

Customer Case Studies in Marketing Communication – Agilefant Ltd.

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<p>Agilefant is a platform independent tool for Lean and Agile management based on scientific research in Aalto University. Case company, a Finnish startup, Agilefant Ltd. (Agilefant Oy) was founded in 2013 to ensure development and existence of the software. Agilefant Ltd. is now looking for growth, so they need more engaged, paying customers.</p> <p>This thesis studies how a small Agile software startup can gain a better understanding of customers via customer case studies. This thesis also studies what valuable insight can be gained from the case studies and discusses how to use the customer studies to benefit the company in marketing communication.</p> <p>Agilefant is available as SaaS (software-as-a-service), on-premises version and open source. Pricing model affects the easiness to customers to buy the product as well as the engagement level they have by the purchase. That is why we first dive into the Agile theory to better understand the Agile software development landscape and licensing models. Then we discuss different marketing communication theories. Based on customer studies, literature and authors own experience this thesis tries to find tools for Agile communication and marketing and ultimately acquire and engage more paying customers.</p> <p>When in a case of a small startup company, depending on its success on one software only to get more sales with low budget and resources, it becomes critical to make the customer find the software. Also, According to many different studies, acquiring new customers is noticeably more expensive than keeping the existing ones. Budget and company's size affect greatly to the actual possible actions. That is where non-traditional methods, inbound marketing, content and Agile strategy raise their importance.</p> <p>The main message in this thesis could be always to adapt the processes and strategies to real clients and their buying processes. That is why continuous user studies are necessary.</p>	
Keywords Customer case study, Agile approach, inbound, content, marketing communication	

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1 Introduction

All the way back to the year 2006, Software Process Reach Group from the Helsinki University of Technology's SoberIT (Software Business and Engineering Institute) decided scientifically to develop a tool to streamline fast-paced software development (Repo 2009). After years of research and development work, in 2013 Agilefant Ltd. (in Finnish Agilefant Oy) was started to ensure development and being of the software, which already is adopted in not only in Finnish companies but also in the USA, United Kingdom, and Far-East.

As now a small startup, Agilefant Ltd. needs more paying customers, because it cannot financially rely on e.g. Tekes financing (Agilefant 2015b). The purpose is to get more visibility and awareness with a low budget. Thus, in this thesis, we interview a couple of Agilefant's customers for a customer case study. We want to learn how to diversely use customer case studies to reach our goal. Based on case studies and literature this thesis tries to find tools for Agilefant Ltd. communication and marketing and ultimately acquire and engage more paying customers. New competitors emerge daily, so Agilefant has to differentiate from competitors.

Agilefant Ltd. follows Agile and Lean project management methods on their business and their software development. Their software, Agilefant, helps companies to work Agile and Lean. In short, Agile project management is fast moving, flexible method of management, responding to change over following a plan (Agile Alliance, 2015a). Agile also affects strategic communication and marketing, which also strengthens the need for this study. Communication and marketing should not require too much effort to implement, and it should all be flexible because the business changes all the time.

The subject is interesting because today more and more companies are adapting Agile values and methods. There are lots of studies of communication, customer behavior, and marketing, but Agile business-to-business environment and software-as-a-service (SaaS) customers require a new type of approach. The SaaS customer is free to stop paying the monthly fee anytime. That challenges communication and marketing and increases the importance of engaging the customer.

People and companies often are too busy to keep the wheels rolling and not stopping for a minute to think if the way they do things is the most efficient and reasonable. Agile and Lean methods introduce many new ways to organize work, but the focus should always be making things more simple and profitable.

1.1 Research objectives and limitations

The objective of this thesis is to take a closer look at customer case studies and how to use them as part of communication and marketing. We interview a couple of Agilefant's customers. By gaining more valuable insight on how the existing users and customers find the software, how they use it and why they use it, this study can improve Agilefant Ltd.'s communication, marketing, and sales. In the end, this study is needed to help Agilefant Ltd.'s growth.

This study first concentrates on finding out an answer to the following question:

- How a company, in this case, a small startup, can gain a better understanding of customers/users via user case studies?

Then, the following questions:

- What valuable insight can be gained from the user studies?
- How to use the customer case studies to benefit the company in marketing communication?

To be successful small companies must increase awareness in the minds of interest groups. Hopefully, this thesis will provide useful ideas to other low-budget startup companies also, whether it is profit or non-profit organization. Hopefully, this thesis likewise encourages organizations and entrepreneurs to think outside the box, find new ideas to use case studies and spark to be more creative with communication and marketing. If something does not work for one, then try something else.

This thesis is delimited to study low-budget business-to-business marketing and communication from small startup software company's point of view. Agile software development methods presented in this thesis to understand better Agilefant's business environment are delimited to Agile, Lean and Scrum. The section about software pricing models is delimited to software licensing models relating to Agilefant. There are many other models too with all hybrid versions, but those are excluded from this thesis.

For the background, Chapter 3 first reviews traditional integrated marketing communication method (IMC). Then, it discusses digital media and tools, because they are better affordable. This thesis does not provide a plan but rather guides to analyze customer case studies from different perspectives and strategize from that basis.

1.2 Personal experience and motivation with Agilefant

I am a non-graduate of the former Helsinki University of Technology and have a personal connection to the team Agilefant. From there came the idea to do this thesis to Agilefant Ltd. The personal connection also gave the motivation to do in-depth research, because it would be for a cause near.

To get a better idea of what Agilefant does, I wanted to create an Agilefant user account for test use. Before creating the user account, the team Agilefant asked if I wanted to attend their software usability test. I am interested in user-centric usability, so I got excited about getting to attend one. Agilefant's Developer conducted the test in nowadays Aalto University's Otaniemi campus in Espoo, Finland. The software felt hard to use and gave no help on what to do, in what order or how. The layout felt a bit old-fashioned, reminding of out-dated Windows. To the team, this was a wake-up call. If I had troubles, there might be other users also struggling. This test also gave a good kick to start user studies.

Later, I got a chance to use Agilefant for Enterprise Resource Planning change and development project management. The layout is now face-lifted, and the overall user experience has improved significantly. Agilefant prevents duplicate work and enables prioritizing work. Because benefitting from Agilefant that much, I wanted to do this thesis even more. I truly wish others to benefit from the software also.

1.3 The structure of the thesis

The first part of the thesis introduces the reader to the subject. It also explains some of the key terms that might be new to the reader.

The second and third parts of the thesis create a theoretical framework for the study. The second part introduces to software pricing models and Agile theory and some Agile methods. The third part discusses marketing communication needs based on Agile business methods. It starts with traditional IMC and then goes to non-traditional methods. Both parts are based on both literature reviews of books, articles, and online resources, as well as on professional and personal experiences and observations.

The fourth part of the thesis dives into research methodology and interviews. It includes interview results. Discussion and conclusions are in the fifth part, and references, production, and appendices create the last parts.

1.4 Key terms

This section explains specific terms repeated in this thesis. Agile and Scrum related terms are chosen to express as Ken Schwaber, of a signatory of Agile Manifesto, and co-developer of Scrum development process explains them.

Agile Software Development. Fast moving, flexible method of management. Prioritizing individuals and interactions over processes and tools, responding to change over following a plan, customer collaboration over contract negotiation and working software over comprehensive documentation.

Increment. A complete slice, or piece, of the finished product or system that is developed by the end of an iteration, or Sprint. (Schwaber 2007, 114.)

Iteration. "One of several successive periods of time when all the work to complete one full slice of the finished product is performed; a project consists of multiple iterations, also referred to as Sprints." (Schwaber 2007, 115.)

On-premises software or on-prem. Software that is installed and runs in customer's own data-center and not in a cloud or other remote location.

Product backlog. "A prioritized list of functional and non-functional requirements and features to be developed for a new product or to be added to an existing product." (Schwaber 2007, 114.)

SaaS. Software as a Service. It is a software distribution model in which the software is accessible typically via the Internet, without any installing or maintaining the software. The software's applications are hosted by a vendor or service provider and usually paid by use e.g. monthly or yearly.

Startup. An early stage in the life cycle of an enterprise, entrepreneur moving from an idea stage searching a scalable business model. These companies are usually newly created, developing and researching for markets.

Subscription license. Gives the user the right to use the software or special parts of it and get latest updates by paying a monthly or annual fee.

Metrics. Data, measuring activities and performance, e.g. customer data, how they use the software.

Scrum. A lightweight, advanced development method from Agile software development methods. It is a method based on small, empowered and self-organizing teams. (Leffingwell 2007.) Or “a process for managing the development and deployment of complex products that is based on empirical process control theory and stands on the core practices of iterative development, which generates increments of product by using self-managing, cross-functional teams” (Schwaber 2007, 115.)

Sprint. “A Scrum iteration, normally of a one-month duration. Shorter durations can be used, but all teams within a project consistently synchronize their work using the same length iteration, which does not vary during the project.” (Schwaber 2007, 115.)

Sprint Backlog. “The task the Scrum Development Team performs to turn Product Backlog items into a “done” increment. Many are developed during the Sprint Planning Meeting (How), but up to 40 percent might emerge during the Sprint. For a Scrum Development Team to start work on a Sprint Backlog item, the task must take 16 hours or less to be completed.” (Schwaber 2007, 115.)

Waterfall. Linear project management and software development method. The process in a software development project could be following: Concept, design, implementation, testing, troubleshooting, operation, and maintenance. Each phase proceeds in strict order.

2 Agilefant Ltd. (Agilefant Oy)

Agilefant Ltd., or in Finnish Agilefant Oy, is a small software company founded in 2013 by a group working together at Aalto University. Agilefant was founded to ensure development and existence of the same named software Agilefant. The office and development were several years located in Otaniemi, which is also the main campus of Aalto University in Espoo, Finland. During the summer of 2016, the office relocated to Helsinki.

Agilefant Ltd. employs half-dozen experts of information technology and Agile software development. It has also offered coding and software development experience for hundreds of students among Aalto University. Agilefant Ltd. has also had several cooperation projects with other Universities around the world, like one in Canada (Paasivaara & al. 2013).

To better understand the business environment around Agilefant Ltd., this chapter now introduces Agilefant software and the most common licensing models affecting the customer behavior. We also explain key Agile values, introduce to Lean thinking and present one of the many different Agile methods.

2.1 Agilefant software

The scientific research behind the software Agilefant started in 2006 among Software Process Research Group or SPRG. SPRG is part of SoberIT (Software Business and Engineering Institute), which today is related to Aalto University's Computer Science department. The idea of Agilefant started to develop when there was plenty of commercial task and time management software on the market, but the group felt they all were missing something. The group wanted to have a tool following modern management methods but still being able to meet the practical everyday challenges. SPRG started a scientific research to develop a tool to streamline fast-paced software development. (Repo 2009.)

The first public open source release was in 2008. Agilefant as we now know it, is a proof-of-concept of an Aalto University dissertation of Jarno Vähäniitty, the project manager of the research group, summarizing existing and presenting "new understanding for linking product and portfolio management with modern development methodologies such as Scrum in the face of the practical realities that may apply to many small software organizations" (Vähäniitty 2012). In his research Vähäniitty brings up that software companies "need to maintain the big picture of the ongoing work of the development staff and align this with the long-term plans of the enterprise." He also wants to underline the importance

of transparency during Agile software development. The research got funding by revenue, the founders, seed investors and Tekes (the Finnish Funding Agency for Innovation). (Agilefant 2015b.)

Today, Agilefant offers a platform independent tool for Lean and Agile management. It is available as SaaS (software-as-a-service), on-premises version and open source. It works for many kinds of project structures. More than 10k users around the world use it for

- Iteration management (to prioritize stories and tasks and set dependencies between stories)
- Project management (to prioritize project tasks and keep track on everything)
- Product management (to have visibility and follow goals)
- Portfolio management (to see who is working on what)
- Daily work management (plan and organize work and follow time usage)
- Time tracking and reporting (to show spent and assumed effort, and give numbers for billing of consulting, etc.)
- Roadmapping (to show history and future plans for product and project management)
- Strategy execution (enables entire company to see top level strategic initiatives)
- Managing companywide work (like marketing communication plan)
- Customer collaboration (collecting customer requests to Agilefant) (Agilefant 2017).

Agilefant helps to split the software related work into smaller pieces, prioritize work, share tasks with team members, and comment different phases. Agilefant can also be used for cost and time management (Figure 1).

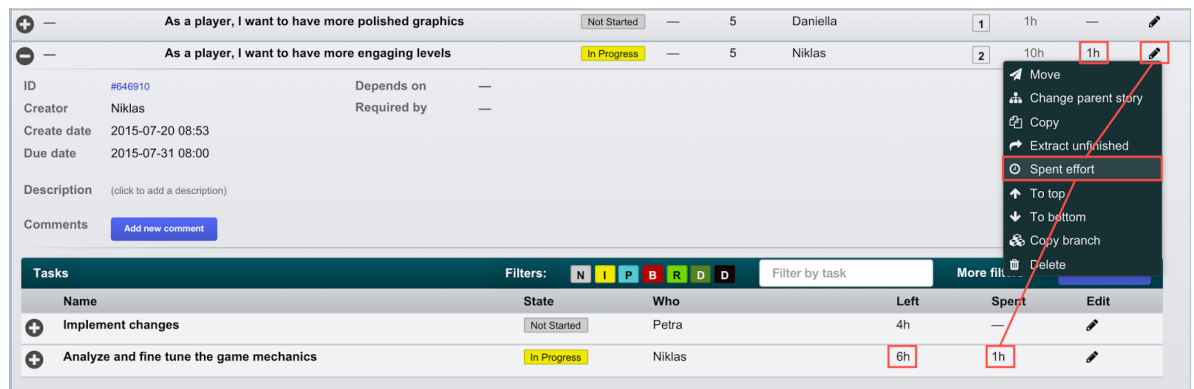


Figure 1. List view of Agilefant 2015 - who must do what (Agilefant 2015a)

Agilefant uses backlog for everything that needs to be done in product, project or iteration planning. Schwaber (2007, 114) describes backlog as “a prioritized list of functional and non-functional requirements and features to be developed for a new product or to be added to an existing product.” Iteration, on the other hand, is a time-boxed period of time in which specific detailed planned tasks should be done, and for different teams, there can be several parallel iterations. Iteration could also be described as repeating specific work queue (e.g. planning, development, testing, review) frequently. The piece of work to be done is described as a story (usually with some value) or as a task (more specific), which

can be stated as Not Started, In Progress, Pending, Blocked, Ready, Done or Referred. Stories can be set up to be depended on other stories, prioritize, time estimated and show them as a tree form (see Figure 2). (Agilefant 2016a.)

