



A Case Study for improving a Travel Company's Digital Marketing activities

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<p>Abstract:</p> <p>The rapid growth of the online travel industry and the travel purchasing behavior of consumers requires a new way for managing the increasing number and quality of tourism traffic. Undoubtedly, with the exponential growth in the number of internet users, the number of online travel consumers utilizing online travel agencies for their travel arrangements has also grown. Additionally, since the advent of the digital revolution, the way marketing is carried out has continued to evolve. Additionally, as more people continue to adopt digital means of communication, the wave of cyber consumers have set off a new wave of digital tools for reaching and meeting the needs of these consumers. More so, the emergence of increasing numbers of e-commerce stores has been bringing together buyers and sellers and changing the nature of digital marketing strategies and activities. Although it is becoming commonplace for businesses to have a separate marketing plan for online and offline, however digital marketing planning is no different to any other marketing plan. This main objective of the thesis is to explore whether a proposed 14 digital marketing strategies can be implemented for a travel agency Incoming Finland Oy to affect an increase in customer base, increase the agency's return on investment and improve competitiveness.</p>	
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1 INTRODUCTION

Through many decades the marketing process has changed and transformed to adapt to the current market and its trends. We live in an era of digitalization and this vast development has brought profound change to the way consumers interact with brands and make their purchases. The development of gadgets gives new possibilities for communication and interaction between the producers and consumers. Additionally, as most businesses go online, so also the competition between businesses to grow their customer base.

Therefore, based on the foregoing, this thesis will focus on exploring best practices of creating a digital marketing plan for a travel agency using literature research methodology. Today's online businesses have a variety of audience acquisition strategies to choose from, including viral content, search placement, banner ad, and pay-per-click (PPC) marketing. This research exploration is executed using the travel agency Incoming Finland Oy as a case study. Incoming Finland Oy is a travel company that has been in the travel industry market for over 10 years. The company operates in Helsinki and Tallinn in several tourism fields, which includes premium class transfers and private and group tours in Finland, Estonia and recently expanded its services to Spain. Even though the company's focus is mainly B2B it is also working with private customers and private groups.

This thesis is in three parts. The first part discusses the research's literature and conceptual framework. The second part discusses the research methodology adopted in the thesis. A major advantage of literature research methodology is that it integrates findings and perspectives from many empirical findings. The foregoing methods were implemented in the context of the thesis' objective of exploring the effect of applying the 14 digital marketing strategies proposed. Also, the second section explores the research design, method of data analysis, and other related information on how the research is conducted. The last section of the thesis contains the presentation and the analysis of the literature collected. However, it is worth pointing out that the literature research methodology is combined with a semi-structured interview data from Incoming Finland Oy and the

researchers experience whilst interning at the travel agency. The core idea of the research is to examine the impact of adopting the 14 digital marketing strategies (Saikiran, 2019) offering it as a marketing plan for travel agencies to help improve their online presence, and attract new customers, improving the relationships with existing ones, as well as get ahead competition.

1.1 Motivation for this research

The idea of the topic is motivated by personal interest because of the researcher's internship with the travel agency company called Incoming Finland Oy that operates in Helsinki and Tallinn. The company offers premium class transfers and private and group tours in Finland, Estonia and recently expanded its services to Spain. The main idea of the research is to explore best practices in designing a marketing plan that will help to improve the company's online presence and attract new customers as well as improving the relationships with existing ones. This is in addition to the researcher's interest in finding the best options for the improvement of the company's digital presence as well as online interaction.

1.2 Problem statement

Today, both travel agencies and tourists have gone online. Hence, to find their next travel destination, tourists rely on the internet, just as much as the travel agencies rely on the internet to find the tourists. However, due to the increasing number of travel agencies that are now online, this increases the competition amongst travel agencies competing to be seen by tourists who are searching for an agency that meet their travel needs.

As the purpose of the research is to improve the travel agency's digital visibility and understand the best options for improving their online presence, the purpose of this research is to understand how and in what capacity is Incoming Finland Oy using the 14 digital marketing strategies (Saikiran, 2019).

1.3 Research Aim

The aim of this thesis is to explore, in what capacity, is the travel agency Incoming Finland Oy using the 14 digital marketing strategies to improve the agency's online visibility and improve competitiveness.

1.4 Research Questions

To achieve the purposes that necessitated the conduct of this thesis, the research question mentioned below must be provided answers to:

1. To what extent is the travel agency Incoming Finland Oy using the 14 digital marketing to increase and improve their online visibility and improve competitiveness?
2. What improvements can the travel agency Incoming Finland Oy make to improve online visibility and competitiveness?

It is the aim of the researcher that the findings in this thesis will aid in the creation of a suitable marketing plan that would increase the business activities of the travel agencies. So that it becomes easier to design a marketing strategy or plan based on the discovery and findings made from this research question.

1.5 Structure of the thesis

The thesis will be divided into 4 chapters. The first chapter is an introduction to the thesis with background, motivation for the research, research questions and the aim of the research. The second chapter is a literature review covering the theoretical part of the thesis. In this chapter, the author presents all the literature findings that are relevant to the topic. Chapter 3 covers the methodology chosen for this research and describes the chosen method, research procedure, analysis process of the collected data as well as information on the chosen group of respondents. Finally, in chapter 4 the analyzed data will be presented and explained, this will be immediately followed by the conclusion.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter of this research contains a review of relevant literature associated with the subject of this study. Certain important and germane sub-topics such as: what is digital marketing; a digital marketing plan; planning a strategy; social media marketing and email marketing are discussed in this chapter of the thesis.

2.1 A history of digital marketing

The first appearance of Digital marketing first was as a term in the 1990s and back then it was a vastly different world. The Web 1.0 at the time had primarily static content with few interactions and without real communities. It was not until 1993 that the first banner advertising emerges, and the first web crawler (called WebCrawler) was created the following year - this ushered in the era of search engine optimization (SEO) that is now popular today. Although this may not seem a distant past, however, when we factor in fact that this was four years before Google was established, over 10 years before YouTube was launched, and that social media was not at this point thought of, then it shows just how far technology has evolved over a brief period (Kingsnorth, 2019).

Once Google began its fast growth and in 1999, the platform that would later become Blogger by Evan Williams and Meg Hourihan at Pyra Labs ushered in the modern internet age. Blackberry, a mobile device aimed towards the consumer market but now a brand not connected with innovation anymore, launched mobile e-mail and Myspace appeared. Myspace was largely responsible for bringing social media to the mainstream as we define it today, but it was not as successful as it could have been from a user experience perspective and ultimately led to its end.

Google subsequently introduced of AdWords in 2000 (an online advertising platform now known as Google Ads) and remains a key revenue stream for Google to this day. Google's innovation, easy to use interface and efficient algorithms continue to remain unchallenged (although Bing, another web search engine owned and operated by Microsoft have been making some good steps forward in recent years). Additionally, Cookies have been a

major development that have played a role in delivering relevant content and therefore personalizing user experience.

The term Web 2.0 is used to attribute websites that emphasize contents that are generated by users, ease of use, collaborative culture and interoperability for end users was later popularized. The term was coined by Darcy DiNucci in 1999 but it was not until 2004 that it became popularized by Tim O'Reilly (Toledano, 2013).

