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**SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING FOR FINNISH SMALL AND
MEDIUM SIZED
BUSINESSES: CASE FINLAND**

Bachelor's thesis

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I hereby declare that I have compiled the paper independently and all works, important standpoints and data by other authors has been properly referenced and the same paper has not been previously presented for grading.

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ABSTRACT

The marketing world has been changing drastically in the past two decades with the digitalization. Social media marketing is one of the features that digitalization has brought to us and today social media platforms are packed full with marketing content.

The purpose of this thesis is to find out how can a small or or medium sized company stand out from the mass with their social media marketing actions and to gain knowledge of what kind attitudes small and medium sized Finnish companies had towards social media marketing before and after they started using it in their own operations. A qualitative research in a total number of three interviews with Finnish small or medium sized companies was conducted for the research to find relevant answers to the research questions of the thesis. The primary data for the work was acquired from the research and secondary data was gained from literal and digital sources from books and articles.

The results of the study indicated that small and medium sized companies can find their own strengths to stand out in the competition for visibility in the social media marketing world with good understanding of social media marketing and what is important in it.

Keywords: Social media marketing, social media content, marketing, social media

INTRODUCTION

Today, consumers of every business industry are using social media. People spend a remarkable time period every day scrolling through their Instagram or Facebook feeds. In the past twenty years, digital media and social media have started to offer interesting alternatives for traditional media as a media source. These to “newcomers” have their hands also in media marketing. This has forced companies to reform their marketing actions and to take social and digital media into account when they think of ways to interact and communicate with their target group.

Social media marketing is a norm nowadays and companies utilize it widely in their marketing strategies. The research problem of this thesis is that all of the social media marketing campaigns are not successful. All campaigns don't receive as much as attention or clicks as the management of the company wanted. Today people see so many advertisements online that it's hard to make an impact and stay in the customers' minds. For some reason, the content is not interesting or special enough.

The aim of this bachelor's thesis is to find solutions to the research questions that are listed below, and to produce timeliness information about social media marketing and from it's different features. The main research question of the thesis is;

How can small and medium sized companies stand out from the mass with their social media marketing?

The secondary question is;

What kind of attitudes Finnish small and medium sized companies had towards social media marketing before and after engaging in it?

The first section of the thesis is theoretical framework. In this chapter the author introduces the history of social media, and tells about social media marketing in general, and about the special characteristics of social media marketing for small and medium sized companies. Theoretical part

explains the features of good social media marketing content and how social media can be divided into three separate divisions which all have different characteristics. Social media marketing's special features for SME companies are gone through. Second section of the thesis is about research methodology and results. In this section, data collection methods and data analysis methods are presented and after them the results and findings of the thesis follow. The research questions are both covered individually in their own sections. The last section of the thesis is conclusion where the main findings of the research are summed.

1. SOCIAL MEDIA AND SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING

Social media can be defined as a collective of online communication channels dedicated to community-based input, interaction, content sharing and collaboration (Rouse, Wigmore). Social media is based on content created by the web users themselves and web user participation. In social media users can share content and media in real-time publicly or privately, and they create profiles for themselves in different kind of platforms for business and leisure purposes.

1.1 Brief history of social media

Two decades ago before the internet and social media revolutionized the way people can communicate and share information with each other, no one had even dreamed of being capable to distribute information, thoughts or ideas globally in real-time in just a matter of seconds. Today anyone can reach a potential group of millions of people through various channels that social media has to offer to all the people around the globe.

The first social media network platform was created in 1997 and it was called Six Degrees. For the first time in the history of social network, Six Degrees allowed its users to connect with their friends through internet with the help of a social network platform (Hendricks 2013). Six Degrees only operated for three years but this type of connection system is still the most popular way of connecting with new people in contemporary social media applications.

Six Degrees was followed by the first online chat service MSN messenger in 1999. MSN messenger offered a simple text chat service which you could operate from your computer desktop. MSN messenger gain popularity in as it gave alternative communication possibilities for people who were limited to use mainly SMS, Telephone call and e-mail in their daily communications. MSN messenger was used during working hours between colleagues and also between friends and family members on leisure time (Petronzio 2012).

Simultaneously with the growing popularity of new chatting service MSN, internet blogging started to grow fast. Blogging sites like Blogger.com and many others were established in the early years

of 21st century. A blog search engine Technorati tracked down 100 000 blogs in late 2003, and by July 2004 it found over three million blogs (Rettberg 2014). That gives an image of the rapid growth of internet blogging world.

The launch of Facebook in 2004 was a big turning point for the social media. Facebook allows its users to share images, videos and texts through platforms designed for computers and portable devices. Facebook also includes a chatting service and user can even link his SMS message application to the Facebook messenger service. Facebook was founded by Harvard dropout Mark Zuckerberg. Facebook had over 2.3 billion monthly users in 2018 (Statista 2018). Zuckerberg wrote a post on his personal Facebook page in 2015 saying that over one billion people used Facebook in just one day (Zuckerberg). That is every seventh person of the whole world's population. On Facebook, a company can share content or offers on their page or for example create competitions where free product prizes are available for everyone. Facebook also offers classic advertising model where advertisements appear on Facebook user feeds or in the sidebars of the page. They can lead to a Facebook page or to a web page outside Facebook. Targeting can be done by demographic factors taken from Facebook user data (Marrs 2019). Today even customer service can be operated through Facebook with the Facebook chat service.