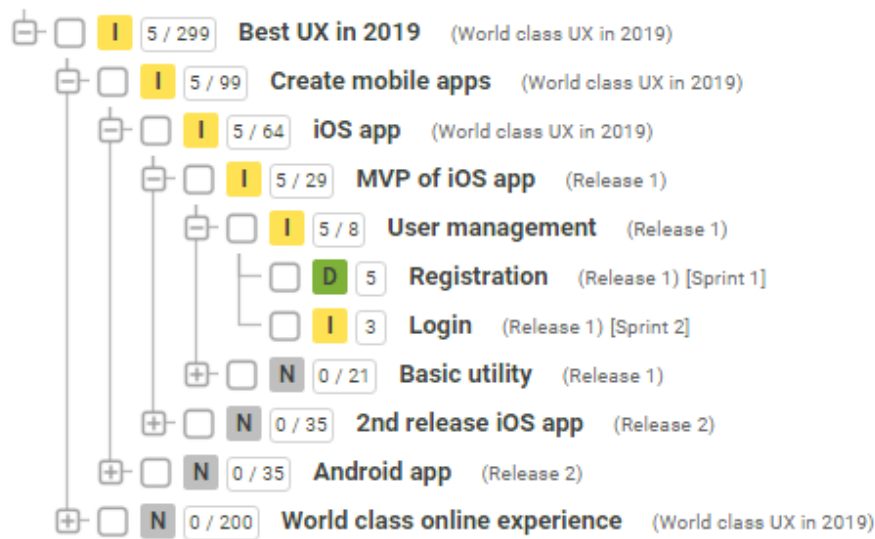


Figure 2. Example of product tree by Agilefant (Agilefant 2016a)

Agilefant supports modern Agile methods, like Kanban and Scrum, but also traditional approaches such as Waterfall. Agilefant supports exporting reports to Excel and has integrations with other widely used software. Scrum is introduced in a later section, but Kanban and Waterfall are delimited in this thesis.

2.2 Licensing models

Agilefant is available as SaaS (software-as-a-service), on-premises version and open source. Pricing model affects the easiness to customers to buy the product as well as the engagement level they have by the purchase.

There could be brought out three kinds of pricing models - a perpetual license, a subscription license, and consumption or pay-as-you-go license - to simplify. The perpetual license could be called as traditional software licensing. The software product is sold as a property or “in a box.” The perpetual license entitles a user to use the software in perpetuity by paying a large “one-time” up-front fee. The one-time fee gives the user right to use that version of the software indefinitely. Additional investments usually come from hardware, installation, and maintenance. Under the perpetual license, new features are typically made available only as part of an upgrade or a new version. (Choudhary 2007.)

Subscription license, in turn, gives the user the right to use the software or special parts of it and get latest updates by paying a monthly or annual fee. Subscription license typically includes all updates and technical support. The newest updates and features to the software are often brought to the customer as soon as they are finished and ready to be published. Subscription license also requires less outlay than perpetual and gives more flexibility as an operating expense. (Choudhary 2007, Zhang & Seidmann 2010.)

Subscription license can be sold as on-premises or off-premises as SaaS. On-premises (or on-prem) requires installing the software or parts of it behind the firewall in the customer's own data center. That means customer hosts the software and that requires, among other things, facility, electricity and admin staff from the customer.

SaaS, on the other hand, is delivered online from the cloud and therefore is hosted by the publisher. Thus, SaaS users do not need to invest as much in hardware and IT personnel because the software runs on the vendor's infrastructure. When the data is stored at the vendor's site, there are implications for trust, security and switching costs. Still, like on-premises license, SaaS gives more cost predictability when compared to a perpetual license. (Choudhary 2007.)

Pay-as-you-go license is much like SaaS, but the user only pays for what is used after using it. Upfront costs are low, and like SaaS, the vendor is responsible for software, infrastructure, and maintenance. Measuring and paying are usually monthly, or annually.

Open-source refers to software license allowing anyone to modify and redistribute the software. Open-source requires expertise from the user. The software is installed on customer's premises, and the customer is allowed to modify the program code. In Agilefant's case, the customer can buy a different size of support packages. The package might include email support and remote help with installation.

According to Choudhary (2007), when compared SaaS to a perpetual license for three time units, more users keep subscribing SaaS than buying an upgrade to the perpetual license. Also, "SaaS licensing model leads to greater investment in product development under most conditions." SaaS publishers have greater interest to invest in product development than perpetual license providers. From that point of view, having new features and updated software might help to keep the customer in the long run.

Subscription software vendor can publish new features and bug fixes immediately when they are finished. That provides a possibility to get feedback from the customers and to

keep the focus on bringing value to the user. If compared to customers using perpetual license software, they must wait for the new version to get new features. Also, the new version is expensive and should thus provide substantial incremental benefits relative to the previous version to make the customer pay for the upgrade. (Choudhary 2007.)

Subscription license customers bring initially low value to the software vendor, but greater in the long run. Though, customers stop bringing value the moment they stop using the software. That creates uncertainty to the vendor or publisher and makes engaging the customer and acquiring new ones necessary.

2.3 Agile values and principles

Charles Darwin has reportedly said that: "It is not the strongest or the most intelligent who will survive, but those who can best manage change." Since organizations are complex adaptive systems, those who fail will not survive. According to Professor Linda Holbeche, organizational agility is an ability to develop and quickly apply flexible, quick and dynamic capabilities. Agility is recognizing the need to be changeable to thrive (Holbeche 2015, 11-12, 272). In this thesis, Agile applies to a specific methodology - iterative project management method, Lean tools, and continuous improvement approaches. (Holbeche 2015, 31.)

Many of the Agile movement arose from the automotive industry in Japan in the 1980s, within Lean manufacturing. Agile concept aroused in the 1990s in response to the need of modern business to operate predictable even in the face of extreme complexity. Complexity is caused by requirements and unpredictable changes, varies of technology and the people doing the work. The arrival of Internet and other advanced technologies has led to a huge increase in types and scale of competition for different size of companies, which highlights the importance to manage complexity. (Holbeche 2015, 31; Schwaber, 94.)

Agility theory is linked with software development, Lean manufacturing, just-in-time supply chains and process improvement methodologies (Holbeche 2015, 11-12). Jim Highsmith (2007, 4) specifies that Agile methods are targeted to product development efforts in domains of software products (examples are operating systems, enterprise resource planning (ERP)), industrial products with embedded software and internally developed IT products fitting the speed, mobility, and exploration factor criteria.

According to Agile Alliance (AgileAlliance 2016), Agile is “ability to create and respond to change in order to succeed in an uncertain and turbulent environment.” In 2001 a community of IT specialists, e.g. Highsmith, discussed approaches to software development in Utah and developed The Agile Manifesto as an alternative to heavyweight, documentation driven project management processes (Highsmith 2001; Holbeche 2015, 31). The core values honored by the Agilists are presented as following:

- Individuals and interactions over processes and tools
- Working software over comprehensive documentation
- Customer collaboration over contract negotiation
- Responding to change over following a plan. (Agile Alliance 2015.)

First, the Agile movement emphasizes the human role - the relationships and communality of software developers and team, face-to-face meetings and close working environment arrangements. Team spirit is essential. Always following a process is inflexible and it wastes the time of getting things done. Overall, communication is important. In all phases of work, Agile movement emphasis on communication.

Second, the Agile team must continuously release out tested working software. The frequency cycle for releases is usually a bi-month or month, but in some approaches, new releases may be released even hourly or daily. The documentation should be decreased to an appropriate necessity level. The software code should be kept simple but advanced.

Third, although well-drafted contracts are necessary especially in bigger software projects, the relationship and cooperation between the developers and the customer are invested. From the business point of view, the focus is on delivering value to the customer as soon as possible. Reducing risks of non-fulfilment of the contract with the customer is also considered.

Fourth, the team and the customer should acknowledge that responding to change over following a plan requires flexibility from the team, customer, and the contract. If and when changes emerge, the team and customer representatives should have adequate authority to respond to the needs and act. (Abrahamsson & al. 2002.)

Organizations often adopt Agile management style also aligned with Agile methods (Agile Alliance 2005b). Highsmith (2007, 8) presents that Agility is an attitude and an environment when Holbeche (2015, 272) speaks about open, alert and flexible mindset. Focusing on delivery instead of on compliance, keeping the set just enough to get the job done and keeping it simple are some of the guiding principles in practice by Highsmith (86).

2.4 Lean thinking

Lean comes from Lean Manufacturing, but Mary and Tom Poppendieck adapted it to fit software development domain. In their book, *Lean Software Development: An Agile Toolkit* (2003), they present seven principles to summarize Lean development: Eliminate waste, Amplify learning, Decide as late as possible, Deliver as fast as possible, Empower the team, Build integrity in, and See the whole.

Later, in a paper published by IEEE in 2009, Mary Poppendieck, comes to these seven updated Lean principles:

- Eliminate Waste
- Build Quality In
- Create Knowledge
- Defer Commitment
- Deliver Fast
- Respect People
- Optimize the Whole

These principles as a group provide guidance on how to deliver software or product for less cost better and faster. Lean sees waste as an opposite to a production system. Quality comes from test-driven development. Knowledge is rational, and it is also important for teams not being forced to re-learn what once known. Poppendieck also believes that rapid cycle time in product development leads to higher quality and reduced cost. She also flags for aggregate measurements instead of decomposing, to drive effective behavior.

Highsmith (2007, 35-36), on the other hand, presents his four tenets of Lean thinking as follows:

- Specify value
- Identify the value stream
- Flow
- Pull

Highsmith clarifies that customer is the one that defines value, not the internal management. Highsmith expresses value in product terms - customer needs, price, time and quality. The value stream consists of the activities required to bring the product or software to the customer. Flow refers to flow thinking and keeping activities flowing from on the next without delays. Pull in turn refers to letting the customer ask for the product instead of pushing it to the customer.

Another essential point raised by Highsmith (2007, 32-38) is minimizing compliance. In a nutshell that means eliminating anything that isn't adding value, which is about the same

what Mary Poppendieck (2009) writes about eliminating waste. Compliance is needed for audit, reporting and paying taxes, but Highsmith recommends to approach compliance from barely sufficient, just-enough perspective. Highsmith admits there are good reasons for some compliance activities, but the point is to keep them from impeding the progress on product development. Compliance is a cost of doing business, but it does not deliver customer value. Organizations cannot avoid external compliance activities, but they can minimize the compliance to only what is required. Internal compliance activities usually grow with the company size, but it should not let interfere any more than necessary with delivery activities. Highsmith emphasizes trusting the people actually doing the work whether some activities add value or not; these include meetings, tasks, and documentation.

2.5 Scrum - Agile framework

Agilefant supports Scrum. Scrum is a lightweight, advanced development method from Agile software development methods. Scrum is a method based on small, empowered and self-organizing teams (Leffingwell 2007). Schwaber (2007, 115) describes Scrum as “a process for managing the development and deployment of complex products that is based on empirical process control theory and stands on the core practices of iterative development, which generates increments of product by using self-managing, cross-functional teams.” In other words that mean building and delivering software in series of fixed-length, generally four weeks, intervals, after each team presents a working part of software with some new functionalities.

Scrum Team is the professionals working together to build increments of products every Sprint. Scrum Team consists of Product Owner, Scrum Master, and Scrum Development team. Scrum Team works on the Product Backlog that they have selected for the Sprint. Product Owner is responsible for what is desired and why. Scrum Master is responsible for the Team following Scrum process and implementing properly. (Schwaber 2007, 115-117.)

Scrum process works as follows:



Figure 3. Scrum process

Product Backlog is a prioritized list of things to be done giving value to the customer (Scrum-Institute 2016). Sprint Backlog, on the other hand, is team's to-do list for that specific Sprint. Product development is divided into iterations of work during which an increment of product functionality is implemented. Iteration is repeating of a process. As a result, there will be working increment of the product or software, and the loop begins again.

As an Agile framework Scrum is consistent with Agile values introduced in Agile Manifesto. Still, there are specific sets of values as the foundation for The Scrum process. Below is listed what Scrum Alliance (2016) presents:

- Focus to deliver valuable items sooner
- Courage to undertake great challenges
- Openness to express what the team is doing
- Commitment when having a great control to the work
- Respect to each other's.

Scrum values presented above are similar to Agile and Lean values. Giving responsibility to the team requires focus, courage, openness, commitment, and respect. Focusing on delivering valuable items requires knowledge of what features actually are valuable to the customer. It is not reasonable to spend time on features that no one uses. Openness helps the team and other interest groups to know what is being done and keep the focus on right things at the right time.

Although Scrum was intended for managing software development projects, organizations can apply it in general project management. Scrum is much about defining requirements, analyzing, testing, designing, implementation, testing, and repeating that loop.