Although the name Web 2.0 might suggest an overhaul of the web technology, however, this was not really the case. Instead, it was more a shift in the way websites are developed to be more of a social place, an enabler for online communities. Hence, an era of social media platforms like Facebook, Skype, Twitter, Pinterest, Instagram, and others were birthed (Toledano, 2013).

Several buzzwords have appeared in the last 10 years, from phrases like 'big data' to 'artificial intelligence', however whilst they can inspire and open many eyes to new ways of thinking they rarely change the fundamental strategic planning of an effective marketing-led company— hence the thesis will review some of the established models, with focus on the digital perspective (Toledano, 2013).

2.2 What is Digital Marketing?

According to the study conducted by Piñeiro-Otero and Martínez-Rolán (2016) in their work titled, *Understanding Digital Marketing—Basics and Actions*, the first approaches to digital marketing described it as an extension of conventional marketing, its tools, and strategies, on the Internet, as against the conventional use of traditional media, which comprise of radio, television and the print media – newspapers and magazines. However, the peculiarities inherent in the digital world and its utilization for marketing purposes have facilitated the growth of channels, formats and languages, which have resulted in the creation of tools and strategies that were hitherto unthinkable offline.

In this era, instead of being a subtype of traditional marketing, digital marketing is now a novel and innovative phenomenon, which combines customization and widespread distribution of contents to meet present marketing goals. It can therefore be assumed that technological convergence; in conjunction with the duplicity of gadgets has resulted in the opening up of the manners in which humans consider marketing with the aid of the Internet. This novel convergence of technology has tilted the pendulum towards a new and ever-growing concept of digital marketing, which is predominantly user-oriented, more measurable, interactive and more importantly, seemingly available everywhere. The advent and growth of digital marketing, alongside carefully planned strategies, are capable of presenting significant benefits for brands and companies. As explained by Piñeiro-Otero and Martínez-Rolán (2016), the following are some of the prospective benefits of digital marketing to companies and organizations:

- i. Visual communication:** The authors explained that based on human's visual thinking and thought processing patterns, digital marketing offers companies and organizations different image and video-based tools for marketing. This represents an effective and attractive way of reaching larger audiences and consequently result in greater engagement and possibly consumption of product or service.
- ii. Relevant advertising:** Digital marketing allows for easy market segmentation and customization of advertising on digital platforms to maximize the output. In addition, digital marketing is devoid of the restrictions and limitations inherent in other media, such as the traditional media. This allows for even more creative, innovative and attractive advertising.
- iii. Viral Capacity:** The main essence of digital marketing is its capacity for exponential spread and expansion of particularly marketing content and messages. For example, taking a cue from the WOM (word of mouth) model of communication, viral digital marketing communication messages are more relevant and effective because of their connectivity, immediacy and ability to share on diverse online platforms, which facilitate the spread of digital marketing contents.
- iv. Branding:** Digital marketing and the platforms that support digital marketing offer immense opportunities to create and sustain brand image over the

Internet, while also supporting frequent updates and constant interaction between companies and their audience or consumers.

- v. **Usability–functionality:** Digital marketing supports easy to use and user-friendly platforms for various categories of audiences or consumers. This serves to improve user experience and allows for the smooth exchange of activities between companies and their clientele.
- vi. **Interactivity:** Still based on the opinions of Piñeiro-Otero and Martínez-Rolán (2016), this feature of digital marketing is perhaps one of the most compelling and beneficial features of digital marketing to companies. This is because, to organizations or companies attempting to create and sustain long-term relationships with their audiences, digital marketing platforms provide the opportunity of creating conversations and consequently of generating a customer-oriented experience with a company, to the satisfaction of the consumers. This interactivity could be ordinary, such as product reviews, or even in-depth, thus creating an all-encompassing encounter.

However, despite all of the benefits of digital marketing discussed above, for companies to reap from these benefits and advantages, there is a need to ascertain that their Internet presence and digital marketing strategy follow a carefully thought-out plan, with practical and achievable goals that are in agreement and unison with the company's brand or image.

In the words of Kierzkowski et al., (1996), every company ought to create a model or framework for its digital marketing campaign to attain success in the era of widespread digital marketing campaigns. This framework will serve as a form of guideline for these companies and guide them through the various processes of their digital marketing decisions. Kierzkowski et al., (1996) created a novel model that he dubbed the *Digital Marketing Framework*.

This *Digital Marketing Framework* is comprised of five (5) activities that come one after another. These activities include acquiring or attracting new customers, engaging the already attracted customers, retaining these customers via ensuring that they always revisit the website, learning through their attitudes and behaviors, and finally, interacting by making available individualized services or products.

According to Chaffey (2009), online marketing communications are categorized into six tools, some of which include: Search Engine Marketing, Interactive Ads, Email Marketing, and Viral Marketing as discussed in the subtopics above.

2.3 Digital Marketing Plan

A digital marketing plan can be defined as a carefully designed document that measures a company's present condition and uses this information to create certain short-term or midterm goals while devising practical strategies and means to attain these set aims. In addition, this document stipulates the various responsibilities and tasks, the target duration and also regulates the tools for measuring the goals (Piñeiro-Otero and Martínez-Rolán, 2016).

The objectives of digital marketing plans are: conducting discussions about companies and their environment. In addition, a company's digital marketing plan requires a set out roadmap of how the marketing strategy would be executed. This suggests that a marketing plan gets increasingly and becomes more adapted to the pace and condition of the company.

Therefore, in essence, a digital marketing plan could be considered as a document that is in unison with a company's strategic plan, which creates goals of activities in the digital environment, and also controls the what, how, when, who and why (6 Ws) of a company's digital marketing messages or contents.

2.4 Planning a Strategy

In a bid to attain a company's planned digital marketing goals, it is important that the word, strategy is defined. According to Rogers (2012), "a strategy is described as the implemented scheme designed to achieve such goals". This strategy is activated through activities that are planned to facilitate the achievement of such goals.

For this research, digital marketing strategy is predicated on the model of a marketing funnel proffered by Strong (1925), as a development of the AIDA model, which means

(Awareness, Interest, Desire, Action). Meanwhile, the metamorphosis of marketing recently and the peculiarities inherent in the digital world now permit for a revision of this marketing model, so that it can encapsulate the conversion strategy, and also the loyalty strategy, in the digital world.

Roger (2012) argues that there exist many models, besides the Awareness, Consideration, Desire and Action, which is an improvement of the AIDA model phases in the current context. He argues that an addition of two new states ought to be incorporated, namely loyalty and advocacy. Meanwhile, like Strong's model, every phase represents a higher level of commitment, and thus, loyalty and advocacy are at the bottom of the model as portrayed in Figure 2.

It is important to note that in the digital world, loyalty and support for a company or brand are capable of altering consumers from mere consumers to prescribers, therefore increasing the scope of the company's tasks, which could also result in the growth of the company's customer base. Hence, while in the period of deciding a particular strategy, capacity and actions ought to be clarified. The figure below contains a diagrammatic representation of Rogers (2012) marketing funnel.

In his book: *The Network Is Your Customer*, Rogers (2011) presented five core strategies for customer networks that can be used by businesses and organizations of all sectors and sizes to build more effective relationships with customers: access, engage, customize, connect, and collaborate. According to him, these strategies can help to drive key business objectives as product differentiation, sales efficiency, build brand, reduced costs, improve customer loyalty, and innovation capacity (Rogers, 2011).

