

Vk.com as an effective tool to promote a business

Olga Volfovich

Bachelor's Thesis

31. 05. 2017

Bachelor's degree (UAS)

Field of Study Social Sciences, Business and Administration			
Degree Programme Degree Programme in International Business			
Author(s) Olga Volfovich			
Title of Thesis Vk.com as an effective tool to promote a business			
Date	07.09.2017	Pages/Appendices	61
Supervisor(s) Petteri Muuruvirta, Päivi Vestala			
Client Organisation/Partners			
<p>Abstract</p> <p>Social media play a very important role in today's society. For a business to be profitable, it is essential to use the opportunities given by social media to spread information, increase potential clients' awareness and as a result gain more customers.</p> <p>This thesis takes a close look at the number one social media website in Russian-speaking countries – vk.com. This thesis is primarily divided into two main parts – theoretical frame and a market research. The first part is based on a vk.com study, as well as on other websites and books. The thesis considers the definition of social media, the history of vk.com, the most effective features of this platform and possibilities of development for owners of commercial communities.</p> <p>The research data was collected with a survey of Russian-speaking regular Internet users and with direct interviews with business owners. All the data gathered is represented in this thesis and was analyzed.</p>			
Keywords Marketing, Business promotion, Social media			

CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION	4
2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.....	5
2.1 What is social media marketing?	5
2.1.1 Social media.....	6
2.1.2 Vk.com as a social media	7
2.2 Vk.com as a tool to promote a business.....	9
2.2.1 Opportunities	9
2.2.2 How to spread information	30
2.2.3. Weak sides of vk.com	33
3 RESEARCH	36
3.1 Methods.....	36
3.1.1 Survey	36
3.1.2. Interview	38
3.3 Data collection.....	38
3.3.1 Survey data.....	38
3.3.2 Interview data.....	50
4 SWOT ANALYSIS OF PROMOTION VIA VK.COM.....	54
5 CONCLUSION	55
REFERENCES.....	56

1 INTRODUCTION

Social media is an essential part of today's world. People of all ages, including kids and pensioners use social media websites on a daily basis. Since every average family has a personal computer and each member owns a smartphone with Internet connection, social media have become a constant companion. According to figures collected by a screen lock app, the average user actually checks their phone around 110 times per day (Woollaston 2013).

There are various types of these sites based on content. Moreover, some countries use certain websites, and others prefer different ones. All together they form an international huge net of social media. Every person on the planet who has access to the Internet is connected with other users. In modern society social media has become a source of information, communication, inspiration and a perfect platform for commercial purposes.

Vk.com is the fifth most popular website in the world and the number one social media site in Russia. It exists since 2006 and today more than 380 million users are registered at vk.com. Originally made for personal communication, nowadays the website is used for multiple purposes. Vk.com allows info sharing, blogging, movie watching and music listening, playing games, chatting and it has plenty of opportunities to offer to business owners for the growth of their companies.

At the current moment, every entrepreneur is welcomed to create a business community at the platform of vk.com. He or she can choose design options, rules, structure of the community and use it according to the purposes and wishes under the terms of the website.

Vk.com is continuously developing, growing social media website with perspective future. Since 2009 it operates as an international platform and today millions of people from non Russian-speaking countries use it every day.

In this thesis various aspects of vk.com will be shown. It considers website's business opportunities, features, functions and rules. The market research represented by survey for regular Internet users and interviews with business owners is supports the theoretical base and makes the real situation clear.

The whole thesis is dedicated to the role of vk.com in the effectiveness of a business.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This part of the thesis concerns theoretical base of the topic. It explains what SMM is and why it is needed to be applied. The part also clarifies what the social media is and describes vk.com as a tool for business promotion.

2.1 What is social media marketing?

With the development of informational technologies it has become clear that various platforms in the Internet can be used as a marketing base. Today thousands of websites offer users from all over the world to stay connected, communicate and share information. After emergence of the first social media with free access people soon realized that they not only can spread their thoughts, opinions, photos, and so on, but also use social marketing to promote their businesses. Moreover, at a certain point of Internet development it has become a necessity for a company survival to be present online.

The Internet opens plenty of opportunities. It offers business owners to tell about their companies to millions of potential buyers, including people living far away from the location of the company itself. Online presence plays a huge role in profitability of small enterprises especially, and this is proven by many success stories. But to gain all the advantages of social web it is not enough just to be present, businesses have to define social media marketing strategy.

What is *social media marketing*?

“Social media marketing is any form of direct or indirect marketing that is used to build awareness, recognition, recall, and action for a brand, business, product, person, or other entity and is carried out using tools of social Web, such as blogging, microblogging, social networking, social bookmarking, and content sharing” (Gunelius 2011, 10).

The most important word of this definition is ‘social’ and it means that a person has to contribute to the conversation to make social marketing really work.

2.1.1 Social media

Modern Internet offers wide range of omnifarious social media websites. What differs social media from regular website in the Internet?

“*Social media* is the collective of online communications channels dedicated to community-based input, interaction, content-sharing and collaboration” (Rouse 2013).

“*Social media* is online media where news, photos, videos, and podcasts are made public via social media websites through submission. Normally accompanied with a voting process to make media items become ‘popular’” (Evans 2008, 33).

Today there are more than 500 social networking websites on the globe. They unite people of the same interests such as photography, language learning, sport, video making, cars, charity and etc. There are also huge social media websites which combine multiple spheres of interests and thus become platforms for communication of people with different views, backgrounds, goals and hobbies.

The most popular global social media is Facebook. Originally launched in Massachusetts, United States, by 23-years old Mark Zuckerberg, in 2004 soon Facebook has become the international biggest website for communication, sharing, discussing and – for promoting businesses (Phillips 2007). As statistics show there are “1.86 billion monthly active users as of December 31, 2016” and about 85% of them are outside of North America (FB Newsroom 2017).

There are many others huge social networking websites born in the USA. YouTube is the most popular website for sharing videos of all sorts, whereas Vimeo was founded to share creative beautifully made videos. Users can find plenty platforms for microblogging. The biggest is Twitter, but also there are Tumblr, Foursquare, FriendFeed and etc. For uploading photos Instagram and Flickr exist. And every Internet user has definitely heard of personal communication oriented social media such as WhatsApp, Periscope, Viber and Telegram.

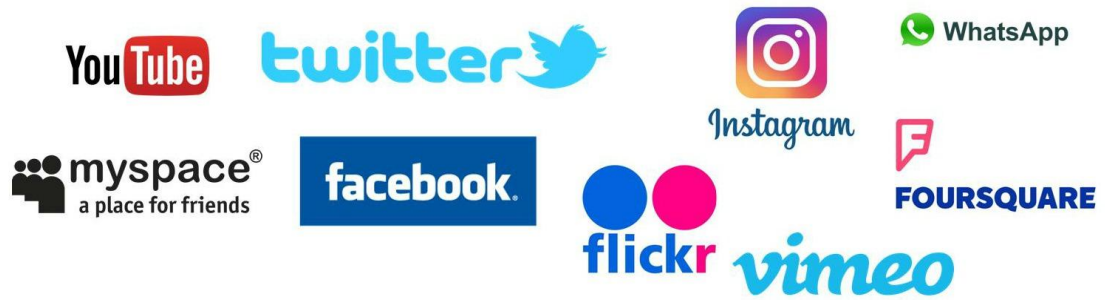


IMAGE 1. Logos of social media websites.

The websites mentioned above are truly international. Anyway, almost in every big country people use analogues to huge global social media. For example, in China they are represented by TENCENT RENREN, WECHAT and TENCENT QQ. Commonly known that the government of China prohibits access to Facebook, MySpace, Twitter and etc, this is why people have created their own social networking sites.

In Russian language speaking countries (Russia, Ukraine, Estonia, Belarus, Lithuania, Mongolia, Kazakhstan, Moldova, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Latvia, Georgia and etc.) the most popular social media website is vk.com. Let's talk about it more in the next chapter.

2.1.2 Vk.com as a social media

Vk.com was launched on 10th of October 2006 by Pavel Durov and had name vkontakte.ru (literally – ‘in contact’ in Russian). Website was originally made as a *Russian-speaking analogue of Facebook* and for some time it had been a closed social media for students only (Vostrov 2008). To get a profile, student had to be invited, and to register he or she must use their real name.



IMAGE 2. Old logo of vk.com.

After a month and a half vkontakte.ru had become an open website. At that point creators did their best promoting the website to have as much registered users as possible. They offered valuable prizes (different types of Apple products such as iPod Nano or iPod Shuffle) as for reward in contest among users for friends invitation. As a result, in one month only vkontakte.ru had grown huge and it had needed to increase its server capacity.

In January 2007 the website had place among 50 most perspective sites of Russian Internet. Later this year it has become one of five the most visited websites and by the end of 2007 there were 3 million registered users. As time unfolds, vkontakte.ru has been developing, every time adding new features. In 2009 domain name 'vk.com' was bought to make the website international. At that moment statistics showed incredible number of unique visitors – 14.5 million people. And after vk.com had become global, in November 2010 the number of all users was equal to 100 million.

Vk.com is constantly developing. In March 2011 creators had launched the application for iPhone and in June – for Android. Every now and then a new feature is added to this social media. As a number of users shows, the evolution of this platform attracts more and more people.

Nowadays vk.com is the number one web site in Russia and number five worldwide (SimilarWeb 2017). Today there are more than 380 million registered users and 80 million out of them use the website every day (Vk.com 2017).



FIGURE 1. The increase in number of users since 2010 till 2016 (Auditoria V Kontakte 2017)

On the 'about page' of vk.com itself the following analytical information can be found:



FIGURE 2. Current numbers (Vk.com 2017)

Considering current situation with vk.com, its history, popularity and potential advancement it would be wise to look deeper, to understand which opportunities it has and to use them effectively for the benefit of a business.

2.2 Vk.com as a tool to promote a business

Among Russian-speaking countries nowadays vk.com is the most popular website. Internet users visit it even more frequently than search engines such as Google or Yandex (Russian version of Google). Vk.com unites people of totally different age, occupations, views and of course it would not be a lie to admit that a great part of all the users are teenagers who simply utilize the website to communicate with their pals, listen to the music or follow entertaining public figures just for having fun. Besides that, many adults come to vk.com also for relaxation or communication and do not seek for any important information or knowledge. But despite this, using vk.com as a platform to advertise a business is a must for every proactive entrepreneur targeting on Russian-speaking markets.

2.2.1 Opportunities

As it has been mentioned before, developers of vk.com are constantly working on improvement of the website and new features are added often, opening more and more opportunities for both private user and a businessman.

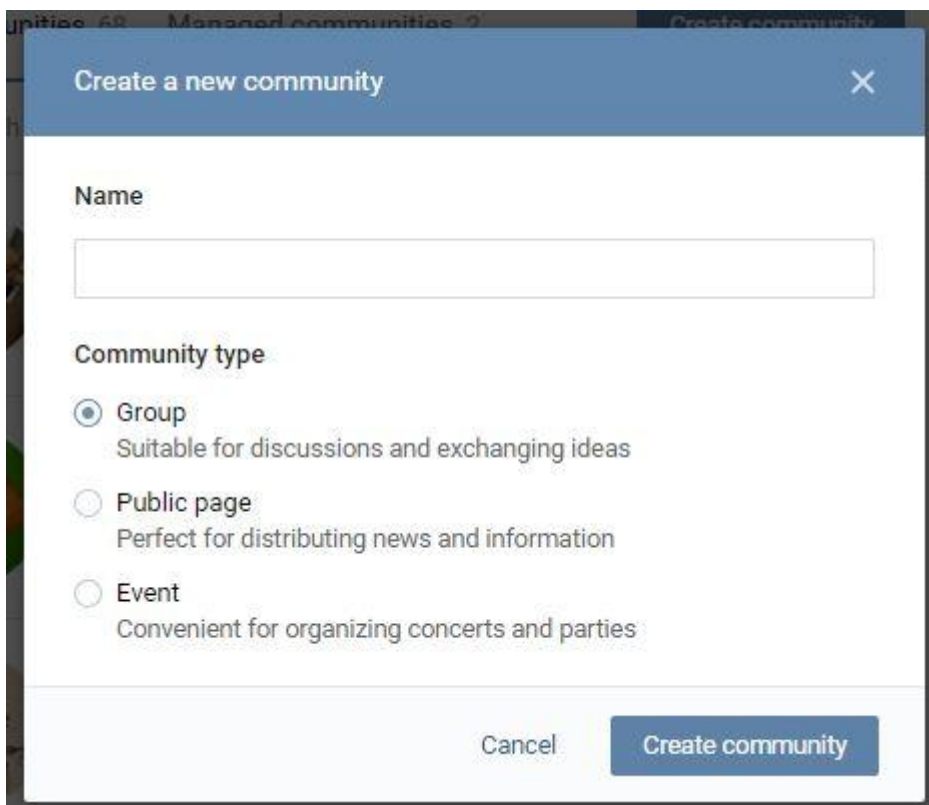
This chapter of the thesis is considering various elements available on website from the point of view of their application for marketing.

Community creation

Community at vk.com is a basis essential for any promotion. There are a lot of different parameters concerning communities that must be taken into account. This chapter will define the major ones.

Type of the community

If any business owner wants to promote their company via vk.com, he or she must create a community. The website offers three types of it: a group, a public page and an event. The last one is a good option at other steps of business promotion, but as for the base community a company may choose between a group and a public page.



The image shows a dialog box titled "Create a new community" with a close button (X) in the top right corner. Below the title is a text input field for "Name". Underneath is the "Community type" section, which contains three radio button options: "Group" (selected), "Public page", and "Event". Each option has a descriptive subtitle: "Suitable for discussions and exchanging ideas" for Group, "Perfect for distributing news and information" for Public page, and "Convenient for organizing concerts and parties" for Event. At the bottom of the dialog, there are two buttons: "Cancel" and "Create community".

FIGURE 3. Community creation, community type (Vk.com 2017)

According to vk.com, the most preferable variant for a business oriented community is a *public page*. What are the advantages of it? Let's make a comparison of these two types to see which one is really more suitable.