Twitter is a popular microblogging service where users are able to create status messages called "tweets". These tweets can express opinions from different kind of topics (Go, Bhayani, Huang). Tweets can cover any subject from sports and music to world politics and environmental issues. Unlike typical blogging sites Twitter delivers short and compact posts with a maximum of 140 characters, compared to long and thorough blog posts. Twitter was founded in 2006, two years after Facebook. In 2018 it had over three hundred million active users (Statista 2018) making it one of the biggest social media portals in the whole world. A company can put up a Twitter page to share it's own content. Twitter offers advertising in the same way as Facebook does, with the same targeting factors. On twitter, a company can also purchase a promotion for it's tweet or page to receive more coverage. The promoted tweets appear to the people with those demographic factors which the company has chosen (Twitter).

Instagram is a unique social media platform which completely focuses on sharing photos and videos. On the contrary to Facebook and Blogging, on Instagram the possibility of writing long posts is completely eliminated. Instagram has successfully copied a feature called ‘‘Stories’’ from social media application called Snapchat. Instagram stories launched in 2016 on the platform. In stories the users can share a picture or a video for their followers or to the public and it will only be visible for 24 hours until it vanishes from the profile forever. Today Instagram has over one billion users (Statista 2018) and the stories feature has over 400 million users every day (Yurieff 2018). Instagram advertisements can appear between the stories when a person uses the Instagram stories feature or they can appear between Instagram posts on the Instagram feed (Instagram). Companies many times establish their own Instagram fan pages where they can share promotional content in a form of photos and videos.

1.2 Social media marketing

Web 2.0 is another term for social media and it describes internet’s cumulative development towards more social and interactive media. The term was created when internet website and service providers and users started to develop internet from static internet sites towards more user-involving, social and interactive direction (Karjaluoto 2010). All the social media platforms are included in the Web 2.0

Social media marketing is communication and interaction between a customer and a company through social media platforms and applications. New web technologies have made it easy for anyone to create- and most importantly- distribute their own content. A blog writing, Instagram post or a YouTube video can be produced virtually free and viewed by millions (Zarrella 2010). Companies can now create their own interesting material for potential customers and they don’t need to rely on paid advertising like they had to before. It is inevitable that marketing trends are switching towards social media marketing methods from classic marketing methods. This is because customers are moving from classic media towards social media. Holly Paquette writes in her text *Social Media as a Marketing Tool* that consumers have switched from passive receivers of marketing message to consumers that express their opinions in both positive and negative matters

on platforms like Facebook, Myspace, YouTube and Twitter. She says that consumers' participation with the company on social media enhances the need for companies to be active participants in the social networking communities they have created online (Paquette 2013).

Every company starts its own social media marketing communications basically from a scratch. There is no previously created strategy or plan on how your company should approach the customer. The first writing of the company's blog is always the hardest, the first Facebook post of the company is always the hardest. It is important to do background research and planning properly before starting to share content (Leino 2011).

- Take a look at your competitors. Reading blogs, writings and posts and looking YouTube videos of company's competitors can be useful
- Ask your customers; do they use social media and how often?
- Ask the customers would they be interested in getting offers and information through social media channels or are the current communication ways sufficient
- Posts should be written beforehand. Only the experienced social media content creators should write posts straightaway from the rebound
- While writing, going through who is your target group and how the post is interesting to them is important
- Testing. Let the colleagues and employees of the company read the text before posting and listen to their ideas
- Listening to the feedback, sharing stories, the audience will listen to them

1.3 Three divisions of social media

Leino (2011) divides social media marketing actions into three different separate parts. Purchased media, personal media and earned media all have different characteristics and different benefits. The three divisions of social media can be easily identified and detected from the social media

Purchased media form is a relatively safe way of doing advertising as it gives a promise of how the media behaves. YouTube video or a Facebook advertisement can guarantee a certain amount of viewers who will see the advertisement, or a website can promise a certain amount of views for a banner advertisement. By purchasing the media space a company can reach the wanted amount of contacts with potential customers. Purchased media can be useful when launching a new project and when a company wants to raise awareness of their product or brand (Leino 2011).

The purpose of personal media is to promote sales and build customer loyalty by creating value for customers in different forms such as: pictures, video or applications. These different types of content are offered in the company's personal social media channels. Offering exclusive content which can not be obtained anywhere else is creating the value to the customer. Interesting, unique or funny personal media is shared further on in customers own social media and this is how personal media turns into earned media. Creating good personal media environment needs to be a priority for a company as purposeful content can create competitive advantage at the market (Leino 2011).

The social media is full of earned media. Recommendations of your product, tips on how to use your product or product reviews are all part of earned media. Earned media is the most interesting form of media from the point of view of an entrepreneur and it should be pursued. The biggest advantage of earned media is that a company does not need to pay for the attention they receive from their customers in a form of shares, likes and positive reviews online in social media. The consumers spread the media among themselves. (Leino 2011). Earned media is basically the same thing as positive electronic word-of-mouth advertising. Electronic word-of-mouth advertising can be defined as negative or positive feedback given by potential, former or a current customer about any product or service offered by any company, which available for large masses of people on the internet (Chiosa 2014).