Figure 2: Marketing Funnel

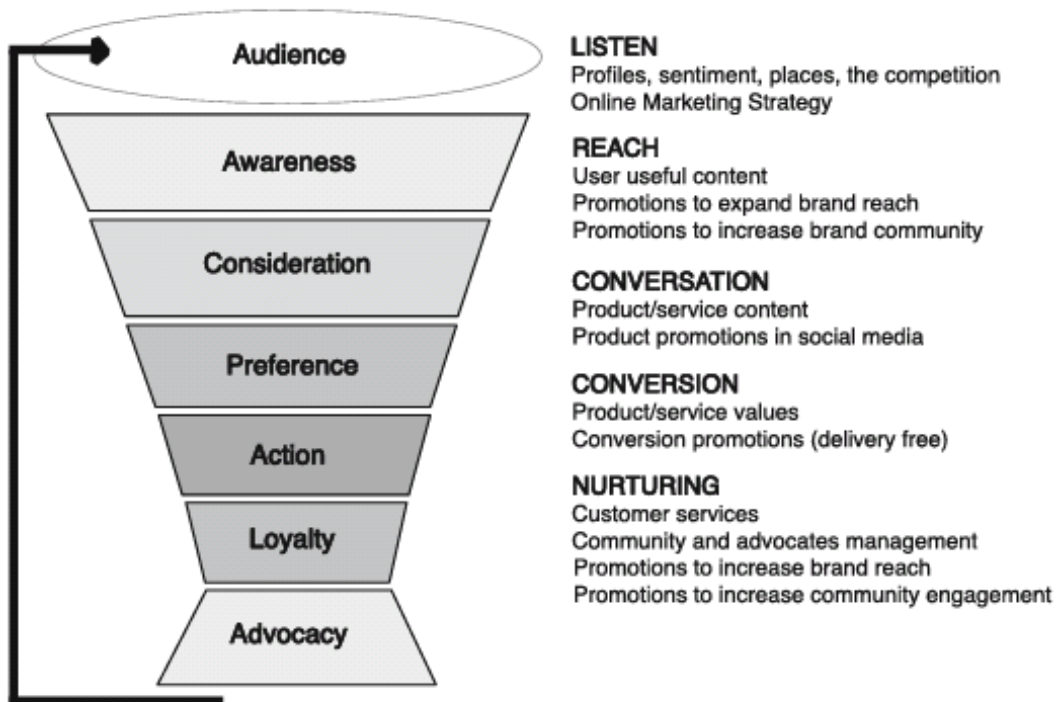


Figure 2 Five Strategies to Thrive in a Digital Age. New Haven: Yale University Press, Rogers (2012).

It is important to mention that even though actions and activities in digital marketing have altered to adjust to novel platforms and users, a number of the most significant digital marketing strategies in the aspect of usage and results in delivery to companies are e-commerce, web search marketing, email marketing and social media marketing. A list of the digital marketing plans travel agencies can leverage to drive more traffic, survive the competition, and increase ROI are listed below and will both be examined through research analysis and in the context of adoption by the Incoming Finland Oy in the data analysis section of this thesis:

1. Website design
2. E-mail marketing
3. Search Engine Optimization (SEO)
4. Search Engine Marketing (SEM)
5. Social Media Management and Marketing
6. Content Marketing
7. Mobile Marketing

8. Advertising
9. Leverage Reviews and Ratings
10. Local directory registration and business listings
11. YouTube Marketing
12. Application marketing
13. Pay-Per-Click (PPC) marketing
14. Online Reputation Engagement Management (Saikiran, 2019).

This list was chosen because it provides a basic yet practical overview of Digital Marketing Plans for travel agencies.

To reiterate, the new realities of the evolving and advancing online business environment have led a number of authors to develop new rules for the new marketing economy. While some of these 'rules' comprise of some marketing strategy and perspectives, however, business' focus must continuously be more explicitly centered on a new set of principles and strategies for marketing in a digital age. Although the marketing plans, as summarized above are still emerging, they offer a starting point for travel agencies to shape a new marketing discipline.

2.4.1 Website design

Customers and prospective customers today interact with sellers on the internet through the sellers' websites. Additionally, as more customers take to the internet to buy products, the success of e-commerce of any company, especially an unpopular branch is greatly dependent on an appealing web design (Gehrke et al., 1999). Web design is crucial because it influences how the audience thinks of a brand. The impression the brand impacts on the audience can either get them to remain on the website and learn about the business or leave and turn to a competitor. An appealing web design helps keep the leads on the web page.

When a prospective customer visits a website either first time or as a returning customer, the website gives the first impression of the business. They will instinctively evaluate the business, and in the first few seconds a good web design makes a positive impact on the audience. An unappealing or outdated website can leave a negative impression on the

audience of the business. This could deter them from visiting the website leading to missed leads (Gehrke et al., 1999).

2.4.2 E-mail marketing

This form of marketing is a digital marketing technique that employs email in the sending of advertisements or commercial information. It is a marketing communication tool utilized to acquire new customers or clients, while also making old customers develop loyalty to a brand or company. In this digital era, emails have served as one of the web tools, which possess the best adaptability to change – either with regards to its content or penetration and scope. Hence, email marketing is considered one of the major tools employed in digital marketing for companies (Radicati Group, (2015).

According to the Radicati Group (2015), as of the year 2015, e-mail was the foremost Internet service before the advent of social media. Additionally, the number of emails across the world hit 4.353 million users by 2015, out of and does not consistently 205 billion emails were exchanged (the Radicati Group, 2015). This number of email exchanges entailed legitimate e-mails and spam. The most popular type of email marketing is the newsletter, which is a publication that is usually distributed within a particular time or season about a particular topic for every recipient, known as subscribers. Meanwhile, the degree of complexity of a newsletter is dependent on its aims and content. They could be simple and written in plain text as the predominant characteristic, or either be filed with images, tables, diagrams, adverts or hyperlinks.

As explained by Hussain (2015), the goal of email marketing could be numerous; however, all of them can be categorized into four predominant goals:

1. **Diverting traffic to the website:** be it the home page or any special section inside it.
2. **Promotion of a special action:** could be for either the promotion of newly launched services or products, exclusive discounts, sales, download of applications, et cetera.

3. **Cost savings:** e-mail marketing conveys management decisions and information to the customer about the status of orders, and the provision of customer support services at very minimal financial implication than other communication channels.
4. **Brand popularity and image:** Similar to other forms of digital campaigns, e-mail marketing is appropriate for the generation of popularity and brand image among consumers.

2.4.3 Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

Search Engine Optimization is a chain of processes that are executed systematically and aimed at enhancing the volume and quality of traffic through search engine (SE) by leveraging the algorithm of the search engine (Iskandar & Komara, 2018). Search Engine Optimization is the process technique of utilizing website optimization to achieve a higher position and ranking in the search engines (SE) when users enter their keyword while searching for any content on the search engines. The aim of Search Engine Optimization is to rank the webpage so it could easily be found on the search engine.

According to Zillincan (2015), Search engine optimization techniques, often abbreviated as "SEO," should form the first positions in organic search results. Although the fundamental optimization techniques have not change over time, however, as the Internet and web evolves, new optimization techniques have thrived and others dropped. Also, Shih and Chen (2013) explained that although SEO is often more expensive than the traditional paid advertisement placements, delivers result that does not justify the high cost, and consistently does not lead to high search-results rankings.