2.6 Agile as a success factor

The Agile principle of simplicity doesn't mean not doing much, but it is about prioritizing and doing things that bring value to the customer. When focusing on things that truly matter, the organization has more resources to bring value to the customer, and that is a huge competitive advantage. The unnecessary stays on the to-do list, but on the bottom of the list or on "not doing" state. Scrum and Lean both base on Agile values with different spices, but as maybe now clear, Agile affects the whole organization and the customers. That way Agile can be understood as a "way of life."

Standish Group International, Inc. has been collecting case information about IT-projects since 1985. The charts on Figure 4 presents Agile success - failure rates on small software development projects using modern programming languages, methods, and tools from 2003 to 2012. The 2012 CHAOS (Standish Group International, Inc. 2013) results represent, that about average IT-projects 18% fail, 43% are challenged, and 39% are successful. The five factors for a successful small, Agile project are, in this order, iterative development style, steppingstones, time boxing, being elastic and interaction.

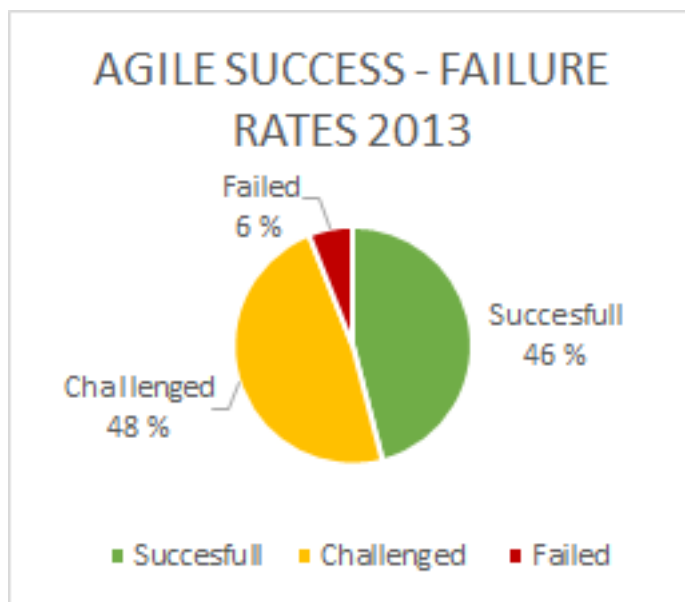


Figure 4. Agile success - failure rates on small projects 2013 (small projects) (Standish Group International, Inc. 2013)

The success rate has increased from previous studies, and in 2004 only 29% of average it-projects were successful. The study names several factors for the increase, like including looking at the entire project environment of processes, methods, skills, costs, tools, decisions, and optimization, to name but a few. The study also adds, that there are more smaller and Agile projects, and decrease of waterfall projects, which all seem to affect the

success rate. As visible on the list, success depends on many things, and most of them relate to Agile methods.

According to the same study, in small projects (with less than \$1 million in labor costs), for example, projects lacking user involvement perform poorly. On the other hand, the Agile process directly addresses executive support, user involvement, optimization and other success factors. For example, good relationship and cooperation with the team and a common communication platform that increases decision speed, and therefore keep the project in time all have a huge impact.

Success depends on several components. One of the success factors according to CHAOS Manifesto 2013 is an Agile process (Standish Group International, Inc. 2013). It is not at the top of the list, though, but statistically, it seems to have positive value for the project both directly and indirectly. How much the other factors are affected by the Agile process, is not inspected. Agile values teamwork, which also means more communication with the management and involving user to the development work. Optimization and skilled resources are also related to Agile.

Table 1. Factors of success for small projects pointed from 1 to 100 (Standish Group International, Inc. 2013)

Executive management support	20
User involvement	15
Optimization	15
Skilled resources	13
Project management expertise	12
Agile process	10
Clear business objectives	6
Emotional maturity	5
Execution	3
Tools and infrastructure	1

Agile is about bringing value and doing things that matter. Still, the Figure 5 shows that the number of software features used is quite alarming. According to a Standish Group report based on CHAOS database in 2014, 80% of features in developed software are used infrequently or hardly ever. Only 20% of features are often used. In other words, that is companies spend thousands of hours of work with low value. Also, spending the time to create something not that important takes valuable resources away from something more

important. Also, the project brings no value to the customer when doing wrong things. (Standish Group International, Inc. 2014.)

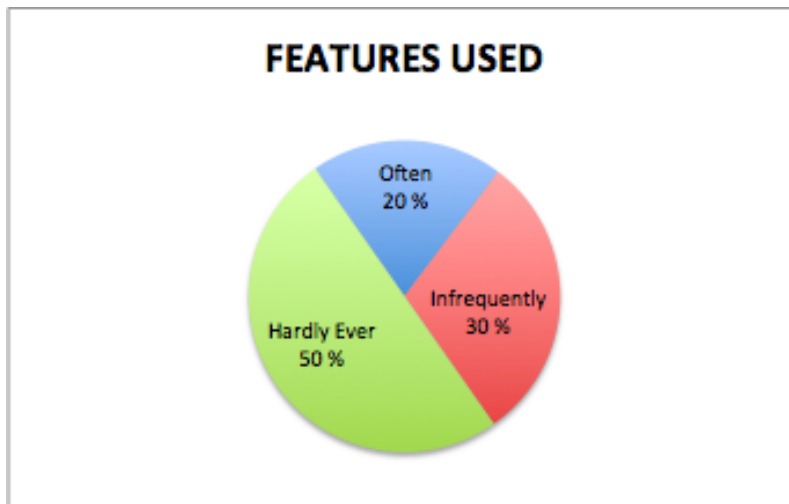


Figure 5. The Standish Group estimate of features used in custom application development (Standish Group International, Inc. 2014)

If teams focus on developing features that are often or at least infrequently used, companies bring more value to the customer and free resources to other business tasks. In a small organization where everyone does a little bit of everything, that can have a huge impact on profit making. Again, this gives a reason to customer studies.

3 Towards Agile marketing communication

The global marketplace consists of a complex set of companies battling for customers. New companies are formed daily increasing the competition. A small software company has a vast job developing software to meet the needs of existing customers and stay in the competition. At the same time, the company should inquire new customers and engage the existing ones. Also, according to many different studies, acquiring new customers is noticeably more expensive than keeping the existing ones. The estimates about that vary between 3 to even 30 times more expensive.

The product might have all the nice features, but the prospect must get convinced it is the best for their needs. Thus, one big bottleneck in most SaaS conversion funnels is getting people to pay (Kissmetrics 2015). Marketing communication should aim to provide enough information to assist the decision process (Fill 2009, 169). Advertising and marketing methods have a huge variety of possibilities to reach the prospect when non-traditional methods come more popular. The market landscape often changes rapidly, which also requires agility from marketing communication.

Marketing communication strategies could be divided into traditional and non-traditional methods. As a traditional method could be seen integrated marketing communication (IMC). IMC aims at cohesive communication to create and maintain the wanted image of the company on the customer and buyer. It is focused on how the company wants to communicate. Today, though, it is all turning upside down. Buyers want to communicate with the company and want to see tailored content. They also are active information seekers, and therefore companies now must differentiate with quality content and expertise image. Inbound marketing and content marketing serve non-traditional ways to separate from competitors.

When buyers today search for information, they use their networks and search the Internet. Case studies are today's word-of-mouth, and together with quality content, they give the buyer first-hand information how the product could help them and convince them to make their move towards a purchase.

When communication is in question, some prefer to use word communications. In this thesis, though, the last "s" from communications is chosen to be dropped out, because of its association with something more technical, like mobile networks, TV, and radio when communication refers more to human-centered interaction and actual communication.

3.1 Traditional method: Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC)

According to Chris Fill (2009, 29), marketing communication is about “finding ways to engage with and interact with consumers.” Marketing communication helps organizations to differentiate from competitors and to reinforce experiences, contribute awareness of organization’s offering and persuade current and potential customers (Fill 2009, 9). Isohookana (2007) describes marketing communication as constant interaction with the markets. According to Isohookana, it is the tool to affect the reputation of the product and what is more, the sales, profitability and profit targets.

The function of marketing communication, according to Isohookana (2007), is to create, maintain and strengthen customer relationships. Organizations need and use marketing communication to convey the essence of their products and to engage their audience. Engagement, according to Chris Fill (2009, 5) “refers to the use of communication tools, media and messages in order to captivate an audience, often achieved through a blend of intellectual and emotional engagement and stimulation.”

3.1.1 IMC objectives and premises

Integrated marketing communication (IMC) aims at cohesive communication to create and maintain the wanted image of the company on the customer and buyer. IMC affects all of the company’s B2B, marketing channels, and customer-focused and internally directed communication. Building a brand, for example, requires the company to be recognizable to the customer the same way despite the distribution channel. (Isohookana 2007, 291-292; Clow & Baack 2010, 32.)

Isohookana (2007, 292) lists four premises for IMC:

- Creating, maintaining and strengthening customer relations
- Organizations core values
- Developing accounting and reporting system
- A professional marketer having the responsibility of IMC.

The first premise by Isohookana is creating, maintaining and strengthening customer relations. That should be the main task of the company, according to Isohookana. From all the employees of the organization that requires focusing on what they offer, how they offer and to whom. Organizations core values are the second premise by Isohookana. They should be summarized on organization’s mission statement. According to Isohookana marketing communication should always reflect the company values on what is done, how things are done and how they listen to the customers. As a third premise, Isohookana

mentions developing accounting and reporting system, so it empowers following the budget and IMC evaluation. Following profits and costs is important for knowing the IMC's effect on profit and sales. Then, the fourth premise is organizational. According to Isohookana, the overall liability of IMC should stand on the professional marketer. That person should take care of the budget and have all the needed resources.

According to Isohookana (2007, 291-292), the importance of integrating marketing communication grows among the competition. Integration accomplishes synergy when messages create and preserve wanted consistent company image among the audience. Messages can be personal, written, electronic or digital messages in words, actions or visually. Integration also makes it essential to think recipient-centered. Despite the channel, the recipient should always get a message that supports the wanted image to deliver. According to Isohookana (2007), careful planning, implementation, and follow-up are the key factors to stand out from the competitors positively.

Isohookana discusses providing wanted image despite the channel. Planning, implementation, and follow-up are also important. What separates non-tradition marketing communication of traditional, is the ability to respond to change. If something works, then good, but if it doesn't, then there should be changes made.

I would also emphasize user-centric approach. Nothing that the company wants matters if the customers do not buy. It should all start from what the customer wants and needs. The company should be able to show they can provide a solution to customer's need and problems. They should show what the company does and what are their values. That is where Isohookana has a good point about reflecting one's values.

3.1.2 IMC tools

Clow & Baack (2010, 32-34) open up integrated marketing communication as a five-stage pyramid (Figure 6). It is largely based on traditional marketing framework and marketing mix (product, price, distribution, promotion) still focusing on promotional components.

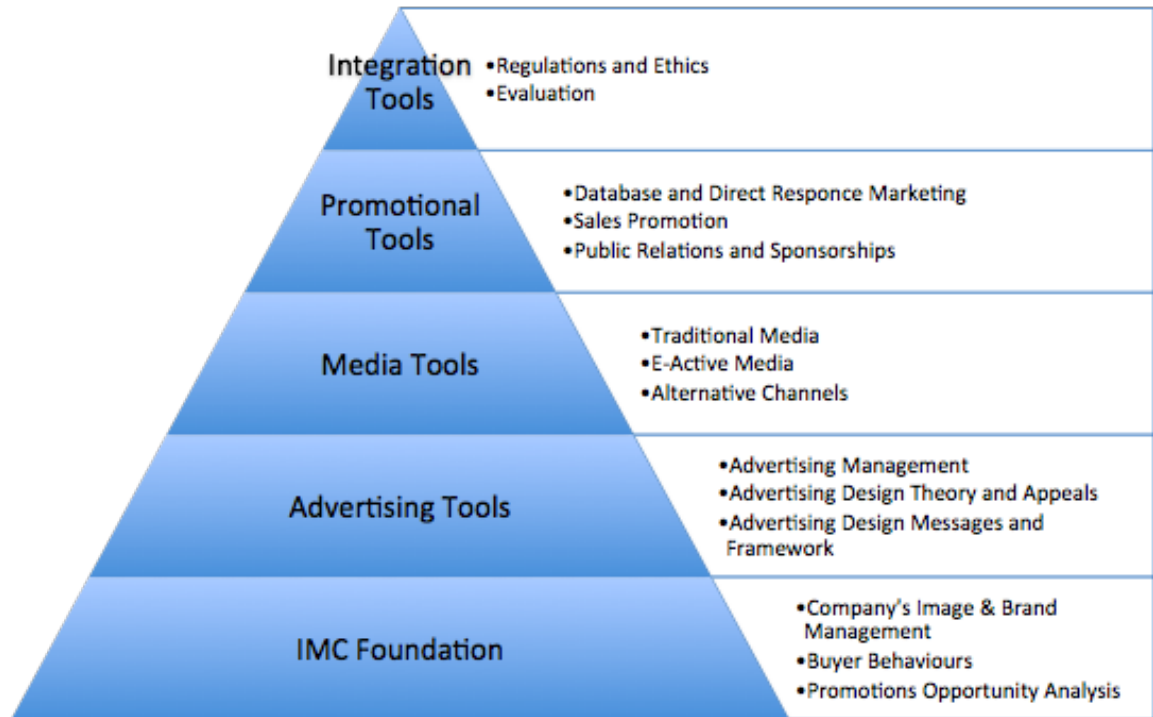


Figure 6. Overview of Integrated Marketing Communication (Clow & Baack 2010, 34)

The foundation of the pyramid, IMC Foundation, consists of Corporate Image and Brand Management, Buyer Behavior and Promotions Opportunity Analysis. The foundation evaluates target markets, how individuals make choices to purchase and then give tools to try to influence these choices by IMC program. It is important to know how to reach B2B purchasing managers and other decision makers within target business. Business markets are also segmented by understanding the demographics of the company's purchase team and noting who the end user will be and determine the benefits the buyer company expects to receive from the product they buy. (Clow & Baack 2010, 34.)