1.4 Content

Social media marketing can not function in a proper way without relevant content. Social media content is something that companies create, promote and share with their customers and groups. Content focused marketing can be defined as a marketing technique that focuses on creating and sharing content that appears relevant, interesting and valuable to the target group. It aims to attract a clearly selected audience and to develop profitable customer actions (Ahmad, Musa, Harun 2016). Producing interesting content, and using it in social media marketing is ideal as it is rather pulling and not pushing technique to make potential customers aware of your product or service and attract them. Unlike promoting products or services, content marketing method shares content that interacts and entices the target group (Plessis 2017). Using relevant content as a backbone of the company's marketing will bring many advantages for the company compared to its competitors can help a company to stand out from the others (Leino 2011). A big part of the purchasing project is done before contacting the supplier. Today customers evaluate their options and compare products and services online, and therefore a company should pay a lot of attention on the content they are sharing on their websites and in the social media (Siniaalto 2014). Properties of good content listed from literal sources and from online articles included these factors (Siniaalto 2014) (Plessis 2017) (Ahmad, Musa, Harun 2016):

- Content entices target group
- Content attracts curious old customers
- Content speaks to new customers
- Content creates awareness of company's activities
- Content can teach new customers before purchasing a product
- Content can eliminate barriers of demand
- Content pulls customer towards the company
- Content creates trust
- Content can help to build a fan base
- Content can help to capture attention
- Content can tell a story

There is large number of different kind of social media services, and the content must adapt to the regulations and ground rules of the platform. Often, creating content for different platforms at the same time is challenging because the services work in a different way. For example, a company can not share a Facebook text on Instagram because Instagram only supports posts in a for of pictures. Copy-Pasting the same text into different platforms is not recommended (Siniaalto 2014).

The role of a picture in the post is critical and multi-leveled. A good picture captures attention, supports the text and helps a customer to remember the content. A picture can be an illustrative photo, a clear photo of the product or infographic explaining the subject. The most important thing is that it makes the content stand out from the mass (Siniaalto 2014). Features of a good picture:

- Fits the topic
- Draws attention
- Stays in the memory of customer
- Helps to understand
- Invites reflection
- Awakens emotion

Today's audience are hungry for visual experiences. Twitter's internal data shows that people are three times more likely to engage with tweets that include visual content instead of just text. Images, colors, GIFs and videos capture people's attention when they scroll through their social media feeds (Twitter 2017).

Text is needed in addition to picture to activate target and to trigger a reaction. Especially in a commercial company's updates on social media, the text has significant role. The image inside a customers' mind is easily ruined by thoughtless text or leaving the text completely out. It is smart to remember that the same thing can be said in many different ways and even an unpleasant issue can be phrased with good words (Siniaalto 2014). Features of a good text:

- Less is more. Careful planning of the text and a compact form

- Stand out from the mass. Anyone can say ‘‘Happy New Year!’’ but how to say that in a more personal way?
- Versatility. Good text does not repeat the same expressions, but rather uses synonyms
- Experimenting new ways. There can be two separate texts from the same topic. It is typical for social medial channels that just one post does not reach the whole crowd

1.5 Small and medium sized enterprises

Small and medium sized enterprises play a big role in European economy. They create new jobs and build are firm base for economic growth. They also ensure the stability of the society. In year 2014, 88.8 million Europeans were employed by the 21 million SME companies around Europe. Out of ten companies nine are SMEs and they generate two thirds of all jobs in Europe (European Union 2015). Today there is SME companies in all different fields of business and they vary a lot in terms of size and special characteristics.

SME shortening stands for a small or medium sized enterprise. European Union determines company size with two measures which are Staff headcount and either turnover or balance sheet total. The limiting values listed by EU are following:

Company category	Staff Headcount	Turnover	Balance Sheet total
Medium-sized	< 250	≤ € 50 m	≤ € 43 m
Small	< 50	≤ € 10 m	≤ € 10 m
Micro	< 10	≤ € 2 m	≤ € 2 m

SME businesses are more numerous than large ones and they also contributed more to the annual employment growth within EU than large companies did. A research conducted by EIM which observed average annual total employment change from 2002 to 2010, and contribution of different size classes into the change, divided EU countries into three sections:

- EU15 The original fifteen member states of the EU

- EU12 The twelve member states that joined EU after 1990
- EU27 All member states of the European Union in 2010

The companies offering financial services were eliminated from the study. The research revealed that contribution to growth of employment within the SME companies was largest in micro and in small companies, medium and large sized were short to them. The average number of annual occupied persons from years 2002 to 2010 was nearly four times bigger in SMEs than it was in large companies (Westhof, Snijders, Timmermans, Vroonhof).

1.6 Social media marketing for SME businesses

Kronberg (2017) conducted a research about how can micro sized companies benefit from social media marketing. She interviewed a total of nine micro companies. She found out that social media marketing was used in all of the companies and that it can bring up several benefits for smaller companies. The micro companies using social media marketing had experienced benefits such as more visibility, increased sales, more traffic on website and more contacts.

Social media marketing is virtually free. This fact alone should invite SME businesses to adapt it to be a part of their marketing communications (Interview 3). As smaller businesses naturally have lower budget for their marketing activities, social media can help a small business to reach potential customers without investing a lot of money in their marketing efforts. Leino states in his book that the effectiveness of social media marketing can be monitored and measured. Free social media monitoring applications deliver accurate data in a form that is easy to interpret without being a social media marketing specialist.

Bigger companies can create social media campaigns that are directed generally to every present and potential customer. They don't need specific information from all of their different target groups to make be successful. Strong brands and well-known products of big multi-cultural companies makes it possible to use same marketing approach among a very diverse group of targets. Unlike big companies, smaller businesses need to know their target group. Many of SME

businesses are operating in their local area. And even if they are planning to expand their business to international markets, it is not going to happen over night. SMEs don't have big brand awareness among people to help them with their sales. Smaller companies really need to know their target audience, their demographics, psychographics and behavioral aspects. SME companies need to plan and allocate their social media marketing actions taking these things into consideration.

(Leino 2011)

SMEs can not compete with large companies in terms of invests in research and development, economics of scale or large promotional expenditures. But given the advantages in flexibility within a small company the strategic concept can be more flexible and adaptable towards new marketing solutions (Torzhevskaja 2017). The dynamicity of a small company can be made use of in small company's social media marketing. When a new marketing trend or a platform in social media marketing world comes up, the small companies can be first ones to exploit it in their activities as the information flows faster through a small organization and decisions making process is shorter.