Search engines (SE) like Google, Yandex, Bing, have three core objectives: that is crawl and build an index, and provide the users with a ranked list of sites that the Search engines have established are the most relevant. The generally assumption is that the more popular the site is, the more valuable the information is to the users.

The SEO process in practice requires improving a website to increase its visibility and the better the visibility of a website has, the more likely it is it would gain attention and attract consumer to the site (Zillincan, 2015).

2.4.4 Search Engine Marketing (SEM)

Like SEO, Search engine marketing (SEM) is equally used to improve ranking on search engines like Google, Bing, and Yahoo. SEM allows businesses to target customers by placing advertisements on search engines, and this marketing method has proven to be an effective audience acquisition strategy (Boughton, 2005). SEM is a marketing strategy that is often preferred to get swift results within 3 months. Unlike the organic SEO services that has a maximum of 6 months conversation rate.

According to Boughton (2005), unlike traditional online advertising, Search engine advertisers pay only when users actually click on an advertisement, and once successfully implemented, SEM can generate steady traffic levels and huge return on investment (ROI). It is worth mentioning that the level of competition is driving bid prices through the roof as the use of SEM becomes more widespread. It is often the case that many advertisers cannot afford to bid on the most highly searched words. Instead, they are compelled to expand their campaign to include multiple search engines or use tens of thousands of keywords (Boughton, 2005).

Notwithstanding, SEM is crucial marketing strategy as it allows companies to closely track their ROI from an audience acquisition perspective. Unlike during the dotcom boom of the late 1990s, when companies would spend millions of dollars on advertisements but were unable to track their effectiveness. Today, advertisers and executives can conduct detailed cost-benefit analyses using the tools provided by the search engine providers.

2.4.5 Social Media Management and Marketing

Social media offer immense opportunity to create and sustain important relationships and also facilitate social interaction or communication, which is defined via dynamic exchanges among members – this time, between companies and their consumers. Currently, it appears as if social media is booming, with regards to the number and types of platforms and their users. Therefore, there exist audio-visual social media platforms like YouTube, Vimeo and SoundCloud; Photographic or image platforms like Flickr, Picasa, Pinterest and Instagram; or other immensely popular general social media networks like Facebook, Twitter, and Google+. There are also very specialized platforms such as LinkedIn (Piñeiro-Otero and Martínez-Rolán, 2016).

Additionally, it is almost general knowledge that the concept of social media networks is not new, however, it continually attains new heights, all of which can be attributed to web penetration and widespread connectivity. Social media networks have evolved via platforms that portray various forms of functions and characteristics. These characteristics are directed towards the establishment of a community through linking users that can interact, have discussions, provide individual insights or knowledge.

Essentially, a social network manager is a service, which permits various persons to establish a general or semi-public profile in an enclosed system. It also allows for the articulation of a list of other users who share connections with and use that list of users. As expressed by Boyd and Ellison (2007), the real nature and name of such connections could be different from one website to the other. Such platforms become carriers and containers for content because they provide space and tools for users that are increasingly possessing an incredibly significant and active role. In this scenario, brands and companies ought to be involved in the social conversation, while utilizing the interactive social media channels to listen to gather and hear from their consumers, who express their opinions, knowledge and experiences or even create value via the creation of content.

Social Media is a bundle of Internet sites that enables the users to communicate, write reviews, share knowledge, experience and opinions; produce text, music, photo and video content. Social networks, blogs, forums, date webpages, virtual games are all distinct types of social media. The reason for its attractiveness for marketers is because the popularity of social media is huge and still growing (Ryan, 2014, p. 151-154). People check their social media channels right after they wake up and before they go to bed; therefore, the power of appropriate usage of content and advertising is crucial (Ryan, 2014, p. 301). The most frequently used online channels for advertising purposes are Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook, VK, Instagram, Snapchat, Pinterest et cetera. This is one of the tools to increase brand awareness. A key feature of advertising in social networks is the precise setting of the target audience. An advertiser can specify in detail the parameters of their target users, such as gender, age, place of residence, interests, education, et cetera (Golbeck, 2015, p.15). Some of the benefits of social media marketing are increased traffic, developed legal fans, generated leads, and increased exposure.

2.4.6 Content Marketing

Today, businesses utilize social media marketing to achieve awareness and promote the business brands to the customers. Nonetheless, the main purpose in sharing the information via social media is essentially to use the marketing content to attract more consumers to engage with the brand. Social media content marketing (SMCM) plays a crucial role in delivering essential information to the consumers hence compel them to maintain engagement with the brand (Ahmad et al., 2016).

According to Ahmad, Musa, and Harun (2016), Social media content marketing in branding strategies can help the firm to increase their brand health score. This is important because the brand health score is an indicator for a business to measure their brand awareness among the target digital audiences. Beyond having a presence in online brand communities, a firm's use of content marketing in an unobtrusive and non-promotional human story can better help to connect with the target audience (Du Plessis, 2017).

Furthermore, social media has become essential for branding due to the brand's ability to connect with consumers in a more interactive and personalized manner. Hence, brands increasingly have interest in social media-based brand communities to cultivate relationships with consumers through what is termed "community building" activities (Du Plessis, 2017).

Du Plessis (2017) observed practitioners strategically develop content communities around content on various social media platforms to achieve as much electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) activity as possible, this approach is adopted not only to build trust and credibility but also to attain the greatest reach and impact (Muntinga et al. 2011:16–17).

2.4.7 Mobile Marketing

Following the recent developments and advancements in the mobile technology, the increased adoption and penetration rates and an inherent characteristic of the mobile devices, the mobile channel has evolved into a central marketing channel, which enables firms to establish a strong electronic presence that is accessible by their customers anytime, anywhere (Varnali and Toker, 2010). Mobile phone technology has continued to advance, evolving from what used to be the size and weight of a brick into something

fashionable and multipurposed. Moving from what was mostly accessible as high-end gadget for the wealthy in 1995 to an essential accessory that is now owned by 5.29 billion of the world's population (O'Dea, 2021).

The moment global companies realized the business potential, the use of mobile services have penetrated practically every aspect of people's online activities. Hence, mobile advertising in itself has become a huge revenue generator for businesses. In fact, according to Statista, mobile advertising spending reached a record 223 billion U.S. dollars globally in 2020. This figure marked an increase of over 17 percent compared to the previous year, and according to the latest data, spending will surpass 339 billion by 2023 (Statista Research Department, 2021).

The advancement and developments and the demand for mobile devices have made mobile marketing an attractive focus for businesses. The services that use mobile devices and services has been growing rapidly globally. In 2020, the global market for mobile entertainment and services is estimated at US\$91.3 Billion and is projected to reach a revised size of US\$257.1 Billion by 2027 (Global Industry Analysts, 2021).

Shankar and Balasubramanian (2009) explained that although a mobile device is frequently used and is location-sensitive, however, simply tossing a company's Internet marketing strategy to mobile marketing strategy could yield opposite result. For an effective result using the mobile marketing channel, the mobile message must be brief, memorable, and well-coordinated with time and the user's location.

2.4.8 Advertising

Undoubtedly, the digital advancement has shaken advertising to its core. Among the most critical changes in the business landscape is the emergence of online consumers and the online business-to-business (B2B) world, the changing reality of an increasingly complex and dynamic world. The internet is changing the way consumers associate with products and markets. Today's online consumers expect tailored and customized services – from the information they desire, the products and services purchased, to the price they are willing to pay.

