MARKETING PLAN FOR A SCUBA DIVING COMPANY

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this bachelor's thesis was to build up a marketing plan for Mar y Más Dive Centre, a scuba diving centre offering PADI certified diving instruction on the island of Fuerteventura, Spain. Being a small partnership business, the company had never created a structured marketing plan. The objectives were set by using first-hand information provided by the representatives of the company, and information from self-conducted research on the scuba diving industry – both online and in the research destination. The main purposes of the marketing plan were to increase the opportunities to gain visibility, to improve the company's positioning in the market, and to provide the company with fresh ideas for its future business operations.

The author studied marketing and its different tools broadly to find out the most effective solutions based on the company's current situation. The selected marketing tools have been considered to be suitable for a small company's use in order to increase its sales and to develop its marketing actions. The final marketing plan can be found in the appendix of this thesis to respect the privacy of Mar y Más Dive Centre.

All of the actions described in the marketing plan have been planned based on the current situation and are subject to change due to varying marketing environment and conditions. It has been left for the decision makers of the company to choose which of the proposed marketing actions the company will use to improve its marketing in the future.

CONTENTS

1   INTRODUCTION

The aim of this bachelor's thesis was to build up a marketing plan for Mar y Más Dive Centre, a scuba diving centre offering PADI (Professional Association of Diving Instructors) certifications for new divers and guided dive trips for already certified divers. The centre is located in Corralejo, Fuerteventura. It is a small partnership business that has been operating since June 2011, slowly raising awareness among its target segments.

Mar y Más Dive Centre had never created a structured marketing plan but as it operates in the market that is continuously increasing in popularity around the world, the company realised that there is a need to find ways to increase its visibility and to improve its positioning in the market. The most suitable method for drawing up a marketing plan was considered to be found out by analysing the appropriate tools and the current market situation of the company, and hence to find solutions to improve its marketing actions.

The objective of the author was to create a practical marketing plan from which the company could benefit and find fresh ideas for its future operations. The marketing plan aims to give a realistic approach into improving the current situation of the company and to use the plan as an advantage for its future. It has been left for the representatives of the company to decide which of the proposed marketing actions they may be willing to use.

2   THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF MARKETING

2.1   Marketing

"Marketing is the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large." (American Marketing Association AMA 2014)

The concept of marketing refers to managerial business functions of an organisation that are concentrated on customer relationships. Marketing is about managing exchange processes between organisations and customers in order to create value for customers and build customer relationships. Briefly, marketing could be explained as *managing profitable customer relationships*. (Kotler & Keller & Brady & Goodman & Hansen 2012, 7-13.) Jay Conrad Levinson, the author of Guerilla Marketing (2007), notes that marketing, which composes of a complex set of tasks and actions, is not an event but a process with a beginning and a middle but never an end (Kotler & Armstrong & Wong & Saunders 2008, 6).

Marketing can be understood in the sense of satisfying customer needs (Kotler and Armstrong 2008, 29). The aim of marketing is not only to sell, but to know and understand the needs and wants of the customer to be able to produce a product or service that may then sell itself. According to a management guru Peter Drucker, *"The aim of marketing is to make selling unnecessary."* (Kotler et al. 2008, 6-8; Kotler et al. 2012, 7-10.)

According to Philip Kotler, who is widely considered as the father of modern marketing, marketing has been there since the first human beings. He utilises the first Bible story as an example. Eve gives the apple to Adam but it was not Eve who was the first marketer. On the contrary, it was the snake that first convinced Eve to market the apple to Adam. (Kotler Marketing Group 2001-2012.) Kotler published his first edition of Marketing Management in 1967. Every three years he has revised the book to bring in the latest new concepts and ideas. (CKGSB Knowledge 2013.)