TABLE 1. Comparison of a Group and a Public Page types of communities

Aspect of comparison	Public Page	Group
Accessibility	Public page is accessible for every user of vk.com and for everyone using the Internet. It can be found through the search engines. Public pages do not aim to hide any information from followers.	If a group is open it has the same situation with the accessibility as a public page, but there is an option for a group owner to make it a closed community. In that case a user who would like to become a part of the community has to apply for membership and wait until the application will be approved.
Wall	Only managers can write something on the wall of the community. Every user is allowed to offer news, like or share a post. Comments for the posts can either be enabled or disabled.	Users can write posts on the wall. This function may be open (every vk.com user can add a post), limited (users may only comment) or closed (users may only look through the wall). If a group is closed, only followers have access to the wall.
Sections in the community header	Pinned post and community info. Manager can pin any important information or place a banner which will open a menu of the community.	Community info, pinned post and latest news. The last section may be renamed or deleted. If a company needs both a menu and another information as a pinned post, choosing a group type is an option.
Other settings	Events may only be organized on public pages.	Documents may only be uploaded in the groups.
Community followers	Manager cannot remove followers from the community.	Manager may ban some of the users.
Promotion	Manager may only share some info with friends. This is more safe method of promotion since users subscribe on their own free will. Moreover, public pages are located more attractive on people profiles under bar named ' <i>noteworthy pages</i> ' and	Manager may invite friends to become group members. Users may hide their lists of groups, which makes it harder for others to find out that a person is subscribed to a certain group.

	every user of vk.com can easily find it.	From that point of view it is a disadvantage for a promotion.
--	--	---

Considering all the aspects from the table above, we can make a conclusion that for business related issues public page is a better option, since this type is more attractive for website users, less aggressive (manager will not need to spam inviting people to subscribe) and it allows to spread the information to as much users as possible.

Type of a public page

If a company decides on a public page, then the next step is to choose the type of it. Vk.com offers four options: place or a small business, company or website, famous person or a group of people and product or work of art. Vk.com itself provides tips under every mentioned option to help the creator of community to choose the right one.

Create a page

A VK page is the perfect way to stay in touch with your clients or fans

Page name

Page type

- Place or small business
Café, shopping center, movie theater, museum
- Company, organization, or website
Google, The New York Times, Mercy Corps, Harvard University
- Famous person or group of people
Donald Trump, Green Day, Beyoncé
- Product or work of art
Movie, album, book, deodorant

I am an official representative and accept the Terms of Service

FIGURE 4. Types of a Public Page (Vk.com 2017)

Page description

Since public pages are indexed by search engines it is extremely important to add an informative description of what a company does and aims with essential key words. This will help Internet users to discover the certain community while looking for a specific product on the web.

The screenshot shows the 'Main information' settings for a VK.com community. The community name is 'Sasha the Cat bookshop'. The description reads: 'Welcome to our cozy warm bookshop in the heart of Helsinki! The shelves are full of unique books on various genres such as architecture, culture, photographing, theater, music, illustration, and s'. The community cover is set to 'Upload'. The community link is 'https://vk.com/public143705310'. A 'Save' button is at the bottom. On the right, a sidebar shows the community name and a 'back to page' link, followed by a 'Settings' menu with options: Sections, Comments, Links, API usage, Members, Messages, and Applications.

FIGURE 5. Community's information example (Vk.com 2017)

There is also one more crucial detail to pay attention to at this stage – the community link. No one remembers useless numbers, whereas a well sound name may stay in some people's minds. It can at least logically pop up in one's head. Vk.com gives the opportunity to choose any free name for the public page as well as change it in the future.

The screenshot shows the 'Community link' settings. The link field contains 'https://vk.com/sashathecat'. A red error message box says 'This address is already taken'. Below the field is a 'Save' button. A note below the field reads: 'You can create stickers for your community adding a short web address to your page.'

FIGURE 6. Community link example no.1 (Vk.com 2017)

Community link:

You can create stickers for your community adding a short web address to your page.

[Address available](#)

FIGURE 7. Community link example no.2 (Vk.com 2017)

To define the community further, the addition information may be filled in. The creator may choose the category and subcategory, specify age restrictions and put links for the official website and other social media.

Additional information

Category:

Subcategory:

Specify age restrictions

Website:

Founding date: Day: Month: Year:

Room on Snapster:

Export to Twitter:

FIGURE 8. Additional information example (Vk.com 2017)

Public pages are flexible as for settings. The administrator may enable or disable different sections of the community.

Sections

- Links
- Photos
- Videos
- Audio files
- Discussion board
- Events
- Places
- Contacts

- Products

[Save](#)

FIGURE 9. Sections of VK community (Vk.com 2017)

It is worth mentioning that vk.com allows to add products which a company sells to a community at the manner of online-shop. This service is designed for those who are engaged with retail trade and it is free of charge. Any group or public page regardless its size may connect the service instead of using photo albums for showing the products.

Products

Delivery regions:

Comments on products: **Enabled**

Store currency:

Contact person:

The "Contact seller" button in a product card opens a conversation with a specified person.

Store description: [Edit](#)

[Save](#)

FIGURE 10. Product function at vk.com (Tovary Vkontakte 2017)

Depending on the country in which a company is based, different currency may be chosen. Euro, Russian ruble, US dollar, Ukrainian hryvnia and tenge (currency of

Kazakhstan) are available. Community administrator may also enable the option for followers to leave the comments under the products.

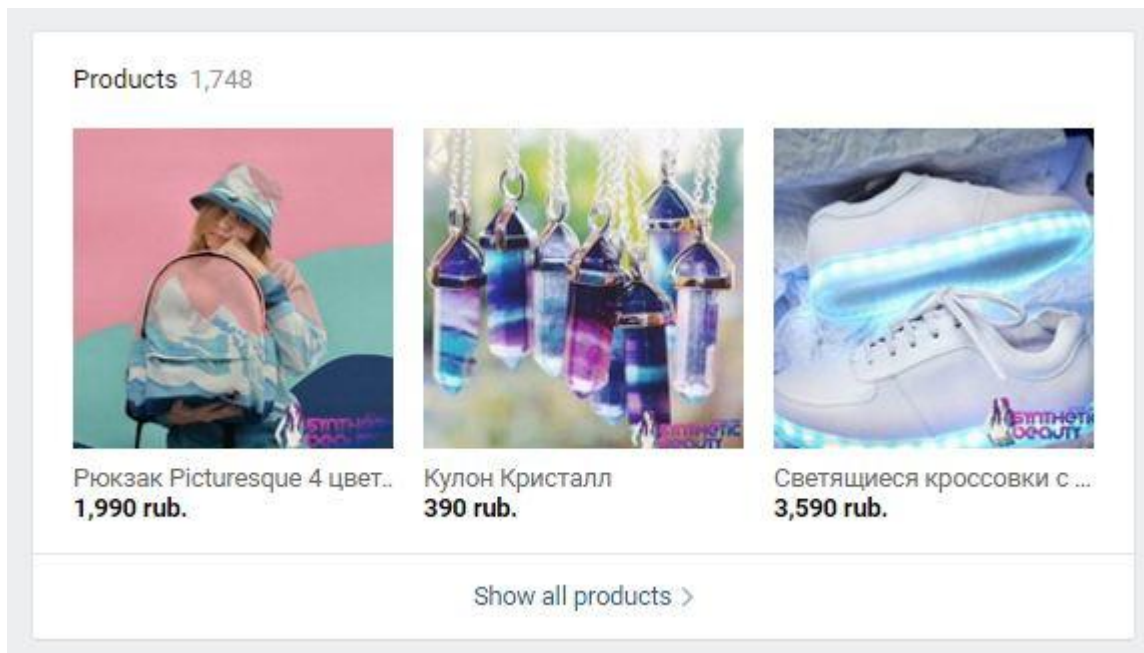


FIGURE 11. Products banner example (Synthetic Beauty Official Shop 2017)

Each product may have one main photo and four additional. It is relevant to remember that the miniature photo can only be square shaped. Community manager may categorize the products to the selections according to their types. Three the latest added products are shown on the profile page of the community as a default. However, manager may put three specific items there by making one of the selections primary.

Products' information, prices and location inside a selection may be edited at any time. To attract potential buyers' attention it is possible to pin the product or share it with friends, followers, or other communities.

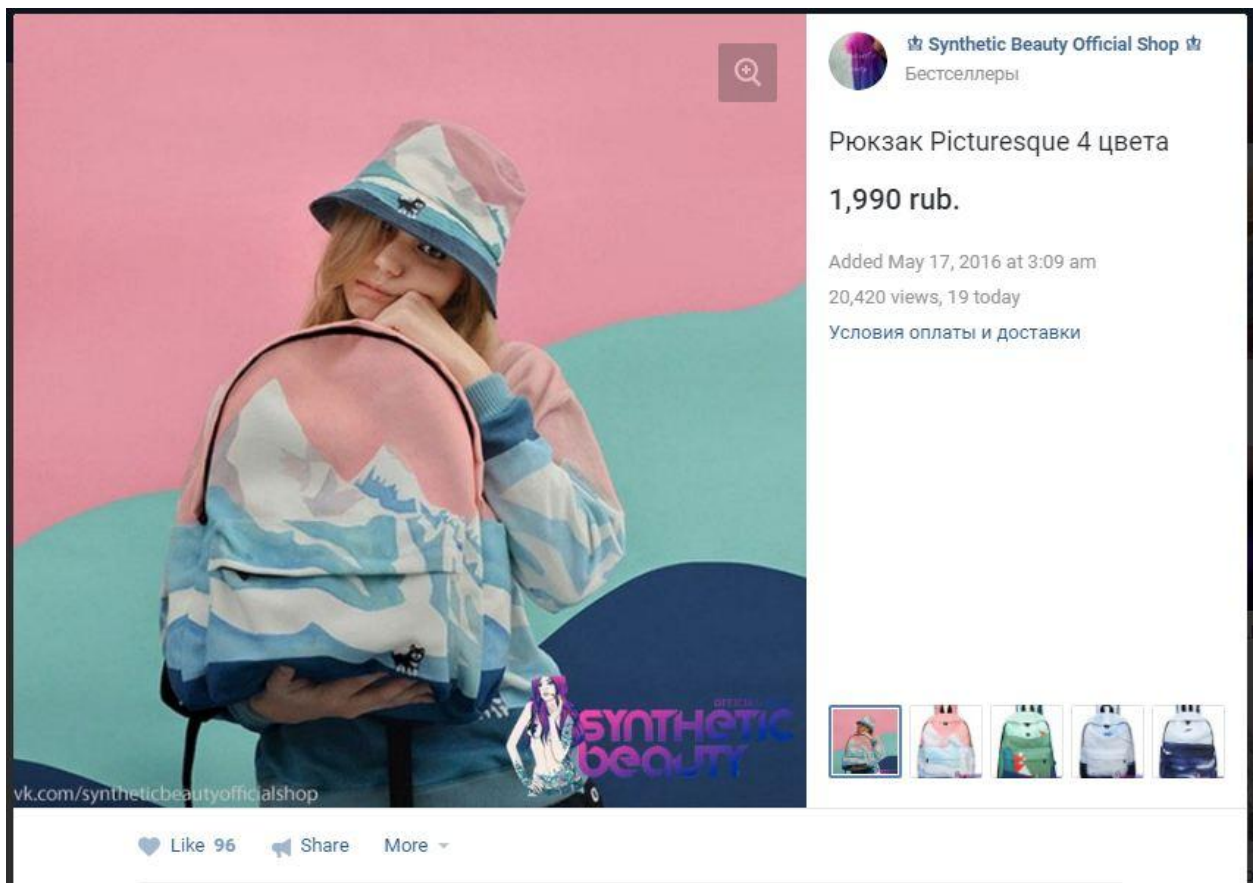


FIGURE 12. A product page example (Synthetic Beauty Official Shop 2017)

If the item is sold out, manager can check the box “not available” in settings. Moreover, the whole product section may be disabled. This will make it invisible for followers, but still existing in the community with an opportunity to restore it any time.

Community Design

There are more than 75.5 million communities at vk.com. Since first of all this website is a communication based platform, plenty of them are not made to sell anything, but entering the words ‘shop’ and ‘магазин’ (=‘shop’ in Russian) to the search window gives more than 600 000 groups and public pages. Some of them are very popular. The biggest store represented at the website is named Synthetic Beauty Official Shop and has at the moment about 454 thousands of members.

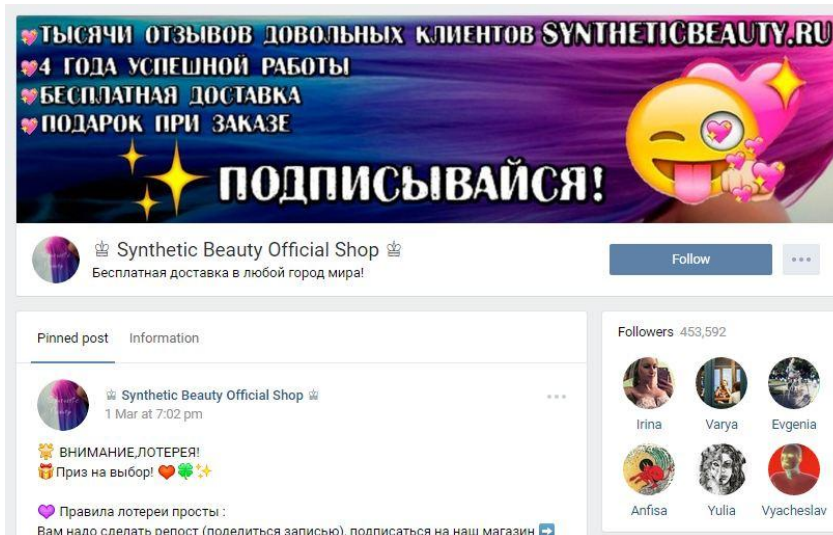


FIGURE 13. Front page of Synthetic Beauty Official Shop (Synthetic Beauty Official Shop 2017)

The huge number of groups and public pages means the high rate of competition. To get noticed, to become popular to be able to incarnate the main goal, the community must have an attractive design and convenient interface.

Community Avatar

As almost every other social media websites vk.com offers to upload a logo picture. JPG, PIN and GIF formats of the image are supported.

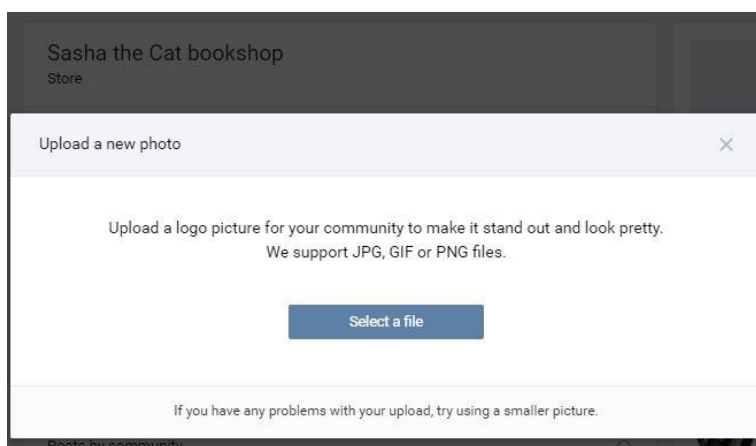


FIGURE 14. Uploading logo for a community, example (Vk.com 2017)

One significant moment is that avatar may only be square shaped.

