and protecting. If the rental products are packaged to boxes, are the boxes good quality and have a similar look? Are all products that customers rent, packaged? Since in events there are typically a lot of furniture and decoration, it is important that different companies' products won't be mixed or lost. To avoid this, Intercom Design could have their signature packaging materials and boxes, that would include their logo with big letters. The packaging material and boxes should also be high quality. In addition, the packages could have a list of the ordered products attached, as well as

other details of the order, such as date, location and the information or name of the contact person. In event productions, there are typically a lot of people from different organizations and the person, who orders the product, the person who picks up the product and the person who uses the product can all be different people. By putting recognizable tags or logos to each and every product, and packaging and protecting them both professionally and identifiable materials, the confusion can be avoided.

Actions

According to the results of the online survey, 11.1% of the respondents didn't fully agree that the opinions and needs of the customer are noticed. In the semi-structured interview, it came up that this is something that the company already pays attention to, which means that the direction is good. In the online survey it also came up that 25.9% of the respondents didn't fully agree that the end result was carefully executed. The online survey doesn't show the reasons for this. However, a deep understanding of the customer's needs and wants is important for ensuring a successful customer experience. Also, according to the online survey, total of 25.9% of the respondents didn't fully agree that the Intercom Design was memorable as a company. As discussed on page 14 of this thesis, it is important for the brand to stay in customer's minds. This can be reached with simple and visual attributes in all communication and other segments of the brand. In practise, this would mean for instance creating a slogan, that includes the core values and service proposition, attaching the company's logo to everything that can be connected to the company (such as products, cars, packaging, etc.) By standing out from others, the brand stays in customers minds and a stronger brand image can be reached.

Service proposition

The service proposition that Intercom Design currently has on their website is "the most versatile furniture, decoration and prop selection of the country". This could be defined and made more visible on different channels: website, social media and other channels of communication, such as email. The service proposition could also include a proposition not only about the products and the selection, but about the service as well. Intercom has several clear strengths, that could be included in the service proposition, for instance over 30 years of experience on the field, quick service, reliability and eco-friendliness. Another topic of the service proposition category is references. As appeared in the net scouting, three of the four companies had references and pictures of their previous works on their websites. This gives a direct and clear picture of what the company has done previously. Intercom Design could also add a gallery of previous works on their website. From the gallery also a new customer can see what the company does and how. Customers can also use the gallery for inspiration and ideas for new orders.

Steps for developing the brand

For this part of the suggestions for improving a brand image, a model for brand development by Sandbacka (2010) is used. The theory of the model is discussed on page 19 of this thesis. In the model (figure 36), the brand development starts by defining values for the brand. As stated before, Intercom Design has not defined any company values. However, some values can still be recognized. As was discussed in the results of the semi-structured interview, the company aims to respond to customers' inquiries quickly yet professionally. In the semi-structured interview, it also came up that the company aims to find points of development, which also can be seen as a value. In the online survey, for the question "Which from the following values do you associate with Intercom Design?" the two most popular options were reliability and quick service. This means that the customers already associate these values with the company. As a summary, company values for Intercom Design could be professional service, reliability, quick service and continuous learning and developing. Defining values would message the customers that the company is passionate about these things and that their business actions are guided by these values. Naturally, the company should also do their business according to these values. Another value could be eco-friendliness. Renting furniture and decoration for events instead of buying all of it and throwing it away afterwards is a sustainable option and Intercom Design could use this fact in their marketing. However, if eco-friendliness is included in the company values, it should be reflected in everything the company does.

Intercom Design could embrace their brand identity and take advantage of the brand image they already have: versatile selection, quick service, reliability and eco-friendly product. One of the online survey's questions were "If Intercom Design was a person, which of the following would describe their personality?", which was based on Aaker's (1997) brand personality dimensions (page 11). The most popular option was "Sincere: down-to-earth, honest and wholesome." Since this is the brand personality type that the customers already associate with Intercom Design, it's something that the company can embrace.