The second layer from the bottom, Advertising Tools, consists of three advertising issues. Advertising Management is about major functions of advertising, general directions the company takes and choosing an advertising agency. Advertising Design Theory and Appeals presents several useful theoretical frameworks for IMC plan. For example, Hierarchy of Effects suggests there are six steps for business buyer purchase process (aware-

ness, knowledge, liking, preference, conviction, actual purchase). Advertising Design Messages and Framework includes strategies and frameworks for execution.

The third layer, IMC Media Tools refers to Traditional Media, E-Active Marketing, and Alternative Channels. Traditional media includes TV and radio. E-Active Marketing, on the other hand, refers to two major components of Internet marketing: e-commerce and interactive marketing. A website, its content, search engine optimizing, blogs, e-mail campaigns, and e-commerce are the most important components to B2B. Selling goods and services on the Internet is the focus of e-commerce programs. Typical e-commerce components on the Web are a catalog, customer service information, public relations information, shopping cart, payment system and other optional components. The goal is to influence purchase decisions. That requires organizations to have a presence on the Internet. Alternative Channels could refer to word-of-mouth marketing program or marketing among hobby or entertainment venues. (Clow & Baack 2010, 268-269, 313.)

Promotional Tools consists of Database and Direct Response Marketing, Sales Promotion and Public Relations and Sponsorship. Database-driven marketing includes permission marketing, frequency programs, and CRM systems. Direct Response Marketing includes marketing efforts by phone, email, the Internet, mass media, or catalog. Public Relations can use tools such as company newsletter, internal messages, public relations releases, annual reports, and special events. (Clow & Baack 2010, 341, 397.)

Integration Tools include Regulations and Ethics and Evaluation. Ethics and morals guide a person's activities. That includes evaluation of whether it is ethical to give and receive gifts, meals and free trips. Then, when it is about Internet marketing, using spamming and cookies could be felt unethical. For example, using cookies on a website lets the company track what websites the consumer visits. Some companies then sell this information to third parties, and they can address customized advertising based on history. (Clow & Baack 2010, 421.)

As visible, IMC Tools include a huge amount of tradition tools. Many of them require a significant marketing and advertising budget, which is usually impossible for a small startup. Internet marketing tools, on the other hand, could provide a good basis for a non-traditional approach. SEO, blogs, and content are crucial today. What comes to e-commerce, web catalog could be in digital form with in-depth feature lists, customer service information is always needed, as well as public relations information. The company must always provide an excellent user experience whether it is face-to-face or online.

3.2 B2B special features and organizational buyer behavior

When analyzing business-to-business (B2B) markets, I think there are a couple of things to understand. First, business-to-business selling is just like regular sales, but the customer is spending someone else's money. That makes the decision-making quite complex. Second, ultimately it is individuals, not organizations, to make purchasing decisions (Kotler & Keller 2012, 189). Business buyers are all individuals with personal motivations, perception, and preferences, influenced by different things and with a different mix of rational and emotional decision-making. Thus, marketing communication planning should always be customer-oriented. (Kotler & Keller 2012, 319.)

B2B markets have many special features that have significant implications for marketing and communication. First, B2B markets have less but bigger buyers. Bigger buyers mean more money to spend. That increases the importance of the single customer to the seller company. Second, because of smaller customer base and the importance of large customers, the suppliers are expected to have a close, long-term and individual relationship with the business customers to respond their needs. Third, business buyers often are trained to purchase. Although buyers, like all people, are affected by emotions, the buying process is more rational. Decisions are often made by economic criteria. Buyers also have to follow their organization's purchasing requirements, constraints and policies. Fourth, organizational buying and selling might be quite risky. For that reasons, there might be important to have contracts if there is much involvement required. Fifth, negotiation between seller and buyer is often necessary. For example, supplier's list price might be one target for negotiation for the buyer to get a better deal. Negotiation skills and power bases of buyer and seller all affect the results of the negotiation. Sixth, organizational buying is complex. Many people are involved from different levels of an organization. (Kotler & Keller 2012, 184-185; Jobber & Lancaster 2009, 78-79.)

According to Jobber & Lancaster (2009, 92-93), organizational buyer behavior could be divided into three elements: Structure, Process, and Content. First, the structure is for who participates the decision-making process. Salespeople might end up wasting time to wrong people working within their comfort zone with people they like or people who yet have no authority to say yes. It is important to find the right persons to influence. Second, the process is how the process goes from information getting to decision-making in the purchase organization. In general, the more complex the decision and the more expensive the product, the more stages and the more time process will take. Third, content is what are the criteria affecting the choices on different stages of the decision-making process. Organizational buying is characterized by both functional and psychological criteria.

So, according to Jobber & Lancaster (2009, 92-93) structure is for the different persons of decision-making unit (DMU). Also according to Fill (2009, 184), it is important for seller organization to identify the members of the decision-making process because they all can influence the decision-making process in their organization. Then, it is important to target and refine the messages to meet each member's needs. Bonoma (1982) identifies six different sorts of persons related to the decision-making process. Initiators start the purchase process. They are the ones that recognize the benefit of buying a new product or service. Gatekeepers control the information flowing to the buying center. These persons usually act as product experts and may work e.g. as technical personnel, purchasing managers or secretaries literally controlling the information flow (Fill 2009, 92). Influencers are those who have a say in different points of view. They often help to set technical specifications for the proposed purchase and assist with the evaluation of the potential supplier. Influencers might be as well stakeholders or end users. The deciders make the purchase decision. They can be a group of company's senior managers, but they might not have the right to sign off the actual contract for the deal. The purchaser selects suppliers, influence the framework of buying situation and manage the purchase. Users are people who actually use the product and evaluate its performance.

The process is how the process goes from information getting to analysis and evaluation to decision-making in the purchase organization. The decision-making process depends on the buying situation. There can be comprised three different buyclasses (Robinson & al., 1967, in Fill 2009, 183):

- New task or new buy, where product is bought for the first time,
- Modified rebuy, and
- Rebuy.

In a new buy situation, the problem is fresh to the decision-makers. There are a large number of decision participants to considerate, and all risks are higher. The amount of information to support decision-making process is huge. In a modified rebuy situation, the requirements are not new when compared to the previous situation, but they are still different. The product, service or software might be the same, but there might be adjustments to the specifications of the product, or the delivery patterns might change. In the rebuy situation, there are same problems to solve than earlier. The buying situation is a routine basis reorder and less information, and people are required for decision-making.

It is important to understand organizational decision-making process for not wasting effort to wrong individuals and tasks. It is also important to have tailored communication depending on the buyclass.

The general organizational decision-making process for new buy has six stages (Robinson & al., 1967, in Fill 2009, 186-188):

- Need or problem recognition
- Product specification
- Supplier and product search
- Evaluation of proposals
- Supplier selection
- Evaluation.

According to Fill, the decision-making process starts from problem recognition. The organization has perceived a difference between ideal state and reality. It has some benefits at the moment but would like to have something else in the future. It might have problems to solve now or opportunities to improve in the future. Further, according to Clow & Baack (2010, 100), many business needs are created by delivered demand, which is based on, generated by, or linked to the production or sale of some other good or service.

After identifying the problem and wanted outcome it is easier to determine the desired characteristic of the product needed to resolve the problem (Fill 2009, 186). New buy requires more detailed specification, possibly with help from several vendors, when rebuy specifications might have only minor alterations (Clow & Baack 2010, 101).

After the organization has decided what it needs, it has to search for right supplier and product. The questions are whether the product will reach all the required performance standards and match the specification decided. The supplier itself also need to fill organization's requirements and show trustworthiness - organizations try to reduce uncertainty and risk. (Fill 2009, 186-187.) Also, the more expensive and valuable product, the more search is done (Jobber & Lancaster 2009, 79).

The fourth step is evaluating the proposals. Several factors are influencing the purchase choice, like facilities and capability, geographic location and technical capability. Also, price, delivery, and service are also evaluated. If the proposed supplier is new to the organization, they might review, whether there are possibilities to build long-term relationships. (Fill 2009, 187; Clow & Baack 2010, 101.)

After evaluating the proposals, it is time to choose the supplier. There might be several analyses used. It also affects, whether they are willing to buy much from one supplier or have deals with several suppliers. Organizations might review, whether there are possibilities to help each other achieve their goals in long-term. (Fill 2009, 187.) Each member of decision-making unit (DMU) has their own criteria for valuing the proposals (Jobber & Lancaster 2009, 79). The supplier is monitored for example against responsiveness to

inquiries, modifications to the specification and timing of delivery. Still, it is people who make the decisions, from their individual projections points of view. (Fill 2009, 188.)

Content as the third element of organizational buyer behavior refers to the choice of criteria used by DMU members. Organizational buyers are affected by functional (economic) and psychological (emotive) aspects. Economic criteria might include price, product specification, upgradability, delivery, life-cycle cost, safety, technical assistance, and reliability, to name but a few. Emotional criteria include e.g. personal risk reduction, office politics, and personal liking or disliking. For example, having two similar offers, the buyer might try to help the supplier they like to be more competitive. Also, emotions might affect buyers to be more selective with information sources sought, information perceives, and with information remembered. (Jobber & Lancaster 2009, 96-97.)

To sum up, organizational buyer behavior could be divided into Structure, Process, and Content (Jobber & Lancaster 2009, 92-93). Understanding the effect of all elements makes it easier to target the right messaging at the right time to right people.

3.3 Messages and advertising frameworks

To be able to provide specified messages to the target audience, it is worth understanding a bit about messages and advertising frameworks. Messages must be likable and contextually compatible to be effective. That means interesting, meaningful and relevant content to the target audience. (Fill 2009, 248.) Marketing communication is always about people. It is messages from person to person, and we all have several personal features affecting when receiving messages.

According to Clow & Baack (2010, 201), "the essence of an integrated marketing communication program is designing messages that effectively reach the target audience." Messages should shape or change attitudes, be remembered and lead to short- or long-term action. The message should also be personal, even if it comes through an impersonal medium.

Messages can have cognitive, affective or conative strategies, which all have a bit different effect (Figure 7). Cognitive strategies awake awareness and knowledge. Cognitive messages include rational argumentation. Affective strategies invoke feelings or emotions. Affective messages have liking, preference and conviction effect. Conative strategies try to affect the action to take and actual purchase to happen. (Clow & Baack 2010, 202, 205.)

Clow & Baack present a Hierarchy of Effect Model, Message Strategies, and Advertising Components.

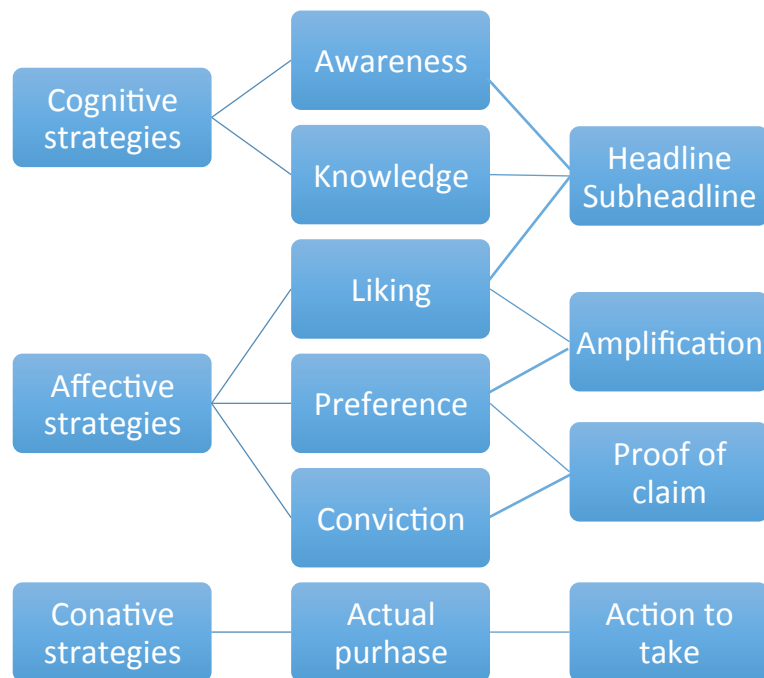


Figure 7. Hierarchy of effect model, message strategies, and advertising components.

Clow & Baack’s model sums the organizational decision-making process in the middle column. Several people of DMU affect the decision-making, and each has their own agenda. At awareness stage, people do information searching, and that is when there must be facts to represent. Conviction might need some first-hand information from someone who knows the product. Actual purchase requires a call to action.

Clow & Baack (2010, 209) describe several execution frameworks of advertising, but here I present four what I think are the best suitable for a small software company (Figure 8). Slice-of-life, testimonials, authoritative and demonstrations are all effectively used execution frameworks of B2B advertising according to Clow & Baack. All of these are also possible to conduct with a low budget and for example on the company’s blog or newsletters.

Slice-of-life is advertising technique where the problem is presented in a dramatic situation. It is a visual approach to demonstrate how the product or service can solve a business problem. Slice-of-life could be condensed to following: Encounter, Problem, Interaction, Solution. The encounter presents an everyday business situation. Problem is for an occurring problem. The interaction slice provides a solution. The last slice shows a happy customer. (Clow & Baack 2010, 208.)



Figure 8. B2B advertisement execution frameworks

Testimonials are today's word-of-mouth. According to Godin (2006, 242), "All businesses are service businesses, and experience is the product." Godin (2006, 274) also says we should treat our every customer so as he could turn into a testimonial. According to Clow & Baack (2010, 209), in testimonials, everyday people, usually company's customers, are telling about the company and its product in a positive way. People tend to ask others for opinions of service they have no experience, so testimonials are one way to get the second opinions and word-of-mouth. Testimonials are effective also because they enhance company credibility. (Clow & Baack 2010, 209.)

