TALLINN UNIVERISTY OF TEHCNOLOGY

School of Business and Governance

Department of Business Administration

Niko Nurminen

Creating a buyer persona to support Gofore's inbound model

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Supervisor: Iivi Riivits-Arkonsuo, PhD

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Niko Nurminen ……………………………

                  (signature, date)

Student code: 156039TVTB

Student e-mail address: aleksinurmine@gmail.com

Supervisor: Iivi Riivits-Arkonsuo, PhD:

The paper conforms to requirements in force

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to draw attention to the emerging marketing phenomenon that is known as inbound marketing, which utilises the creation of digital content as well as various other digital tools. Buyer personas are the core of an inbound marketing model and contribute effective organisational lead conversion.

The purpose of this study is to develop methods for creating an inbound model and how to apply the model to generate leads for a company. The objective is to create a buyer persona for Gofore Plc, based on a series of client interviews.

The interviews provided valuable data that could be exploited to form a perception of a buyer persona. This information may be used in the future to develop an inbound marketing strategy for the company.

The theoretical part of this paper consists of marketing strategies in the digital age, the components of inbound methods and the role of buyer personas. The practical part consists of ten semi-structured client interviews that are used to form the buyer persona.

The findings suggest ways for Gofore to exploit the creation of a buyer persona by developing an inbound marketing strategy. By utilising the buyer persona, Gofore can more efficiently acquire leads and convert them into clients. This paper also offers a solution for the reducing efficiency of traditional marketing techniques.

Keywords: inbound marketing, digital marketing, lead, prospect, CRM, marketing automation

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to develop methods for Gofore, a Finnish information technology company, to build an inbound marketing strategy and ways to exploit this strategy as a technique for obtaining leads for the company. To achieve this, a buyer persona will be defined to assist the full implementation of the inbound marketing model. Defining a buyer persona will improve the efficiency of the organization's acquisition of promising leads.

Gofore will begin the implementation of an inbound marketing model in Fall of 2018 in cooperation with Hubspot. They will be introducing automation to the processes involved later during the year. To support these marketing activities, a need for a defined buyer persona came up, which sparked the idea for this paper.

The paper is divided into theoretical and practical proportions. The aim of the theoretical part is to explore the inbound marketing model, the content creation aspect of digital marketing, and the role of buyer personas in the B2B context. The practical part of the paper focuses on analysing ten interviews in which Gofore's current clients took part in. The interviewees were inquired about their activities on digital channels, preferred means of retrieving information and factors affecting their purchase decision.

The objective is to create a buyer persona using the data accumulated from the series of client interviews. The defined buyer persona can then be utilised to create suitable digital content for the visitors with the most potential to become company clients. Smart content that can attract visitors better will increase overall traffic on their website and other digital platforms in which they offer useful content.

Marketing has experienced a vast transformation during the past few decades as digital channels have dethroned traditional platforms for marketing activities. Digitalisation has reshaped the traditional ways for interaction between buyers and sellers. The current nature of marketing has brought new possibilities for consumers to research a brand, as well as its products and services. Consumers are increasingly spending their time online and on various social media platforms, creating an environment for marketers in which they can gain consumer attention and build beneficial communities for their consumer base. (Taiminen & Karjaluoto, 2015)

The shift of marketing activities from traditional to digital platforms has resulted in the modern philosophy of marketing. With the introduction of digital marketing, the emphasis of marketing has transferred from the products and services to the consumers. Since consumers have become more aware of the market and can conduct research on their needed products and services, the creation of relationships based on trust and loyalty has become the primary objective of organisations. These relationships are built on content creation and two-way communication between the buyer and seller. The digital content created must have value to the consumer based on their wants and needs, making it more engaging. Patrutiu-Baltes (2016) suggested that content marketing should be focused 80% on the consumer's information and education, and the remaining 20% on sales growth.

One of the trending marketing methods today is inbound marketing. It is an emerging marketing methodology that focuses on earning customer attention instead of buying it (Waishampayan, 2014). Inbound marketing is primarily a subcategory of digital marketing, and it introduces various methods for gaining online visibility and converting visitors into customers. Perhaps the most promising aspect of the inbound methodology is its cost-efficiency. Digital content creation is indeed affordable, and according to research, inbound marketing is an excellent option for small corporations in terms of business growth (Taiminen & Karjaluoto, 2015). The topics covered in this paper have a lot to do with current issues amongst marketers, and it seems that the inbound methodology has a lot to offer today. According to a Hubspot survey (2018), 80% of marketers stated that their lead generation efforts are only slightly effective. Digital marketing strategies, inbound marketing, in particular, have proved to contribute solutions to this problem.

The case company in this paper is Gofore. It is a Finnish information technology company that offers expertise in designing and developing digital services. The company was found in 2001 in Tampere, Finland and is a public corporation. Gofore has expanded its services over the past years

to keep up with the increasingly changing nature of marketing and digital services. Their turnover increased by an astonishing 82% in 2017 from the previous year. It has six offices in four different countries, over 370 employees and over 150 clients at the beginning of 2018. Their clientele is rather extensive and distributed amongst many industries. Gofore's has clients in both, the public and private sectors. Gofore was chosen by the Great Place to Work Institute as the best workplace in Finland in 2017. The company had placed third during the previous years of participation in 2015 and 2016. Gofore's services include management consulting, service design and construction, and services related to cloud computing. (Gofore annual report, 2017)

Organisations taking on content creation in their marketing activities must first define their targeted audience. Directing appealing content to these individuals is the root for gaining visitors on digital platforms. Determining a target audience may be conducted by the creation of buyer personas based on the organisation's desired customer characteristics. Figuring out which features the prevalent portions of an organisation's past and current customers form a model of a buyer persona. This model can further be utilised in the B2B market to achieve more customer businesses through inbound methods. This paper aims to create a buyer persona for Gofore, based on data of their most recent clients, as well as define the marketing strategies suitable for achieving success through the established buyer persona.