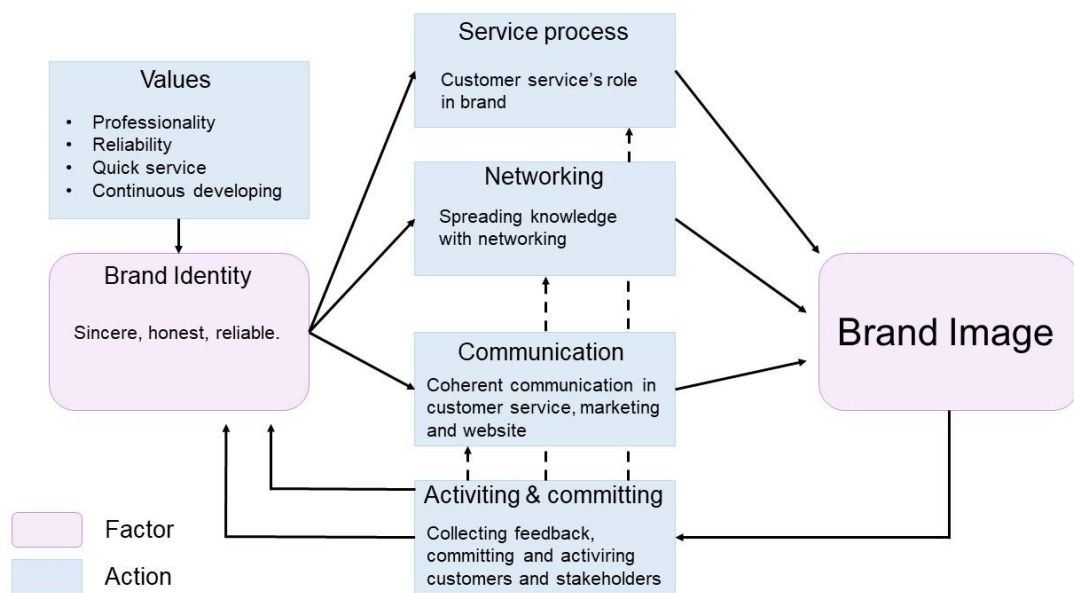


Figure 36: Steps for branding

The values and the brand identity guide the actions of the company: service, networking and communication. The customer service should be implemented corresponding with the brand values and brand identity, since especially in a small company, the customer service has a crucial role in creating a desired brand image. In practise, this means implementing customer service, that is professional - this requires well trained employees - reliable, quick and includes regular self-evaluation and developing. Networking means being active on the field and deepen existing and build new relationships in the sector. As the customer service, also communication should be implemented corresponding with the brand values and brand identity. Communication covers all types of communication that the company does, such as customer service face-to-face, in the phone, in emails, website, social media channels and marketing. When these actions are implemented carefully according to the defined brand values and brand identity, the brand image starts to form in customers' minds. Information about the state of customers' brand images about Intercom Design can be collected by collecting feedback regularly and even with customer satisfaction surveys. According to the results of feedback, the other parts and steps of the brand development process can be improved or changed.

6 Conclusion

In today's business world, standing out from others has become more and more significant. If a customer is not happy with their product or service, it's easier than ever to move to the next one. Also, markets have moved from being product-centric to being customer-centric. This means that instead of customers fighting over services or products, the companies are fighting over customers. It's important to commit customers, convince them about your product being the best option for them and to build relationships with the customers to ensure that they came back again. Customers create images and associations about the company based on their experiences related to the company and this phenomenon is called the brand image. Brand image is something that forms inside the customers' heads, which means that the company is not able to decide, what kind of brand image they have, but instead they can affect the experiences the customers get and therefore affect the formation of certain kind of images.

The purpose of this thesis was to create a plan for improving the brand image of the commissioner, a Helsinki-based event company Intercom Design. The theoretical framework of this thesis focused on the definition and the role of a brand, brand image, identity and personality, visual image of the brand and communication as well as the process of developing and maintaining a brand. With the three research methods used in this thesis - online survey, semi-structured interview and net scouting - the purpose was to create an overview of the current stage of what images and association the customers have of the company and based on those and the theory, create a realistic plan that consists of practical suggestions for improving the brand image. The online survey was the first research method to be executed. The link to the online survey was sent to 254 people, who had used Intercom Design's event product rental services in the past year. The online survey was open for respondents for two weeks and it gathered 27 responses. The data from the online survey were collected and analysed. After that, a semi-structured interview was implemented to an employee of Intercom Design. The purpose of the semi-structured interview was to complete the research part and gather data of the same topics that were discussed in the online survey, but from a different point of view. The last research method was net scouting. Net scouting was implemented by gathering data from the internet of four Helsinki-based event companies that were pre-determined. The purpose of the net scouting was to gather information of what other companies, that operate on the same field do.