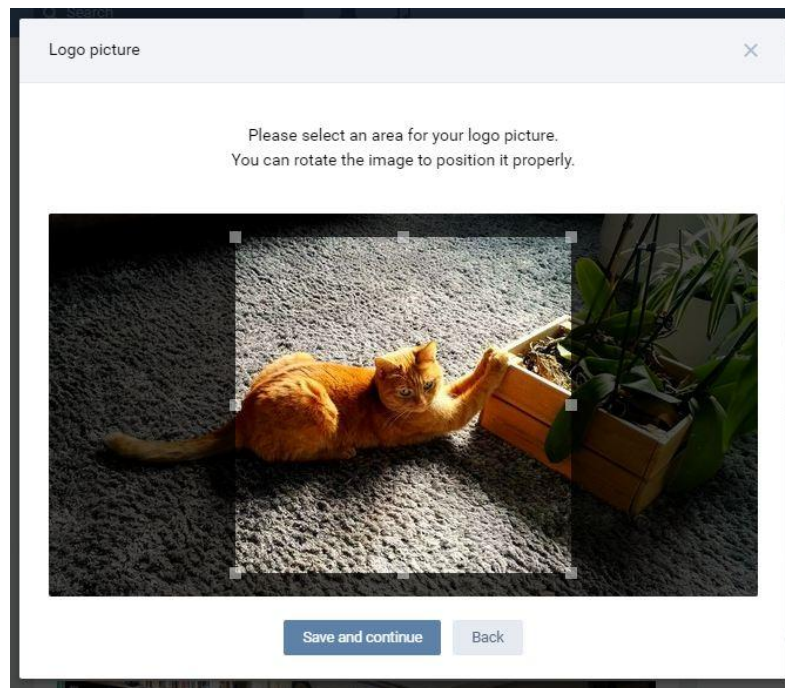


FIGURE 15. Logo picture, example (Vk.com 2017)

As the opposite of it a miniature image will be round shaped. These two facts must be taken into consideration when choosing the right photo for avatar as they directly influence at community good looking.

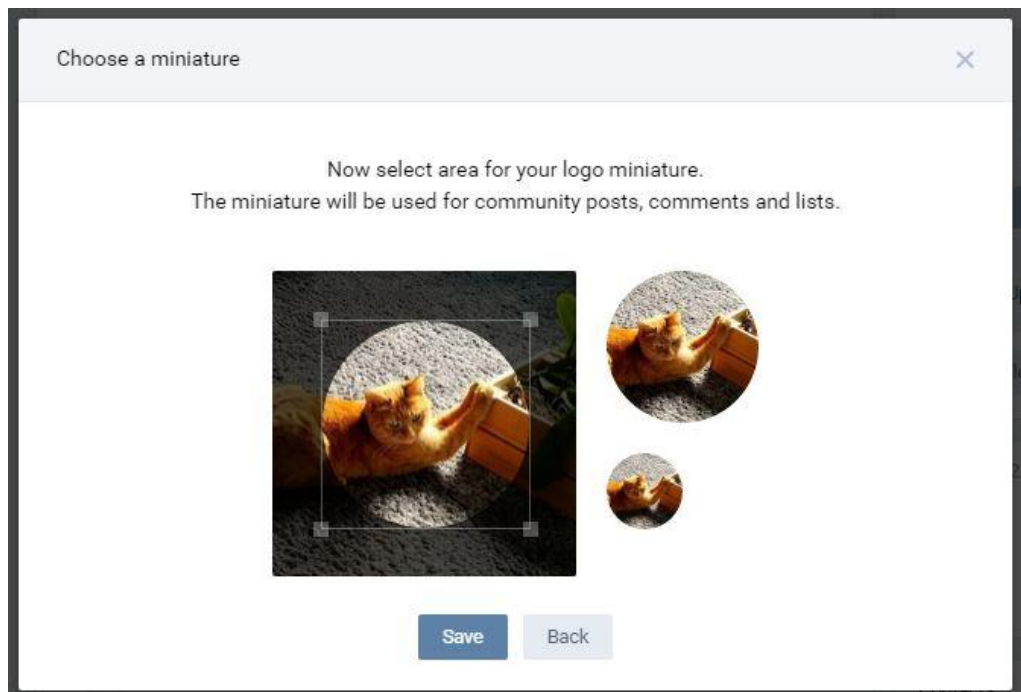


FIGURE 16. Miniature, example (Vk.com 2017)

Page design

Every group or public page initially has the same blue and white standard design. Anyway, a new feature was added in the end of year 2016 and now every community manager has an opportunity to create a cover for it (Oblozhki dlya soobshhestv). Cover is a wide stripe at the head of the community. It also replaces the avatar and allows to experiment with the community design. Vk.com is currently developing this function to work on smartphones.

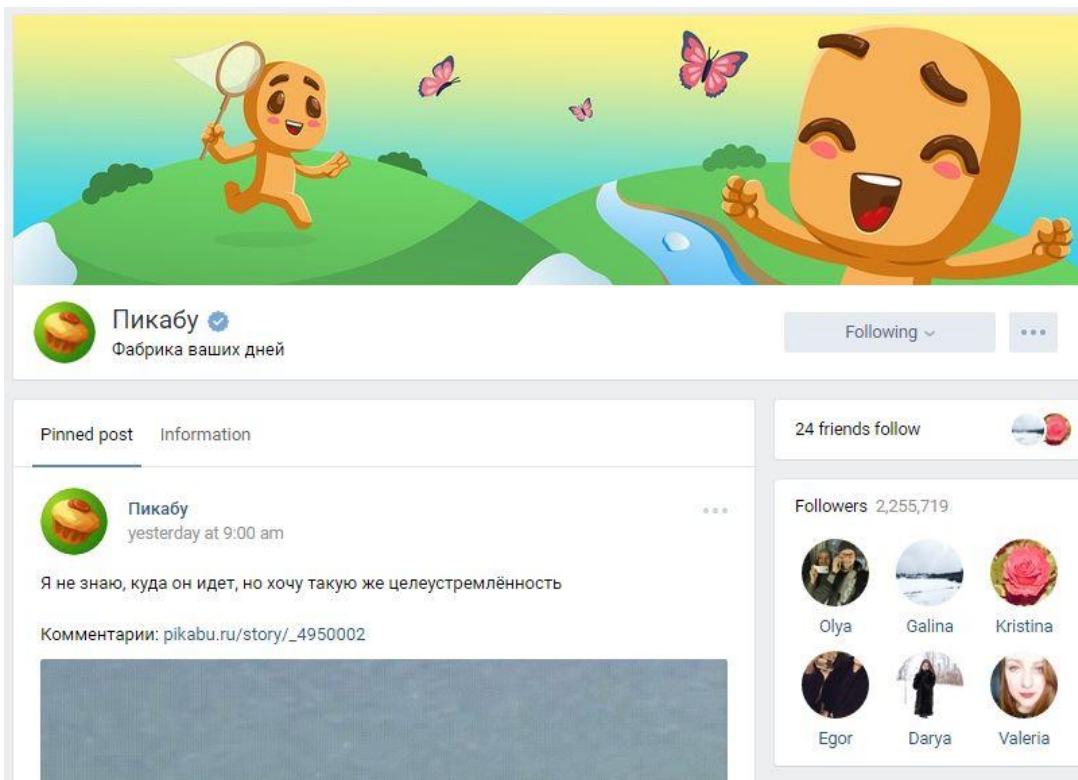


FIGURE 17. Cover example (Pikabu 2017)

Moreover, it is possible to code for community design, menu, different buttons and etc. Using knowledge and time a programmer can build a perfect public page on the base of a standard page of vk.com.

Content

Primary content-related functions include basic post publishing. There is an opportunity to attach up to ten files to a post (images, audio files, documents, videos, products,

polls, graffiti and locations). The body text of the post will always appear above all the attachments. Website uses an algorithm according to which it arranges the photos, for example depending on their sizes and quantity.

Timer for posts

To be popular, community has to post qualitative content regularly. The most efficient way is to publish posts regularly. Timer helps to keep the schedule. Up to ten posts may be added to the queue.

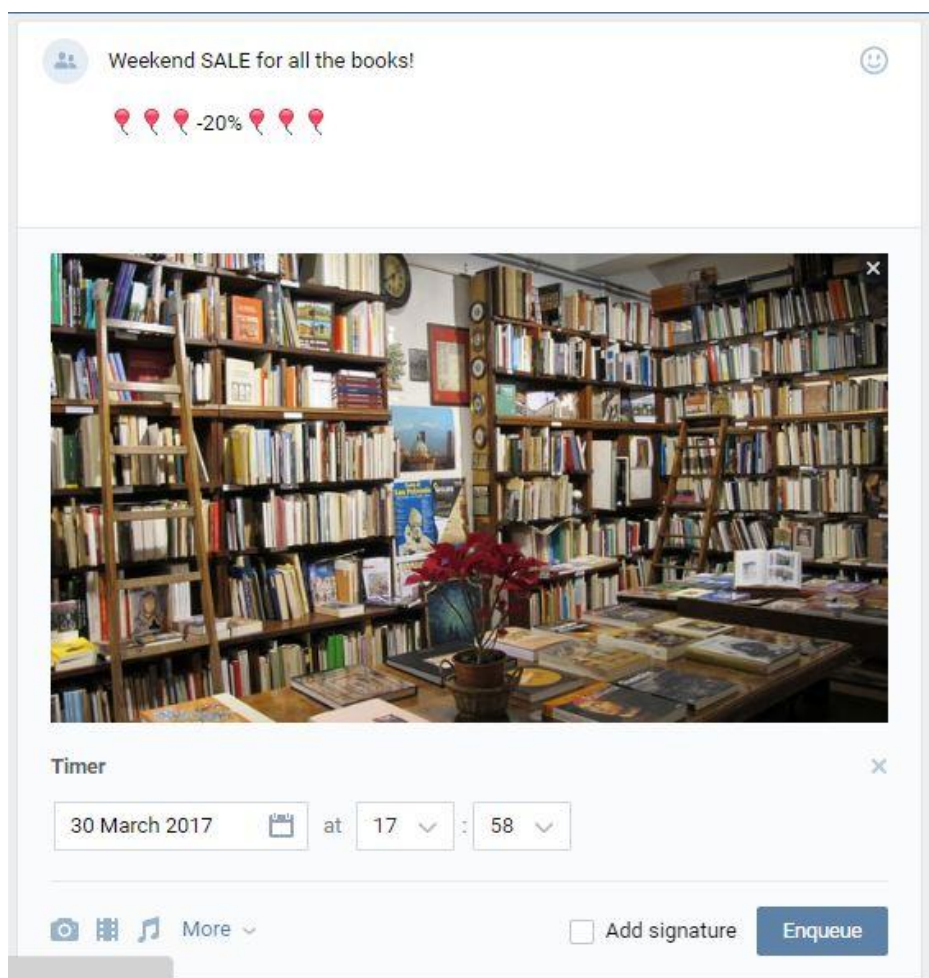


FIGURE 18. Timer for VK communities, example (Vk.com 2017)

Hashtags

Hashtag system is widely used at the website. For a community owner it would be a beneficial to complete a post with several hashtags which as a result may lead users to the public page.

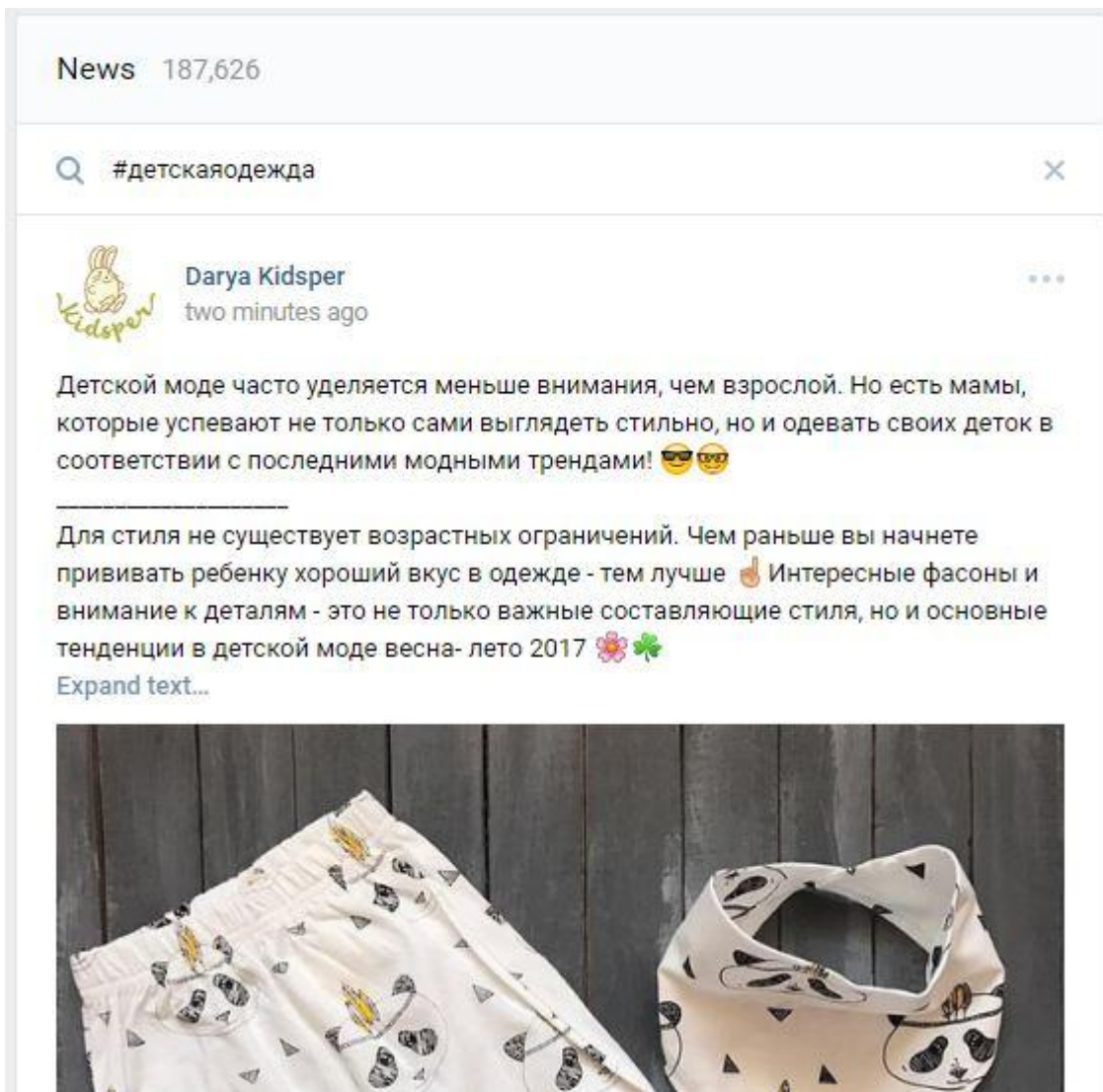


FIGURE 19. The results of searching for hashtag 'children's clothes' (Vk.com 2017)

The screenshot shows the results of searching for hashtag 'children's clothes', one of the most popular hashtags used, and the number of found publications is rather significant.