The research questions of this study are as follows:

RQ1.   What is the buyer persona of Gofore and what are the characteristics involved?

RQ2.   How should Gofore allocate and target their marketing activities based on the defined buyer persona?

2. Related literature

Literature used in this paper focuses on the marketing activities that have emerged due to the changes in the marketing environment. The causes and effects of this transformation are discussed. New approaches and combinations of various techniques have risen to offer a solution for marketers to reach the consumers more efficiently than before.

2.1. Marketing in the digital era

Inbound marketing, as a relatively new marketing technique, has only recently begun to gain attention within the business-to-business marketing scope. Global digitalisation during the past decade or so has overall transformed the basis for marketing activities, and some traditional approaches have experienced a decrease in efficiency and practicality.

The increasing relevance of social media and other digital platforms as a communication and marketing tool has transformed the environment of marketing as a whole. Traditional marketing methods imply taking the product or service directly to the customer. This type of marketing is referred to as push marketing, in which the customer is interrupted to hear out what the seller has to say, using advertisements or company showrooms, for instance. Pull marketing, on the other hand, focuses on getting the customer to get in contact with the company by themself, with the use of intriguing content the company puts out.

Content, as defined by Merriam-Webster, is "the principal substance (such as written matter, illustrations, or music) offered by a website". This definition refers to digital content, which is no doubt more influential than any other type of content today. Digital content has the potential to spread at a very rapid pace due to the ease of distribution and sharing possibilities. Digital content may be created with a relatively small amount of effort and can reach potential customers much more efficiently than physical content.

Content marketing is a form of marketing in which content is created to attract an audience of potential customers. As opposed to traditional marketing strategies, content marketing shifts the focus from selling to helping and is referred to as a form of inbound marketing by various commentators. The primary aim of content marketing is to provide the audience with useful and appealing information that compliments a specific company in one way or another. (Holliman & Rowley, 2014)

"Digital marketing is a new approach to marketing, not just traditional marketing boosted by digital elements," (Taiminen & Karjaluoto, 2015). Digitalization has entirely transformed the nature of marketing and its activities. Traditional "push" marketing strategies have taken the back seat, as more efficient modes of marketing have emerged. Today's digital marketing enables a two-way communication stream between the buyer and the supplier, in which information flows both ways. Companies can educate and inform their customers about the offered products and services using affordable means online. In turn, the organization may collect data from its customers acquired through social media channels, for instance, and use this information to optimize their future marketing or selling activities. Higher efficiency rates can be achieved using modern digital marketing methods, and smaller firms also have the possibility to increase their competitiveness and overall growth. (Taiminen & Karjaluoto, 2015)

2.2. Inbound marketing

Inbound marketing is a form of digital marketing that is based on the idea that clients find the content targeted towards them on their initiative. Content marketing and inbound marketing are two very similar marketing strategies and are often mistaken for the other. However, inbound marketing possesses more attributes to it than content marketing. Inbound marketing includes a variety of diverse marketing strategies, although the essence of it is content creation and thus, inbound tactics require the methods used in content marketing to function (Lieberman, 2016). As opposed to traditional outbound marketing techniques that revolve around one-way communication, the inbound model attempts to create a relationship with the client using two-way communication and the creation of high-quality digital content (Casas, Weisfeld-Spolter, Yurova, Gironda, O'Leary, 2016).

Inbound marketing involves techniques such as content marketing, Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) and Really Simple Syndication (RSS). Content marketing occurs in the form of content creation on a company's own website, blog activities on various blogging platforms and social media content creation. Outbound marketing techniques consist of activities, such as TV and radio advertising, print ads and direct mailing systems. (Bleoju, Capatina, Rancati, Lesca, 2016)

Inbound marketing concentrates on the buying process at large and is customer-centered, while outbound marketing is more focused on the result and by nature is product-centered. Inbound marketing is an ongoing process that aims to create relationships with clients based on trust. Outbound marketing, on the other hand, often occurs as shorter campaigns with special offers, for instance. Relationships are built through satisfied customers but are developed after the buying process has taken place.

Traditional marketing methods, such as TV and newspaper advertising are commonly seen as expensive ways of introducing your product or service to your audience. Most inbound channels are free, and they offer a better return on investment (ROI). Even if a company perfects its outbound strategy, it will most likely miss out on potential growth that could be gained through inbound methods. Johnson (2013) stated that "sustaining growth...requires a strong inbound marketing strategy that can help the firm develop more opportunities than it would have time to develop otherwise".