The Evolution of Marketing according to Kotler (2013):

1950s – Post-war

- The Marketing Mix
- Product Life Cycle
- Brand Image
- Market Segmentation
- The Marketing Concept
- The Marketing Audit

1960s – Soaring

- The Four Ps
- Marketing Myopia
- Lifestyle Marketing
- The Broadened Concept of Marketing

1970s – Turbulent

- Targeting
- Positioning
- Strategic Marketing
- Service Marketing
- Social Marketing
- Societal Marketing
- Macro-Marketing

1980s – Uncertain

- Marketing Warfare
- Global Marketing
- Local Marketing
- Mega Marketing
- Direct Marketing
- Customer Relationship Marketing
- Internal Marketing

1990s – One –to - one

- Emotional Marketing
- Experiential Marketing
- Internet and e –Business Marketing
- Sponsorship Marketing
- Marketing Ethics

2000s – Financially–driven

- ROI Marketing
- Brand Equity Marketing
- Customer Equity Marketing
- Social Responsibility Marketing
- Consumer Empowerment
- Social Media Marketing
- Tribalism
- Authenticity Marketing
- Co–creation Marketing

Marketing entities and concepts

Marketing managers can market seven entities; services, products, events, experiences, persons, places, and ideas (Kotler et al. 2012, 10-12). In addition, marketing may consist of five core concepts within customer and marketplace relations (Kotler et al. 2008, 8-12):

- *Needs, wants and demands*

  Physical, social, or individual needs create a basic part of a human being. Wants, on the other hand, are formed by these basic needs but shaped by culture and individual personality. Wants convert into demands when backed up by buying power – the ability to pay for products and services. Consumers' willingness and ability to purchase a product or a service by demanding it adds up to the most value and satisfaction.

- *Market offerings* (products, services and experiences)

  Market offerings are a combination of products, services, information or experiences that are offered to a market to satisfy customers' needs or wants by fulfilling them. Market offerings can include physical products but also essentially intangible services that do not result in an ownership. Entities, such as persons, places, organisations, information, and ideas, are also part of market offerings.

- *Customer value and customer satisfaction*

  Customer value and customer satisfaction refer to previous expectations of the product's value and the extent to which the satisfaction level is reached after the product's performance. The key is balancing customer expectations and company performances in order to satisfy customers' needs, wants and demands.

- *Exchanges and relationships*

  The buyers of a certain need or want can be satisfied through exchange relationships that finally derive into marketing. Exchange is the core concept of marketing – it is an act of obtaining a desired object by offering something in return.

- *Markets*

    Market defines the set of all actual and potential buyers of a market offering. These buyers share a particular need or want.

2.2 Services marketing

The concept of service can be described as an essentially intangible activity or benefit that is offered from one party to another and does not result to an ownership of anything (Kotler et al. 2008, 597). Services are defined as economic activities that, in exchange for the buyers' money, time, and effort, are expected to obtain value from access to goods, labour, professional skills, facilities, networks, and systems (Lovelock & Wirtz 2007, 15).

Service characteristics

In order to design services marketing programmes, a company may consider four special service characteristics. These widely recognized core characteristics consist of intangibility, inseparability, variability and perishability, and are summarized in figure 1. (Gilmore 2003, 10-11; Kotler et al. 2008, 599-604; Kotler & Armstrong 2010, 268-270.)
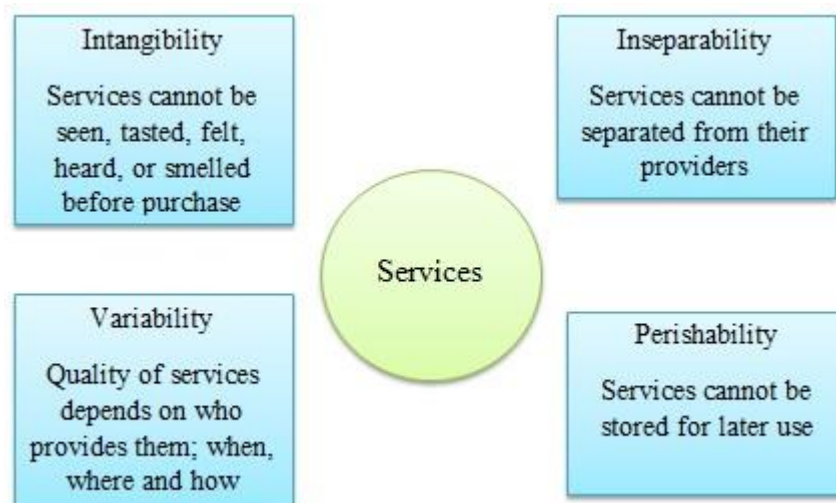