From the results of the online survey, it can be summarized that generally the customers of Intercom Design associate fast and good service, reliability, easy communication and good selection of products. Some topics for improvement could be retrieved from the results as well, such as the functionality of the website, the price-quality ratio compared to the condition of the products and the packaging and protecting of the products. As a summary of the semi-

structured interview, it can be stated that the company has not defined any specific company values, but there are things that they prioritize in the service, such as fast reactions and professionalism. Also, misunderstandings about the performance of products came up in the semi-structured interview. Net scouting was implemented by searching information from the internet about four different companies, that operate on the event field. Key findings of the net scouting were related to the functionality and the features of the company's website, how much information is available and how it's displayed, available portfolio or references and additional services.

The improvement suggestions include practical and ready-to-use ideas for improving the brand image of the commissioner. The improvement suggestions focus on embracing the brand identity and taking advantage of the positive association of the brand that customers already have, such as fast and good service, reliability and wide selection, emphasizing the long experience and expertise, that the company has on the field, deepen the understanding of customers' wants and needs with communication methods, that are coherent with the brand identity, define the company values and implement the customer service according to them and improving the memorability of the brand by visually integrating the brand into all aspects of the company's business. The purpose of this thesis was to deliver a plan for improving a brand image of Intercom Design. This thesis provides the commissioner with a realistic and reliable picture of the current state of brand images, as well as realistic and ready-to-use suggestions for the improvement of the brand image. The commissioner's strength in this situation is especially the fact that the brand image does not need to be built from scratch, but instead the company can strengthen the existing brand characteristics and images. In addition, others than the commissioner can also benefit from the information gathered in this thesis on developing and maintaining a small company's brand and brand images.

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Appendix 1: Online survey

Kysely Intercom Designin brändimielikuvista / Survey on Intercom Design's brand images

Kysely on suunnattu Intercom Designin kaluste- ja somistevuokrauspalvelua käyttäneille asiakkaille. Kyselyn tarkoituksena on kartoittaa vastaajien mielikuvia Intercom Designin brändiin liittyen. Kyselyssä on neljä osiota. Ensimmäisessä osiossa kartoitetaan vastaajan tausta ja suhde yritykseen. Toisessa osiossa vastaaja arvioi väitteitä asteikolla 1-5. Kolmannessa osiossa kartoitetaan vastaajan mielikuvia yrityksestä erilaisten kysymysten ja väitteiden avulla ja neljännessä osiossa vastaaja saa vapaammin kertoa kokemuksistaan ja ajatuksistaan liittyen Intercom Designiin. Kyselyyn vastaaminen vie n. 5-10 minuuttia. Lisätietoa kyselystä ja opinnäytetyöstä saa Saana Darthilta (saana.darth@student.laurea.fi).

The survey is directed at customers who have used Intercom Design's furniture and decoration rental service. The purpose of the survey is to gauge respondents' perceptions of the Intercom Design brand. The survey consists of four sections. The first section identifies the respondent's background and relationship with the company. In the second section, respondents rate the statements on a scale of 1 to 5. In the third section, the respondent's perceptions of the company are explored through a series of questions and statements and in the fourth section, the respondent is asked to share more freely their experiences and thoughts about Intercom Design. The questionnaire takes approximately 5-10 minutes to complete. For more information about the study and the questionnaire, please contact Saana Darth (saana.darth@student.laurea.fi).

Oletko vuokrannut Intercom Designilta tuotteita yksityishenkilönä vai yrityksen käyttöön? *

Have you rented products from Intercom Design for personal or business use?

☐ Yksityishenkilönä / Personal use

☐ Yrityksen käyttöön / Business use

Kuinka monta kertaa olet vuokrannut tuotteita Intercom Designilta? *

How many times have you rented products from Intercom Design?

☐ 1

☐ 2-5

☐ 6-10

☐ 11 tai enemmän / 11 or more

Tuotteiden pakkaus ja suojaus on hyvin tehty. *

The products are well packaged and protected.

0 1 2 3 4 5

Saan hyvää asiakaspalvelua. *

The customer service is good.

0 1 2 3 4 5

Palvelu on nopeaa. *

The service is fast.