However, the wide adoption of internet as a medium for commerce is not isolated to the consumers, the most of the e-commerce activities and revenues have been generated in the business-to-business world. In fact, according to Forester Research Inc, business-to-business e-commerce in United States alone is estimated at \$1.8 Trillion by 2023 (Forrester, 2019).

Ryan (2016) opined that the simple answer why businesses need a digital advertising strategy is because without one they are likely to miss opportunities and lose partnerships. Hence, formulating a digital advertising strategy is an essential first step that will help to make informed decisions about the digital marketing economy, and ensure that efforts are focused on components that are most relevant to the business (Ryan, 2016).

Increasingly, the business sector matters less and it is fairly safe bet that a growing number of the target audience use the digital technology for day-to-day research, evaluation and the purchase of products and services. Therefore, without a coherent digital advertising strategy for engagement and retention, businesses are at best missing a golden opportunity, and at worst be left behind.

2.4.9 Leverage Reviews and Ratings

The use of Reviews and Ratings systems often referred to as “social discovery” is rapidly expanding, often used to breed vibrant and interactive communities. In the burgeoning e-commerce and internet shopping, users may contribute reviews that are subject to evaluations from other users. Additionally, other users may provide comments remarking agreement or disagreement with the original reviewer (Walther et al., 2012).

Participatory websites offer communication systems that presents the users with information from a variety of sources in various forms. According to Huang, Chou, & Lan (2007), consumers evidently view consumer-generated reviews as more trustworthy than the traditional advertising information.

Additionally, review websites offer a contrast of multiple sources of influence (see Walther et al., 2010a), for instance the users’ reviews, aggregated user representations deliberating others’ ratings of the reviews, and distinctive comments about reviews, provided by various individuals and groups.

User-generated reviews and ratings can provide a crucial new information medium for tourists, throughout the purchasing lifecycle, reorienting the way other users evaluate, select and share experiences about the product.

2.4.10 Local directory registration and business listings

When making online hotel or airport transfer reservation decisions, consumers rely on other consumer ratings as a hint to rate previous customers' experiences with the particular company. This ability for consumers to generate content and collaborate with other consumers is one feature of Web 2.0. It means consumers can now take an active role and create online communities. TripAdvisor and Yelp are one of such companies that allow users to create or interact with user-generated contents. TripAdvisor went public in 2004 as an application for the tourism industry. It is a user-generated content website that offers tourism consumers a plethora of reviews from travelers' recounting their experiences with restaurants, hotels, and tourist attraction locations. The platform has since been ranked as the most popular website for tourists planning their trip, with millions of users visiting the website to arrange their holidays

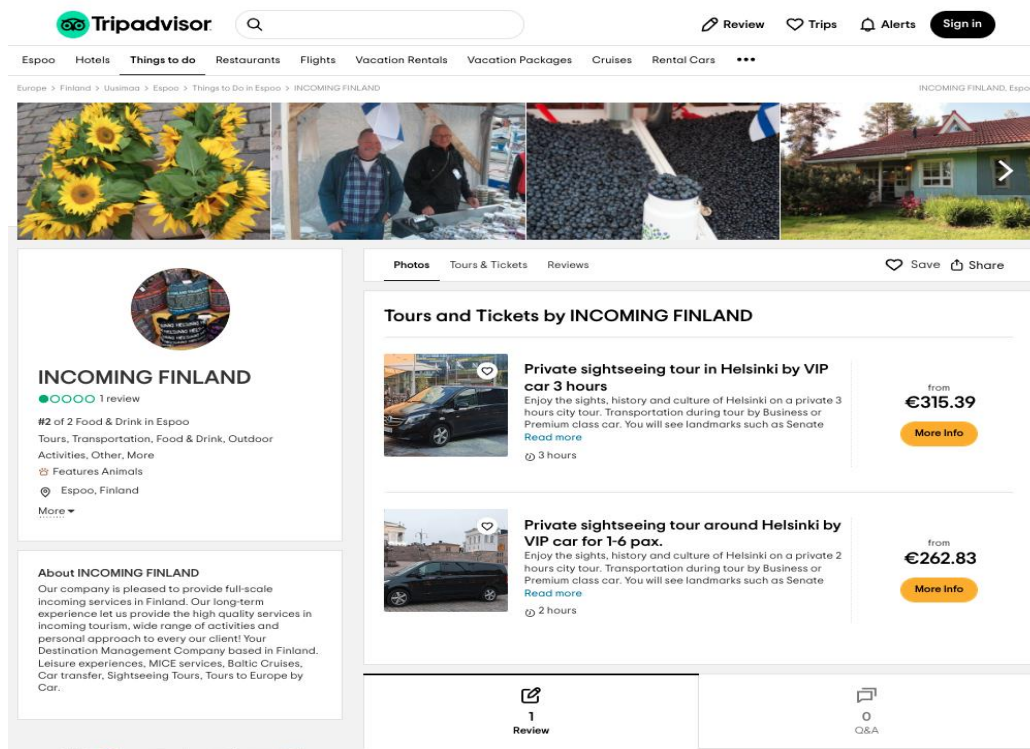


Figure 3 Incoming Finland Business listing on TripAdvisor. TripAdvisor 2021.

On one hand, web applications like TripAdvisor and Yelp allow for companies to list their services on the platform, and on the other it also allows for these companies' customers to recount their experiences and rate the service. Hence, companies listed on web applications like TripAdvisor gain online visibility when listed on the platform. Additionally, since these platforms have millions of monthly visitors, businesses found on them get more traffic and prospect of getting sales. For instant, because TripAdvisor is so popular with millions of visitors, tourists can also check the popularity index, of companies listed on the platform. This feature is made available to the users with an algorithm that combines the user-generated reviews and other sources like guidebooks and newspaper articles.

2.4.11 YouTube Marketing

YouTube began as a social media tool but has now evolved into a marketing communications tool. It is a site where users upload, share and watch videos, and is currently the global leader in the video streaming market, with over a billion videos views per day. The marketing of tourism products is fast changing as the needs, wants and expectations of the consumer become more demanding. With the advent and use of the internet, the power relationship between the individual consumer and the tourism sector is evolving, to the benefit of the consumer. The traditional marketing techniques, such as TV adverts, brochures and consumer exhibitions are becoming less relevant to the new tourism consumer (Reino & Hay, 2011).

One of these new methods is the adoption of visual user generated content (UGC), via video sharing sites such as YouTube, which are steadily playing a crucial role in both shaping a brand's/product's image and in counteracting any negative perceptions, by connecting directly with the consumer (Reino & Hay, 2011).

In December 2005, YouTube went public (YouTube, 2009) and in this short time the company has experienced an astonishing growth, given the large audiences that they

attract. Between 2016 to 2021, YouTube has accumulated 1.86 billion views according to a Global number of YouTube viewers (Ceci, 2021).

Undoubtedly, the video streaming technology is changing the way tourism products are presented to the consumer. And YouTube excels as an essential marketing tool for the tourism sector since it allows businesses and marketers to create promotional videos, that can then be watched by audiences that search for them on YouTube. Potential tourist can now watch a video of people swimming in the Maldives, climbing a volcano in Latacunga in Ecuador, sailing the Whitsunday Islands in Australia or walking in Kruger National Park, without leaving their seat.