FIGURE 1. Four service characteristics (Kotler et al. 2008, 599)

- *Intangibility*

Service intangibility refers to the fact that services are not readily displayed; they cannot be seen, tasted, felt, heard, or smelled before the purchase (Kotler et al. 2008, 599). For example, as indicated by Kotler and Armstrong (2010, 269), airline passengers have only a ticket and a promise of their luggage to arrive at the destination prior to the actual use of the service. This intangibility may cause uncertainty in buyers due to lack of tangible characteristics. To reduce the uncertainty and to present tangible evidence of the service, evidence management is being used. Its aim is to add tangible cues suggesting high quality to intangible offers in order to send the right signals to potential buyers. (Kotler et al. 2008, 599-600.)

- *Inseparability*

To differentiate physical goods from services, physical goods are produced, stored, sold, and consumed in this order, whereas services are first sold, and then produced and consumed at the same time at the same place. Inseparability means that services, whether people or machines, cannot be separated from their providers. Customers, on the other hand, actively participate in co-producing the service products. (Kotler et al. 2008, 601.)

- *Variability*

Variability in services means that the quality of services depends on who provides them, as well as when, where and how they are provided. As such, it is difficult to control service quality. As an example, within a single hotel there might be various types of customer encounters, depending on the employee's personality or the frame of mind at the moment. (Kotler et al. 2008, 601-602; Kotler & Armstrong 2010, 269.)

Quality control can be managed by four steps (Kotler et al. 2008, 602-603):
1. Investing in recruiting right employees and providing excellent training.
2. Motivating the staff by employee incentives that reward quality.
3. Increasing visibility and accountability of service employees to customers.
4. Increasing consistency of employee performance by substituting equipment and by standardizing service-performance process in the organisation.

- *Perishability*

According to Gilmore (2003, 11), perishability can be explained as following: *"Given the intangible nature of services, they cannot be inventoried, stored, warehoused, or re-used."* When demand and supply are off-balance, perishability might be a problem. Because of this, firms often design special strategies for producing a better match between them. (Kotler & Armstrong 2010, 270.) These strategies may include, for instance, differential pricing, complementary services, part-time employees, and peak-time efficiency (Kotler et al. 2008, 603).

2.3 Marketing mix

Marketing mix can be explained as "*a set of controllable tactical marketing tools that the firm blends to produce the response it wants in the target market*" (Kotler 2008, 49). Marketing mix tools are used to create, communicate and deliver value to the customer.

The most popular way to present the marketing mix traditionally consists of four variables, referred to as the 'four Ps' (Kotler et al. 2008, 49-51; Kotler et al. 2012, 973):

- Product (service) – anything tangible or intangible that may satisfy a want or need
- Price – value set for a product or service, amount of money charged
- Promotion – communication techniques and activities to reach public awareness
- Place (distribution) – making the product or service available through company activities

According to Kotler et al. and Holloway the four Ps include the following factors (Kotler et al. 2008, 49-51; Holloway 2004, 52-53):

Products (variety, quality, design, features, brand name, packaging, services, warranties) are the goods and services that are offered to the target market.

Price (list price, discounts, allowances, payment period, credit terms) is the amount of money customers pay to purchase the product or service. In tourism business, prices can often be variable and negotiable, as the consumer is seeking to obtain the best value on the market between a range of competitive products.