Streaming

According to VK LIVE – an official community posting information about all innovations at the website – starting from January 26th 2017 every community or verified users (mainly celebrities with a check mark) may give streams. Regular users may stream via their smartphones, vk.com is currently working on making his feature available to all the website users both on PC and smartphones.

Payment issues

Online stores which have communities at vk.com may not even have a separate official website. Since products can be added directly to the community, the store has an opportunity to sell them online through vk.com and receive money from the buyers via different payment systems.

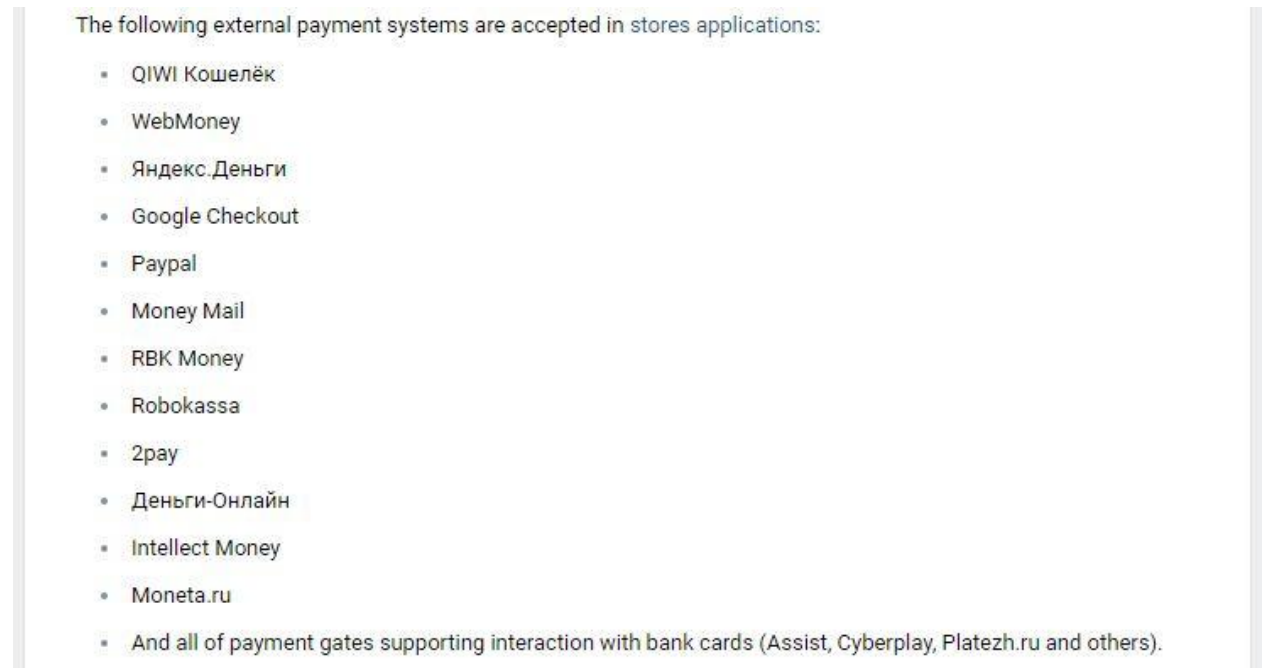


FIGURE 20. Payment systems at vk.com (VK Developers 2017)

The important point is that stores application cannot use SMS-payments and subscriptions for payments.

Vk.com has its own payment system. According to information published by VK LIVE it has three major advantages: convenience, benefit and internationality. This system allows transferring money to a person or a community without knowing their card number, skipping high commissions due to different banks involved and sending money to people in 17 countries.

Sum of one transfer must fit the limits of 100 to 75000 Russian rubles. This system is highly secured from hackers since a user has to type CCV code and a code which bank sends by SMS. Money receiver does not see the card number, but only name of the sender and the sum of the transfer.

Marketing

Many marketing strategies may be applied to companies presenting on social web. Businessmen may use both direct and indirect marketing to ensure the best result. Anyway, vk.com offers its own paths for marketing. In collaboration with other ways, a company is able to achieve the highest benefit.


Promotion


There is a complete section at the website dedicated to promotion. 'VK ads' combines various advertising tools provided by vk.com. Four types of promotion are represented in this section.

VK ads


VK is the largest social network in Europe. You can reach its **170 million audience** using a vast choice of advertising tools.

VK offers a set of marketing solutions to any company, from a small family business to an international corporation.







Targeted ads



Posts promotion



Ad posts in communities



Offers in games

Helpful information

Learn how targeted ads work and how you can effectively use those.

Support for advertisers

In case of problems regarding ad platform: read FAQ or contact the

Recent news All news

on 29 March 2017 at 12:12

1 декабря 2016 года мы запустили конкурс на лучшую службу поддержки ВКонтакте (<https://vk.com/blog/bestsupport>). В нём участвовали как сами сообщества, так и пользователи, которые предлагали на конкурс

FIGURE 21. VK advertisement options (VK ads 2017)

The first one is named "Targeted ads" and it is aiming to only reach relevant audience. The advantage of this type of promotion is its flexibility – it gives the ability to edit the text of the advertisement any time. Also it allows choosing payment model and gives access to a comprehensive statistics of the campaign.

Potential audience is targeted by multiple attributes such as sex, marital status, age, country, city, city region, educational background, job, and even hobbies and favorite books.

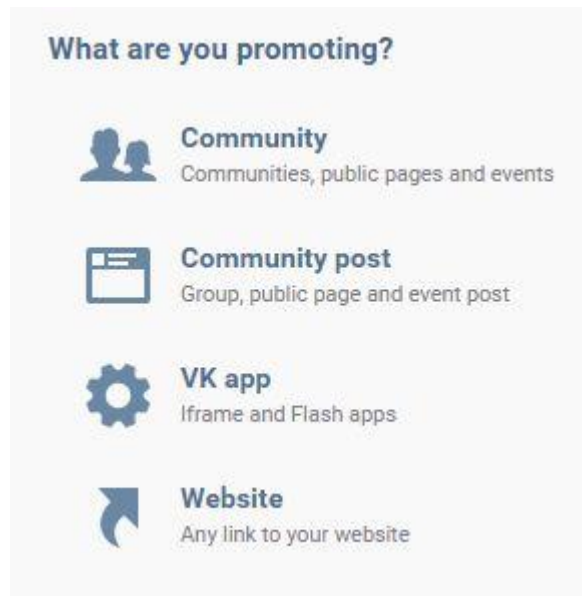


FIGURE 22. Promotion settings (VK ads 2017)

Promotion creator has to choose the needed subject from the offered list of options depending on what he or she is going to promote. This can be community, community post, VK app or a website. After primary selection creator is forwarded to a page full of different parameters to be defined. The creator is to choose an ad type, title, description, category and subcategory and age restriction. As for targeting settings, there is a plenty of criterion united to five groups: geography, demography, interests, education and work and additional parameters.

The last section on this list is concerning price and placement settings. Promotion creator may either choose to pay by click or by impression. For target audience equalling to 150 000 people price of one click would be about 8 Russian rubles. Ad destination may also be chosen. Whether ads will be shown at vk.com only or at third-parties sites as well is decided by creator.

Promotion of a certain post in a community will cost about 40 rubles per mille for audience of 150 000 users. Choosing this option still provides ad creator with a list of targeting parameters. Recommended costs for advertising a website of a VK app are similar to the ones for a community.

It is critical to remember that by creating an ad user agrees with VK policy of advertisements. Every piece of promotion must follow certain rules, starting from the

design, lettering, and proper images and finishing with the content (Advertising rules 2014).

As for second type of advertising offered by VK Ads – ‘Post promotion’ – it aims to let a business visually present all the information. What vk.com says about this type is: “This format will allow you to place your ad content on behalf of your company in users feeds. These ad posts and common posts look alike, but contain a mark "Ad post". Posts promotion is a new and modern format that perfectly fits a social network news feed” (Vk.com 2017).

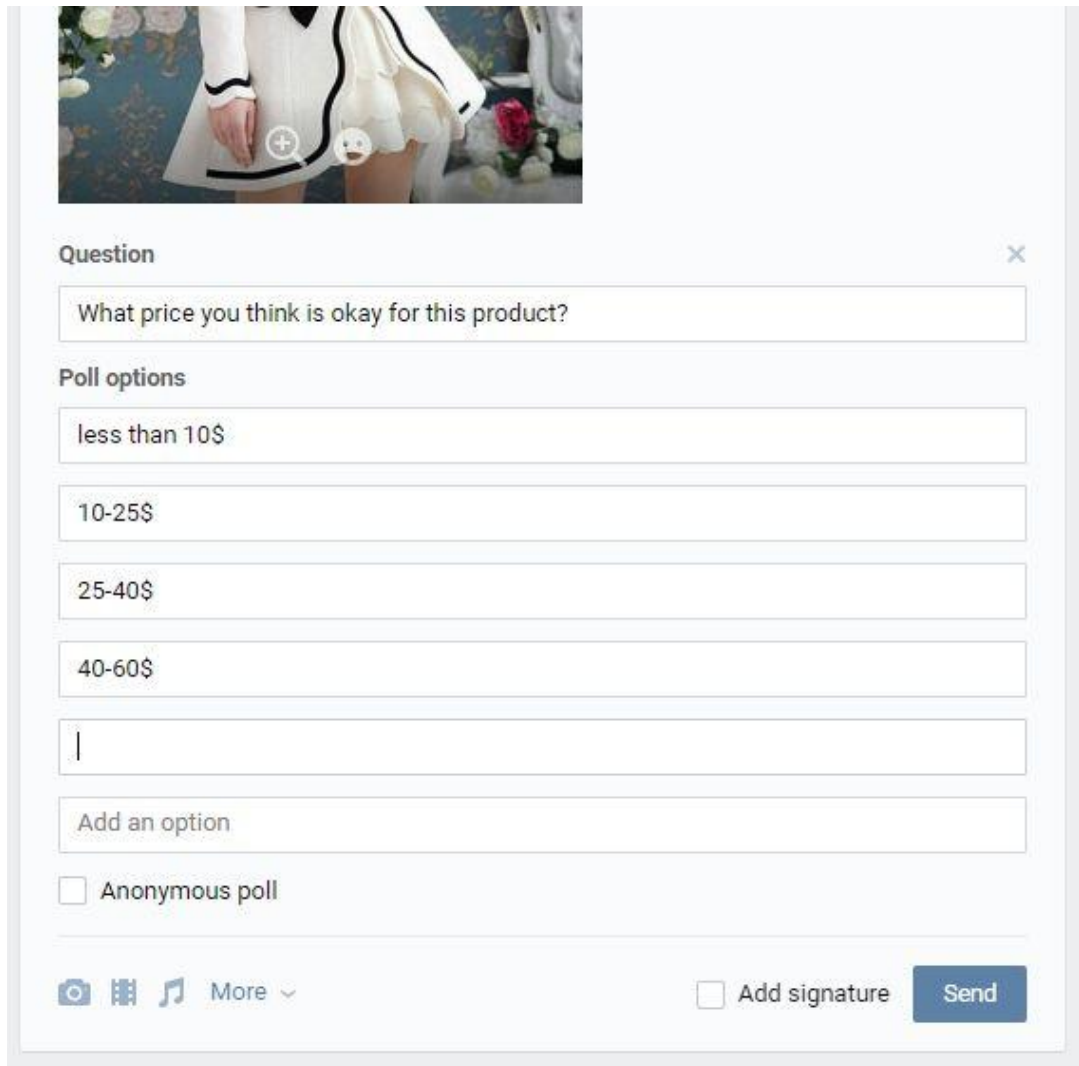
The feature is especially created to help providing audience with detailed information about the product, company or service. Images, texts, polls, videos and other material may be attached to the post.

‘Ad posts in communities’ platform gives an opportunity to be advertised in thousands of social network communities with an access to management tools and advance statistics. The costs of this service depend on the type of a group or public page where the post will be published.

The last section presenting on VK Ads is called ‘Offers in games’. “Tens of millions of users every day play VK games and use apps. Offers let you reward users for completing different tasks within VK games. Tasks may vary from registration on your website or joining a community to buying your goods and services” (Vk.com 2017). To use this option a company must contact VK corporation directly by e-mail.

Polls

A necessary function of social media marketing is gathering the feedback information from the audience. For the majority of regular internet users leaving comments means a boring waste of time. At the same time polls are quick options for the same goal and they attract followers – everybody likes seeing that her or his opinion is valued.



Question ×

What price you think is okay for this product?

Poll options

less than 10\$

10-25\$

25-40\$

40-60\$

|

Add an option

Anonymous poll

Add signature
 Send

FIGURE 23. Poll example (Vk.com 2017)

Website only allows adding ten options for one poll. Creator may leave it open or click a special box to make the poll anonymous.

Statistics

Besides dozens of special analytic plugins, websites and applications, which may help to get statistical data, vk.com has its own tools free to use. Every community at vk.com has a statistic bar. By clicking to that one community manager may see plenty of numbers and graphs. Parameters of community statistics are the following:

- Unique visitors and pageviews
- Sex, age, country and city
- Devices
- Traffic sources

- New and lost members
- Audience coverage
- Feedback and activity

And other.

Verified Apps

On VK LIVE page (Poleznye prylozheniya) any user may find a list of links to useful apps and websites for community analysis. This chapter will tell briefly about some of them.