The inbound methodology, as defined by Hubspot, consists of the following activities: attract, convert, close and delight. These activities as a whole make up the process of converting strangers into promoters with of the firm.
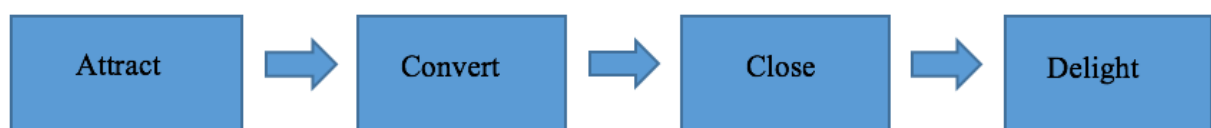

Figure 1. Inbound marketing methodology (Hubspot, 2017)

The first phase of the inbound methodology is the attraction of new potential customers. This phase includes gaining attention from preferred individuals using the right kind of content at the right time. Successful practitioners of inbound strategies make explicit connections between their

content strategy and key buying triggers. These triggers, for instance, might be brief descriptions of issues that can be tackled with the help of a service provided by the company. The audience is thus, exposed to a problem and they are in need of a solution. (Johnson, 2013)

The second phase is converting visitors into leads. This process of conversion may be conducted using different ways of communication. During this phase, the company will be able to provide useful information to the customer. This information must be relevant to the customers' current stage in the buying process. The company may decide to meet up with the customer, send a personal message or a questionnaire or form that the customer shall fill out. The result of the conversion is to gather data from your potential customers into the company's customer relationship management (CRM) database. This information will make the following phases of the inbound methodology possible. This phase is perhaps the most decisive regarding project success, as the inability to create leads from website traffic is a common mistake amongst marketers. (Johnson, 2013)

The next phase of the process is called closing, which converts the best leads acquired in the previous stage into customers. The most promising leads should be attended first to achieve higher efficiency in gaining customers for your company.

The final phase is called delight. The customers that have positive experiences from your company's services are more likely to become promoters of the company and will more readily recommend your services to others. Meaningful customer conversations and applying smart content directed to the right buyer personas is the key to keeping your customer base satisfied.

Johnson (2013) defined the steps of the inbound process as follows: creating a compelling website, creating content, generating traffic, converting traffic to leads and converting leads to sales. These stages are very much alike the phases stated by Hubspot. But how do organisations get their created content to reach their respective target audiences in the first place? Various inbound tactics are designed to get this job done effectively. The core of the inbound methodology is that prospects find the digital content with the use of SEO, social media marketing, and RSS. According to Caragher (2013), content must be optimised for search engines and shared via social media to gain customer attention.

One of the most critical factors for success using the inbound model is SEO. The purpose of SEO is to make website more attractive for search engines. The ability of a search engine to find a specific site can be enhanced using either search engine advertising, search engine optimisation, or the combination of both. Search engine advertising is a service provided by search engines that place the chosen website to appear before others when using the search engine. This service is widely used by organisations and competition for better placements on a list of search results is high, and therefore, increases in the costs related to acquiring this service are typical. (Baye, De los Santos, Wildenbeest, 2016)

A study by Chitika (2013) suggests that the first page of a Google search receives as much as 95% of traffic. This shows just how desirable it is to obtain a positioning on the first page of a list of search results and that although the price for the service is bulky, it almost certainly pays back, assuming that the landing page and digital content is engaging for the audience.

Buyer pesonas are the core of any inbound marketing strategy. Kusinitz (2014) defines a buyer persona as "a semi-fictional representation of your ideal customer based on market research and real data about your existing customers". Buyer personas are created based on your customers' behavioral patterns and motivations. Creating buyer personas is mainly characterising your customer base into homogeneous groups based on behaviour rather than demographics. These personas can be utilised when creating content for your company. When you have identified your detailed buyer personas, you will be able to create content that is suitable and highly influential for these individuals. The content has to be directed towards these personas to gain the most out of any content marketing campaign. The principal goal of digital content marketing efforts is to create useful content for your target audience, and thus, with the use of clearly defined buyer personas, companies can develop appropriate customer oriented content and fully execute their inbound marketing model. (Zambito, 2013)

A company may determine its buyer personas by acquiring information about their current customers and potential customers by interviewing or collecting data through questionnaires directed to the person making the buying decision from the buyer company. A buyer persona is always research-based and requires qualitative research. This information may consist of personal objectives within the job description, motivations of the entire organisation or possible challenges they may face. The more detailed a company's buyer personas are, the better understanding it has

of its customers and the larger its competitive advantage becomes as opposed to its competitors in the same industry.

Organizations should include more than just demographic information to obtain a complete view of its buyer personas. The combination of demographics, background, goals, and challenges paints a much more vivid picture of your customers' personalities. Especially in business-to-business context, demographic information remains less important, as a particular industry sector, which often yields a single buyer persona, faces similar objectives and challenges (Taylor, 2017).

2.3. Buyer's journey

Digitalisation has changed the buyer's journey. Clients are now able to find out about their needed services and service providers through the internet without having to contact the service provider. The CEB (Corporate Executive Board) estimated that B2B buyers had completed 57% of the buying process before contacting the provider's sales team (Spenner & Schmidt, 2015). This implies that the role of a salesperson has decreased as a source of information concerning the service (Media industry newsletter, 2014). As a result, this responsibility has transferred to the marketing sector of the company. Clients are informed through engaging content that sells the brand itself along with its services. The digital age has also increased the number of people within an organisation to be a part of the buying decision. Communication amongst colleagues is more relevant than before due to new communicational platforms. The ease of sharing information has made group decisions more common.