Promotion (advertising, sales promotion, personal selling, publicity) refers to the set of activities used to deliver the product or service to the customer's awareness and reach.

Place (channels, coverage, assortments, locations, inventory, transport) indicates the company activities that make the product available to customers.

Services are typically produced and consumed simultaneously, and customers are usually part of the service production process. Services may be defined as intangible activities or benefits that one party can offer to another but does not result in the ownership of anything (Kotler et al. 2008, 597). Services marketing mix is used for services marketing. It is an expanded marketing mix consisting of the original four Ps and three extra Ps – people, physical evidence and process. (Hudson 2008, 15-16.)

Holloway (2004, 54-55) explains the meaning behind the additional variables as follows:

People (employees and customers, recruiting, training, education) refer to the vital part of tourism as a service product – interrelationships and people contacts.

Process (flow of activities, number of steps, customer involvement), or service delivery process, refers to encounters between the tourist and representatives of the service provider, and handling different situations that arise to ensure service quality.

Physical evidences (facility design, equipment, reports, statements, guarantees) differ from products by being almost indefinable cues experienced by tourists. They include elements of sight, sounds, smell, touch and taste.

FIGURE 2. 7 Ps of Marketing (Holloway 2004, 54-55)

2.4 Marketing communications

Marketing communications refer to the means by which companies attempt to inform, persuade and remind customers about the brands they market. Marketing as such can be done directly or indirectly. Kotler et al. (2012) suggest marketing communications to be considered as the 'voice' of the company, whereas the brand would be the way to establish a dialogue and build customer relationships with customers.

Developing effective marketing communications can be stated as following (Kotler et al. 2012, 776):

Identify target audience → determine objectives → design marketing communications → select channels → establish budget → decide on media mix → measure results → manage integrated marketing communications.

2.4.1   Marketing communications mix

Marketing communications mix, also referred to as promotion mix, is a mix that includes specific marketing tools that companies use to persuasively communicate customer value and build customer relationships (Kotler et. al 2008, 691). This mix consists of eight major communication modes (Kotler et al. 2012, 777-778);

Advertising is any form of non-personal presentation and promotion of ideas, goods or services by an identified sponsor.

Sales promotion can be understood as short-term incentives to encourage purchase or sales of a market offering.

Events and experiences are activities and programmes that are company-sponsored and designed to create brand interactions.

Public relations and publicity refers to building up company's image, building good relations with the public by obtaining favourable publicity.

Direct marketing can include the use of mail, telephone, fax, email or internet to communicate directly with customers to obtain an immediate response.

Interactive marketing consists of online activities designed to engage customers, raise awareness, improve image or elicit sales of market offerings.

Word-of-mouth marketing refers to interaction between people, conducted either in oral, written or electronic form.

Personal selling is interacting face-to-face with one or more prospective purchasers.

In marketing communications today, an additional concept can be added.
Social media, according to the definition of Charlesworth (2014, 1) can be understood as "*any web presence where users can add their own content but do not have control over the site in the same way as they would their own website*".