Community stats or SocialStats.ru

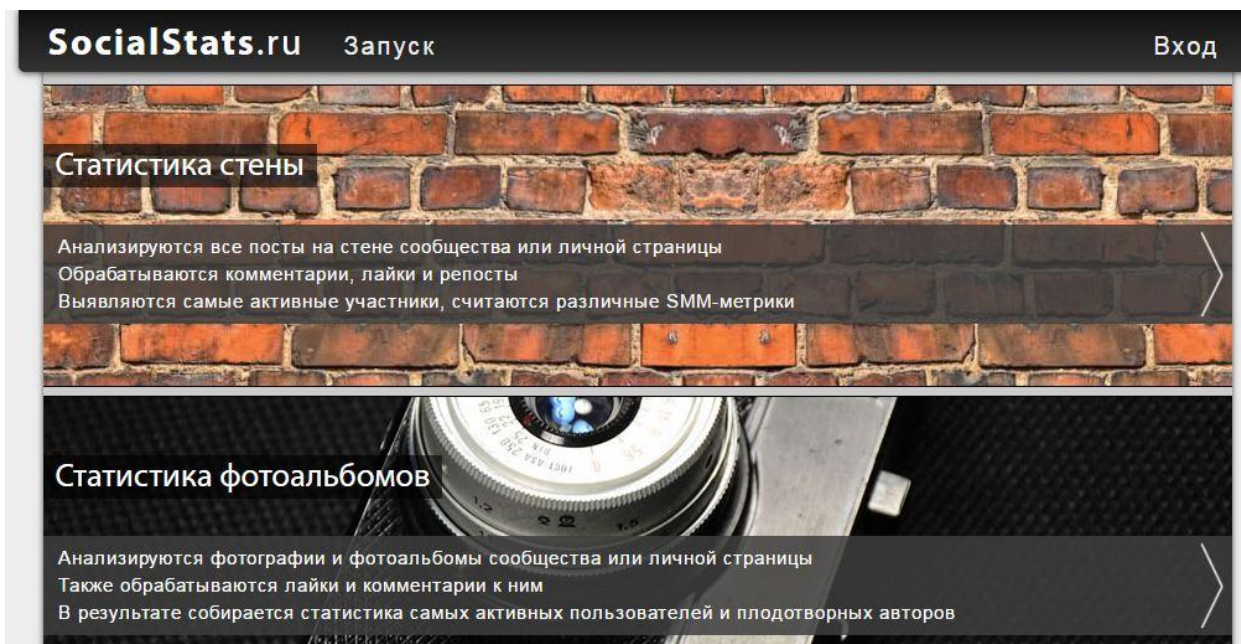


FIGURE 24. Front page of the app (SocialStats 2017)

The app gathers advanced statistics of managed community and makes tops of members based on likes, comments and other activity in different time periods. Service has tens of parameters for statistical research.

VK.Suggests

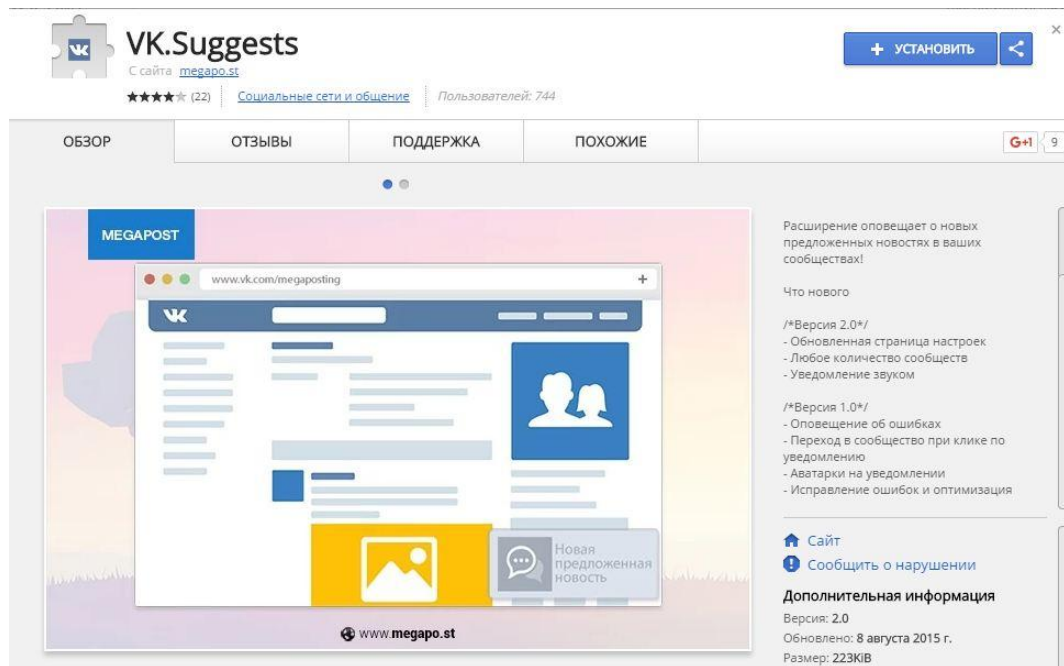


FIGURE 25. Front page of the app (VK.Suggests 2017)

The app is designed for Google Chrome exclusively. This browser extension notifies community managers about all new posts that have been suggested to the community.

Дезертир (Deserter)

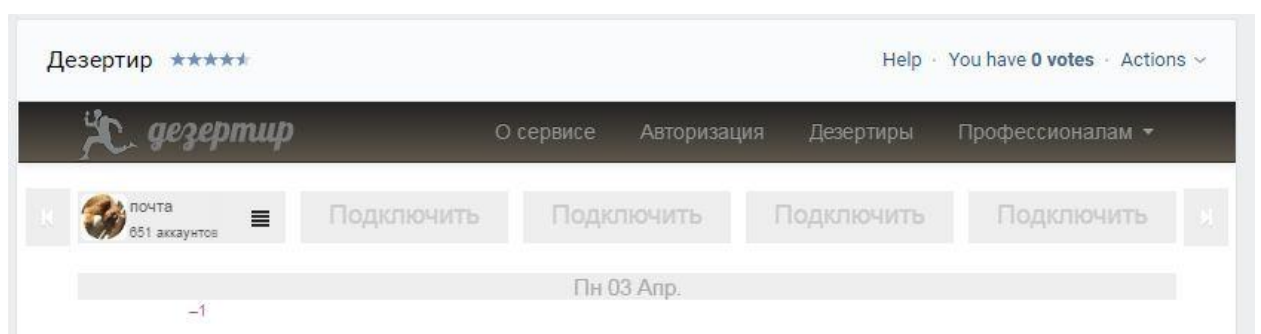


FIGURE 26. Front page of the app (Дезертир 2017)

This app shows a profile of a certain person who have left a community at the same time may also lead to a new member's profile.

The presented list of links is rather large and contains also of paid services. Moreover, new applications are created daily and community manager can monitor this section and find something suitable for statistical actions. It is common for vk.com to use votes as e-money. Votes in their turn may be bought with real money via various options.

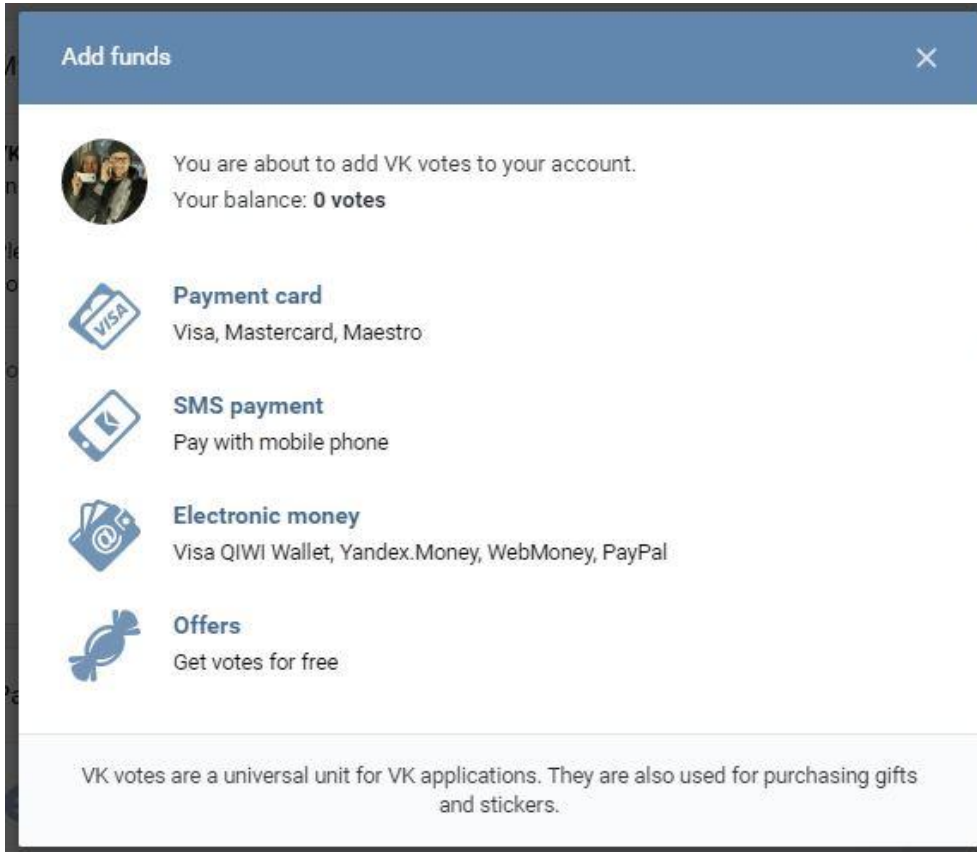


FIGURE 27. Votes example (Vk.com 2017)

2.2.2 How to spread information

The more people follow a community, the higher number of potential clients will receive the news. It is profitable for a company to have many Internet users knowing the information. To build a big community, manager should care about information flow. This chapter defines various ways of spreading the news.

Reposts

Reposts are the most efficient way to spread the information at social media websites. If content is relevant, interesting, unusual, accurate, if it catches an Internet user, he or she will more likely want to share the post. Once the post appears on person's wall, his or her friends will see it in their feed. Some of them may also wish to save the

knowledge and repost it. As a result, thousands of people of different backgrounds will see the post, get the information, and remember the name of the community or a company. The more people are aware, the more potential clients there are. Or, for instance, the higher company status becomes.

Andrei Albitov (2011, 110) tells: “I do not suggest you to publish more than one post a day. It is very important to concentrate on quality of the post and make it interesting”.

Another way to motivate members of the community to share the post is to create a giveaway. Typically in social media web the rules of giveaway include two main points – to take a part in it user has to be a subscriber and to repost a publication. Community manager may choose the prizes – for example, some products which the community sells or a discount, a free access to an online course and etc.

Share a post as a community

Vk.com allows communities to share its posts to private messages, manager’s wall or other communities administrated by the same person.

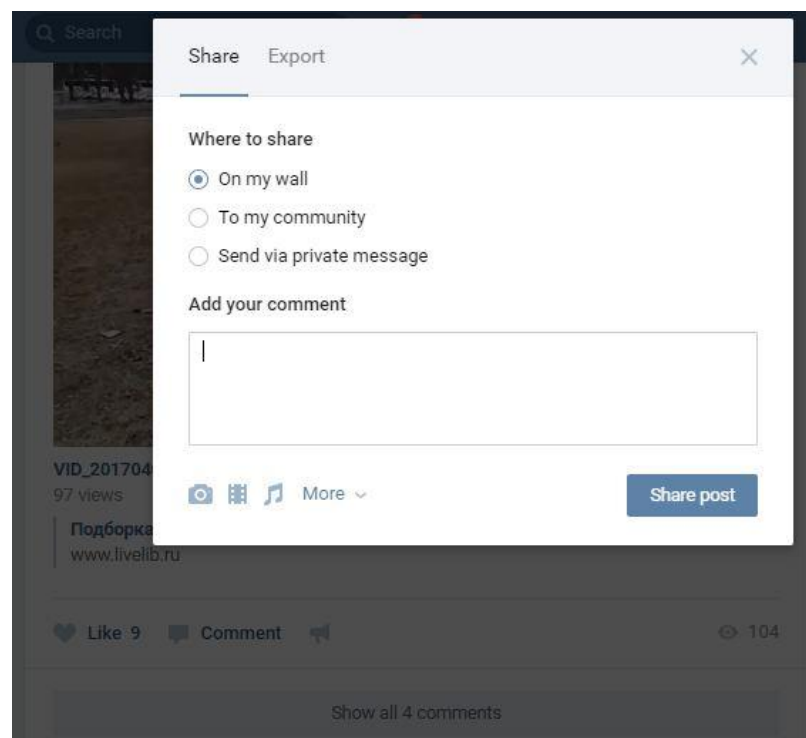


FIGURE 28. Sharing post, example (Vk.com 2017)

Vk.com offers to add a text or any other file to the repost. A timer may be attached as well.

If community manager wants to share a post to any external media, there is function 'export'. With its help manager is able to get a link to a certain post and share it to connected accounts such as Twitter, Facebook and etc.

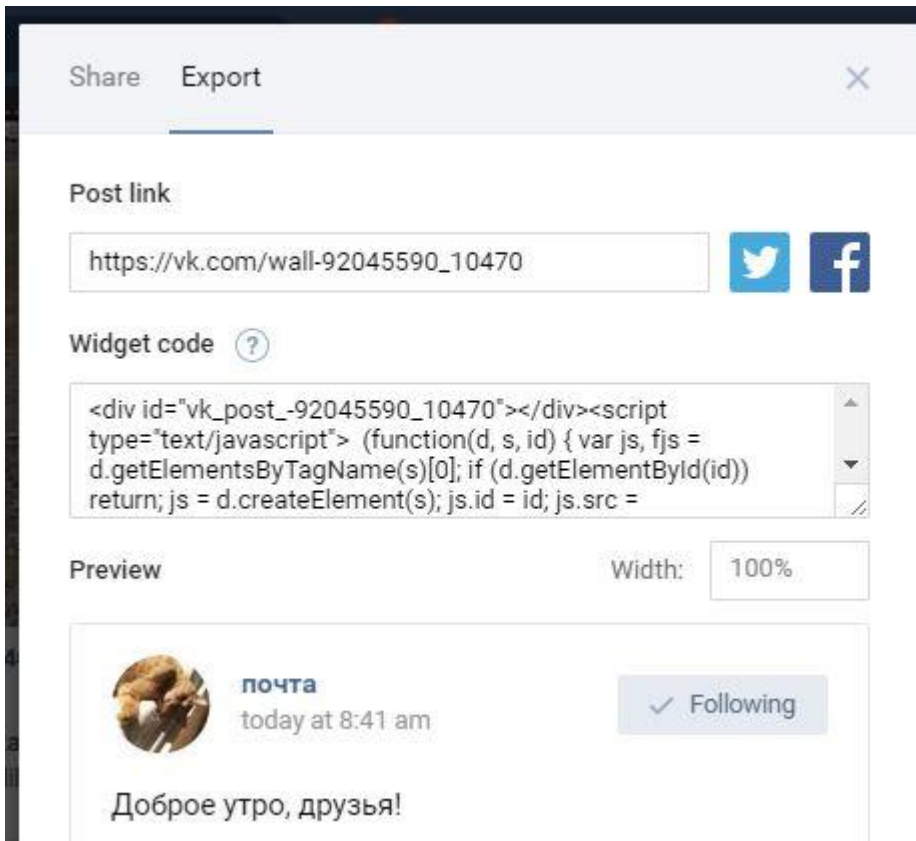


FIGURE 29. Post export, example (Vk.com 2017)

Word-of-Mouth

Online communication with the clients gives many advantages to the company. Customers feel valued and respected, they have an opportunity to ask, complain, suggest and receive a reaction on their opinions. Meanwhile the company benefits from this communication too. It gets feedback, may ask clients questions important for marketing and product improvement. Social media website is a perfect platform for personal communication and word-of-mouth is still applicable at vk.com.

“For many small businesses with limited marketing budgets, the word-of-mouth marketing potential of social media allows them to compete against larger businesses with deeper marketing pockets. It also helps businesses to know current and prospective customers – something that small business owners are typically better equipped to do than executives of large corporations, who are usually impeded by corporate and legal policies”. (Gunelius 2011, 178).