While small companies conform and react to changes in their environment faster. They also need to be more open for new opportunities. SME entrepreneur and marketing strategist Shari Medini writes that on the contrary to big companies who can lose millions of customers and lots of revenue by taking the wrong step in social media, small companies take a risk of losing their whole business by not trying new things in marketing. Small companies can try out new things and see if they work, and if if they don't work they can nimbly move on to something else (Medini 2017).

Blendtec is a company that manufactures kitchen appliances used for blending and mixing food. Blendtec company's social media marketing campaign "Will it blend?" which was launched in 2006 on YouTube, demonstrates the power of their blenders by blending unusual items that you would never imagine to be put inside a blending machine. In the videos, CEO and founder Tom Dickson tries to blend items such as iPads, golf clubs and crowbars and see if they blend or not. The most popular videos on their channel have tens of millions of views. Dickson has stated in an interview that the campaign took off almost instantly and that they have definitely felt an impact on their sales. "Will it blend?" is a great example of how SMEs can achieve success in social media marketing by creating a viral hit that starts to spread through the internet

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND RESULTS

In this thesis the author is conducting a research to find answers to research questions considering SME company social media marketing. The research was conducted using three different kinds of communication methods with the interviewees. This thesis contains both primary and secondary data. Theoretical part of the thesis is built from secondary data. The secondary data for theoretical section is gathered from both literal and digital sources. The primary data for research is gathered from a qualitative research.

The marketing research methods are divided to quantitative and qualitative research methods. The qualitative interviews can be structured, semi-structured or unstructured. The research design of this thesis is a structured qualitative interview with three SME entrepreneurs, who widely utilizes social media marketing in their companies' marketing functions. One of the he interviews was conducted face-to-face and two of the interviews via e-mail. The author of this thesis believes that with the supporting theory and the interview he conducted, he obtained necessary information for answering the research questions of the thesis.

2.1 Data collection

For acquiring additional information to support the theoretical section, the author conducted a qualitative research with three Finnish SME entrepreneurs. Primary data of the thesis was acquired from these interviews to be able to find solutions to research questions. One of the interviews was conducted face-to-face and two interviews via e-mail. All three interviewees were contacted successfully again by phone for more specific answers.

The structure of the interview is following. The interview begins with questions related to basic information of the interviewees' company's functions and operations, and questions about the background of the interviewee. After this category the interview moves towards general issues of social media marketing and further on to social media marketing matters in SME companies. The interview was ended naturally with closing questions.

The complete transcripts of all the interviews can be seen appendices section of this thesis.

The theoretical section of the thesis is collected from various sources using both digital and literal information resources. Online articles and researches, and books concerning social media marketing were among the most popular information sources the author used.

2.2 Data analysis

To avoid errors in the registering of the interview, the face-to-face interview was recorded with a voice recording device and the phone interviews were recorded also. E-mail interviews were carefully examined and handled to avoid errors in spelling and registering. All the answers of the interviews are presented as they were said. No external tools were used in the data analysis. The data collected in the theoretical part and from the interview are analyzed to find adequate answers to the research questions set in the introduction part of the thesis.

2.3 Results

In this section of the thesis, the results of the interviews are presented. The author merges together and compares the findings of the theory section and data gained from the interviews with the SME companies. The combination of information from both of these sources are used to find adequate and thorough answers for the research questions of the thesis which were introduced to the reader earlier. Both of the research questions are answered individually and the findings and remarks are put together in the conclusion section of the text.

2.3.1 Which kind of attitudes and feelings Finnish SME companies had towards Social Media Marketing before and after engaging in it?

All the three companies saw social media marketing as a natural first choice for their main marketing channel. Still, before starting the social media marketing actions two out of three

companies I interviewed had second thoughts on putting too much weight on marketing in social media because of the huge amount of marketing material in social media and their limited resources felt like they are in disadvantaged position compared to bigger companies when they were first starting up social media marketing. They were not sure if the investments in marketing campaigns on social media sites would pay off eventually. In a small company, putting marketing message to the internet where there is various other marketing messages of countless other companies can feel pointless.

“We were cautious and did not want go ‘all-in’ right away to the social media marketing” (Interview 1)

“After creating our company’s own social media pages, we felt unsure how much we should invest in marketing on those platforms. We felt that the amount of marketing content in the social media and the power of bigger companies can be very overwhelming and our voice could get lost in all that noise.” (Interview 1)

“Creating our own Facebook and Instagram pages were a natural choice for us as they work also as company’s homepage and also as a main conversation channel between us and a customer. But before starting marketing on social media we thought carefully on how much to rely on it as our efforts could go past our target group without noticing because social media marketing is so popular nowadays, We always planned to use it though, we were just not sure about the volume and importance to us” (Interview 2)

The two companies that had doubts about social media marketing used adjectives such as “cautious” and “careful” when the author asked about their attitudes toward social media marketing before they engaged in it. One of the three companies felt confident about social media marketing right away and they had a clear vision of making the social media marketing the most important marketing feature even before starting their actual marketing operations.

After all of the companies had engaged the social media marketing I asked if their attitudes had changed towards social media marketing, and how they feel about it now as they are using social

media in their marketing. Both of the companies that had doubts about social media marketing before engaging in it, had totally changed their feelings about it.