0 1 2 3 4 5

Voin luottaa siihen, että palvelu toteutuu sovitulla/odotetulla tavalla. *

I can be confident that the service will be delivered as agreed/expected.

0 1 2 3 4 5

○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

Asiakkaan mielipiteet ja tarpeet huomioidaan. *

The opinions and needs of the customer are noticed.

0 1 2 3 4 5

○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

Lopputulos on siisti ja huolellisesti toteutettu. *

The end result is immaculate and carefully executed.

0	1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Intercom Design jäi yrityksenä mieleeni. *

Intercom Design was memorable as a company.

0	1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Valitse seuraavista **neljä** mielestäsi parhaiten Intercom Designia kuvaavaa sanaa: *

*Please choose **four** words from the following that describe Intercom Design most accurately in your opinion:*

- ☐ Laadukas / High-quality
- ☐ Luotettava / Reliable
- ☐ Helppo / Easy
- ☐ Monipuolinen / Versatile
- ☐ Suppea / Narrow
- ☐ Kallis / Expensive
- ☐ Hyvä asiakaspalvelu / Good customer service

- ☐ Helposti saavutettava / Easily accessible
- ☐ Moderni / Modern
- ☐ Vanhanaikainen / Old-fashioned
- ☐ Kilpailukykyinen / Competitive
- ☐ Epäsiisti / Untidy
- ☐ Hyväkuntoinen / Good condition
- ☐ Huolimaton / Sloppy
- ☐ Ekologinen / Ecologic

Jos Intercom Design olisi henkilö, mikä seuraavista kuvaisi hänen persoonaansa parhaiten? *

If Intercom Design was a person, which of the following would describe their personality?

- ☐ Vilpitön: jalat maassa, rehellinen, tervehenkinen ja pirteä / Sincere: down-to-earth, honest wholesome an...
- ☐ Jännittävä: rohkea, eloisa, ajantasainen ja mielikuvituksellinen / Exciting: daring, spirited, up-to-date and i...
- ☐ Pätevä: luotettava, fiksu ja menestyvä / Competence: reliable, intelligent and successful
- ☐ Sivistynyt: viehättävä, hienostunut ja korkealaatuinen / Sophisticated: charming, upper-class and high-qu...
- ☐ Karkea: maskuliininen, villi ja seikkailunhaluinen / Rugged: masculine, wild and adventurous

Mitä seuraavista arvoista liität Intercom Designiin? *

Which from the following values do you associate with Intercom Design?

- ☐ Luotettavuus / Reliability
- ☐ Ekologisuus / Ecology
- ☐ Vastuullisuus / Sustainability
- ☐ Muista erottautuminen / Standing out from others
- ☐ Nopea palvelu / Quick service
- ☐ Kasvu / Growth
- ☐ Läpinäkyvyys / Transparency

Laita seuraavista tärkeysjärjestykseen kolme tärkeintä asiaa, jotka vaikuttavat vuokrauspäätökseen.

From the following, rank the three most important things that affect your rental decision.

	1	2	3
Hinta / Price	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Valikoima / Selection	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Tuotteiden laatu / Qualit...	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Palvelun laatu / Quality ...	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Palvelun luotettavuus / ...	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sijainti / Location	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Kuville esimerkkejä hyvistä ja huonoista kokemuksista liittyen Intercom Designiin.

Please describe examples of good and bad experiences with Intercom Design.

Pitkä vastausteksti

Jos Intercom Design olisi sinun yrityksesi, mitä tekisit toisin?

If Intercom Design was your company, what would you do differently?

Pitkä vastausteksti

Kuinka todennäköisesti suosittelet Intercom Designia ystävällesi tai kollegallesi? (1: en suosittele, 5: suositteleisin todennäköisesti)

How likely would you be to recommend Intercom Design to a friend or colleague? (1: I wouldn't recommend, 5: I would most likely recommend)

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Mistä kanavasta sait tietoa Intercom Designista? *

Which channel did you use to find out about Intercom Design?

- ☐ Instagram
- ☐ Facebook
- ☐ Nettisivut / Website
- ☐ Paperimainonta / Printed advertising

Appendix 2: Companies of the net scouting

C1 Cosa

C2 Tapahtumavuokraamo

C3 Sisters Inc

C4 ME Studio