2.4.2   Communication process

Kotler introduced the elements of the communication process in his first edition of
Marketing Management in 1967. These elements still remain the same, and the same
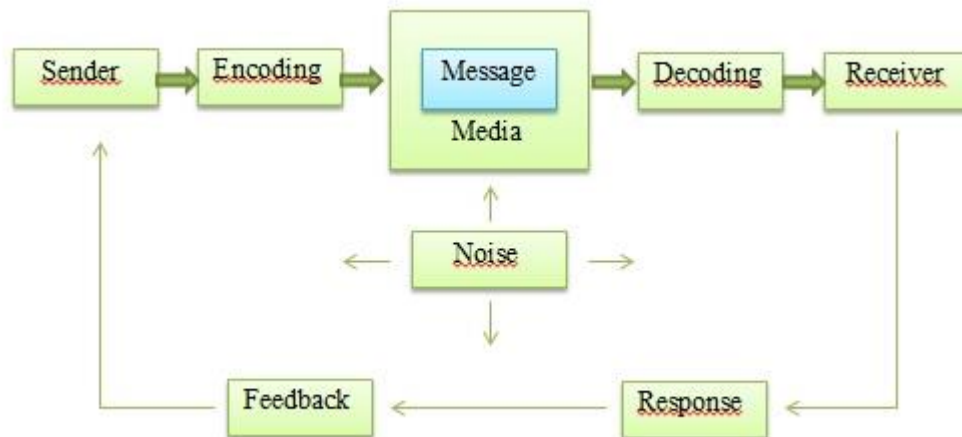figure can be found in the latest publications.

FIGURE 3. Elements of communication process (Kotler 1967-2012)

This macromodel consists of nine elements that represent the communication parties:
sender and *receiver;* communication tools: *message* and *media;* communication func-
tions: *encoding*, *decoding*, *response* and *feedback;* and interfering messages called *nois-
es*. The emphasis of this model is on effective communication. Sender encodes a desired
message to the target audience to decode it. The message is transmitted through media
that reaches the target audience and develops feedback channels to monitor the respons-
es.

Various communication models and theories have been created and developed for un-
derstanding the process. The communication field has evolved considerably over the
last decades. However, the models used in communication textbooks (Adler 1991; Ad-
ler, Rosenfeld and Towne 1996; Barker and Barker 1993; Becker and Roberts 1992;
Bittner 1996; Burgoon, Hunsaker and Dawson 1994; DeFleur, Kearney and Plax 1993;
DeVito 1994; Gibson and Hanna 1992; Wood 2002; collected by Davis Foulger) are the
same models that are used today. (Davis.foulger.info 2004.)

2.5   Segmentation

Due to large, broad or diverse markets, it is not possible for companies to appeal to all customers. Instead of scattering their market efforts (the shotgun approach), companies seem to be leaning towards target marketing – focusing more on the buyers who have greater interest in the values they create best (the rifle approach). (Kotler et al. 2008, 410; 2012, 367.)

Broken down into pieces; a *market* is people or firms who have the ability to purchase a market offering, whereas a *market segment* refers to a subgroup that has one or more characteristics in common that causes the representative of the segment to have the same product or service needs. *Market segmentation* is the process of dividing a market into different groups of buyers, identifying different ways to segment this market and developing profiles for the segments. (Education Portal 2003-2014; Kotler et al. 2008, 410.) According to the definition of The Economic Times (2014), segmentation plays a great role in today's cluttered marketplace. Segmenting correctly may have a big impact on the company's success or closure.

Further, to evaluate the markets, it is desirable to look at three factors: segment size and growth, segment structural attractiveness, and company objectives and resources. After the evaluation, target market segments can be selected. They can consist of one or more segments. Target marketing strategies are: undifferentiated (mass) marketing, differentiated (segmented) marketing, concentrated (niche) marketing, micromarketing (local or individual marketing). (Kotler et al. 2008, 423-424.)

Moreover, there are four commonly known variables that can be used to divide the market into segments (Sinclair Marketing Australia 2014; NetMBA 2010):

- *Geographic segmentation* – Dividing the market into geographical units such as nations, regions, states, counties or cities.

- *Demographic segmentation* – Dividing the market according to variables such as age, gender, family size, income, occupation, education, religion, race, generation or nationality.

- *Behavioral segmentation* – Dividing the market as per consumer knowledge, attitude, use or response to a market offering.

- *Psychographic segmentation* – Dividing the market into groups based on social class, lifestyle or personality characteristics.