The authoritative advertisement might include some scientific or survey evidence. It relies on cognitive process when making purchase decisions. With authoritative advertisement, the product tries to convince it is superior to other brands. For example an article in trade journal affects differently when compared to some un-trusted media. (Clow & Baack 2010, 210.)

Demonstrations are popular on business-to-business ads. A demonstration shows how the product works. It allows demonstrating how the product can meet the specific needs of another business. (Clow & Baack 2010, 210-211.)

3.4 Inbound marketing

Traditionally marketing has been interrupting - print advertisement, radio commercials or cold calling disrupts customer's activities. Internet pop-up ads that are often filtered with pop-up blockers could also be put in the same category (Winterberg, 2013). These "outbound marketing" messages are easy to block.

According to Schultz (1994), marketing and communication should approach "outside-in" instead of "inside-out." Inside-out marketing communication starts from organizations needs and then try to find customers. The outside-in approach, on the other hand, always starts with the customer. Schultz presents that the key is to know the customer using customer database and trying to understand what they are like and what they might want in the future. He also writes about the importance of seeking to build a relationship with the customer and keep the customer satisfied. To know which customers to keep and which to let go requires valuing customers. That also lets the organization focus on profitable customers. Effectiveness is also valued to become a low-cost marketer.

Inbound marketing is not distracting the customer. Inbound marketing is being there where the customer wants the organizations to be and aligning the content with customer's interests. Inbound marketing focuses on pulling the people towards the company and product by creating quality content for people to find, attracting the customers - not interrupting them. (HubSpot.com 2016a.)

According to HubSpot.com, inbound marketing is turning the website into a magnet by creating interesting content, optimizing the site for search engines and using social media to share the content. The landing pages created for advertising should be engaging, calling the prospect to action. The website should be personalized and easy to use and informative. (HubSpot.com 2016a.)

Inbound marketing merges a variety of different marketing tactics. HubSpot.com (2016a) presents four inbound marketing actions that are structured in Figure 9. It presents the four actions (Attract, Convert, Close, Delight) companies should take to obtain visitors, leads, visitors, and promoters. Along are the tools, where they first come into use, to accomplish these actions.

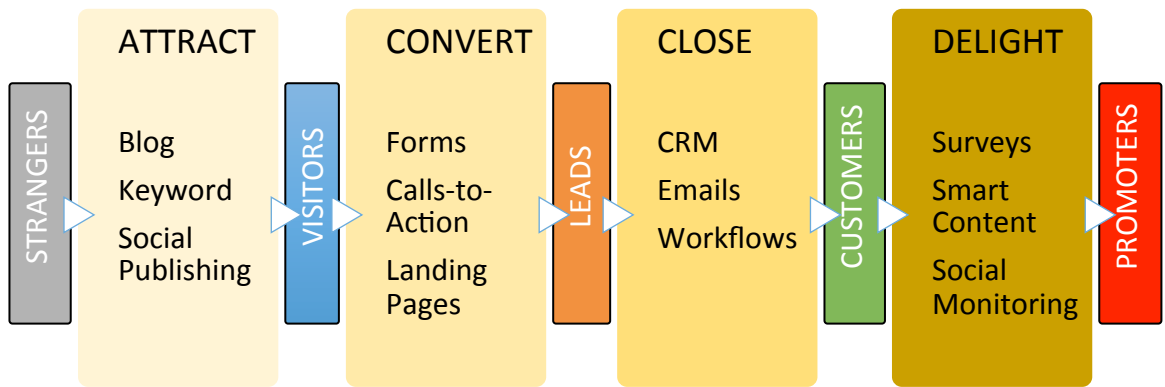


Figure 9. Inbound marketing actions (modified from HubSpot.com 2016a)

First, the company wants to attract strangers to visitors. The company wants people who are most likely to become leads, and ultimately, customers. That requires right kind of traffic to their website. Tools to attract people are the website, blogging, SEO and social publishing. According to Winterberg (2013), company’s blog is important. The posts should provide content that feels relevant to the ideal customer. The content should be written for company’s ideal customer or target group, or else it will not affect the audience deeply enough to take it to the next level. HubSpot.com (2016a) suggests writing educational material that answers visitors’ questions. Online material, like YouTube videos, is also a good way to enhance the website content, according to Winterberg (2013).

SEO or search-engine-optimizing is vital for potential customers to find the company’s website. According to HubSpot.com (2016a), getting better ranking on search results, organizations need to “carefully, analytically pick keywords, optimize your pages, create content, and build links around the terms ideal buyers are searching for.” Search engines determine reputation by counting the number of incoming links to the website. This is called Reputation SEO. If other websites consider the site trustworthy enough to link to the site, that page probably is meaningful (Nielsen & Loranger 2006, 169). So, the better reputation, the better ranking.

Wuorisalo (2017) adds, “Google tries to find authorities who provide the best answers to its users (searchers). Authority is claimed by being relevant. Thus, the amount and relevancy of a website’s content is key in good search engine visibility. Good and relevant content is helpful for the customer and it creates shares and inbound links.” The website that provides useful information to the visitor, show expertise and true motivation to help. Product related content also creates keywords for SEO (Nielsen & Loranger 2006, 317). Also, “if your site doesn’t make it easy for you visitors to quickly grasp your purpose” they

will not come back. That means it is essential to write the way people read. Good content sells itself (Nielsen & Loranger, 2006, 258, 262). Winterberg (2013) also mentions the importance of mobile accessibility of online content. People access the Internet with their mobile phones and tablets, so organizations should keep that in mind, as well.

The actual website should be optimized to show the best company offers. It is also important to understand how web users act. For example – web users are lazy to scroll the main page. Only 23% of users scroll the homepage on their first visit, but 42% scroll the interior page. Also, users, who scrolled the homepage, may not have scrolled enough to see the entire page. Visitors spend approximately 25 to 35 seconds on the home page, and most of that time goes to figuring out where to next on that page. (Nielsen & Loranger 2006, 30, 47.) Based on this, better not leave anything important on the bottom.

Second, after attracted the website visitors with online content, visitors should convert into leads. That happens by gathering their contact information. The website should also make it easy to the visitor to provide the company permission for further correspondence in the form of a newsletter. Sending a periodic newsletter is rewarding the subscriber with exclusive content that addresses the subscriber's interest. Newsletters also allow the company to send targeted messages to a different audience. (Winterberg 2013.) Tools for converting are forms and calls-to-action buttons, like "Learn more!" on the landing page.

The third step is closing leads into customers requires CRM and email. Customer Relationship Management (CRM) systems keep contact details in order. A series of emails that contain carefully chosen, useful and exciting content help the possible customer to become more ready to buy the product. Also, if the contact arrived through social media, the following messages should reflect that, also. (HubSpot.com 2016a.)

The fourth step is delighting customers. Communication should not end after closing the deal. Surveys and smart content engage the customer. Customers might become promoters of organization or products they like. Social monitoring is useful to listen to customers' questions, comments, likes, and dislikes. (HubSpot.com 2016a.)

Therefore, inbound marketing serves a way to serve buyer's decision-making process - and requires no extra money from the company. However, it is essential to provide right content in the right place. That requires studying where the potential customer searches the information and make sure they find it - and are hooked.

3.5 Content marketing

As discussed when talking about inbound marketing, inbound needs content to work. Organizations should always publish content the target audience is searching for through channels buyers are using. In 2016, for example, buyers relied on word-of-mouth referrals, customer references, and media articles when making purchase decisions for business software (HubSpot 2016b). Regardless of what type of marketing tactics the company uses, quality content should be part of all marketing and communication. Interesting content is truly relevant and useful to the company's prospects and customers. Creating and sharing content that delights the target group, whether they are visitors, leads, or customers, is the main point of inbound marketing.

The Content Marketing Institute (2017) defines content marketing as “a strategic marketing approach focused on creating and distributing valuable, relevant, and consistent content to attract and retain a clearly-defined audience — and, ultimately, to drive profitable customer action.” People today are quite critical, and quality and trustworthy content increase trust and image of expertise.

According to a survey by Bizible (Nguyen, 2015), content marketing and referrals generate business for software and technology companies. According to their study, the top five marketing channels are

- SEO & Content Marketing
- Referrals and Word-of-Mouth
- Outbound Calling
- Email Marketing
- Conferences and Trade Shows.

That means business-to-business (B2B) buyers today are being more active and using the Internet to find the best product or service to meet their needs and requirements. That is a good thing if the company has a low marketing budget. However letting the buyers find the product by themselves increases the importance of understanding their decision-making process, and being there to find and providing the right content to arouse interest among buyers.

Businesses have the biggest marketing challenges with generating traffic and leads (HubSpot.com 2016b). Although, providing interesting content and being social seems to show growth if believing studies. HubSpot.com (2016a) found that companies that blog 15 times or more per month get five times as much website traffic than companies that do not blog. According to Yes Lifecycle Marketing (2016), a company using Instagram saw 93% growth month-over-month in 2014. When viewing electronics industry, Facebook had an

average growth rate of 41%, Twitter 39%, and Instagram 155%. Youtube and Google+ are also growing their popularity. The global trend in marketing seems to be on video content and mobile (HubSpot.com 2016b).

3.6 Strategic planning

Arthur W. Samansky has presented that successful strategic communication plan is realistic, achievable, and flexible and that the best plans show how to reach the goals like roadmaps. Organizations must explicitly state their goals and objectives, so that progress and achievements can be measured. (Samansky 2003.)

(Clow & Baack 2010, 33) present that marketing plan, on the other hand, requires:

- Situation analysis to examines factors from company's internal and external environment. It also analysis and identifies marketing problems and opportunities present in the external environment, and also internal strengths and weaknesses of the company.
- Defining primary marketing objectives, which include targets such as higher sales.
- Budget.
- Marketing strategies applying not only to 4P's of the marketing mix (product, price, place, promotion) but also to any positioning, differentiation, or branding strategies.
- Marketing tactics that are a day-by-day guide to activities necessary to support marketing strategies.
- Evaluation of performance. (Clow & Baack 2010, 33.)

According to Clow & Baack (2010, 33), integrated marketing is based on a strategic marketing plan, which helps to harmonize the messages sent to customers and others. The same plan integrates all promotional efforts to keep company's total communication program in sync.

The marketing communication is a mix of these. For an Agile software company, though, it is impossible to create specific one-to-three year strategic marketing communication plans with a strict timetable. If the company publishes a new version of software monthly, that requires extreme flexibility from the strategy. As an example, the product may have changed tremendously after feedback from the users. The plan should work as flexible as the company itself, and it should be connected to the product.

Budget and company's size affect greatly to the actual possible actions. It is essential to always adapt the processes and strategies to real clients and their buying processes. For business communication, business buyers still prefer email, face-to-face, and phone for communication, although social media channels are increasing their popularity (HubSpot 2016b).

3.7 Agile strategy in marketing communication

Today's marketing landscape is rapidly changing. Marketers can no longer afford to gamble on the success of a few long-term campaigns (VentureBeat 2015). From quickly build and iterate software, the Agile method has been expanded into the marketing world. Successful marketing is about iteration and experimentation. What works today might not work tomorrow. (Kaykas-Wolff 2016.)

Highsmith (2007, 35-36) presented four tenets of Lean thinking; specify the value, identify the value stream, flow and pull. He also writes about to let the customer ask for the product instead of pushing it to the customer. Agile core values, on the other hand, speak for individuals and interactions, working software, customer collaboration and responding to change (Agile Alliance 2015).

These thoughts could be implemented into marketing communication. If the company works Agile way, marketing communication should also be Agile. Agile in marketing communication could refer to customer-centric, successful, interactive marketing communication, and responding to change. The ideal situation could be, that the customer becomes that convinced of company's product quality and knowledge that she on her initiative wants to work with the company.

Sean Work writes in his blog (Kissmetrics 2015) that the bottleneck in most SaaS conversion funnels is getting people to pay. SaaS software might be flexible and give lots of reports easily, but the customer must get convinced it is the best to their company. Marketing communication should aim to provide enough information to assist the decision process (Fill 2009, 169). Still, subscribers may have a higher willingness to pay for software because they expect to get new features and enhancements to the software (Choudhary 2007).

Companies should listen and get to know the prospects and customers. Then, it should choose the strategy depending on that research. Inbound and content marketing provide modern and Agile tactics to separate from the Internet noise and "spam". Purchasers look for and compare information on the Internet, and it would be important to help them to make them with decision-making in every step of the decision-making process.

4 Customer case studies in research

This chapter explains the objective, problems, and development tasks in this thesis. We discuss the design and implementation of the empirical part and explain choices made in this thesis. Later, we present the findings and results of this thesis.

Production #1 is conducted from the basis of findings. As a marketing act we also created a Wikipedia article (Production #2).

4.1 Objective and research problems

Agilefant has a growing user base and a dedicated community behind it. Agilefant Ltd. is now looking for growth, so they need more engaged, paying customers. As a startup, they have limited financial resources that force them to be creative and efficient. As a company using Agile project management methods on developing the software, they also require flexible methods for communication and marketing. Long-term stiff plans are out of the question when no one knows how the business runs tomorrow. Customers may not renew their subscription. Also, Agile communication and marketing are still relatively rare subjects on literature or articles at the moment of writing this thesis.

For all these reasons, in this research, we dig into user studies with the help of existing literature. Learning from customers who already are familiar with Agilefant, we hope to get tips and tools to move forward. Inbound marketing might become the strategy, but with user studies, we want to learn more. We hope to learn where Agilefant Ltd. has been successful and where not to focus marketing and communication actions better.