2.4.12 Application marketing

Having a mobile app for any business has essentially become a necessity, and in the case of a travel agency, it gives more sales. Consumers on social media platforms are exposed to an excessive number of promotional messages of brands who are all competing for their attention. Constantly, consumers unconsciously go through a selection process to filter the irrelevant from what deserves attention, mostly struggling to process all received information every time they are online. Hence, simply having a presence on social media platforms is not enough for businesses. Today's businesses need to other means to provide content and services to their audience and having an application is one way to achieve this goal.

An application not only serves as an avenue for offering services to the customers, it also can serve as channel for collecting reviews and ratings, advertising new products to the customers and promoting the improving the brands online reputation. Mobile applications today can facilitate functionalities such as effortless access to the services, instant notification on brand updates, easy and Fast booking process which includes hassle-free monetary transactions, ability to find available of packages. These are time saver and can improve customer experience. If done well, having a mobile application can give the business an advantage over competitors.

2.4.13 Pay-Per-Click (PPC) marketing

Pay-per-click (PPC) is one form of digital marketing, an online advertising model where an advertiser pays a publisher each time an advert link is “clicked” on. It helps businesses reach customers online through paid search advertising. Once PPC is added to organic search results by search engines, it provides an additional layer to the SEO ranked results. This additional layer leads to more competition among websites, especially e-commerce stores. Hence, they have to compete for the top 10 positions amongst each other, and due to the new layer, they compete for a first position.

PPC or Pay for Placement was created as a way of raising revenue for search engines. Over the past 23 years, users have become used to using the search engines for free are often not ready to pay (Kritzinger & Weideman, 2013). PPC is usually used to denote a variety of overlapping strategies or practices that primarily refer to linking websites to specific keywords for a fee (Moxley et al. 2004). Consequently, potential customers are instantly taken to a website by clicking keywords (also known as sponsored links) (Curran 2004). As PPC suggests, advertisers have to pay for every click they get via the featured link (Jansen and Schuster 2011).

2.4.14 Online Reputation Engagement Management

Online reputation monitoring is increasingly considered an important management process for marketers and public relations specialists (Jones et al. 2009). Broadly, online reputation management has been studied by many researchers using models like the reputation management models which include concepts like listening and engaging (Aula & Mantere 2008). Additionally, a number of frameworks have been developed to facilitate the practice. frameworks such as the online reputation management framework that is a combination of traditional communication models and contemporary online reputation models.

The conventional practice for online reputation management explores how a business’ online reputation contributes to, damage or improve the business’ reputation and brand image. Undoubtedly, it is crucial to monitor digital platforms, particularly social media platforms to manage corporate reputation.

Contextually, the online reputation management framework is an online framework that businesses can use to create and communicate specific images of themselves to their stakeholders and audience to influence perceptions about the business. It is a framework that enables businesses to relay information about themselves. It essentially promotes the following: allows the media to say something about the business, highlight the business' actions in public conversations, and captures how businesses “listen” to what customers are saying about the business on the internet (Van den Heever & Rensburg, 2018). Hence, this is an essential digital marketing tool for businesses seeking to manage their online reputation to improve sales.

3 METHODOLOGY

This chapter will give an overview of the methods that have been chosen for the thesis' topic as well as the qualitative research methodology. Since the main objective of the research is to explore in what capacity is the travel agency Incoming Finland Oy using the 14 digital marketing strategies to improve the agency's online visibility and improve competitiveness, it has been decided that a qualitative method will be used. Additionally, as far as the author is concerned there are growing numbers of theoretical research that are frequently conducted in this area, hence it is necessary that the conducted research adopts a practical approach and that the gathered data and information is enough for future analysis and case study.

3.1 Overview of research method and Data Collection

Since qualitative research tends to be concerned with words, rather than numbers (Bryman, 2012) it provides the researcher with rich data for analysis. This method determines to open up the research topic and give the researcher the possibility to discuss freely in a flexible manner.

3.2 Choice of method

This research will be conducted with qualitative research methodology as the primary source of information, while other secondary means of information gathering such as collecting data from the travel agency Incoming Finland Oy using semi-structured interview. Thus, in order to collect the necessary data, apart from the qualitative research analysis, the researcher also considered it appropriate to interview the Incoming Finland Oy management staff due to their area of expertise and qualification that would provide valuable thoughts and insights on the research.

3.3 Respondent

The reason for conducting the semi-structured interview is in order to understand the topic from the view of interviewee's knowledge, interest and thoughts (Kvale 1996 & Laws, 2003). The semi-structured interview method with Incoming Finland Oy is the most suitable method for this research, since it allows the interviewer to keep an opened mind on the topic allowing the concepts and theories develop from the data (Bryman, 2012).

Semi-structured interview is used in survey investigations and gives the researcher the opportunity to conduct the interview with a flexible guideline, which will allow the interviewees to show their knowledge and opinion on the subject. Even though it is stated that rich data is necessary to get a deep understanding of the researched topic, some guidance is still necessary for the researcher to be able to follow up on the questions or concentrate and help to open up some of the areas of the subject of interest.

Additionally, since the thesis also adopts qualitative research methodology for data analysis, hence the semi-structure interview will be crucial for context, concept and delivery of the digital marketing plans. The reason for the qualitative research approach is to develop and relate the thesis' focus to existing knowledge. Thus, the thesis review papers and uses systematic reviews to collect data.

3.4 Conducting Interviews

Interviews are one among the most common methods of knowledge collection in qualitative research. They are especially useful in revealing the story behind a participant's experiences. Researchers can follow a line of inquiries to gain more information, or further explore responses or findings. But the researcher must plan and choose the format of the interview before collecting data. Additionally, interviews require the researcher to possess a sound understanding of their use and appropriateness. The skill to conduct interviews is one that grows over time (Doody & Noonan, 2013).

3.4.1 Semi-structure interviews

Semi-structured interviews are the most common type of interviews used in qualitative research where the researcher is free to request clarification and incorporate the use of predetermined questions (Holloway and Wheeler 2010).

An interview guide is created to collate data from all participants and form a sense of order (David and Sutton, 2004, Bridges et al, 2008, Holloway and Wheeler, 2010). The interview can be spontaneous, with open-ended questions and the possibility to explore issues that arise spontaneously (Berg 2009, Ryan et al 2009). Additionally, semi-structured interview allows the leisure to vary the wording and sequence of the questions (Power et al 2010), based on the direction of the interview, and to get additional questions (Corbetta 2003).

In addition, the researcher can probe new findings that arise during the interview that may not have been initially considered (Gray 2004). He or she has the ability to frame questions instinctively and develop a spontaneous communicative style during the interview that focuses on the topic (Patton 2002). Hand (2003) and Dearney (2005) discovered that the open nature of the questions encouraged depth and vitality', that helped fresh concepts to emerge. This raised the validity of the study and was beneficial in obtaining rich data for analysis.

In the context of this thesis, Roman Drugalev, the CEO of Incoming Finland Oy was interviewed using the semi-structure approach to get data about the travel agency's marketing strategy. The video interview was conducted using the social media application called WhatsApp on the 14th of November. The semi-structured interview session lasted approximately an hour and half.

In addition, the Interview Guide designed by the researcher was used to guide the direction of the interview, so that it does not go out of the focus of the research. See *Appendix 2 for Questionnaire Guide*.

3.5 Analysis of the data

Data gathered were grouped, analyzed and interpreted by extracting data from recorded response of the interviewed participant agent and transcribed them. Subsequently, the recorded audio excerpts of the interview were discussed against the various research questions which the thesis treated. This was done by extracting relevant quotations to back up presented data where it is deemed appropriate.