The buyer's journey is a process through which buyers go to solve their need. As mentioned, using digital tools, buyers can begin the process before they feel the need to contact salespeople. They figure out everything they can search the Internet and come well prepared when approaching a sales team. According to Hintz (2016), the process consists of three stages. The first stage is the awereness stage, followed by the consideration stage and finally, the decision stage.

During the buyer's journey, the buyer acknowledges a problem and the need for a solution, researches options and ways to fix the problem and finally, decides which solution to pursue. Companies are able to define their buyer's journey by gathering and examining information on what activities their buyers do before making a purchase decision. Potential clients' activity can

be tracked on company websites and other platforms that offer company-created content for these clients. Monitoring these activities can be made considerably less time consuming when automation is introduced.

Digital marketing has come to a point where artificial intelligence (AI) can be implemented to support other marketing activities. Automation in marketing is a phenomenon that refers to searching for online visitors and transforming these visitors into customers using artificial intelligence. The time spent on searching for the most promising individuals can be significantly decreased when the knowledge of machines is introduced and exploited. (Grossberg, 2016)

Automation allows companies to learn about their potential customers by tracking their activity and monitoring their behaviour online. This information provides the company a complete look at what the individual knows about the company and from which channels they learned it. The company can then make informed decisions about how to continue their two-way conversation with the prospect individual. The three most substantial benefits of automation in marketing activities include the increase in speed, reduced costs, and higher capabilities for statistical reporting. (Grossberg, 2016)

Smith (2004) stated that automation mixed with CRM systems result in higher levels of efficiency, more accurate reporting capabilities and reduced costs. Automation also enables predictive marketing, which refers to the creation and utilisation of a customer data model. This model can be used to place focus on the most promising profiles and increase efficiency concerning time usage (Grossberg, 2016). When automation is introduced, marketing and sales become better aligned. This alignment allows sales to feed off of marketing teams' customer insight and use it to boost revenue. It is essentially a cross-functional collaboration between two teams within the organisation (Kippenberger, 1998). Successful cooperation between these teams is vital in today's consumer market since customers' knowledge of suppliers has improved faster than sellers' understanding of their customers (Dania, 2016).

CRM has experienced a significant transformation during the past decade. Digitalisation has leveraged the role of the customer, which has made many business activities more customer-centric. Customers today are social customers and strong relationships between the company and the customers are required to induce a purchase decision. The modern form of CRM, often referred to as social CRM or SCRM, in short, integrates customer transactions with customer interactions.

SCRM introduces a social element to the traditional CRM process. This combination involves connecting transaction data with information concerning customer conversations and relationships, and when properly managed, it provides marketers with valuable and insightful information about their customers' behaviour. (Greenberg, 2010)

Companies use CRM softwares to manage collected consumer data. These softwares are either installed on the company's premises or are web-based cloud applications and contain valuable data about all company relationships and interactions. With the use of automation, website and social media visits may be recorded when a call-to-action is implemented and the visitor decides to leave their contact information. All information gained from automated digital processes may be stored into an adopted CRM software and put to use later. Borth (2018) discussed CRM paired with automation and stated: "a good CRM ensures that no prospects fall through the cracks...provides detailed, unique information about your customers...increases the value of your business".

The CRM process paired with automated compiling of customer data provides huge potential for companies executing the inbound methodology (Lipiäinen, 2015). This has to do with the extended length of the buyer's journey. There are numerous steps for visitors to take before becoming important leads for the company. This is why recording visitor activity is crucial for knowing when to contact them. Automated collection of data helps marketers define the critical moments in the buyer's journey when the prospect needs more information about the product or service. Since prospects are scattered randomly throughout the buyer's journey, they require different means of initiative from the provider company. The prospects that are new and haven't yet built trust with the company certainly do not want a sales pitch, and the ones that are already deeply engaged with the company may feel underestimated if presented with general service information. (Estrada, 2015)

The sales funnel is a tool commonly used by companies to track their sales opportunities' progress. A buyer-centric sales funnel maps the sales process based on the stages that prospects make before making the purchase decision. A sales funnel that utilises digital components is used to visualise the process in which a prospect enters a landing page and continues to progress into a promising lead or possibly a paying customer. With the use of a sales funnel, the purchasing process may be divided into smaller segments. As visitors move further down the funnel, they become more ready to make a purchase, and the marketing and sales teams must take specific measures to manage

them in their respective stages of the funnel. Aligning marketing and sales activities with the steps involved results in improved effectiveness and increased lead conversion. (Sellers, 2009)

Smith (2016) suggested that the most successful sales funnel for service companies is a webinar funnel. Individuals sign up to take part in automated webinars that offer the most crucial information about the service. According to Smith, the content of the webinar should be mostly content driven, and a small sales pitch should only be present at the very end of the webinar.
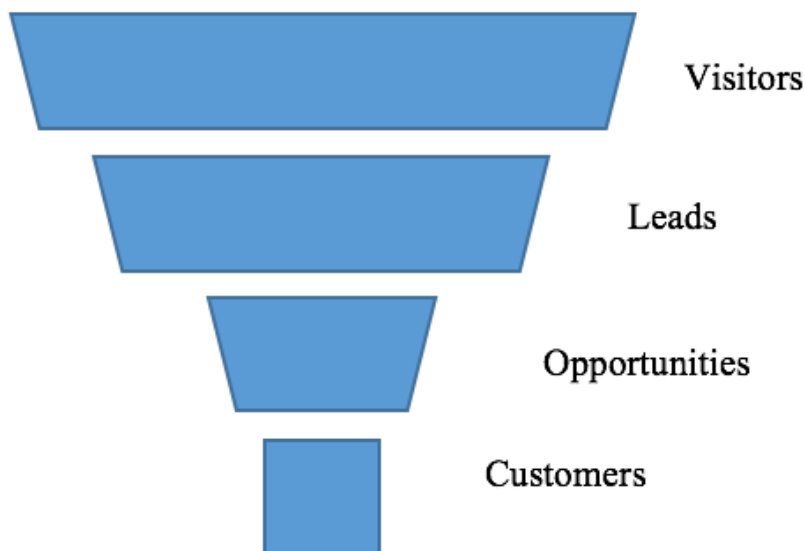