Overall, this thesis tries to find out an answer for the following question:

- How a company, in this case, a small startup, can gain a better understanding of customers/users via user case studies?
- What valuable insight can be gained from the user studies?
- How to use the customer case studies to benefit the company in marketing communication?

This thesis investigates the first and second questions through interviewing Agilefant's customers as part of user case studies and then analyzes the results based on collected data, observations, and literature. The answer to the third question is mainly based on available theory, but it is reflected in the information gathered from the user case studies.

4.2 Methodological choices for qualitative approach

Team Agilefant wanted to gain a better understanding of their customers via user case studies and interviewing some of their customers. That defines this research to be a qualitative single case study. According to Myers (2009, 4), qualitative research lets the researcher see and understand the context within which the action and decisions are made. According to Kananen (2014, 25), qualitative research also lets the researcher be part of the research by deciding what to ask, from whom to ask, observe and let the researcher decide what to bring up on the paper. Qualitative research is about trying to understand and explain.

In a business discipline, according to Myers (2009, 73), case study research uses empirical evidence from real people in real-life organizations asking “how” and “why” questions. According to Becker & al. (1994-2012), case study refers to a collection and presentation of detailed information about selected participant or group. A case study can also be defined as a form of qualitative descriptive research that is used to look at individuals, a small group of participants, or a group as a whole. Data can be collected using a variety of methods, such as interviews and participant observations. (Becker & al. 1994-2012.)

Agile project management emphasizes face-to-face (Cob, C. G. 2015), and that is why team Agilefant wanted to have face-to-face qualitative interviews over impersonal questionnaires. That justifies using qualitative interviews and observation as research methods to collect experiential knowledge to answer research questions in this thesis. We decided that two interviews do an adequate sample for a qualitative study when each interview takes from one hour to one and half hours. The interviewees are two different customers of Agilefant, and they are interviewed in two individual interviews by author and Agilefant Ltd.’s representative. That also increases the validity of the interviews.

The interview method is semi-structured. There is a list of pre-thought-out questions to ask and a framework of themes to explore during the interviews. The interviews allow new ideas to be brought up during the discussion. A semi-structured interview is a mix of structured and theme interview, and therefore it felt the best option for this thesis. The structured interview has exact questions with answer alternatives and does not allow diverting if wanted. Theme interview, on the other hand, keeps the discussion on specific themes yet allowing the interview to go on interviewee’s terms and one’s answer opens new questions. Semi-structured interview prefers open questions and discussion but wants to have answers to specific questions around the theme. (Kananen 2014, 74-77.)

4.3 Description of implementation

The team Agilefant wanted to conduct the first interview as soon as possible. Decisions about the design of this thesis and interviews had to be done on a tight schedule. The team presented a list of ready-made software related questions by their marketing team to start with and that they wanted to use. According to the thesis supervisor, the questions were way too much software related and had not much to do with either with marketing or communication, which was still the framework for the thesis. Still, Agilefant Ltd. is a software startup, so it is all about their software. They want customer satisfaction and to be able to deliver best possible value to their customers. The product, in this case, software Agilefant, is one of the four P's of the marketing mix (product, price, place, promotion). How customers experience the software, is also a part of the marketing communication experience. Therefore, after argumentation, the thesis supervisor showed a green light to questions focusing on the software. The final questions were agreed together with team Agilefant.

The interviews were from one to one and half an hour in length, so that limits the number of new questions. The themes were

- Getting to know the customer's business and background
- Finding out what kind of challenges they have had, problems and goals
- How the customer heard about Agilefant
- Solution and results
- Feedback for the team
- Future plans with Agilefant
- Communication channels.

Also, when designing the questions, we had in mind the possible use of the study as marketing material. As brought up in Chapter 3, buyers rely on word-of-mouth referrals and customer references when making purchase decisions for business software (HubSpot 2016b). Agilefant already had one customer case study on their website www.agilefant.com/customer-stories. We chose some questions to possibly give similar outcome if the material was favorable.

We decided not to give the interview questions to the interviewees beforehand. The questions worked as an interview body - if the interviewee in one answer already answered some upcoming questions, there was no need to ask one question again - if only to specify. The idea was to give the interviewees a possibility to speak quite freely about whatever was on their mind and maybe get some new ideas that way. The questions are shown in Appendix.

Team Agilefant selected and booked the interviewees from among their customers by a couple of specific criteria. First, the team wanted to interview project managers or other accordance who have a good practical experience of using the Agilefant software in their daily work. Second, the team wanted to arrange the interviews face-to-face, which forces to choose the interviewee from Helsinki area in Finland. There was a backup option to arrange Skype interviews if schedules did not go together.

The first interview was conducted with Coriant Oy. Coriant Oy manufactures and delivers networking products and services to more than 200 customers worldwide. Coriant Oy uses Agilefant for project management. The one-hour-interview was arranged in February 2015 in Espoo. The meeting was participated by the author, Developer from Agilefant Ltd., and the interviewee, Engineering Manager from Coriant Oy.

The second interview was with Rautakesko Oy. Rautakesko Oy is a home improvement and specialty goods retailer operating several brands in more than half-dozen countries. The on-hour meeting was arranged in late June 2015 in Vantaa. The interviewee works as Business Controller and Product Owner at Rautakesko Oy. They also use Agilefant for project management.

4.4 Data analysis

For backup, both the author and Agilefant's representative recorded the interviews and wrote notes. The author used Audacity, a free audio recorder software because it was on her Macbook and already was familiar with it. Files were on Audacity's own AUP format but were later exported into MP3-format, to easily play the records with any audio player. Agilefant's representative used an audio tape recorder and iPhone's voice recording feature for recording.

After both interviews, the author manually transcribed the interview by listening to the audio file and writing down the verbal content and possible stronger emotions. Stronger emotions could have been e.g. laughter, good or bad mood. Pauses and other non-verbal were left out of the transcribed content because of having no remarkable extra benefit for this study.

After transcription of the records, the author analyzed the transcriptions and wrote memos to answer research questions. The answers also gave lots of marketing content that was good to share with prospects and customers. The author grouped the answers into themes like benefits, challenge, and solution, for marketing material purposes.

4.5 Interview findings

The team at Coriant Oy first heard about Agilefant when some colleagues of the interviewee met some of the team members of Agilefant Ltd. in an event. The interviewee's colleagues were curious to try Agilefant, which wasn't perfect to their needs but had much potential. They agreed to go with Agilefant, which had development located near, and developers of Agilefant also seemed open to feature development suggestions.

Before Agilefant, interviewee's department had different approaches to manage their backlog. They were using tools like Microsoft Excel, wiki pages, and text files. Due to many tools and lack of transparency, their department, according to the interviewee, had the challenge to monitor what was being worked on. Teams also had troubles providing estimates for their work.

Coriant Oy now uses Agilefant for project management. Agilefant has improved the way they work and according to the interviewee, "productivity has gone up significantly" after starting to use Agilefant. Also, possible problems are now spotted earlier.

The interviewee was also pleased with the support by the team Agilefant. According to him, the team listens to the customer's needs and takes criticism. According to the interviewee, team Agilefant has taken the feedback into action and constantly makes improvements to the software. That is highly appreciated by the customer point of view.

The second interviewee's team at Rautakesko found Agilefant through Internet search. They wanted an Agile approach to tackling a specific project. They had evaluated several tools for managing Agile development and searched the Internet for different options. They had a list of features required, and Agilefant was the only tool to meet all the team's needs. The next step was then to convince the management to buy the software license from a small startup.

According to the interviewee, Agilefant Ltd. as a small startup felt riskier to work with when compared to companies with a longer history. The management agreed to pilot one Agile approach for three months with Agilefant. They compared the results to a fixed price offer they had received for the same work from another supplier. The results from the pilot stopped any debate they had about the Agilefant: compared to the fixed price offer, with Agilefant the Agile team was able to complete 90% more work for 47% of the cost. The interviewee was also pleased how team Agilefant takes personal contact and asks for their opinions on different features. That would not be an option with bigger software ven-

dors, according to the interviewee. However, it was noticeable that informing about new features could be better. She did not remember receiving many newsletters, either.

Overall, both interviewees showed to be happy to discuss with us. They were talkative and helpful. The first interview chronologically followed the interviewing body from one question to another. The second interview was the opposite. One question could inspire a longer story, answering also following questions, but also arousing new extra questions. We also got permission to use the material for marketing purposes.

So, both interviewees were happy with Agilefant and felt it has increased the visibility of their work in their organizations. They both also appreciated how the team Agilefant listens to them and also develops the software based on their feedback.

Still, adopting new software is more work, even though it might make things easier in the long run. Keeping track of everything requires daily work and adding the information to Agilefant, and that is also a new way to do things. Teams also have to harmonize the information added to Agilefant so that it delivers the same amount of information to everyone. That is though something to decide within the organization.

4.6 Results

This thesis tries to find out an answer for the following question:

- How a company, in this case, a small startup, can gain a better understanding of customers/users via user case studies?
- What valuable insight can be gained from the user studies?
- How to use the customer case studies to benefit the company in marketing communication?

The first research question is “How a company, in this case, small startup, can gain a better understanding of customers/users via user case studies?” A small startup can gain a better understanding of customers via user case studies in different ways. First of all, as discussed in Chapter 3, it is important to know the customer. A case study is a good way to really meet the customer face-to-face and truly get to know the customer.

Second, user case studies give information that can be used to develop the software, learn what is the competitive advance compared to competitors, and tools to improve communication. A small company has little resources for marketing study, so the most cost effective way to do it is to study company’s current customers. Asking about themes company wants to know companies can gain a better understanding of the customers. Semi-structured questions also enable free conversation.

Also, it serves both parts that case studies are done. Businesses today want to co-operate and when the other party benefits, it benefits the other party, also. You give some, and you get some, has someone ones said.

The second research question is “What valuable insight can be gained from the user studies?” User studies provide information about whatever asked. As came up with the previous question, user studies provide background information, but they can also reveal if there are communicational flows in relation to customer decision-making process. They can also teach about the buying steps by the customer, and that way teaches the company to operate better.

The user studies showed that decision-making process has huge differences depending on the organization. Choosing software might require only a small process in a smaller organization and be mostly based on “good feeling” and “why not give a try” about the software and the vendor. It can also include first lots of search of information and analytical comparison of features based on information found on the Internet. Then, selling the idea inside the organization is also one step. This all strengthens what discussed in the

chapter about B2B special features and organizational buyer behavior – it is important to persuade the right decision makers.

Interview questions about past situations before Agilefant give a hint that organizations still use tools that decrease their profit possibilities. There have been many tools that do not synchronize with each other's, like Microsoft Excel, and text files. These files are also hard to keep up to date and share with a group of users. With better tools, organizations could help visibility and efficiency inside their organizations. It also showed that communication within the organizations could be better. Also, a lot of work might be done in vain only because no one knows it is already done.

The answers gave much information about how the customers feel about bringing new software into use. Between the lines, when analyzing the answers, there also seems to be some difficulties adapting Agile work methods. People are busy to do their actual work, and it might be difficult to learn new methods at the same time. Still, Agilefant has taught how to prioritize work, which is one step closer to an Agile organization. Agilefant has also taught the customers about their processes due to more visibility.

What also came up is the state of after sales communication. For example, the customer did not always know about the new features in Agilefant. Also, the number of the newsletter has not been flattering. The study also told what software features customers liked or needed more.

On the basis of the interviews, user studies are also an opportunity to the customer to give feedback and strengthen the relationship between organizations. In this case, user studies showed that customers seem happy to meet the company's decision-makers face-to-face. It made the customers feel important and not just one customer among others. They also liked the way the team takes the customers into consideration. For example, customers are asked for feedback, and their suggestions for feature development have listened.

The third research question is "How to use the customer case studies to benefit the company in marketing communication?" When case studies are well planned, they give both information and content to use with marketing communication. The answer to this question is based on interviews and literature. At the moment, especially inbound and content marketing include lots of tips and tools for this question.

First, the interviews and case studies give the information how, where and when the organizations should be visible. Based on this study, small software startup should be online

and attend some major events because that is where the prospects and customers are. Online presence is crucial because that is where buyers look and compare software vendors. They also like to read reviews of how others like the company or product.

Second, as noticed during the interviews, customers might say something that sounds like a good quote and reference for sale. One of the interviewee's said, "we would not have finished our project without Agilefant." That sentence sounds like something to put on the website. It calls to put a call-to-action button saying "read more." So, customer case studies might provide good persuasive and sell stories, quotes or testimonials to put on homepage or landing page. People respond to themes they can relate.

When the company has happy customers, why not share it with others on the website. "Success Stories," or "Case Studies" page provide easy to access and relatable stories to visitors. People love stories. Reading a story does not make one feel like someone is forcing to buy something. An inspirational story that has goals, approach and results give the visitor "word-of-mouth" information and gives more in-depth content for decision-making. A good story helps the reader to decide whether that product is best for needed purpose or not.

Today companies write blogs because people read them. People find them through Google, social media and external links. Customer case studies provide useful content to the blog. For example, if the customer has been successful using the software for time tracking, the blog could not only discuss that but also demonstrate how to do it in practice as discussed in the Section 3.4. The blog is also an excellent tool to show company's expertise and engage readers. If the content is good, people share it on their social media accounts, which is a free advertisement for the company.

The customer study could be shared on social media and newsletters (see Section 3.5). Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn all provide a platform to let people know where one has been successful. When used in a newsletter, case studies might wake up those sleepy ones, former customers, who have stopped the subscription. To existing customers, happy stories might increase a feeling of being part of something good. Above all, it is important to choose the right channels according to the target audience. Here, exploring, experimenting, measuring and learning from the mistakes are important. It is also important not to be afraid of making mistakes!