2.2.3. Weak sides of vk.com

There are plenty of popular social media websites in the Internet. Every one of them has its positive and its negative sides. Being the top site in Russian and number 5 worldwide, vk.com does still have disadvantages which are going to be highlighted in this chapter.

Geography

As it has been mentioned before in this thesis, vk.com is mostly spread in Russian-speaking countries. Therefore it is wise to use this website as a platform for business promotion for those companies which are oriented to, for example, Russian market.



FIGURE 30. Traffic by countries (SimilarWeb 2017)

Despite that, vk.com supports many languages and is used worldwide. Taking vk.com into consideration while promoting a business also makes sense even if company is operating in a country other than Russia, because Russians are everywhere.

Azərbaycan dili	Português brasileiro	ГалгӀай мотт	Қазақша
Bahasa Indonesia	Română	Дореволуціонный	नेपाली
Bosanski	Shqip	Ирон	हिन्दी
Dansk	Slovenščina	Кыргыз тили	বাংলা
Deutsch	Suomi	Къарачай-малкъар тил	தமிழ்
Eesti	Svenska	Лезги чӀал	සිංහල
English	Tagalog	Марий йылме	ភាសាខ្មែរ
Español	Tiếng Việt	Монгол	ქართული
Esperanto	Toliṣə zivon	Русинський	ᲞᲠᲣᲚᲘᲗ
Français	Türkmen	Русский	日本語
Hrvatski	Türkçe	Татарча	汉语
Italiano	Čeština	Саха тыла	臺灣話
Kiswahili	Ελληνικά	Советский	한국어
Latviešu	Qumuqça	ТоцикӀ	Հայերեն
Lietuvių	Slovenčina	Тыва дыл	עברית
Magyar	Абаза Бызшва	Српски	اردو
Moldovenească	Адыгабзэ	ЧӀавашла	العربية
Nederlands	Адыгэбзэ	Эрзянь кель	فارسی
Norsk	Башкортса	Хальмг келн	پنجابی
O'zbek	Беларуская	Удмурт	
Polski	Беларуская (тарашкевіца)	Українська	
Português	Български	Українська (Галицка)	

FIGURE 31. List of language supported by vk.com (Vk.com 2017)

Age of audience

A critical disadvantage of vk.com is a high percentage of young audience. According brandanalytics.com (December 2015), about 36% of all users are younger than 25 years old.

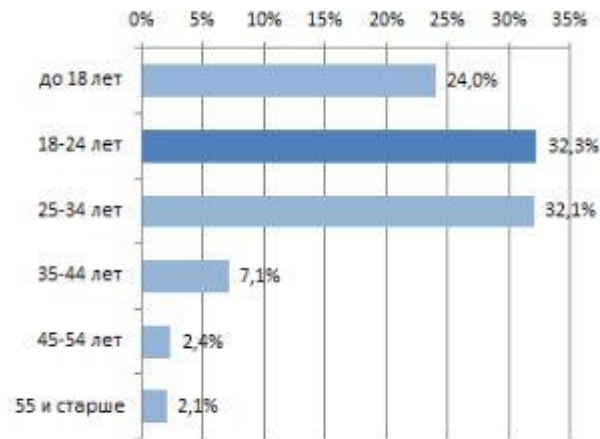


FIGURE 32. Age of VK audience (Brandanalytics 2015)

Facebook in its turn is dominated by users age of 25+. The percentage of young people (13-25 year old) is about 29% (Isi 2017).

Facebook - 1.2 Billion Users

Facebook Age Demographic	Number of Users	Percentage of User Base
13-17	9.8 Million	5.4%
18-24	42 Million	23.3%
25-34	44 Million	24.4%
35-54	56 Million	31.1%
55+	28 Million	15.6%

FIGURE 33. Age of Facebook audience (Apuzzo 2014)

Most of the companies are not oriented on young people because they do not work yet and are not serious. This is what may be a disadvantage of vk.com.

Despite all the weak point of vk.com this website still has dozens of opportunities and is a great platform for business promotion. Especially if a company produces products or services accounting for people living in countries such as Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Kazakhstan and so on, it should consider vk.com as an eminent and free social media website.

3 RESEARCH

To better understand the current situation with the website it is wise to ask real users' opinion about their experience and thoughts concerning usage of vk.com. For this purpose survey and interviews were held.

Survey designed for regular VK users was supposed to clarify users' background, the purposes of using vk.com, their experience of purchasing products via the website and how it affects their buying decision.

As for interview, which in its turn was made to ask business owners who promote their companies via vk.com, its main goal was to discover opinion from businessman's point of view. The questions that have been asked during the interview were covering background information, platform usage and satisfaction of it and also opinion of business owners on effectiveness of promoting via vk.com.

3.1 Methods

For the purposed of this thesis quantitative methods were used. As it was mentioned before there were two groups of people in this research. The first group – regular Russian-speaking VK users, a survey made on Google form was used to collect data from that group. The second one is represented by 5 business owners. Direct interview with certain questions was held to gather information from them.

3.1.1 Survey

Survey was held in Russian language. There were 20 questions in it. 19 of them were compulsory, the last one was optional. Here is the list of the questions:

- Sex (Female, Male)
- Age (Less than 18 year old, 18-24, 25-34, 35-50, 51+)
- Location of your permanent residence (Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Other CIS countries, Other European countries, Other)
- How often do you use vk.com? (Several times per day, Couple of times per week, Couple of times per month, Less than once a month)
- For what purposes do you use vk.com? (Checkboxes: Communication with friends, Business communication, Searching for something interesting (news, music, games), Communication with people of the same interests, Buying something or info searching)

- Have you ever bought anything via vk.com? (Yes, many times; Yes, once or twice; No)
- Have you ever paid via vk.com? (Yes, No)
- Is it important for you that a company you are going to buy from has an account at vk.com? (Yes, No, I do not care)
- Do you check reviews on a company you are going to buy from at vk.com? (Yes, No, Depends on a product)
- Was there ever such a case that you have bought something just because you have found the product at vk.com? (Yes, many times; Yes, once or twice; No)
- Was there ever such a case that you have preferred one company to another because the second one did not have a VK community? (Yes, No)
- Do you follow any commercial communities? (Yes, many of them; Yes, some; Not at all; Not yet, but who knows)
- What you think should be in the successful community? (Checkboxes: Attractive design, Limited number of advertisements, Detailed info, FAQ, Fast replies, Honest reviews, Many photos, Interesting facts about the company, field, Contact info)
- Do you think VK community is enough or website existence is also important? (VK community is enough, It is better to have both, I don't care)
- Does the number of members of a company's community influence your buying decision? (Rather yes, Rather no)
- Why do you share communities' posts? (Checkboxes: Giveaway rules say so, Because I like the content, I want to share the info with my friends or people who might like it, I want to keep the info, Other – what?)
- Do you agree with the statement that vk.com helps people to get familiar with new products and companies? (Yes, No)
- Do you agree with a statement that every small company oriented to Russian speaking market should have a VK community? (Yes, No)
- If you will open your business, will you create a VK account for it? (Yes, No)
- Would you like to add something else? (Free form answer)

The link to survey was published on vk.com and reposted many times by different people. This fact allowed gaining high result.

3.1.2. Interview

As well as survey, the interview's language was also Russian. Business owners were asked with 9 questions:

- For how long does your business exist?
- When did you create community and why?
- Was it hard to gain many members?
- How you use your community? (Info, Photos, Inspirations, Communication...)
- Have you notice the difference before and after?
- Do you use statistics?
- Which features do you lack?
- Do you think companies should have VK communities? Why or why not?
- Do you agree with a statement that vk.com is an effective tool to promote a business?

The background information is public, and is also taken into consideration.

3.3 Data collection

During two weeks period data for this thesis have been collecting. 156 users have replied to the survey and 5 business owners have answered to the interview.

3.3.1 Survey data

About 2000 people have seen the post about survey published at vk.com. As a result the responses of 156 users are collected. This chapter shows each one in details.

Укажите Ваш пол (156 responses)

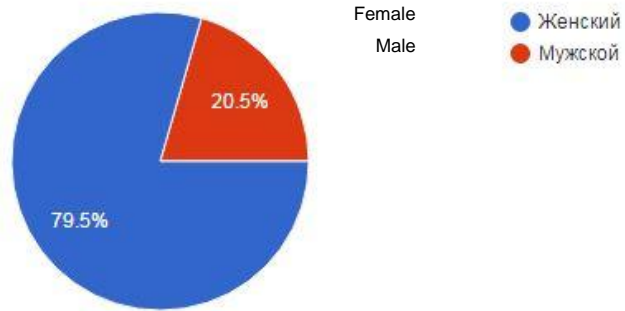


FIGURE 34. Sex

Укажите Ваш возраст (156 responses)

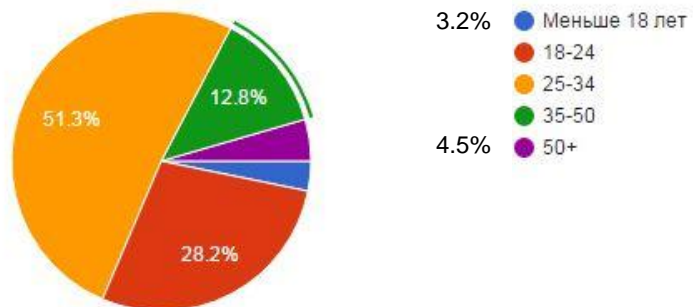


FIGURE 35. Age

Укажите регион Вашего постоянного проживания (156 responses)

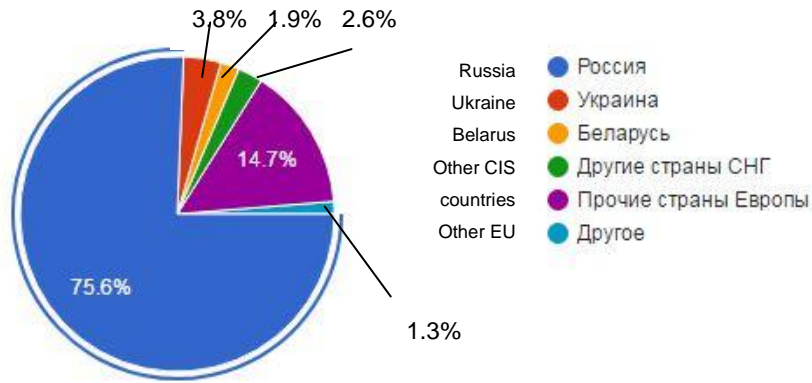


FIGURE 36. Location of your permanent residence

Как часто Вы пользуетесь сайтом vk.com? (156 responses)

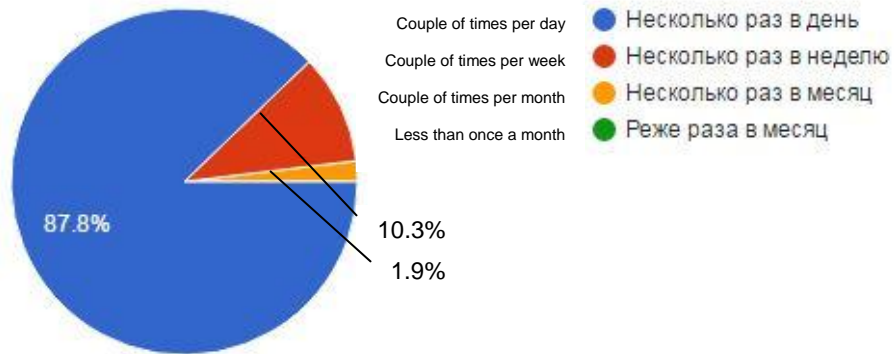


FIGURE 37. How often do you use vk.com?

Для каких целей Вы используете сайт? (156 responses)

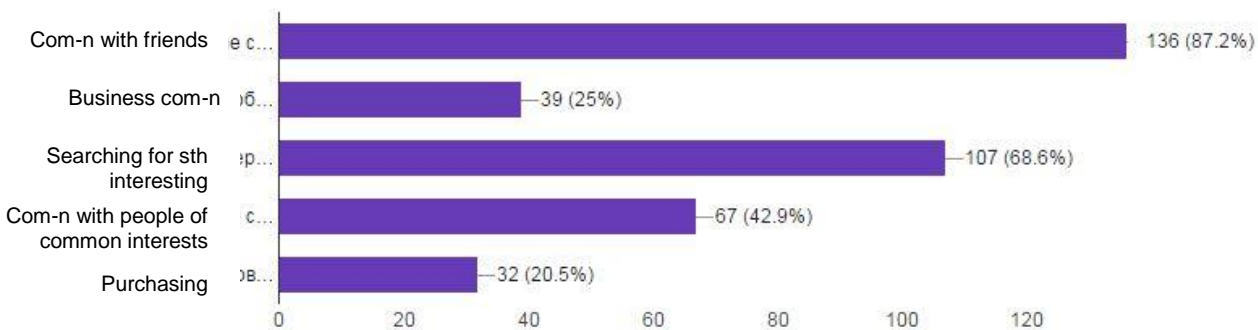


FIGURE 38. For what purposes do you use vk.com?

Приобретали ли Вы когда-нибудь что-либо через сайт vk.com?
(156 responses)

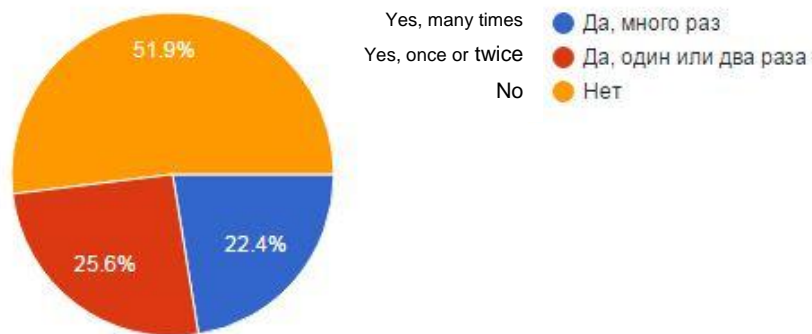


FIGURE 39. Have you ever bought anything via vk.com?

Случалось ли Вам платить за что-либо через сайт vk.com? (156 responses)

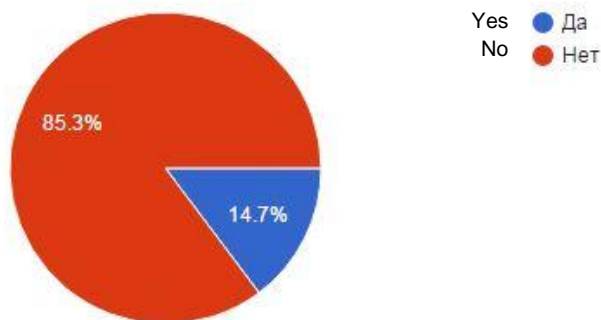


FIGURE 40. Have you ever paid via vk.com?