Figure 2. The sales funnel (Jessup, 2016)

Figure 2 shows the various stages related to the purchasing process. The first stage involves raising awareness about the service or product offered to the audience. This may be done using either social media marketing, creating blog posts or taking part in various events that provide visibility to the company. These methods result in so called visitors. Visitors are those who enter a landing page on any platform on which useful content is provided. The usefulness of the content is precisely what attracts them to visit the page, and as they browse through the content, they become more engaged with the company and their services. The most engaged visitors are referred to as leads.

Social selling becomes an essential activity in the next stage of preparing leads and getting them closer to the purchasing mindset. After generating leads, businesses begin to divide them into

smaller segments based on the level of potential and retarget their marketing activities on the top layers. Companies must filter out a particular portion of their leads that are not worth putting time and effort into, and prioritize the leads that are qualified. The most qualified leads are generally referred to as prospects. The content that is provided for these leads should be carefully chosen to suit the lead's position on the sales funnel and the specific buyer persona if multiple personas are identified. (Hourigan, 2011)

The opportunity stage, mainly, has to do with the presentation of sales offers. In the case of service businesses, the team of consultants or experts are introduced in depth, and the needs of the client are discussed to find out the best solution. The prospects that make the purchase become clients of the company. The final stage of closing concerns keeping the clients satisfied with the service by sending information to keep them up to date with the service process, for instance. Satisfied clients inevitably make other potential buyers more aware of the service and help feed the sales funnel even more.

3. Buyer persona interviews

3.1. Methodological approach

The method used in this paper is a semi-structured interview. The questions used are the same for each interviewee, and there are no limits to responses. The interviewee may freely answer the questions, which kicks off a dialogue that requires ability from the interviewer to follow up with additional questions. Interviews as a research method is an example of qualitative research. It is a research method that provides the researcher with highly valuable data, given that the process is executed well. Conducting qualitative research interviews require a lot of planning and preparation, as well as a skill set suitable for interviewing. The interviewer must plan and arrange the questions used in a manner that makes the interviewee's task as effortless as possible. The questions should be simple enough to be answered in a way that prevents false interpretations. (Qu & Dumay, 2011)

The intent of qualitative interviews is to gather data on the interviewee's views, thoughts, and opinions. Bryman and Cassell (2006) suggested that "the interview is not a static event, but an active, dynamic, process where both the interviewer and interviewee are co-constructing meaning". This implies that an interview, fundamentally, is a conversation between two parties in which both offer the other something of value, as opposed to merely asking questions and answering.

The research method used in this paper is qualitative research by interviewing since it allows the interviewee to express their attitudes and opinions on the matter. Interviews will enable the interviewer to make follow-up questions if they don't receive the information they were looking for at first. The length of the interviewees' answers impacts the ability to create buyer personas since rephrasing and backing up personal responses provides insight into the thought process of the interviewee. A structured questionnaire, in this case, would most probably result in loss of data. The objective of the research is to find out abstract constructs rather than concrete facts. This is

why structured responses would be extremely tough to compose. Qualitative methods are often used to gather preliminary data for further research. Information acquired from interviews may be later utilised to construct structured surveys. (Qu & Dumay, 2011)

The interview as a research method, however, has been critiqued on the grounds of the following issues: the problem of representation, the nature of language, the inseparability of researches and knowledge and the difficulties of writing (Qu & Dumay, 2011). Lack of skill from the interviewer may also cause problems since data collected from interviewing is subject to interpretation by the interviewer. Interactional issues often arise from the inabilities of the interviewer. As Roulston (2014) stated, "interactional problems are sometimes ascribed to the interviewer's inability to understand and orient to participants in ways that facilitate mutual understanding". The interviewer and interviewee may not see eye to eye and the retrieved information may be corrupted due to this.

The realiability and validity of the study have to do with the researcher's ability to reach as close to the truth as possible and to make objective interpretations. As Patton (1999) stated, "qualitative analysis is a creative process, depending on the insights and conseptual capabilities of the analyst". The qualitative study was conducted by an inexperienced researcher, and thus, the results may not be accurate. Also, the sample size of the interviewees was relatively small and does not entirely correspond the actual population as a whole.

3.2. Sample description

Purchase decisions are often affected by multiple individuals, especially in the B2B context. This is important to consider when managing the interview process. The interviewees were chosen on the basis of who contacted Gofore with the intention of purchase and which resulted in a partnership or client-provider relationship. The interviewees were, thus, the ones who took the first initiative to contact a salesperson and made the inquiry.