4 RESULTS

In this section of the thesis, the researcher reviews the results of the empirical study data by examining the collated research material from Rogers (2011), in addition to the interview data. The research presents the information which is crucial to the thesis topic by answering the overarching research questions:

1. To what extent is the travel agency Incoming Finland Oy using the 14 digital marketing to increase and improve their online visibility and improve competitiveness?
2. What improvements can the travel agency Incoming Finland Oy make to improve online visibility and competitiveness?

The following sections examine the 14 digital marketing strategies from the perspective of Incoming Finland Oy adoption and utilization of the strategies.

4.1 Website design

In a video interview on the 14th of November with the CEO of Incoming Finland Oy, he confirmed the company adopts overall good website design. Although the website tracks the number of audiences who land on the website, however, due to the recent COVID 19 pandemic and the fact that the website design was recently revamped, it is difficult to determine if the website design has actually improved traffic to the site.

On a scale of 1 to 10, he rated the current website design three, considering there is still a lot of work to be done in terms of improving the content on the Finnish website. Although the Spanish website has undergone significant improvement, it has not been easy to reflect this improvement on the 10 websites the company has.

4.1.2 Discussion

Since the company has 10 websites to work on, and the CEO contributes his time to the website design development it is obvious that the time is a valuable resource, and it is not possible for one person to allocate equal amount of time for every website. In order to

improve the website design, the company could allocate resources on hiring more professionals that would work on the website, consistently improving its design and performance or outsource the service to a third-party company that specialize in website development and design.

4.2 E-mail marketing

According to the CEO, the company seldom sends out email marketing. Sometimes once a month, maybe a couple of times, because it takes time for the content creation. And it's not possible to allocate all the time only for that. This is why it's not so often. And again- you need to create design, text and so on and it's not possible to do it for all the 10 websites at the same time, that's why it's so rarely.

In the past 6 months, the conversion rate for email marketing produces 5 percent positive response. However, he emphasized there is not enough time to create unique contents for the email marketing to avoid spamming the customers. The emails that are sent out are about a specific product only and nothing else.

Additionally, due to the pandemic the tourist market remains ambiguous: it sometimes seems the tourists are returning but still remains unclear since people are scared and worried about risking their health.

He rated the current adoption of email marketing as three out of ten. According to him, if it is done purposefully and consistently, perhaps not every week but at least every two weeks, then it is quite possibly the outcome would be different that is, higher conversion rate.

4.2.1 Discussion

In order to increase the positive response on the e-mail marketing the company could hire a marketer that would take up the responsibility of e-mail content creation and optimization. This would help the company to allocate time for consistent content creation as well as a schedule for sending out the emails. The company could try to use one of many automated e-mail marketing platforms, such as Mailchimp, where one can schedule campaigns and emails.

The e-mails could be sent out more often, for example once a week. Also, the same email content could be used for other marketing strategies such as in-app marketing or content marketing via mobile SEOs.

Additionally, besides sending out emails with only specific products the company could send out more personalized emails, such as a reminder before a trip about the destination and a check list for packing a bag. After the trip a satisfaction questioner can be sent, which would help the company to evaluate their customers satisfaction rate.

4.3 Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

The SEO works more or less well. The company uses the services of Google Analytics and it is seldomly checked. It is not such a big of interest, however, from time to time he types the keywords in Google to determine at what positions the company website is ranked. Usually, the search ranking is relatively satisfactory especially when it is ranked in the first position. More attention is given to the search ranking than on actual click through rate. More so, how much of the company's product was sold.

On adoption, utilization and result of SEO marketing, he ranked it between six and seven. However, it is worth mentioning that the due to the recent revamping of the website, the SEO is not properly set up. Unlike on the previous design and content where it was running perfectly. Of course, the Finnish site is properly indexed on the search engine, however, unlike the Spanish site that is well optimized the Finnish site needs some more work.

4.3.1 Discussion

As the CEO has pointed out the SEO marketing was up running and working well for Incoming Finland website before the revamping. Due to the staff constraints, the SEO marketing can be improved with the help of a hired hands who would set up the SEO for the Finnish website and consistently check the performance and the click through rate. The company could also use other search engine result pages besides Google, such as

Yahoo and Bing. However, this would drastically drive up the cost, hence would require a clarity of intent and purpose to guarantee optimal results before it is embarked upon.

4.4 Search Engine Marketing (SEM)

According to the CEO, the company previously ran a SEM quite often and, in some cases, the ads campaigns ran for half a year. The paid ads cost 5 euro per day and the result was relatively satisfactory.

On adoption, utilization and result of SEM, he ranked it seven or eight out of ten. According to him, the results were relative because they are seasonal. If the campaign is run during holiday season, they yield better results than other times.

4.4.1 Discussion

For SEM, the company could allocate resource for skilled marketer to set it up and oversee the channel. Using other platforms besides could also increase the click through rate to the Incoming Finland website.

A quick search of the company name on Google search engine returned a ranked list of websites the company is listed. It also includes a brief description of company.

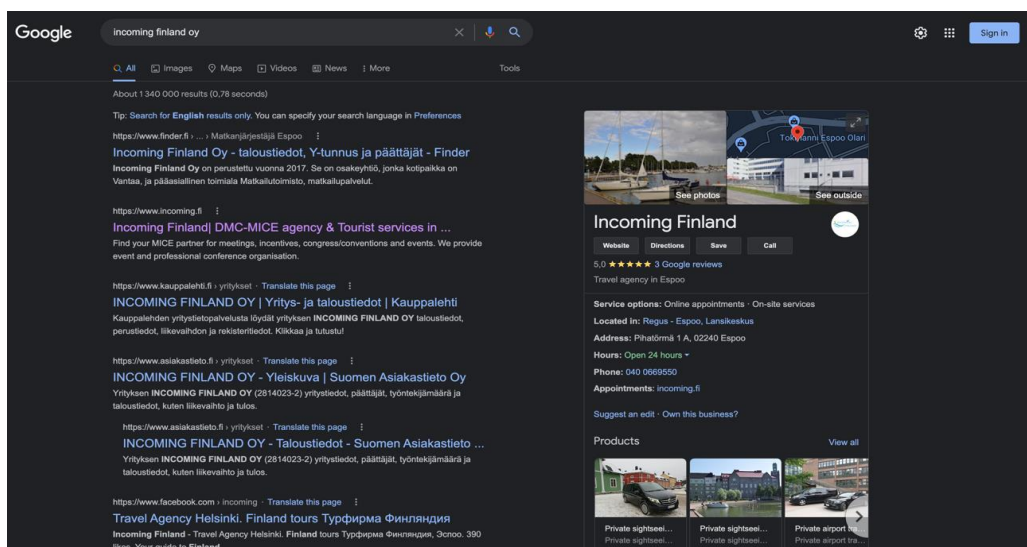


Figure 4: Google Search Result for Incoming Finland Oy. Google Search Result 2021.

4.5 Social Media Management and Marketing

At the moment, the company does not utilize the full potential of social media marketing. The company does not have a staff to manage social media marketing by creating picture, videos or content for their social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, YouTube.

On a scale of one to ten for adoption, utilization and result for social media management and marketing, he ranked it five out of ten. Presently, the website conversion is at maximum of 10%. For instance, for every 25,000 views, only about 500 to 2000 visits the website.