Имеет ли для Вас значение наличие сообщества VK у компании, товары/услуги которой Вы планируете приобрести?

(156 responses)

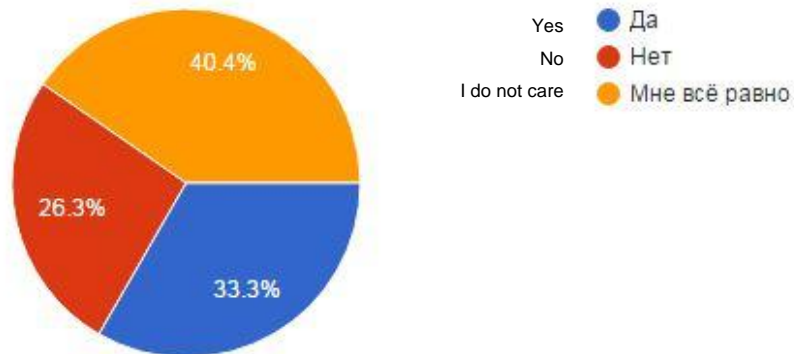


FIGURE 41. Is it important for you that a company you are going to buy from has an account at vk.com?

Смотрите ли Вы отзывы о компании, товары/услуги которой Вы собираетесь приобретать, на сайте vk.com?

(156 responses)

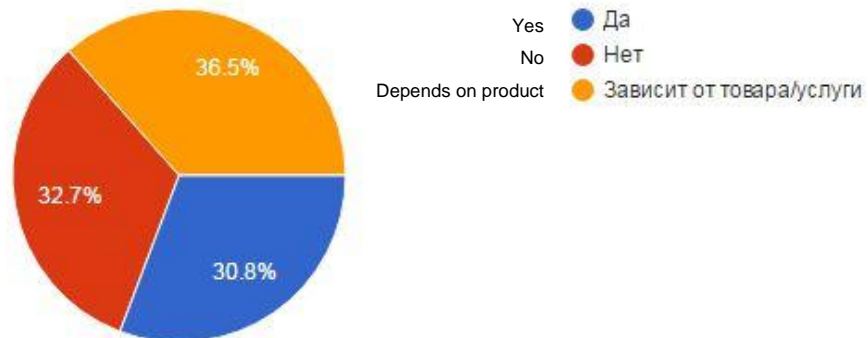


FIGURE 42. Do you check reviews on a company you are going to buy from at vk.com?

Случалось ли Вам когда-нибудь покупать товар только потому, что Вы наткнулись на него на сайте vk.com?

(156 responses)

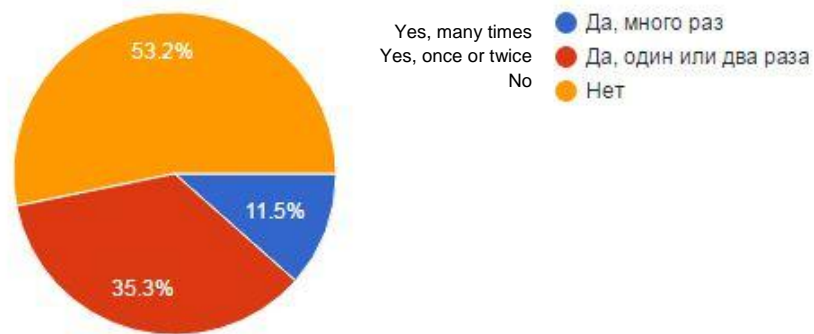


FIGURE 43. Was there ever such a case that you have bought something just because you have found the product at vk.com?

Случалось ли когда-нибудь, что Вы предпочли одну компанию другой, потому что у второй не было сообщества на сайте vk.com?

(156 responses)

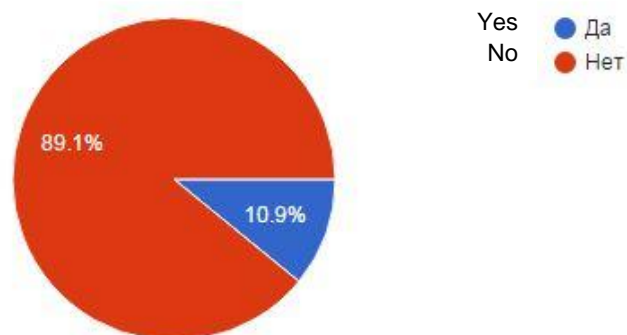


FIGURE 44. Was there ever such a case that you have preferred one company to another because the second one did not have a VK community?

Следите ли Вы за какими-либо коммерческими VK сообществами?

(156 responses)

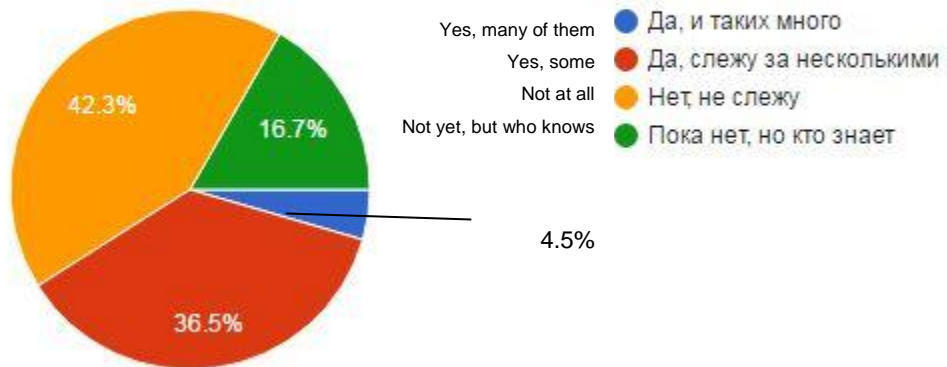


FIGURE 45. Do you follow any commercial communities?

Какие факторы, по Вашему мнению, важны для того, чтобы VK сообщество было успешным?

(156 responses)

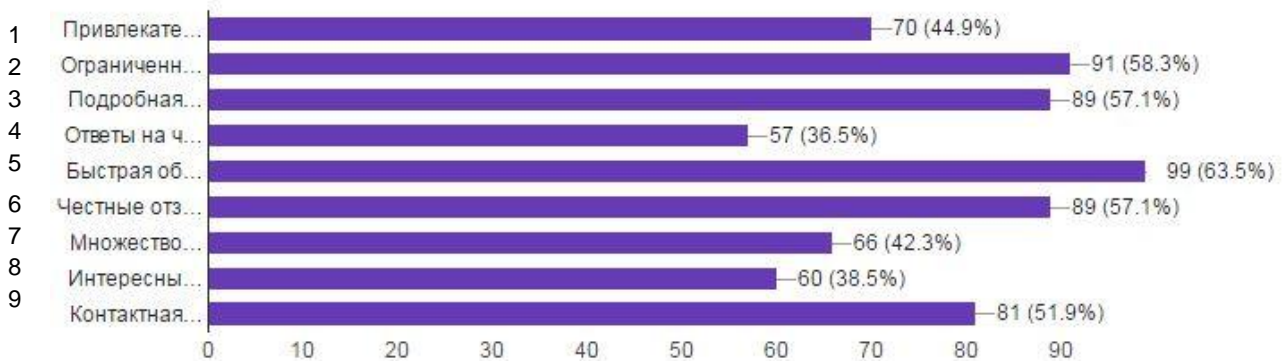


FIGURE 46. What you think should be in the successful community?

1= Attractive design, 2=Limited number of advertisements, 3=Detailed info, 4=FAQ, 5=Fast replies, 6=Honest reviews, 7=Many photos, 8=Interesting facts about the company, field, 9=Contact info

По Вашему мнению, достаточно ли компании иметь сообщество VK или наличие веб-сайта также важно?

(156 responses)

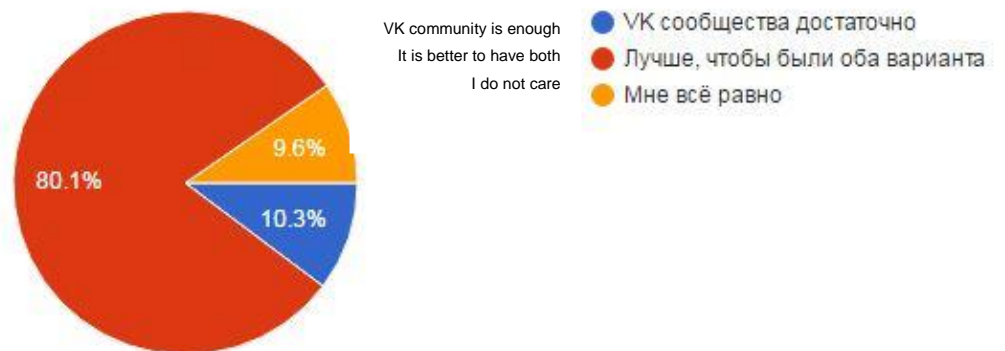


FIGURE 47. Do you think VK community is enough or website existence is also important?

Влияет ли на Ваше покупательское решение количество участников сообщества компании, товары/услуги которой Вы планируете приобрести?

(156 responses)

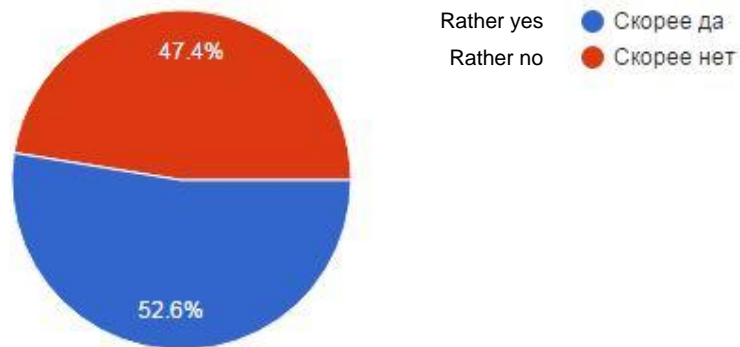


FIGURE 48. Does the number of members of a company's community influence your buying decision?

Почему Вы делаете репост записей сообществ? (156 responses)

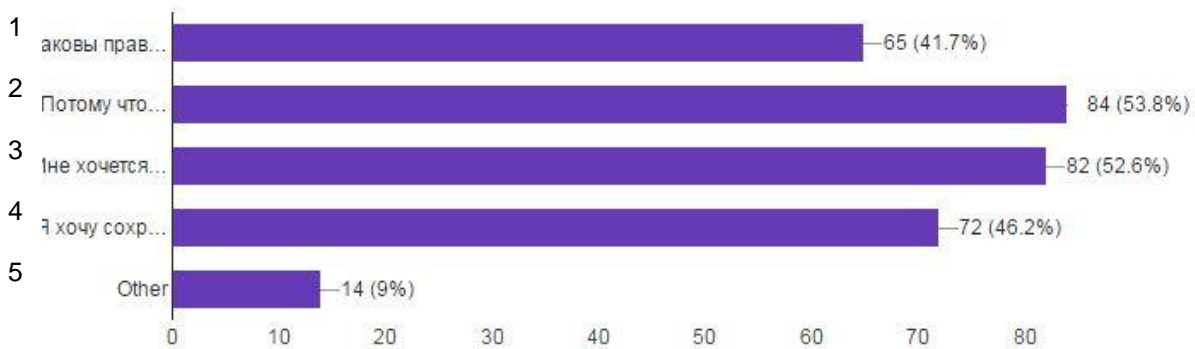


FIGURE 49. Why do you share communities' posts?

1=Giveaway rules say so, 2=Because I like the content, 3=I want to share the info with my friends or people who might like it, 4=I want to keep the info, 5=Other – what?

Согласны ли Вы с утверждением: "vk.com помогает людям узнать о новых продуктах и компаниях"?

(156 responses)

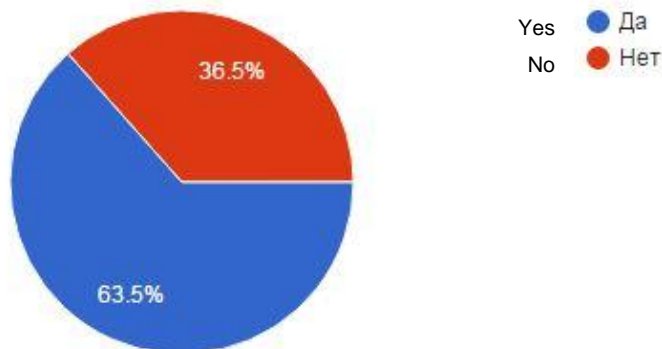


FIGURE 50. Do you agree with a statement that vk.com helps people to get familiar with new products and companies?

Согласны ли Вы с утверждением: "Каждая небольшая компания, ориентированная на русскоговорящий рынок, должна иметь VK сообщество"?

(156 responses)

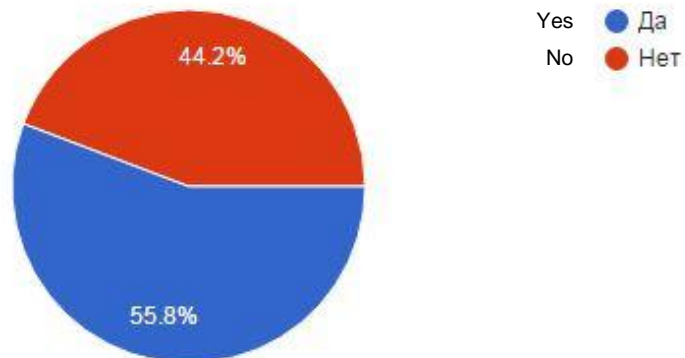


FIGURE 51. Do you agree with a statement that every small company oriented to Russian speaking market should have a VK community?

Если Вы откроете свой бизнес, будете ли Вы создавать для него VK сообщество?

(156 responses)

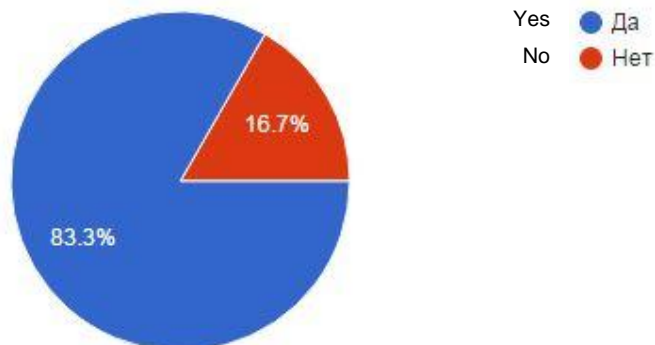


FIGURE 52. If you will open your business, will you create a VK account for it?

Would you like to add something else?