Table 1. Description of the interviewees

	Age	Position	Education
Interviewee 1	50	Development Manager	Master of Science, Industrial Economics
Interviewee 2	42	Director, R&D	Master of Science, Computer Science
Interviewee 3	46	Chief Strategy & Development Officer	Master of Arts
Interviewee 4	44	Head of Business Design	Master of Science, Computer Science
Interviewee 5	43	Head of Department	Master of Science, Business Administration
Interviewee 6	48	Product Development Director	Doctor of Science in Engineering
Interviewee 7	45	Director, Business Development	Master of Business Administration

Based on Gofore's experience, the chief development officer is usually the one who takes the initiative to make the buy. They are in charge of overall organisational development and are in charge of decisions related to taking on digital services that Gofore offer. They act a central role within their organisation and inspecting what induces their purchase decisions can provide remarkably valuable knowledge to the process of inbound marketing.

The interviewees chosen were restricted to private-sector companies since public-sector companies act under a clause in Finnish legislation that obliges public competitive tendering. The interviewees were also restricted to those who have purchased Gofore's services within the past year. This restriction allows the interviewees to contribute insight on their latest acquisition and Gofore to make implications on their current competitive advantages, based on feedback provided by the interviewee. The arising competitive advantages may be further utilised in the inbound marketing process and when approaching other similar organisations.

3.3. The logic behind the interviews

Because Gofore's client relationships were at stake, I wasn't personally allowed to contact their clients on their behalf. Instead, my contribution was providing Gofore staff with questions that would unveil the information needed to create a buyer persona. The sales representatives or account managers that were responsible for the relationships with their respective client organisations conducted the interviewing part. Audio from these interviews was recorded and later transcribed by me. The interview questions used may be seen in Appendix 2. The interviews were conducted providing full confidentiality to the interviewee, and therefore, the answers of the interviewees can not be revealed in this paper.

The interview questions required careful consideration due to the nature of the services that Gofore offer. Their services involve support for strategic leading and designing and building various digital tools and cloud services. The questions chosen for the research were applied to better achieve a suitable buyer persona for Gofore. Because Gofore doesn't offer a specific service or solution for its clients, nor does it use a particular type of software to provide their services, the aspect of goals and challenges may take a back seat when defining their buyer persona. Since Gofore offers agile consultation methods for distinct needs and their services are constantly changing, depending on the needs of their clients, the buyer persona is best defined by observing the buyer's journey and the factors that induced the purchase decision. Behavioural patterns were prioritised when developing the research questions.

Hubspot's (2018) principles of inbound marketing that revolve around content creation, designed to address the problems of ideal customers, attraction of prospects and building trust and credibility, were adopted in this paper to compose the questions used for the interviewing process. By gaining a better understanding of their clients' behaviour and what lead to their purchase decisions, using digital marketing content, Gofore will be able to create smart digital content that will generate more leads for the company.

Qualitative data analysis may be challenging, because of the nature of data. It requires interpretation from the researcher. There are no explicit rules as to how qualitative data should be

analysed. The four key steps of qualitative data anaysis, according to Graue (2015), are data collection, data reduction, data displays, and conclusion verification. This paper adopts these stages of qualitative data analysis. Data collection in this paper occurs using interviews as the research method. The data is then reduced and organised into more manageable categories. Based on these categories, the researcher can draw conclusions and make findings. The display stage is more concerned with why the results are the way they are. The conclusion includes statements about findings and how these findings could be made. (Graue, 2015)

3.4. Results

The interviewees were all males between 40 and 50 years of age on average, and they worked in high positions within their organisations. Their job titles included positions such as Chief Development Officer and other positions in management, with Chief Development Officer being the most frequent position. All interviewees had completed Master's degrees in university, specializing in either computer science or strategic business management.

Most of the interviewees follow Gofore on social media on at least one platform. All of them follow news about their respective industries on the internet on different levels. The client companies of the interviewees were from media, manufacturing industry, telecom, and finance sectors of business. When asked about the impact of digitalisation, all of them admitted to it having an affect on their particular industry. In fact, all but one industry had experienced the digital transformation as a whole. One sector that is still undergoing major transformations due to digitalisation and that is the financial sector. This field of business is currently the most disruptive of all as the regulations are continually changing and technologies, such as Bitcoin and other digital banks and companies, emerge. This transformation has already taken place for all of the other industries dealt with in this interview process. Media and finance sectors are developing new services what they are delivering to their customers.

Most of the interviewees use social media in both, personal leisure time and, in matters related to work. Surprisingly enough, two interviewees were not present in social media at all. On the other hand, this has to do with the age distribution of the interviewees. The individuals in these roles that require decision making and management duties are most probably older than most other employees within the organisation. What was interesting about the ones who aren't on social media

is that they were the ones who obtained a technological education and are employed in the more technologically demanding industries of manufacturing and telecom. Their reasoning for their absence in social media was ideological and was based on principles of not wanting to share private information publically online.

The job tasks of the interviewees demanded frequent retrieval of information. The most common ways for this appeared to be using internal channels and personal networks within their workplaces. It turned out that the younger respondents purposely searched for blog posts that offered information valuable for their embarked projects and about their respective industries. The majority who are on social media stated that they follow up on the news using social media weekly. This is most likely the case for the majority of the population of this age distribution. LinkedIn was the only digital platform that was used by all interviewees. Only less than half of the interviewees share different types of information within their private networks. Those who did just shared it with their close peers and colleagues. Only two interviewees had shared academic articles on Twitter and LinkedIn.