2.6   Marketing plan

The term marketing plan is commonly used for a firm's short-term plan for two years or less, and explains in detail how the firm will use its marketing mix to achieve its marketing objectives (Hudson 2008, 78). The marketing plan is an important, and usually highly detailed, heavily researched, and well written document that is produced by marketers. It is widely used by both small start-up companies and large corporate marketing departments. Essentially the marketing plan makes the companies consider various aspects internally and externally in order to understand the market in which they operate, and thereon set goals for their future. (Wood 2014, 4-8.)

Each and every type of an organisation, including start-ups and multinational corporations, needs a marketing plan to indicate the paths to the goals. Marketing plans generally cover one full year together with specific operational directions for how the company will use marketing to achieve the targeted results. (Wood 2014, 4-8; KnowThis.com 2014.)

Wood (2014, 7), suggests an eight-step process to understand marketing planning. The contents, length, and format may vary but the majority of the marketing plans contain the following sections:

- Executive summary
- Current marketing situation analysis
- Target market, customer analysis, positioning
- Objectives and issues

- Marketing strategy

- Marketing programs

- Financial and operational plans

- Metrics and implementation control

Executive summary, although placed in the beginning, is actually the last part to be written because it provides a brief overview of the main points of the marketing plan.

3 ANALYSES AND RESEARCH

3.1 Industry overview and background

Industry analysis is a market assessment tool designed to provide a business with an idea of the complexity of a particular industry. It involves reviewing the economic, political and market factors that have an influence on the way the industry develops. *"Major factors can include the power wielded by suppliers and buyers, the condition of competitors, and the likelihood of new market entrants."* (BusinessDictionary 2014)

3.1.1 Scuba diving industry

The industry offers scuba diving instruction in the form of escorted diving excursions or certification classes. The industry products consist of training, instructions and equipment rentals. The industry activities are formed by scuba certifications, instructions, diving trips, and gear rentals. The industry includes revenue from instruction-related training only; membership dues, merchandise sales and other revenue sources are excluded.

Scuba diving industry is experiencing a continuous increase in popularity around the world. Diving can be found in every continent in different regions. Divetime (2014) has 13 144 reported dive sites listed.

3.1.2 PADI

PADI (Professional Association of Diving Instructors) is the largest scuba diving training organisation of the world. It was founded in 1966 by two friends who decided the world needed a more professional way to approach and teach scuba diving. According to Padi.Com (2015), their original goal was to give people a chance to enjoy the underwater world by offering relevant, instructionally valid scuba diving training to create confident scuba divers who dive regularly. (PADI 2015.) PADI requires a list of all the

existing scuba diving centres around the world in order to control the number and to make sure they have everything under control to run their business as certified PADI instructors.

3.2   Market analysis

Market information and knowledge play an integral role for effective management of an organisation. It is also the key to successful customer relationships and generating customer knowledge, which, in turn, strengthens the company's ability to interact more effectively with the customers and to understand customer needs, expectations and behaviour better. It is essential for the companies to gain insight into marketing activities to fulfil these customer needs, and to acquire information about the strategies of the immediate competitors. According to Kuada (2008, 30), *"Market orientation entails continuous market knowledge generation and dissemination and the development of strategies in response to the guidelines provided by the knowledge generated."* (Kuada 2008, 17-19, 30.)

3.3   Macroenvironment

The marketing environment consists of micro- and macroenvironment. Macroenvironment in marketing is related to the forces outside of marketing that have an impact on the company's ability to maintain and develop the target customer relationships, offering both opportunities and risks. (Kotler et al. 2008, 179.) The macroenvironment consists of the demographic, economic, natural, technological, political, social and cultural environments (Kotler & Armstrong 2010, 94-115).

To analyse the external environment, PEST analysis is used to examine each element separately (Kotler et al. 2008, 43). PEST can be expanded to PESTEL by adding two extra characteristics: environmental and legal (Pestleanalysis 2015).