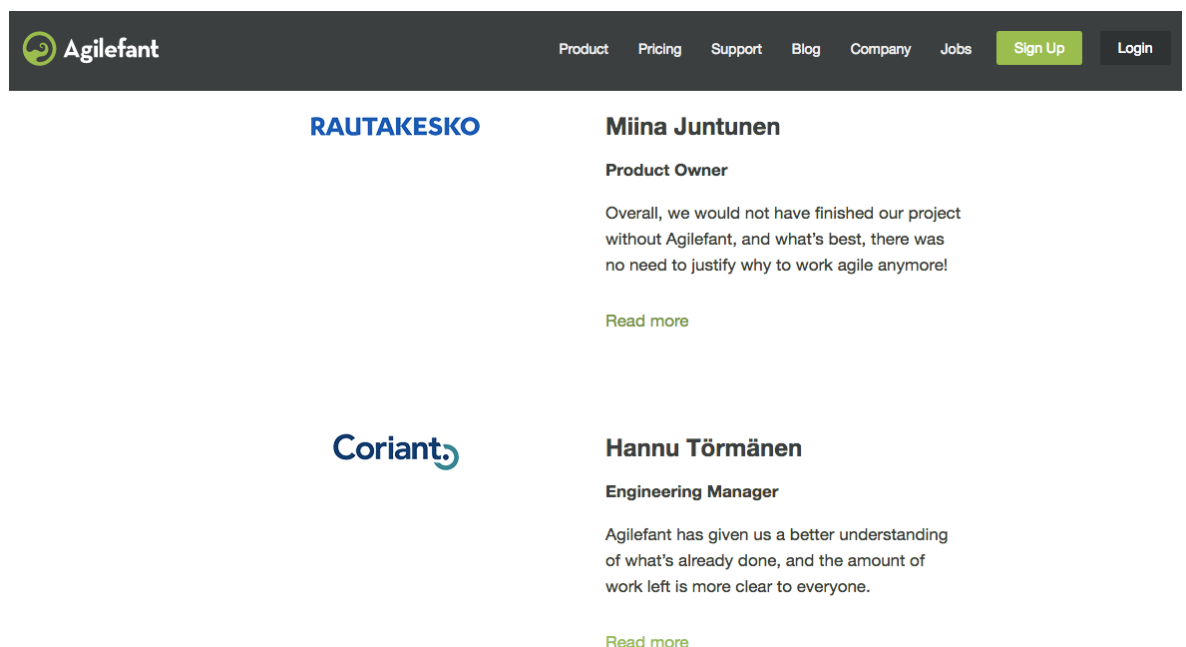
4.7 Production

Customer studies gave an excellent content to use on customer stories and the website. Those are the additional production of this thesis. After customer stories and testimonials to the website, a Wikipedia article also felt decent idea. Several third-party sources have noticed Agilefant, which gave the idea to write the Wikipedia article.

4.7.1 Production #1 - Customer stories and testimonials on the website

The transcribed interviews gave such an excellent marketing material that they were decided to be used as marketing content on Agilefant's website. Agilefant had one previous case study on their Case Studies page, which gave a good content structure for user stories.

After transcription, I prepared versions of the case study texts and team Agilefant made the final editing and publishing. Case studies are shown on appendices, and they are also visible on www.agilefant.com/customer-stories/. The interviews also gave nice and selling quote material, where some were also picked to testimonials. Quotes are on Customer Stories page, where there are links to actual case studies (Figure 10).



The screenshot shows the Agilefant website's customer stories page. At the top, there is a dark navigation bar with the Agilefant logo on the left and links for Product, Pricing, Support, Blog, Company, Jobs, Sign Up, and Login on the right. Below the navigation bar, the page is divided into two columns. The left column features the RAUTAKESKO logo. The right column displays a testimonial from Miina Juntunen, Product Owner, with a quote: "Overall, we would not have finished our project without Agilefant, and what's best, there was no need to justify why to work agile anymore!" and a "Read more" link. Below this, the Coriant logo is shown. To its right is a testimonial from Hannu Törmänen, Engineering Manager, with a quote: "Agilefant has given us a better understanding of what's already done, and the amount of work left is more clear to everyone." and a "Read more" link.

Figure 10. New Case Studies to Agilefant.com (Agilefant 2016b)

4.7.2 Production #2 - Agilefant in Wikipedia

In 2014, to let potential customers better find Agilefant, team Agilefant created an English Agilefant Wikipedia page. That article was “speedied,” meaning the article is tagged by other contributors for speedy deletion for some of the community criteria for speedy deletion. According to arguments by other contributors. The article had no indication of importance as a subject. Tagged article was given about one week to fix the named issues, or else administrator of Wikipedia was about to delete it. Those issues were not fixed, and the article was deleted. According to team Agilefant, the page did have advertising voice, which is not allowed, according to Wikipedia rules. (Wikipedia, 2016.)

During writing this thesis, I re-created the English Agilefant Wiki page. Again, the reaction by other contributors was the same than in 2014. There was no indication of importance, according to them. Also, according to the majority on the discussion page, there were not reliable enough, surely independent sources linked to the article.

Once more, in 2017, I re-created the article to Finnish Wikipedia. Now the content was kept simple, and sources used were only third-party sources.

Agilefant

Agilefant Oy on suomalainen ohjelmistoalan yritys, joka on kehittänyt lean-transformaation työkalun organisaatioille. Agilefantin työkalun avulla organisaatiot voivat mm. seurata, missä vaiheessa erilaiset kehityshankkeet ovat.^[1] Agilefant sopii myös Scrumiin^[2].

Agilefant sai alkunsa Teknillisen korkeakoulun Ohjelmistoliiketoiminnan ja -tuotannon instituutti SoberIT:n ATMAN-tutkimusprojektissa 2007-2010. Projektissa seitsemän yritystä testasi Tekesin tuella, miten tekemissalkkua tulisi hallita.^[3]

Agilefant kuuluu Prodeko Venturesin ensimmäisiin sijoituskohteisiin.^[1] Tekes on tukenut Agilefantin kehitystyötä myös projektin jälkeen^[4], kun ohjelmiston jatkokehitystä varten perustettiin Agilefant Oy.

Agilefant on käytössä mm. Steerillä.^[5]

Katso myös [[muokkaa](#) | [muokkaa wikitekstiä](#)]

- [Ketterä ohjelmistokehitys](#)

Lähteet [[muokkaa](#) | [muokkaa wikitekstiä](#)]

1. ↑ ^{a b} Startup-sijoituksia asevelihengessä – Jokainen yhtiö saa 25 000 euroa [T&T](#). Viitattu 3.4.2017. (englanniksi)
2. ↑ Käytännön ohjelmistotuotanto - Panu Leppäniemi [ohjelmistotuotanto.panuleppaniemi.com](#). Viitattu 3.4.2017.
3. ↑ Repo, Hanna: Työt hallintaan ilmaisella ohjelmalla. *Kauppalehti*, 19.10.2009.
4. ↑ Avoin tietoineisto - projektien mukaan [extranet.tekes.fi](#). Viitattu 3.4.2017.
5. ↑ Agilefant on myös Steerin valinta [Mynewsdesk](#). Viitattu 3.4.2017.

Aiheesta muualla [[muokkaa](#) | [muokkaa wikitekstiä](#)]

- [YLE.FI: YLEX: Päivä tulevaisuudessa: Näin arki toimisi, jos Slush-keksinnöt saadaan käyttöön](#)

Luokka: [Ohjelmistotuotanto](#)

Figure 11. Agilefant on Wikipedia.fi on April 3, 2017.

5 Discussion and conclusions

The objective of this thesis was to study how customer case studies can be used in marketing and communication. To better understand Agilefant's business environment, we studied Agile software development and both traditional and non-traditional marketing communication tactics. Interviews showed the importance of customer case study to better plan and target marketing communication efforts.

Customer case studies give companies first-hand information to understand their customers and their problems, needs, and behavior. Knowing the customer makes it easier to sell what customer needs and provide better service. Understanding the customer behavior also helps when planning and implementing communication and marketing.

Customer studies might provide valuable insight that is hard to get otherwise. They give information about customer's decision-making process, with what criteria the product was chosen among competitors and how pleased the customer has been with the product. Customer case studies can give information about the user or customer and their behavior that otherwise wouldn't be known. Customer studies are thus an important way to gather information and get to know the customers. Still, customer studies only answer questions one asks. That is why the methodological choice of interviewee has a huge meaning. Semi-structured interview ensures answers to questions thought out in advance but enables discussion about other themes. Gathered information and feedback help to provide a better strategy for user-centric marketing communication. It helps to choose activities that provide information the prospect or customer needs the way she wants it.

User studies might also reveal unexpected things. What came up during one interview is the possible lack of resources to adopt Agile methodologies. Companies might be busy delivering what they sell that they have no time to adopt the Agile way to work. That might also affect adopting Agilefant and make the start harder. Agile methodologies are where Agilefant is an expert.

What also came up is the state of after sales communication. For example, the customer did not always know about the new features in Agilefant. Also, the number of the newsletter has not been flattering. The team defended though, that before some customers had complained about getting too many newsletters. Changing the messaging cycle from too much to zero might not be the best option, so here the team has to work to find a balance. Later, Agilefant has attached a new bell icon to Agilefant menu bar to indicate whenever there are significant new features.

Agile emphasizes face-to-face meetings, as discussed in Chapter 2. Meeting the customer face-to-face also strengthens the relationship and gives the customer an opportunity to give feedback. Someone might feel asking customers to take part in a customer case study is disturbing the customer. Sure, it disturbs for a while, but still, it is also an opportunity for a face-to-face discussion. Also, it is in everyone's interests that the service provider stays in business! So, if the customer has something nice to say and it helps the small company to sell, that also increases certainty in long-term. As discussed in Chapter 3, companies prefer long-term b2b relations and help each other's to achieve each other's goals.

There are many ways to use case studies to benefit company's marketing communication. Buyers use the Internet to compare different options and look for reviews from other users (Section 3.5). That could also be called Internet's word-of-mouth. Interviews also supported the theory – the interviewees or their teams compared Agilefant to other software based on information on the Internet. That increases the importance of providing informative content with in-depth product specifications on the Internet. According to this research testimonials and other informative blog posts and emails could work with Agilefant. What Agilefant has achieved with other companies could help the information searchers to relate and get a better understanding of how the software could support them. Existing users could get tips from the studies when knowing how others use the software.

Overall, customer case study gives an excellent opportunity to learn from the selected customers. For marketing purposes, case studies also provide material to use on the company's website, blog, marketing and selling material and newsletters. Case studies are also a way to companies help each other in the long run, which is favorable for long-term success in business together. In the software business, customer study and feedback should be a continuous part of product development, focusing marketing content and customer behavior research.

Also, if there are not yet many customers to study, the Internet is full of competitors' user case studies. Those case studies give in-depth information about who the customers are, where they are located, what kind of problems they have had, what kind of solution they got and why they ended up to choose the competitor. Knowing what competitors' customers value might give a clue how to stand out of the competitors.

The interviews brought up different sides of being a small startup. Below is gathered some of the main factors related to Agilefant Ltd. as a form of SWOT-analysis.

Strengths

Being a small startup makes it possible to have a personal connection with the customers. That is because of empathizing face-to-face meetings, direct emails, and phone calls. The customers also feel, that they and their opinions matter. That is because they are asked for opinions and feedback when developing the software and creating some new features. Agilefant Ltd. also has a central geographical location in Helsinki, which might have a positive effect on buyer organizations' decision making.

Weaknesses

The company might be busy developing the software and not remember to inform the users about new features and follow what features are actively used. Based on the interviews and personal experience, communication could be better. During one year of the time of using the software for project management, email newsletters could be counted on the fingers of one hand. Weaknesses with marketing communication strategy, message and analyzing effects might affect wasting low resources with low effect.

Opportunities

If focusing on better-planned marketing communication, with interesting content, strategic timing and well-thought-out message to deliver, there are real opportunities to engage users and acquire new ones. Buyers search information from the Internet, so providing informative content for buyer's bucket list comparison is vital. New case studies regularly help prospect's decision-making process. Agilefant Ltd. also seems to listen to customers' needs and provide features from that base. Listening to the customers is essential.

Threats

According to personal experience, it is quite easy to forget the existence of Agilefant after specific phase in a project where Agilefant has been in use. That might be a bottleneck where people end their subscriptions. Personal contact and tips and hints about how to use the software in different ways in different areas of business could trigger more versatile use. For example, ERP provider could use Agilefant within their organization, but also ask the customer use the software for the project management. That way both could get real-time information on the state of tasks and decrease the amount of emails and delay of management.

5.1 Trustworthiness of the research and limitations

Even though we only conducted two interviews, this amount also showed the importance of user studies as a source of information. A couple of more interviews sure would give more data, but these two gave a good starting point for further user study. What is also noticeable, a small company also has limited resources to tackle problems. Even these two gave many ideas of what to do better.

Agilefant Ltd.'s representative selected both interviewees. Both the interviewees were contended with Agilefant and had been actively participating in development. If there were more interviews with different satisfaction levels that could have given answers that are more versatile. Though, we did not measure satisfaction but asked decision-making, use, problem-solving and communication-related questions.

I think the semi-structured question body was a good choice to this research. That gave the possibility to add or change questions based on how the interview went. It also gave the possibility to go a little bit off the track, if the interviewee felt something off the questions was important to bring up. We were a little bit in a hurry when planning the questions, so with more time, there could have been better questions. Still, new questions might have required more time. Also, the questions were a bit different for both interviewees. That was because during the interviews new questions and topics arose. The basic idea stayed the same, however.

5.2 Conclusions and suggestions for development

According to many different studies, acquiring new customers is noticeably more expensive than keeping the existing ones. The estimates vary between 3 to even 30 times more expensive, so knowing that, subscription model companies should invest in making the customers use the software and succeed (CIM 2010). As brought up in Section 2.2, customers pay a subscription fee for the service, meaning they can switch to another service anytime they want. That makes engaging the customer important. User case studies teach how to engage.