The selected interviewees all took part in the purchase decision. This was one of the criteria when coming up with the target group for the interviewing process. The interviewees acted a central role in these purchase decisions. However, the consensus of accepting the offer was made by taking into account the influence of their colleagues. The acceptance of colleagues played a significant role when deciding whether to accept the offer or not. For some clients, the proposal was forwarded to the head of the particular project, who would become the contact person regarding communication between the client company and Gofore during the project.

The number of individuals from Gofore staff that the interviewees had met either in person or by digital means of communication varied between two and seven. After speaking to a sales representative, Gofore had provided a consultant with the precise expertise needed for the job to support the sales representative to give more information about the service on a detailed level. The number of consultants that took part in the dialogue varied based on the size, intensiveness, and depth of the project in question. The consultants essentially provided the value proposition of the service for the client to make a more informed purchase decision. All of the interviewees had a sufficient amount of knowledge about the acquisition, and if they had accepted the service and the budget met the price, the purchase was made. Three interviewees stated that the initial need was modified during the sales process and became more substantial concerning project content.

Reliability, reputation, and references arose to be the three most crucial factors that influenced the purchase decision. Excellent reputation and recommendations have been built through many successful projects that Gofore have taken. Price comparison came up in two interviews but, in general, it was not of great significance when deciding to buy. Reliability was seen as the ability to deliver additional services and after-sales support long after the end of the project. The sufficient size of staff also came up in many interviews. This also has to do with the reliability aspect. If a specific consultant would leave Gofore, he or she could be easily replaced, and the quality of the service would not be affected negatively.

The most considerable doubts or challenges for making the purchase were questioned, and the only substantial factor appeared to be the certainty of service delivery. This doubt was overcome during the sales process and the discussion between the client and Gofore representatives. The interviewees stated that the purchase process as an experience was relatively effortless. Two interviewees told that the purchase process was prolonged due to the replacement of the salesperson with whom they had interacted.

When contacting Gofore, the interviewees all stated they would first contact the salesperson or account manager with whom they had worked. Their preferred means of communication were over the telephone or by e-mail. None of the interviewees preferred social media as a tool to contact Gofore staff. In general, they experienced positive feelings about contacting their salesperson or account manager, because the purchase process of the first acquisition allowed the two parties to become familiar with each other. The only negative emotions were linked with the two interviewees whose contact person was replaced during the purchase process.

All interviewees had at least some knowledge about Gofore before the beginning of the purchase process. Almost all had been either ex-colleagues with some members of Gofore's employees or known someone from Gofore in their private life. Three interviewees remembered they had seen Gofore's recruiting campaign on at least one platform, either on major newspapers or yellow papers. Those who have personal relationships with Gofore's employees stated that they would recommend the company in their own networks.

When asked to describe Gofore as a brand, 80% of the interviewees said that they associate Gofore with high-quality services and 20% did not know how to describe the brand. Out of the 80%, most

also associated Gofore with being a great employer and a great place to work. Surprisingly many, however, were not aware of the full spectrum of services that Gofore offer. Most had only knowledge on the specific service that they had acquired and only two had knowledge about the other consulting services that Gofore have to offer.

CONCLUSION

The set of interviews provides us with some pieces of information that allow the creation of a buyer persona. Determining a buyer persona enables an organisation to make better strategic marketing decisions. Primarily, it can be utilised to allocate and target Gofore's marketing resources better.

The first research question addresses the characteristics of the buyer persona. Developing a buyer persona for Gofore proved to be much more challenging than expected, due to the nature of their services. The services are extremely tailored to suit the detailed needs of the client. Because the organisational goals and challenges of Gofore's clients differ vastly from each other, the generic buyer persona creation process is not entirely applicable. Instead, the buyer persona is defined by the characteristics that may be used to group and represent the overall motivations towards Gofore of the client base. Gofore helps their clients in the digital transformation of their business, making it easier for them to reach their respective goals.

The current buyer persona of Gofore is characterised in this paragraph. The buyer persona is a male aged between 40 and 50 and by works as a Chief Development Officer or in some other position in their organisation's management duties. He has a Master's degree in computer science or strategic business management. His job description demands information retrieval at least weekly, and his primary methods for this is using personal networks and social media. He is relatively active on at least one social media platform and uses it to follow up on events and news every week. He runs into blog posts either intentionally or unintentionally from time to time when searching for information online. He acts a central role within his organisation when it comes to strategic decision-making. The most frequent factors affecting his purchase decisions are the reliability, reputation, and references of the service provider. The source of concern when making purchase decisions is the uncertainty of service delivery. He researches the specific service his organisation is in need of before making a purchase decision.

Table 2. The created buyer persona

Gender	Male
Age	Between 40 and 50
Position	Development or management
Education	Master's degree in computer science or management
Information retrieval	At least weekly using personal networks and social media
Social media usage	Active on at least one platform
Other online activities	Reads blog posts
Purchase decision	Acts as a decision maker, researches the needed service
Factors affecting purchase decisions	Reliability, reputation, references
Concerns in purchases	Uncertainty of delivery

The second research question concerns the allocation and targeting of Gofore's marketing activities. This issue offers a challenge for Gofore when developing their future marketing strategies. At the moment, it seems that the marketing strategy is generating enough leads and converting them to clients. The fact that some of their clients and target audience do not use social media platforms is something that cannot be influenced. The emphasis should be placed on those who are, and content should be directed to those individuals.