Out of 25 responses to this question only _ concern the topic. Here they are:

- "I work in a trade company and I know on my own experience how important it is to have a VK community. Clients prefer to familiarize with the assortment and prices through the community and come to buy. No one likes to run for nothing and call to shops."

- “I am a spender. If I find an interesting item for my collection, I would buy it anywhere.”
- “Purchasing depends on target audience and sometimes there is no sense of having VK account. Vk.com is for entertainment, Facebook is for business. I find out about new products through the advertisement at vk.com. I do not buy products at vk.com (except for stickers), but the website acts like mediator.”
- “I mostly listen to the music via vk.com.”
- “I use website mostly to send files to other people. I purchase goods online rarely but if I do I use official websites.”
- “All these communities only work for B2C, as for B2B – no one cares what communities companies have and what they post there.”
- “I only use vk.com for communication.”
- “Vk.com is a platform for communication with people, but through them, mostly, the information about products flow to other people. They tell to others about what they like and give contact information.”
- “I do not think that all companies must have VK communities, but I agree that it is convenient, informative and easy.”

The analysis of this data allows making the following conclusions.

83.9% of respondents constantly live in Russian-speaking countries, this proves the expediency of the use of vk.com if company targets on Russian-speaking customers.

Vk.com is very popular among young people on the daily basis – 87.8% of respondents use the website several times per day. The biggest reason for it is communication with friends (136 people out of 156 have chosen that option), but 32 people have also proven that they use vk.com for buying something, which accounts to 20.5%. More than one fifth of the respondents purchase goods via this platform, even though it may not be the primary reason of visiting the website.

Moreover, 48.1% of respondents pointed that they have bought something via vk.com at least once. At the base of this fact it is possible to say that vk.com is a perspective social media website to sell goods. Vk.com supports payments and according to survey results, 14.7% of the respondents have paid via it. Low number may be explained by several reasons starting from payment function novelty and ending with users' mistrust.

One third of the respondents (33.3%) have answered that it is important for them that the company they are going to buy from has a VK account. On the other hand, for 26.3% it has no difference and 40.4% do not care and the numbers together give higher percentage, but this data means that if a company is not going to have a community at vk.com, it will most likely lose one third of all potential customers. 30.8% of respondents mentioned that they look for reviews at vk.com before making buying decision which only proves the conclusion in the previous sentence.

46% of the respondents pointed that they have bought a product or service at least once just because they have noticed it at vk.com. Again, this number is lower than the percentage of people who have never bought something for that reason only, but for companies having no community at vk.com this may become an omission.

Answering to the question 'Was there ever such a case that you have preferred one company to another because the second one did not have a VK community?' 10.9% of respondents said 'yes'. With other equal parameters a company existing at vk.com wins more customers than the one which does not.

80.1% of all respondents answered that they prefer that a company has both VK community and the website. 10.3% said that VK community is enough. These numbers reliably show the importance of presence at vk.com for commercial needs.

According to the data, regular VK users believe that for community to be successful there should be fast replies (63.5%), limited amount of advertisement (58.3%), Detailed information and honest reviews (57.1% each) and contact info (51.9%).

The number of members of a community influence buying decision of 52.6% of the respondents. Combining the last two pieces of analysis it is possible to make a conclusion that the more users subscribe the public page, the better and to attract new members communities' administrators must pay attention to the quality of feedback service, information and reviews and should keep balance with advertisement.

63.5% of the respondents agreed the statement that vk.com helps people to get familiar with new products and companies and 55.8% agreed with the statement that every small company oriented to Russian speaking market should have a VK community. An interesting fact here is that much higher percentage of the respondents (83.3%) said that they will create a VK community for their business if they will open it someday.

3.3.2 Interview data

Name	Big Bro	Art Polka	Iz Sunduka	Crema Caffè	Vse Svobodny
Business field	Barber shop	Flea market	Fabric shop	Coffee shop	Book store
Location	Petrozavodsk, Russia	Petrozavodsk, Russia	Saint-Petersburg, Russia; online	Petrozavodsk, Russia	Saint-Petersburg, Russia; online
Business owner	Eugenia Matasova	Mikhail Semenov	Nika Artemyeva	Andrey Kiselev	Lyubov Belyatskaya
Number of members	3072	3013	3527	2784	21932
For how long does your business exist?	Since 20.06.2015 (almost two years).	Since June 2016 (almost one year).	About three years.	Five years.	Six years.
When did you create community and why?	The company is a franchise, so Head company has created the community on March 2015.	Several months after community creation, for promotion purposes.	It was initially a company based on vk.com. For me it is a very easy and understandable platform.	At the same time with community creation, for promotion purposes.	Half a year before opening the store for announcing the opening.
Was it hard to gain many members?	No, our subscribers join the community to be able to book time for haircut.	Yes, it took time.	The number of members was not the aim, but the more members the more effective and pleasant it	No. We have not been cheating with subscribers.	Yes, of course, it is everyday hard work.

			is. Once I have tried to attract people by paid advertisement in one popular group, it was not successful.		
How you use your community?	For sharing the atmosphere of our company through the social media, so that a person will know what he or she is going to receive when come to us.	For promotion of the products, advertisement, attracting clients, and for inspiration of crafters.	For commercial usage at the first. Then for inspiration and motivation.	We almost do not use VK platform.	Company's news, communication with clients, inspiration for booklovers.
Have you notice the difference before and after?	Not really. Since we sell services, word-of-mouth is the most important tool.	Of course. The difference is huge. Firstly, the client knows what products we have and comes to buy a certain one. Secondly, it is convenient for the client, because he or she can track discounts and product	Since the whole business was based on VK community, there is no correct answer to this question.	No difference. We believe that social media do not give promotion, they can only attract a little bit of attention, everything else happens offline.	We have created the community before the opening. But anyway we can see how every post affects.

		availability. Many people find out about our shop through the Internet. Consumers' interest has grown significantly.			
Do you use statistics?	Yes.	No.	No.	No. Why should we?	Yes, every time.
Which features do you lack?	Everything is okay.	Basically, everything is okay.	I would like messenger to be separated to private and business ones.	None.	More functions with design.
Do you think companies should have VK communities? Why or why not?	Yes, of course they should. Today's youth has grown with the Internet and they receive all the information through it.	Yes, we agree. Most of people today use social media, sometimes there is no possibility to walk to real shops this is why Internet presence is important.	I think that it is essential for small companies. As for big ones, VK community may be used for information purposes.	I suppose the most important thing is a high quality service, it is it which will give inflow of customers.	Yes. I think it is very convenient. For me it is strange if a company has no community.
Do you agree with a statement that vk.com is an effective tool to	Yes.	Yes.	Yes. The effectiveness of this tool depends on company's business	No.	Today it is more complicated than, for example, three years

promote a business ?			field and on how it uses the tool. Today social media, especially vk.com, may become the perfect platform for business promotion.	before, but nevertheless I do not know another more effective way.
----------------------	--	--	---	--

Business owners operating in different market fields have answered variously to the same questions. Only five interviews show the diversity of opinions. Anyway, even though there is no question to which all of interviewees have answered the same, some conclusions can be made.

Concerning the communities themselves business owners mentioned that they use it for promotion, info sharing, communication and inspiration. 3 out of 5 respondents admitted that it was hard to gain many members.

As for functional aspect of VK platform, 2 out of 5 interviewees mentioned that they use statistics at the time then others do not. Moreover, 40% of respondents shared their opinions on what extra features they need.

4 out of 5 business owners agree on the statements that companies should have VK communities and that vk.com is an effective tool to promote a business. 2 respondents admit that they have noticed the difference after creation a community at vk.com.

All in all, the majority of the respondents suppose that VK community matters, it helps to attract new clients and stay in touch with old ones. Lyubov Belyatskaya, the owner of the business which community has about 22000 members said that in her opinion nowadays there is no other platform which is better than vk.com.

4 SWOT ANALYSIS OF PROMOTION VIA VK.COM

According to theoretical base and the data collected via research, vk.com appears to be a perspective platform for business development. The website is already number one in Russian-speaking countries and is used by many companies of different sizes for promotion. To summarize the information which has been discussed in this thesis, let's make SWOT analysis.

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vk.com is the most popular website in Russian-speaking countries, is used by millions of people every day • It unites people of completely different interests, backgrounds, views • Vk.com allows implementing dozens of ideas • Almost all of the functions are free of charge • Website is easy to use, understandable and has perfect feedback service (Smith 2016) • Almost endless amount of functional, design opportunities for development, including both free and paid features • High speed of work • High amount of media content 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vk.com is oriented on Russian-speaking market • Lack of some features which other platforms have (Dolinina 2014) • Limited opportunities for advertisement placement (for example, alcohol and tobacco are forbidden) • High percentage of young audience • Website has many fake accounts and spammers
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunities for company's development due to every day improvement of the website • Possibility of gaining wider markets because of growing number of non-Russian speakers at vk.com 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High competition due to thousands of communities • Problems with legislation may occur because of copyright law

As SWOT analysis shows, the platform of vk.com has plenty of advantages as well as some disadvantages. Here it is wise to evaluate them both and decide what is more important for a particular company. The main external threat when using vk.com for commercial purposes is legislation issues. A business owner planning to create a community at vk.com has to read the rules and follow them in the future to avoid possible problems.

5 CONCLUSION

The core idea of this thesis was to discover opportunities of vk.com from the point of view of entrepreneurs having businesses in Russian-speaking markets and to prove that vk.com is an effective tool for business promotion. To develop this idea deep theoretical research as well as qualitative market research has been implemented. As a result, the information collected in this thesis reliably indicates truthfulness of the statement reflected in the title of the thesis.

In 2010s-2020s it is relevant for all the companies aiming to Russian-speaking markets whether in Russia or outside of this country to have a community at vk.com to promote the business. In today's world Internet plays an enormous role and to ignore it means cutting company's chances to success. For young generation and for people of middle age, social media websites represent one of the biggest source of information.

There is hardly one person in Russian language speaking countries who has no account at vk.com. People all over the globe use the website every day. It influences their buying behavior and attitude to certain companies on the market. VK communities are used for information search, communication, inspiration and purchasing. Business owners have a great opportunity to evaluate statistics, ask clients' opinion and have a discussion. For them vk.com is a significant source for business improvement, as it allows to keep in touch with customers and share the value of the company.

Regular people are interested in other people's lives and blog on the platform of vk.com can be a factor why people will become clients and will appreciate a company. In fact, there are plenty of other platforms for blogging and promotion which are widely and successfully used for promotion, but since the majority of Russian-speaking people use vk.com, it is convenient for them to find communities of the companies and follow them. According to market research results, for high number of users VK community existence matters when making purchase decision.

Today it is absurdly to ignore vk.com as a platform for business promotion if speaking of companies targeting to Russian-speaking countries. With all of the opportunities which this website gives and with its popularity vk.com can be defined as an effective and perspective tool to promote a business.

REFERENCES

Albitov A. 2011. *Facebook Как найти 100000 друзей для вашего бизнеса бесплатно*. Moscow: Mann, Ivanov and Ferber.

Anna. 2016. *Socialnye seti v Rossii, zima 2015-2016. Tsyfry, trendy, prognozy*.

Brandanalytics. [web publication]. [accessed 27 March 2017]. Available from: <https://www.shopolog.ru/metodichka/analytics/social-nye-seti-v-rossii-zima-2015-2016-cifry-trendy-prognozy/>

Apuzzo, R. 2014. *Social Media User Statistics & Age Demographics for 2014* [web publication]. 20 October 2014. [accessed 6 April 2017]. Available from:

<http://jetscram.com/blog/industry-news/social-media-user-statistics-and-age-demographics-2014/>

Dolinina, O. 2014. *Plyusy i minusy populyarnykh socialnykh setei* [web publication]. 8

January 2014. [accessed 24 March 2017]. Available from: <https://pixella.ru/blog/3-plyusy-i-minusy-populyarnykh-sotsialnykh-setey>

Evans D. 2008. *Social Media Markering. An Hour a Day*. Indianapolis: Wiley Publishing Inc.

Gunelius S. 2011. *30-minute Social Media Marketing*. The United States of America: McGraw-Hill

Phillips, S. 2007. *A brief history of Facebook* [web publication]. 25 July 2007. [accessed 24 March 2017]. Available from:

<https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2007/jul/25/media.newmedia>

Rouse, M. 2013. *Social Media* [web publication]. Last updated in September 2016

[accessed 17 March 2017]. Available from: <http://whatis.techtarget.com/definition/social-media>

Smith, B. 2016. *10 Incredible VK Facts You Should Know (AKA Russia's Facebook)*

[web publication]. 18 July 2016. [accessed 26 March 2017]. Available from: <http://www.makeuseof.com/tag/10-incredible-vk-facts-you-should-know-aka-russias-facebook/>

- Vostrov, A. 2008. *Istoria sozdaniya Vkontakte* [web publication]. 2008. [accessed 24 March 2017]. Available from: <http://www.seoded.ru/istoriya/internet-history/istoriya-vkontakte.html>
- Woollaston, V. 2013. *How often do you check your phone? The average person does it 110 times a DAY (and up to every 6 seconds in the evening)*. [web publication]. 8 October 2013. [accessed 6 May 2017]. Available from: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-2449632/How-check-phone-The-average-person-does-110-times-DAY-6-seconds-evening.html>
- Advertising Rules* [webpage]. 18 July 2014. [accessed 26 March 2017]. Available from: https://vk.com/ads?act=office_help&terms=1
- Auditoria Vkontakte* [webpage]. 2017. [accessed 20 March 2017]. Available from: https://vk.com/page-47200925_44240810
- Facebook newsroom* [webpage]. 2017. [accessed 17 March 2017]. Available from: <http://newsroom.fb.com/company-info/>
- FAQ po denezhnym perevodam Vkontakte* [webpage]. 2017. [accessed 24 March 2017]. Available from: https://vk.com/page-2158488_51994404
- Oblozhki dlya soobshhestv* [webpage]. 2017. [accessed 24 March 2017]. Available from: https://vk.com/page-2158488_52248420
- Pikabu* [webpage]. 2017. [accessed 20 March 2017]. Available from: <https://vk.com/pikabu>
- Poleznye prilozheniya* [webpage]. 1 October 2013. [accessed 26 March 2017]. Available from: https://vk.com/live?w=page-2158488_45237871
- SimilarWeb* [webpage]. 2017. [accessed 20 March 2017]. Available from: <https://www.similarweb.com/website/vk.com#overview>
- Synthetic Beauty Official Shop* [webpage]. 2017. [accessed 20 March 2017]. Available from: <https://vk.com/syntheticbeautyofficialshop>
- Tovary Vkontakte* [webpage]. 2017. [accessed 21 March 2017]. Available from: https://vk.com/page-59800369_51014929

Vk.com [webpage]. 2017. [accessed 17 March 2017]. Available from:

<https://vk.com/about>

VK Developers [webpage]. 2017. [accessed 24 March 2017]. Available from:

https://vk.com/dev/accepted_p