“Before starting to create content to social media and beginning to invest in it we had our doubts, but approximately after one year of starting the social media marketing efforts, we started to realize the power of it. Platform statistics and a questionnaire on our homepage revealed that most of the leads to our website came through social media. This is the point when we realized that social media can be valuable resource for us and we decided to increase our efforts in it.” (Interview 1)

“Social media was a success in our marketing. We got contacted by people who ever interested in our services through Facebook Messenger and through Instagram direct messages. That was a very positive surprise for us we got rid of the doubts we had after we saw that social media creates great opportunities for us.” (Interview 2)

“Right from the start, social media was planned to be our focus in the marketing sector. It turned out be just as successful for our company as we hoped it would be. Our attitude towards social media marketing has remained good all the way through our company’s history.” (Interview 3)

2.3.2 How can small and medium sized companies stand out from the mass with their social media marketing?

Today when businesses of all sizes have widely adopted social media marketing as a part of their marketing operations, it can be hard to stick out positively from the large mass of marketing content which is taking place. Two of the companies I interviewed had second thoughts on putting too much weight on marketing in social media because of the huge amount of marketing material in social media and their limited resources felt like they are in disadvantaged position compared to bigger companies when they were starting up social media marketing. They were not sure if the investments in marketing campaigns on social media sites would pay off eventually. In a small

company, putting marketing message to the internet where there is various other marketing messages of countless other companies can feel pointless.

“Every single consumer and a potential customer of any business face so much marketing and advertising traffic today in social media that they largely just ignore it. Standing out from the boring grey mass of advertisements is a real challenge, especially for smaller companies with limited resources.” (Interview 3)

Kronberg’s study revealed that social media marketing can offer many benefits for smaller companies (Kronberg 2017). Standing out from the mass in social media is important as today’s social media platform are packed full with marketing material. Content must be interesting for the target group and a social media posts need to support brand’s image and the aim of the social media campaign. (Interview 3) In this part of the research the author answers the research question how can small or medium sized company stand out from the mass with their social media marketing.

The study revealed that two of the companies that involved entrepreneurs and owners of the company as an active as part of the content has given them positive results in their marketing actions. In the marketing actions the companies deliver their marketing message through the entrepreneurs themselves and they many times appear in the videos and pictures on their social media platforms. Both of these companies felt that this way of producing content has appealed positively to the target group. Giving a face to the content and the presence of the owners was an effective factor in social media marketing.

“In our social media marketing activities, we as head executives of the company bring our character and our personal traits to our marketing actions in a distinctive and special way. We are the ones that that created company’s values and we feel like that we are also the ones that can communicate them to the target group in the best form. This way the target group can connect with the core of our company. Our way of doing marketing has developed a lot of positive feedback and traffic to our website. We are bringing ourselves briskly to the content and that stands out, it has developed positive feedback and visibility for us.” (Interview 1)

“We are a two-man company and it really shows in our social media marketing, especially on our Instagram stories we like to be involved. We like to think ourselves as funny and humorous guys and it can be seen in our content. We thought this idea of bringing ourselves in to the content through, and it is all a part of our image building process. On our field of business, we communicate and interact with customers as we deliver our service and we want to be open about who we are, also in social media. This method in marketing that we use has created a lot of shares and comments for our content, visibility. And they have further on led to customer relationships.” (Interview 2)

“Big companies have usually stable image which they have built over a period of long time and and they feel like they want to protect it. Small companies can take risks and try out new things. They can be more courageous.” (Interview 3)

In small companies, resources are often smaller and more limited than in bigger companies. Focusing social media marketing on to some specific platforms appeared to be beneficial in the study. Focusing completely on a couple of platforms led to improvement in the quality of content in the companies and helped the company to stand out from the mass. Spreading the marketing message widely across many different platforms was seen as wasting scarce resources and also it seemed to deteriorate the power and effectiveness of marketing message.

“ We tried using Snapchat in our marketing but we felt like we were wasting our resources. We felt like we were creating too much content and the quality of content just got worse in the process. We also noticed but we did not reach as much people as we wanted with it and also we felt like that Snapchat’s features overlap with Instagram’s features so we decided to leave it out. Overall focusing only in Facebook and Instagram has worked for us better than adding a third platform to our marketing.” (Interview 1)

“We focus completely on Facebook and Instagram as our platforms. We like to think that we can reach our potential customers and target groups using these two channels as they are very popular among people and also they support well our content. Less is more in the social media marketing

channels, especially for smaller companies. This way we can better allocate our resources which leads to better content and helps stick out from the competitors.’’ (Interview 2)

When the author asked about properties and qualities of good content, the companies highlighted the matter of successfully executed visual side in the content. The theory section of the thesis noted that well created visuals in the content can be helpful when trying to separate own company from other companies positively. Instagram as a platform is known for its complete support on only pictures and videos, so it can be a fruitful platform for companies which are trying to stick out with visuals

‘‘We are utilizing visuals as a main focus in our social media marketing content. Eye catching visuals such as colors and photo perspectives have been in the center idea of our Instagram portfolio and it seems to be working when I think of the customer response. We also plan the chain and order of our pictures on our feed before hands to create a beautiful looking wholeness.’’ (Interview 2)

‘‘The visual side of our pictures and videos play a key role in our content. We want to create content that present our content in the best possible manner visually. Good and capturing picture takes the attention of a customer. Text is not in that important role. Without a good picture to support the text, the text won’t be noticed by audiences.’’ (Interview 3)

Creating positive electronic word-of-mouth and trying to make content spread around the social media as a viral hit were two things that came up continuously during the interviews. These two things were seen as very effective ways shine out from others in the social media marketing world. On the contrary, reaching these two goals was seen as a hard and complicated task. Today social media is used a tremendously by companies. Social media has become a good environment for spreading reviews and comments from one customer to another and companies should be focusing a lot on creation of good word-of-mouth. When recommendation or a good review comes to customer from person they know and not from the company, the customer tends to take the message more seriously (Yusof, Hashim, Nasiruddin 2016). Viral hit is a piece of content, usually a video or a picture that gains huge popularity on the internet, many times in a social media platform. Viral hit

spreads via likes and shares on and on like a snowball. Viral hit can bring forth the marketing message of a company nation wide or even worldwide (Interview 3). Achieving good word-of-mouth or creating a viral hit were seen as something to pursue.