User case studies are a free and efficient way to give the company first-hand information about the customers. Face-to-face interviews also give the possibility to ask questions of the record and strengthen the customer relationship. Customer's project manager can talk straight to the product owner, and open communication increases trust also.

Agile seems to have many features that are relevant to marketing communication, like actually communicating with the customer and involving them in the project. Studies also show (Section 2.6) that Agile approach on small projects brings notable success, it might be useful to adapt in marketing and communication also. Besides, Agile methods could provide a beneficial tool for prioritizing marketing communication tasks. Continuously analyzing feedback from the customers, marketing communication should focus on bringing value to the customer as fast as possible. Agilefant could be used for marketing communication management, also.

Agilefant has a useful product according to their customers. To let the bigger audience to know what it has to offer, I suggest putting more effort into studying the effects of marketing communication tasks and learn from that. I would also put some actual sales targets for each week. Marketing communication should not be felt like a burden, that takes resources from developing the software but a delightful way to tell people what the company has done and how that helps others with their businesses!

People are busy during the workdays, so a regular ordered email newsletter with some tips and information about new features could either go to the spam or actually help someone to fix his problem. It could also prompt to go and read more depth from the blog post. Also, even if there were no time to read it at that moment, it would still leave a memory trace, and the post could be read afterward. Newsletters could also awaken ex-subscribers to re-subscribe. Team Agilefant could provide teaching newsletters and blog posts to assist their customers using Scrum, Lean, Kanban or other Agile methods sup-

ported by Agilefant. That would not bring straight cash flow but would nurture the customer relations and strengthen Agilefant's image as professionals.

As mentioned in Section 3.2 companies seem to look for longer co-operation. Startup software provider might feel riskier than some other one. Successful test phase helped with decision-making according to one interview. That required someone first being enthusiastic of Agilefant and then influencing the decision-making process. From that perspective, it could be one strategy to target the communication marketing efforts to coders, project managers, coordinators and process owners trying to multitask with different tools.

Also, whether there are problems to solve or not, the seller must either use marketing or selling to wake awareness to their product. That is why marketing team should emphasize their specific strengths as parts of the selling process. Still, it is always people who make the decisions. They have their own attitudes, values, opinions and first impressions. Therefore "all messages, including bids and proposals, must be carefully designed to create favourable impressions in order to achieve success." (Clow & Baack 2010, 101.)

When we evaluate how companies can use case studies in their marketing communication, the proposals in this thesis are quite commonly usable with a comparatively low budget. Still, I would underline always measuring what works and what doesn't. I hope this study inspires small companies and marketing people to listen to customers, make Agile plans, really think about the message wanted to deliver, prepare to change plans and think outside the box.

Afterward, I started to think that there could have been more in-depth questions related to the customer acquisition process. It could have been useful to study better how the customer was reached. Also better understanding of the engagement process and activation process by both sides could have been interesting.

User studies strengthened the hypothesis of where to invest marketing communication efforts at the moment. The Internet, inbound and content, play a huge role when buyers and other influencers of DMU search for information. Taking part of events might also induce sales.

Based on this study, I think companies cannot afford not to use case studies as part of their business strategy. Businesses can learn a lot from their customers, their product(s), their communication and marketing plus also something they could not even understand they could learn.

5.3 Reflection on own learning

It was surprising to notice how Agilefant had made a huge impact on someone's daily work. Especially after hearing how much the software had improved effectiveness, it is easy to understand the enthusiasm around Agilefant. Sure, with more customers to interview, the feeling could be different.

Meeting and interviewing the customers face-to-face was eye opening. I think in many situations personal, and face-to-face meetings have a huge meaning for business. The software companies are getting bigger and bigger, leaving personal contact with the developers impossible. Possibility to get one's voice heard as a customer is an advantage for the companies providing the service.

Business environments can be very different among the various customers. I first thought that Agilefant's software is only for code management, but it can be used for very different kinds of complicated projects. One can use it for product development, one for organizing a huge organization change, or as I have used, for enterprise resource planning (ERP) change and development project management. That might make it interesting when providing support for the software. Still, I see that more as an opportunity than a threat.

Theoretical framework about licensing models and Agile methods taught a lot about the business environment Agilefant Ltd. tries to conquer. As a small startup with the tiny budget, there is an enormous challenge to both create something meaningful but also make people know about it. I respect the hard work team Agilefant is doing and hope them all the best. I learned to use Agilefant for project management, and I truly believe that Agilefant or other similar software saves a huge amount of duplicate work and piles of money in many organizations.

I also got excited about Agile methods. I think there are some really good values and that for example Agile and Lean thinking should be exploited in marketing communication, also. Providing something ready and useful and being ready to change direction if necessary are good teachings for many occasions. Also, I think it is important to analyze the results. What surprised me, I started to speculate how those values could be combined with systems thinking. Though, I am not the first one thinking about that, because there already is SAFe, which combines systems thinking, Agile development and Lean product development. This is me, always taking things one step further.

Providing something ready steers to learning to become an expert on one's own area of study. Cambridge dictionary says expertise is "a high level of knowledge of skill." During gathering information about the subject matter, there were an enormous amount of information that all felt important for the thesis. It was hard to keep the text focused, and yet it still could be more focused. I rewrote many parts of this thesis because of new insights, but at some point, you just need to let it be. I think that one part of expertise is providing something knowledgeable upon given time frame. It might not always provide the perfect outcome but something to work with later on. There is a saying "well-planned is half done," but half done is still not finished! Sure, there must be planning done, but what I've learned is just getting things done. Still, I could have planned better.

All the time I got in mind new ideas for marketing, for inbound strategy, creative content, for selling, for the website, for customer relations! I learned that I truly enjoy developing strategies and ideas how to do things better. I also learned to use studies and statistics more efficient. What comes to writing in a foreign language, I think my English is little bit developed, also.

I want to thank the team Agilefant for this interesting subject. I also want to thank my family, friends, and workmates for the support during this process.

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7 Appendices

7.1 Appendix 1. Customer Case Study Questions

The original questions from Agilefant:

- What is the nature of your business?
- What is the problem you needed to solve?
- What technology/solution did you use prior to Agilefant?
- What other technology/solutions did you consider?
- How did Agilefant help solve your problem?
- What are the benefits of Agilefant from your experience and were there any unexpected benefits.
- Where there any problems using Agilefant?
- What are your plans using Agilefant moving forward?
- Comments for the Agilefant team?

The Interview Questions, version 2

About your business:

- Tell me about your business?
- What were the problems you needed to solve?
- Were there some goals you wanted to reach?

Using Agilefant:

- How did you hear/learn about Agilefant?
- Did you use some technology/solution prior to Agilefant?
- Did you consider other solutions besides Agilefant?
- What are the benefits of Agilefant from your experience?
- How did Agilefant help solve your problems / meet your goals?
- How is that measured?
- When measured, did you find some improvements?
- Were there some unexpected benefits?

Can the benefits be measured with concrete numbers?

- How has Agilefant increased/decreased
- The productivity and efficiency?
- Time usage? How much time was saved?
- Reliability?
- Project and salary expenses?
- End customer satisfaction?
- Something else?

Is the visibility to development progress better? Can that be measured? How?

Feedback for Team Agilefant:

- What is good?
- What should be improved?
- Where there any problems adopting Agilefant? Did you get help easily?

Other:

- What are your plans using Agilefant moving forward?
- How was Agilefant better/worse than other similar software you have used?
- To whom you would recommend Agilefant?

The Interview Questions, Final Version

Customer Description

The Contact Person (Name, Background, Occupation/Title)

About your business:

- Tell me about your business? What do you do? What industry do you serve?

The Challenge

- What were the problems you needed to solve? What situation you wanted to change or improve?
- Were there some goals you wanted to reach?

Our Relationship

- How long have you been using Agilefant?
- How did you hear/learn about Agilefant? Did you know us from beforehand?
- What other technology/solution you used prior to Agilefant?
- What other solutions you considered besides Agilefant? Why didn't they work out?
- Why you chose Agilefant as a solution? What was the objection? Product, price, something else?

The Solution and Results

- What are the benefits of Agilefant from your experience?
- How did Agilefant help solve your problems / meet your goals? How is that measured?
- When measured, did you find some improvements?
- Were there some unexpected benefits?
- Can the benefits be measured with concrete numbers? How has Agilefant increased/decreased
 - o the productivity and efficiency?
 - o time usage? How much time was saved?
 - o reliability?
 - o project and salary expenses?
 - o end customer satisfaction?
 - o something else?
- Is the visibility to development progress better? Can that be measured? How?

Feedback for Team Agilefant

- What is good?
- What should be improved?
- Where there any problems adopting Agilefant? Did you get help easily?

Other

- What are your plans using Agilefant moving forward?
- How was Agilefant better/worse than other similar software you have used?
- To whom you would recommend Agilefant?

Communication channels


- So you heard about us (where). What other channels could have been possible? (An event, blog, cold email, Google ad, social media, LinkedIn).
- Where you bought Agilefant? Direct or through an app store/directory?
- Do feel the emails and tips you get from Agilefant useful?
- Can I share this information in our marketing materials?

Thank you!

7.2 Appendix 2. Customer Stories on www.agilefant.com


7.2.1 Case Study – Coriant (PDF)

Readable at URL: <http://www.agilefant.com/customer-story-coriant/>



Case Study

Scaled agile over three continents



Coriant Coriant manufactures and delivers networking products and services to more than 200 customers worldwide.

Benefits

- Agilefant is used to manage the backlogs of tens of teams on three sites
- Understanding dependencies has helped prioritization
- Progress and what's left are now visible
- Problems are spotted earlier

Challenge

Originally, the backlog was spread over multiple documents and difficult to organize. Teams had different approaches to how they managed their backlogs. Additionally, they were using different tools for this (MS Excel, wiki pages, text files, etc.). This hindered overall visibility and transparency to backlog items across teams. It was difficult to monitor what was being worked on. The teams had trouble providing estimates for when features would get done.

Coriant wanted to store all the project's requirements and tasks in a single tool. The goals were to harmonize the process for building the backlog, and improve the visibility to how work is proceeding. A key need was also to find a common way of working for all teams.

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Solution

Coriant started using Agilefant in March 2014.

A year later it is used by tens of Scrum teams on three continents, working together on the main product launches. The backlog is in Agilefant, and the teams pull features to their sprints. "Using Agilefant felt good from the start. We were also able to influence its feature development", says Hannu Törmänen, an engineering manager at Coriant.

"Agilefant has improved the way we work. We have been able to observe our workflows and why problems occur. We learned to improve the writing of user stories. Now team members have a better understanding of what they should do."

"Overall, Agilefant has given us a better understanding of what's already done, and the amount of work left is more clear to everyone. We also are able to see how the teams' work depends on things which are outside of our software R&D organization. This further helps us in prioritizing the work, and as a result, our productivity has gone up significantly."

Using Agilefant has helped Coriant to realize that there is still a lot to learn. "Although we had practiced agile for many years already, using Agilefant has opened our eyes that there are many areas we still can improve in."

Hannu Törmänen
Engineering Manager
Coriant

**About**

Agilefant is a versatile software tool for tracking and planning that enables organizations to unleash the full potential of their employees, partners and existing tools. Agilefant is available as SaaS as well as an on-premises installation.


Contact

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7.2.2 Case Study – Rautakesko (PDF)


Readable at URL: <http://www.agilefant.com/customer-story-rautakesko/>



Case Study

Twice the results with half the cost





Rautakesko is a home improvement and specialty goods retailer operating several brands in eight countries.

Benefits

- End-to-end requirements management with many stakeholders in several countries
- Efficient and easy-to-use agile project management of a massive 1.5 year project
- Providing visibility to all stakeholders on project progress
- Better access to information and no need for manual reporting

Challenge

In 2013 Rautakesko had selected a new system for business intelligence reporting and needed to migrate existing reports from legacy tools as well as implement new reports enabled by the new system. Some 500 requirements had been identified for the project, and it was estimated that delivering them could take the assigned team several years. Additional complexity came from the fact that the system had multiple end users in several countries, with many of them having different business needs.

The team wanted to use an agile approach to tackle the project. Agile was new to the organization, and was initially met with skepticism. Also, the tools that had been in use – Jira and MS Project – didn't match the needs the project team had in mind.

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Solution

Several tools for managing agile development were evaluated, and Agilefant was selected. It was the only one to meet all the team's needs. On top of that its usability was superior.

"In Agilefant we could group and split the requirements in a flexible manner. That was a key factor in our choice."

Management had agreed to pilot the agile approach for three months, and then compare the results to a fixed price offer that they had received for same the work. The results from the pilot stopped any debate they had about the choice: compared to the fixed price offer, the agile team was able to complete 90% more work for 47% of the cost.

In the end, the project took 18 months to complete, but first benefits from the new system were gained early and where they were most needed. Communication was easier, as the end users from different sites could add their requirements directly to their own backlogs. These were frequently reviewed with the team and then prioritized to development sprints. Everyone could follow the progress in real time and get the reports they needed directly from Agilefant. This speeded up information sharing, and greatly reduced the need for manual reporting.

"Everyone can now look up the status for themselves instead of emailing back and forth or having somebody manually compile and distribute status reports."

Rautakesko is now adopting Agilefant and the agile development approach in new projects. During the two first years of use they have been very pleased with the product. Also, whenever they have had a feature request it has swiftly been implemented.

"We have received unparalleled support from the Agilefant team"

About

Agilefant is a versatile software tool for tracking and planning that enables organizations to unleash the full potential of their employees, partners and existing tools. Agilefant is available as SaaS as well as an on-premises installation.

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