The clients act as opinion leaders that share opinions and other information within their networks that influence others to make decisions. As the interviews revealed, Gofore's clients associate it with high-quality services. When competing with other businesses in an industry that offers highly detailed, tailored services, the quality aspect is something that clients prefer over price. Gofore is not aiming to compete with low rates, nor should it be. A higher price may sometimes be even associated with guaranteed quality. Organisations that are looking for low-priced services may not be in Gofore's best interest to even pursue using their marketing activities.

Making sure that the clients receive what is promised is what makes Gofore stand out from its competitors, and this is something they should let their potential clients know from early on. This was the main point of interest for the interviewees in this study. Ensuring visitors and leads know this from the first pieces of digital content they stumble upon might make acquiring prospects, and

therefore, clients, more efficient. Not all of their current clients have entered the sales funnel through digital content, but their future visitors will be more familiar with it, and digital content creation will be more crucial than it is today in terms of lead conversion.

The interviewing process unveiled that the clients are generally satisfied with the purchase experience. However, problems occurred when the sales representative or account manager who is in charge of communication with the client is replaced. The most significant challenges for Gofore's buyer persona when approaching consultation services is their certainty of whether or not the service will be sufficient for their needs and will the quality of it reduce due to unexpected events. This exposes a risk for the sales department. The relationship with the client may be damaged if a single person leaves the company. This risk could be disposed of if a system were to be established, in which the responsibility of maintaining the client relationship was distributed amongst several employees. A model for strategic account management, where a customer relationship management software combined with automation could offer a solution where the information exchanged with the client would be available for Gofore's sales team.

The areas of development mentioned offer a challenge and a possibility for Gofore to develop an inbound marketing strategy that could lead to rapid growth. Acquiring new leads is costly and requires investments. The interview data implies that the clients are generally not aware of the full selection of services that Gofore has to offer. However, if their content would educate their clients about their whole range of services, they could be able to make larger sales deals. I would suggest emphasizing their strengths related to service quality, reliability and flexibility of services in their digital content creation from an early stage when attracting visitors onto different landing pages. Creating attractive digital content that instantly addresses Gofore's buyer persona's common concerns may be used to assure them of the high quality and devotion to their services. The first piece of content a potential client sees may be the one that decides whether or not they want to continue to find out more about Gofore and their services, and inducing a purchase process.
Based on the characteristics of the buyer persona, and more importantly, its habits, it would seem that social media presence is necessary. Blogs are another form of content through which the buyer persona retrieves information either during business hours or on spare time. Creating attractive yet informative content on social media and blogging platforms is something Gofore needs to continue doing. However, there is always room for improvement. Gofore might want to inspect the efficiency of their digital content by making marginal changes in the content, specifically regarding content titles and headings, and inspecting which of them creates the most traffic and leads the

most visitors onto their landing page. This strategy of having multiple campaigns with minor differences in content is referred to as A/B testing, and may also be used when expanding to new regions or markets to determine the optimal content and strategy to acquire new leads and clients (Biedrzycki, 2016).

The buyer persona created in this paper reflects on Gofore's current clients only. As mentioned, their future clients will most likely be more familiar with digital content and digital platforms, in general, than their current ones. This is why it is crucial for future success to update their perception of their buyer persona. Introducing new services and forms of consultation would also create a need for updating the vision of a buyer persona. A suggestion would be to continually conduct interviews with new clients to keep track of the overall client behaviour and attitudes, as well as being aware of when to make changes in their digital content.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Interview questions (in Finnish)

1. Nimi/organisaatio/Titteli/Koulutus/Ikä
2. Käytätkö sosiaalista mediaa vapaa-ajalla tai työhön liittyvissä asioissa? Missä kanavissa?
3. Vaatiiko työtehtäväsi tiedon hakemista päivittäin/viikoittain/satunnaisesti?
4. Mistä kanavista haet tietoa? Oletko aktiivinen jakamaan tietoa tutuillesi?
5. Olitko mukana ostopäätöksessä Goforen kohdalla?
6. Montako henkeä osallistui ostopäätökseen?
7. Montako henkeä tapasit Goforen puolelta ostotapahtumassa?
8. Kuinka vahva tietotaso sinulla oli Goforen palveluista?
9. Mitkä olivat kolme asiaa, jotka vaikuttivat mielestäsi ostopäätökseen?
10. Mitkä olivat mielestäsi suurimmat kysymykset, pelot tai esteet hankinnalle?
11. Millaiseksi kuvailisit ostotapahtumaa?
12. Keneen ottaisit yhteyttä Goforella? Millä välineellä ottaisit yhteyttä?
13. Mistä olet kuullut Goforesta?
14. Kuvaile Goforen brändiä ja palvelutarjontaa muutamalla sanalla.

Appendix 2. Interview questions (translated into English)

1. Name/Organisation/Job Title/Education/Age
2. Do you use social media in your spare time or in work-related matters? Which channels do you use?
3. Does your job description require information retrieval daily/weekly/occasionally?
4. Which channels do you use for information retrieval? Do you actively share information with your acquaintances?
5. Were you involved in the purchase decision?
6. How many people were involved in the purchase decision?
7. How many people did you meet from Gofore during the purchase process?
8. What level of knowledge did you have of Gofore's services?
9. Which three factors affected your purchase decision?
10. What were your biggest questions, doubts or barriers for the acquisition?
11. How would you describe the purchase process?
12. Who would you contact from Gofore? How would you contact them?
13. Where have you heard from about Gofore?
14. Describe Gofore's brand and range of services using a few words.