“If a company manages to create viral hit, it is like winning in a lottery.” (Interview 2)

“In our company many of our customer contacts come through positive electronic word-of-mouth, when somebody comments our content or service in a positive manner, it appears also on the social media feeds of that person’s contacts and creates positive word-of-mouth.” (Interview 2)

CONCLUSION

The main purpose behind this thesis was to find answers to the research questions the author has chosen for his work. This thesis aimed to find answers to questions which were the following; How can an SME company stand out from the mass with its social media marketing actions and what kind of attitudes Finnish SME companies had towards social media marketing before and after engaging in it. The author also wanted create and gain up to date information of today's the social media marketing. From the results of the research, author can put together feelings that can be around and occur when an SME company first thinks about getting into the world of social media and how the feelings changed after adapting it into the company's marketing actions. Various methods and ways of standing out from the mass and being different compared to others were discovered in the study. Fundamental information and theories were acquired from literal and digital sources which helped in the understanding of basic concepts that are in connection with social media marketing. The research part was a crucial part of the thesis and it supported the theory section for finding answers and suggestions to the research questions. The qualitative research which was conducted for the study played a big role in finding answers for the research questions.

Before starting social media marketing themselves, Finnish SME companies had reserved attitudes towards social media marketing and they appeared to be very doubtful towards it. The research revealed that two out of the three companies were having concerns before they took social media marketing into their own marketing actions. The endless amount of marketing content in the social media seemed to create pressure on the companies and make them feel like they would not be heard in all that mess and the power of bigger companies and bigger brands was also mentioned. One out of the three companies felt confident about social media marketing before starting it and the interviewee said that their plan has always been to utilize social media.

The attitudes seemed to change quickly into completely other direction when social media and social media marketing started to show its positive sides for the company. Today social media marketing is used as a main part of the marketing in both of the companies that first had their doubts in it.

The interviews brought up many interesting aspects of how can SME companies stand out from the mass with their social media actions. Focusing only on some specific platforms to be able to better allocate and direct the company's resources was seen beneficial as it led to better content quality. Being courageous came up in the interviews and bringing entrepreneurs themselves in to front of the eyes of target audiences was seen as a good way of approaching the target groups, it seemed to appeal to them. Bringing entrepreneurs' own character to marketing was used in two of the companies interviewed. When discussing the topic of content with the interviewees two companies mentioned the huge importance and great value of good visuals. With good visual style the companies were able make a difference in social media marketing and stand out. Aiming for positive electronic word-of-mouth and viral hit came up in the interviews also. They were seen as hard to achieve but very effective once conquered.

There are various ways of standing out from the mass in social media marketing and this research was able to discover some of them. Results of this research could be used in SME companies when planning of engaging with social media marketing and thinking of ways how they could be in some special there and stand out from the others.

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APPENDICES

Face-to-face interview with the CEO of Ahjo Training Center

12th of April 2019

Interviewer: Manu Hirvonen

Duration: 45 minutes

Question 1. What is your educational background and professional occupation?

Well, I am a Master of Science in Marketing and after three years of running my business Ahjo Training Center, I decided quit my day job and focus all my attention to my career as an entrepreneur. I am the Chief Executive Officer of Ahjo Training Center Oy.

Question 2. What kind of business does your company Ahjo Training Center do?

Ahjo Training Center operates in the city of Kerava, Finland and we are offering a wide selection of different kind of martial arts courses. We offer sports such as: Brazilian Jiu-jitsu, Judo, Boxing, Kickboxing, Thai Boxing, MMA and Wrestling. We offer both individual and group training.

Training for Warriors is another scheme we are offering. Training for Warriors offers cross-fit lessons which consist of group lessons and strength training, and a fitness circuits.

Question 3. What kind of attitudes and feelings your company had for social media marketing before you started utilizing it?

Well, at first were not completely convinced with the social media marketing. We were not sure how much we wanted to value it in our company's marketing. After creating our company's own social media pages, we felt unsure how much we should invest in marketing on our platforms. We felt that the amount of marketing content in the social media and the power of bigger companies can be very overwhelming and our voice could get lost in all that noise. We were cautious and did not want go "all-in" right away to the social media marketing.

Question 4. What about feelings and attitudes after you started using social media marketing?

As I said before, at first and before starting to create content to social media and beginning to invest in it we had our doubts, but approximately after one year of starting the social media marketing efforts, we started to realize the power of it. Platform statistics and a questionnaire on our homepage revealed that most of the leads to our website came through social media. This is the point when we realized that social media can be valuable resource for us and we decided to increase our efforts in it

Question5. What types of social media marketing your company uses?

In addition to our company's personal social media space, we use Instagram and Facebook advertising. Banner advertisements and Stories advertisements mainly. The statistics show that these ways of doing advertising works well for our company and we receive increasing amount of clicks all the time. We have this so called 'year clock' in use to know when to upload material to these sources. We are putting the main events and important dates to the calendar type clock. That is how we know well in advance what is coming up and we have our content created well in advance before the date. You also have to leave empty spaces to the clock, because suddenly there can come up new important posting topics that you need to get out. You cannot plan a too tight timetable over a timespan of a year.

Question 6. What channels your company uses?

We use Facebook and Instagram. We also use LinkedIn where we share only our major news and connect with other companies. LinkedIn is more like a place where stay in touch with other companies, not so much with individual customers.

Question 7. How did you select these channels?