3.4   SWOT

SWOT analysis stands for strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. It is an internally focused analysis, conducted by the organisations to determine these factors prior to setting up objectives for the upcoming year. It is conducted in order to evaluate the present position and to identify the potential problems of the company. (Holloway 2004, 30; Hudson 2008, 91.)

Wood (2014, 31) gives a deeper insight into explaining the four letters:

Strengths refer to internal capabilities, which can be helpful in achieving the goals and objectives of a company.

Weaknesses are internal factors that can, contrarily, prevent the company to achieve the set goals and objectives.

Opportunities are external circumstances that can be benefitted from or used as a tool for higher performance.

Threats refer to external circumstances that are not directly under the company's control and may do harm to its performance now or in the future.

Prior to setting the SWOT analysis for the actual usage for the marketing plan, the company's previous performance is to be examined, as well as comparing the strengths and weaknesses of the key competitors (Wood 2014, 42).

3.5 Research process and data

The research questions of this bachelor's thesis were derived from a marketing plan, as the aim was to create a realistic marketing plan for Mar y Más Dive Centre with proposals for its future operations. In order to draw up the marketing plan, the author wanted to know answers to the following questions: What is included in a marketing plan? What is the current position of the company in the market? How to gain more visibility? How to market the company efficiently to the selected target groups? How to benefit from the marketing tools to find out fresh ideas and new market opportunities for the company?

Qualitative approach, which the author thought to be the most suitable approach for drawing up the marketing plan, was used throughout the entire thesis. The data were collected from both primary and secondary sources. The primary source was the company itself, and the data was collected by interviewing the company representatives through different means of communication. The secondary data were collected mainly from the internet and were used to analyse different factors, such as the current situation of the market and the previous and current performance of the company's competitors. Literature was used to find out the appropriate marketing tools and in the process of drawing up the marketing plan.

The thesis consists of five chapters. Chapter one (1) introduces the thesis and summarizes the subject of matter behind it. Chapter two (2) gives an insight into marketing and explains the theoretical framework of the thesis. In chapter three (3) the author focuses on different analyses that are relevant in order to draw up a marketing plan. This includes, for example, analysing the industry and the market in question, and analyses of the macro- and microenvironments. Chapter four (4) introduces the actual marketing plan. The marketing plan will not appear in the thesis due to confidentiality reasons and can be found in the appendix. The thesis ends to a conclusion in chapter five (5).

4   MARKETING PLAN

In this chapter the author focuses on the current marketing of Mar y Más Dive Centre and on providing a more profound understanding of the market environment and SWOT. The author also aims to give a deeper insight into the current marketing strategy and existing marketing opportunities.

The author has drawn up a marketing plan for the company. Due to confidentiality reasons the marketing plan is not published and it can be found in the appendix of this thesis.

5 CONCLUSION

This bachelor's thesis contains the marketing plan for Mar y Más Dive Centre, the background information and the different approaches used. The main objective of the thesis was to draw up a realistic marketing plan for a small company that had never had one before. Therefore, it was necessary for the author to study the theoretical framework before beginning. This step was followed by a thorough analysis of the market, an overview on the company's background information, and its current situation in the market in order to create a successful plan for its future operations.

The idea behind drawing up a marketing plan for Mar y Más Dive Centre came from both parties: the company representatives had already realised the need for a marketing plan, and the author herself had personal experience on using the services provided and considered that the company had potential to grow in the market. The aim of the marketing plan was, hence, to improve the company's visibility and to increase awareness among its target segments in order to gain new customers and maintain the existing ones. The plan does not include budgeting due to lack of information provided by the representatives of the company.

All of the analyses of the current situation and the suggestions for the future can be utilised now or within a few years. For being the first marketing plan for a small company, it can be used for a longer period of time than a normal one–year marketing plan. The company representatives will determine which of the proposed marketing actions they may be willing to use.

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APPENDIX

Appendix. Marketing Plan for Mar y Más Dive Centre

MARKETING PLAN

Mar y Más

Elisa Kuusela