At first we thought, what platforms are our target group using. A quick discussion with our customers of that time made Facebook to be a natural first choice for our company. We also thought what kind of content are we planning to produce for our potential customers and which platforms support our content in the best possible way. We wanted to produce pictures and video and combine

them with text so we picked Instagram. Instagram was also popular among our customers and is generally popular with social media users.

Question 8. What are the the elements of good social media content? What kind of content stands out?

Of all, the most successful post is one that awakens a feeling in the follower, creates emotion. The challenge is to stand out from the crowd and create emotional reactions and communicates company's values. In our social media marketing activities, we as head executives of the company bring our character and our personal traits to our marketing actions in a distinctive and special way. We are the ones that that created company's values and we feel like that we are also the ones that can communicate them to the target group in the best form. This way the target group can connect with the core of our company. Our way of doing marketing has developed a lot of positive feedback and traffic to our website. We are bringing ourselves briskly to the content and that stands out, it has developed positive feedback and visibility for us.

Question 9. What tools are you using for campaign monitoring?

We use pretty much only the analytics and tools provided by by Facebook and Instagram for companies. Additionally, we use only Google analytics.

Question 10. How the target group needs to be taken into account when doing social media marketing in SME companies?

Taking target group into account is very important. We put a lot effort into research to find out characteristics of our target group. Next step was to thoroughly think how we can reach them in the best manner and what kind of content and material could appeal to them. This was all done thoroughly before we started to plan which marketing methods we are going to use and in which manner.

Question 11. What differences do you see between traditional marketing and social media marketing?

The biggest difference is, that social media marketing changes faster and is much more hectic than traditional media is. For a small business this creates a chance to be on top of the game all the time as organization structure is more narrow and information moves quickly. Traditional marketing is one-way communication and social media marketing is interactive communication with the customers. Nowadays, however, traditional and social marketing can be intertwined and it is hard to separate them from each other, but that is another matter however.

Question 12. Why should small or medium sized enterprise use social media marketing in it's marketing operations

A small company can share content in their own channels for free which is just great. Traditional media marketing like ads on newspapers or radio always cost money. This is specially a benefit of social media marketing for small businesses where financial resources are scarce. It offers a great channel to take care of customer service of the company. It can also help to create a long lasting customer relationship

Question 13. How can small or medium sized enterprise stand out from the mass with it's social media marketing?

Allocating resources correctly leads to better content and helps in standing out from the mass. We tried using Snapchat in our marketing but we felt like we were wasting our resources. We felt like we were creating too much content and the quality of content just got worse in the process. We also noticed but we did not reach as much people as we wanted with it and also we felt like that Snapchat's features overlap with Instagram's features so we decided to leave it out. Overall focusing only in Facebook and Instagram has worked for us better than adding a third platform for us. The amount of content we created reduced but the quality got better and this is important in SMEs. Good content is another part that can help a company to stand out. Good content creates feeling in the follower, it creates emotion. The visual side is more important than the text and it's hard to gain as much attention with only text than with good visuals.

Email and phone interview with Sås Catering Oy

5th of May 2019

Interviewer: Manu Hirvonen

Question 1. What is your educational background and professional occupation?

I am a Bachelor of Hospitality Management and I am currently doing university studies on entrepreneurship. I am still working a couple of shifts in restaurant Grön in Helsinki, but I am planning to soon to put all my efforts into my career as an entrepreneur.

Question 2. What kind of business does your company do?

We have two concepts under one company. The first and more important concept to our business is Sås Catering which offers catering services for businesses and individual consumers as well. The other concept is called Yrttipojat and in this concept we deliver fresh ingredients from Finnish nature mainly to restaurants. We have also seen growing interest from individuals for this concept.

Question 3. What kind of social media marketing does your company use

Facebook is the one most important channel for us as it works as our company's homepage also. We use Facebook and Instagram channels where we can easily share our content for free of charge. We also from time to time engage in paid advertising on those platforms.

Question 4. What kind of attitudes and feelings your company had for social media marketing before you started utilizing it?

Creating our own Facebook and Instagram pages were a natural choice for us as they work also as company's homepage and also as a main conversation channel between us and a customer. But before starting marketing on social media we thought carefully on how much to rely on it as our efforts could go past our target group without noticing because social media marketing is so popular nowadays, we always planned to use it though, we were just not sure about the volume and importance to us

Question 5. What about feelings and attitudes after you started using social media marketing?

Social media was a success in our marketing. We got contacted by people who ever interested in our services through Facebook Messenger and through Instagram direct messages. That was a very positive surprise for us we got rid of the doubts we had after we saw that social media creates great opportunities for us.

Question 6. What types of social media marketing your company uses?

We mostly rely on our own content but from time to time we use sponsored advertisements on Instagram, or the stories advertising feature.

Question 7. What channels your company uses?

We use only Facebook and Instagram as our channels, we don't even think about taking more of them to our marketing operations as we have our hand full with these already.

Question 8. How did you select these channels?

They came up as a natural way for us. We thought about the channels that we use personally, and the channels that most people use and came up with these two. We held two channels as a maximum for us because there is only two us and we did not want to greedy. It could have led to bad post and bad content.

Question 9. What are the the elements of good social media content? What kind of content stands out?

That is a good question. A good content sticks in the mind of a customer and makes him think and process the message seen in the content. We are utilizing visuals as a main focus in our social media marketing content. Eye catching visuals such as colors and photo perspectives have been in the center idea of our Instagram portfolio and it seems to be working when I think of the customer response. We also plan the chain and order of our pictures before hands to create a beautiful looking wholeness. Also using humor can be strong method in content creation. We are a two-man company and it really shows in our social media marketing, especially on our Instagram stories we like to be involved. We like to think ourselves as funny and humorous guys and it can be seen in our content. We thought this idea of bringing ourselves in to the content through, and it is all a part of our image building process. On our field of business, we communicate and interact with customers as we

deliver our service and we want to be open about who we are. This method in marketing that we use has created a lot of shares and comments for our content, visibility. And they have further on led to customer relationships.

Question 10. What tools are you using for campaign monitoring?

We get a great variety of data only from the own tools offered by Instagram and Facebook. We get all the information we need and more from those sources

Question 11. How the target group needs to be taken into account when doing social media marketing in SME companies?

We are targeting both businesses and consumers with our marketing. This has been taken into account with our market planning. Of course any company needs to produce information that is interesting for their target group. We have tried to keep our content interesting for both B2C and B2B companies. Small company can't waste resources to produce general marketing content, but it should focused to something at least at some level.

Question 12. What differences do you see between traditional marketing and social media marketing?

- Dynamic vs stable
- Low cost vs big cost
- Interactive vs mechanic
- Two-way vs one-way

Question 13. Why should small or medium sized enterprise use social media marketing in it's marketing operations

It is a great channel for reaching big masses of people and spread your marketing message to them. It also free if you rely completely on your own content in your own sources. Those two came first into my mind. Possibility to create positive word-of-mouth is also valuable for food service providers like ourselves. Social media creates a chance for message to spread fast and far.

Question 14. How can small or medium sized enterprise stand out from the mass with it's social media marketing?

We focus completely on Facebook and Instagram as our platforms. We like to think that we can reach our potential customers and target groups using these two channels as they are very popular among people and also they support well our content. Less is more in the social media marketing channels, especially for smaller companies. This way we can better allocate our resources which leads to better content and helps us stick out from the competitors. In our company many of our customer contacts come through positive electronic word-of-mouth, when somebody comments our content or service in a positive manner, it appears also on the social media feeds of that person's contacts and creates positive word-of-mouth which can separate your company from competitors. Creating a nation wide viral hit is something we have dreamed of for a long time. If a company manages to create viral hit, it is like winning in a lottery.

Email and phone interview with Aarniwood

6th of May 2019

Interviewer: Manu Hirvonen

Question 1. What is your educational background and professional occupation?

I am a Master of Business administration in marketing. I am one of the three founders of the company Aarniwood and I am taking part widely in all operations of the company.

Question 2. What kind of business does your company do?

We are selling wooden watches and eyewear in our own online store and through retailers.

Question 3. What kind of social media marketing does your company use

We actively use Facebook and Instagram marketing. They are the biggest channels where we spread awareness about our brand. Social media creates more traffic than anything else to our website in that leads to more purchases.

Question 4. What kind of attitudes and feelings your company had for social media marketing before you started utilizing it?

Social media was agreed on to be our main source of marketing. We agreed on this between all the founders and we all realized the large potential in it even before starting.

Question 5. What about feelings and attitudes after you started using social media marketing?

Right from the start, social media was planned to be our focus in the marketing sector. It turned out be just as successful for our company as we hoped it would be. Our attitude towards social media marketing has remained good all the way through our company's history.

Question 6. What types of social media marketing your company uses?

Paid advertising has been used ever since we started. These two channels work well for us and support our content in the best possible ways. Marketing research also revealed that these two are used mostly by our target group.

Question 7. What channels your company uses?

We are focusing all our efforts in Facebook and Instagram we can't see ourselves using anything else in the upcoming years. Of course we are ready if something comes up.

Question 8. How did you select these channels?

We came up with these sources were naturally when we were thinking about our own social media use and the type marketing we have seen around us. It really was not a hard a task

Question 9. What are the the elements of good social media content? What kind of content stands out?

The visual side of our pictures and videos play a key role in our content. We want to create content that present our content in the best possible manner visually. Good and capturing picture takes the attention of a customer. Text is not in that important role. Without a good picture to support the text,

the text won't be noticed by audiences. It is important the content supports the goals of the post and the brand. Text must be written in an interesting way to ensure the customer really reads it.

Question 10. What tools are you using for campaign monitoring?

In Facebook and Instagram platforms we use Facebook business manager which is a relatively good control panel for marketing campaigns. Google analytics is important in web shop traffic examining.

Question 11. How the target group needs to be taken into account when doing social media marketing in SME companies?

Target group is one of the most important factors in successful marketing. When target group is right, a mediocre marketing message works well and a good message works in an excellent way.

Question 12. What differences do you see between traditional marketing and social media marketing?

In social media marketing you can be successful even with a small budget. In traditional marketing you may need a ten thousand-dollar front page newspaper ad to be seen. Traditional media requires big investments whereas social media is small. Social media is a good way to reach a big amount of people with small financial investments.

Question 13. Why should small or medium sized enterprise use social media marketing in its marketing operations

- Good channel to bring yourself aware
- Create brand reputation
- Great way to show that you are better than the competitors
- Offers great possibilities to stick out from others

Question 14. How can small or medium sized enterprise stand out from the mass with its social media marketing? Every single consumer and a potential customer of any business face so much marketing and advertising traffic today in social media that they largely just ignore it. Standing out from the boring grey mass of advertisements is a real challenge, especially for smaller

companies with limited resources. Big companies have usually stable image which they have built over a period of long time and they feel like they want to protect it. Small companies can take risks and try out new things. They can be more courageous. Viral hit is also something we try to aim for viral hit spreads via likes and shares on and on like a snowball. Viral hit can bring forth the marketing message of a company nation wide or even worldwide. One of the strongest influencing ways is creating positive word-of-mouth. we are always aiming for good reviews and offering ways to give it on platforms. trying create positive word-of-mouth with our content, we value it very high inside our company.