4.5.1 Discussion

To utilize the full potential of social media marketing the company could hire a marketer who would be responsible for the management of all the social media platforms that the company is using to market their brand and products. Nowadays, social media marketing is one of the most important marketing strategies and should be utilized to its fullest in creating engagement.

As noted by Piñeiro-Otero and Martínez-Rolán (2016), social media marketing has a viral digital marketing capacity that is far more cost effective, because of their connectivity, immediacy and the ability of contents to be shared on diverse online platforms, which facilitate the spread of digital marketing contents.

Thus, the lack of a dedicated state and time resource to manage the social media marketing can lead to low results in attracting new customers as well retaining the old ones. Also, aside the platforms that the company has already utilized an additional approach would be to explore viral platforms like YouTube or Tik Tok to improve their online presence and engagement and acquire new potential customers.

4.6 Content Marketing

Since the social media management and marketing also relies on contents, the content marketing adoption is same. Contents are often published weekly and seldom multiple times a week. The frequency depends on the nature of the content and like everything marketing, it takes time to develop the contents.

On a scale of one to ten for adoption, utilization and result for content marketing, he ranked it seven out of ten because this is one aspect of the company's marketing that requires consistent creation of interesting informative contents.

4.6.1 Discussion

Although the company is dedicated to creating interesting content, however, this has not been the case. This is one aspect the company can outshine its competitors by publishing contents that are beneficial to their audience. One recommendation would be to have consistency in publishing and reserved time for the content creation in order to create and publish content at least 2-3 times a week. This can be done with the help of a dedicated content writer or marketer, who would be responsible for the creation of the content as well as scheduled publishing.

4.7 Mobile Marketing

The company does not run mobile marketing campaigns. Although the websites are set up for mobile users, but that is as far as it goes. However, the CEO is convinced if used regularly could increase the customer base.

4.7.1 Discussion

The company could hire a professional to maximize the experience of mobile users by improving the website mobile version performance as well as setting up the SEO for it.

4.8 Advertising

The company create ads on Facebook from time to time. However, the frequency depends on the availability of content. He affirmed the digital marketing is better than simply posting on social media platforms, however, the current rate of once a month is insufficient.

Additionally, on a scale of one to ten for adoption, utilization and result for digital advertising, he expressed it is one aspect of the company's marketing campaign should require nothing less than five out of ten for positive result. However, it depends on several other factors like the quality of the content. A poorly developed digital ad would yield no result while a good digital ad would have a high conversion rate.

Notwithstanding, the current adoption, utilization and result is ranked at six out of ten.

4.8.1 Discussion

Facebook, Instagram and Tik Tok are at this time one of the most popular and effective platforms to advertise your business. Allocating time for creating appealing and interesting content with a help of a marketer, setting up a scheduled posting plan and a budget for paid adds will help the company to improve their digital presence. It is apparent though that besides the digital advertisement the company does not use other forms of advertising such as radio, newspapers, billboards and tv.

4.9 Leverage Reviews and Ratings

The company values the importance of reviews and ratings. For instance, when a complaint is made to a driver, it is immediately dealt with. The company also enjoyed very good reviews, and that is reflected on the Facebook page. It is worth noting the company seldom engage the audience via reviews and comments.

He affirmed that the goal of the company is to provide better service and often times this is reflected in the good reviews the company gets. It is important that the more the reviews and ratings the more the response and engagement from company to solve any problem and provide better service.

On a scale of one to ten for adoption, utilization and result for reviews and ratings, he ranked six or seven out of ten.

4.9.1 Discussion

In addition to the existing process, a schedule may be put in place to make the evaluations 1-3 times a week so that the company can acknowledge and respond as soon as possible and react to the feedback received by proceeding with necessary actions.

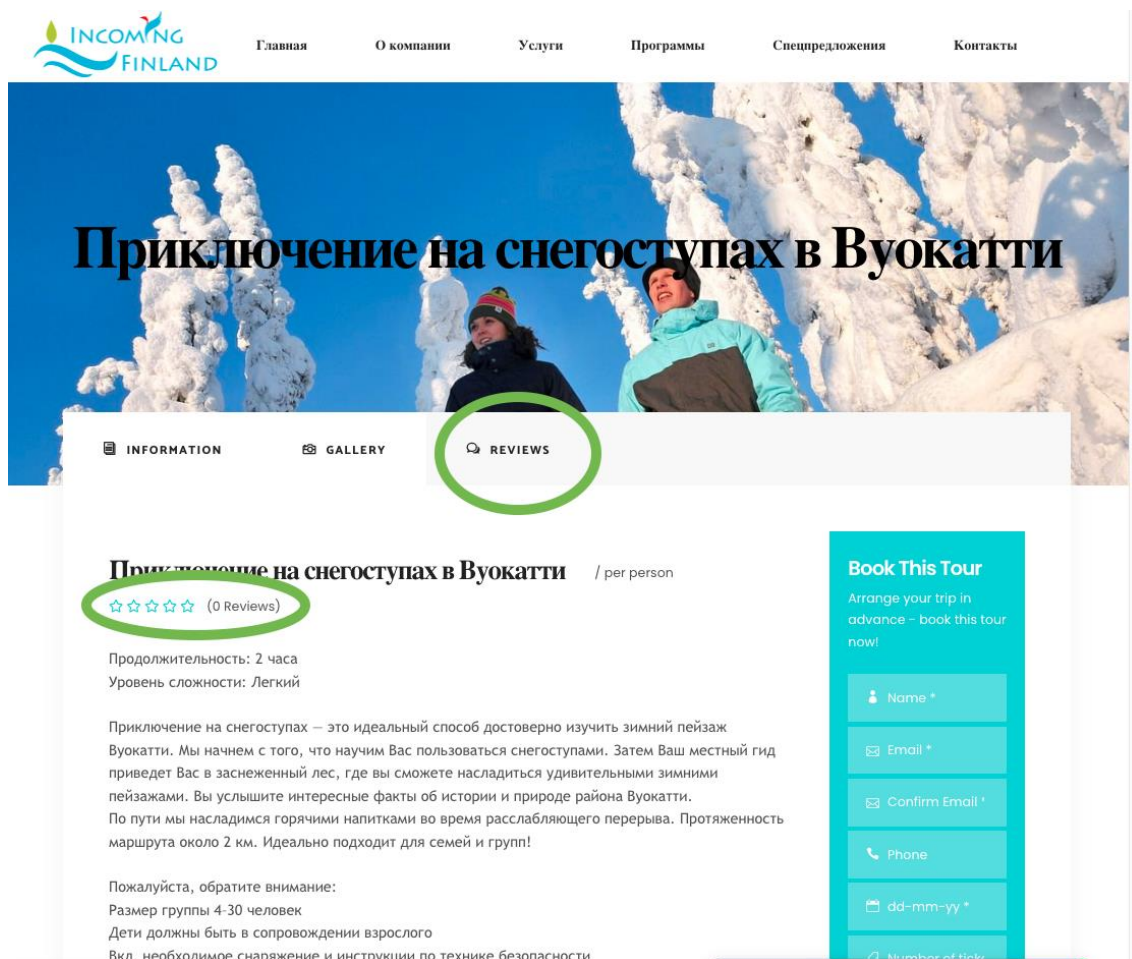


Figure 5 Product listing on Incoming Finland Oy. Incoming.fi 2021

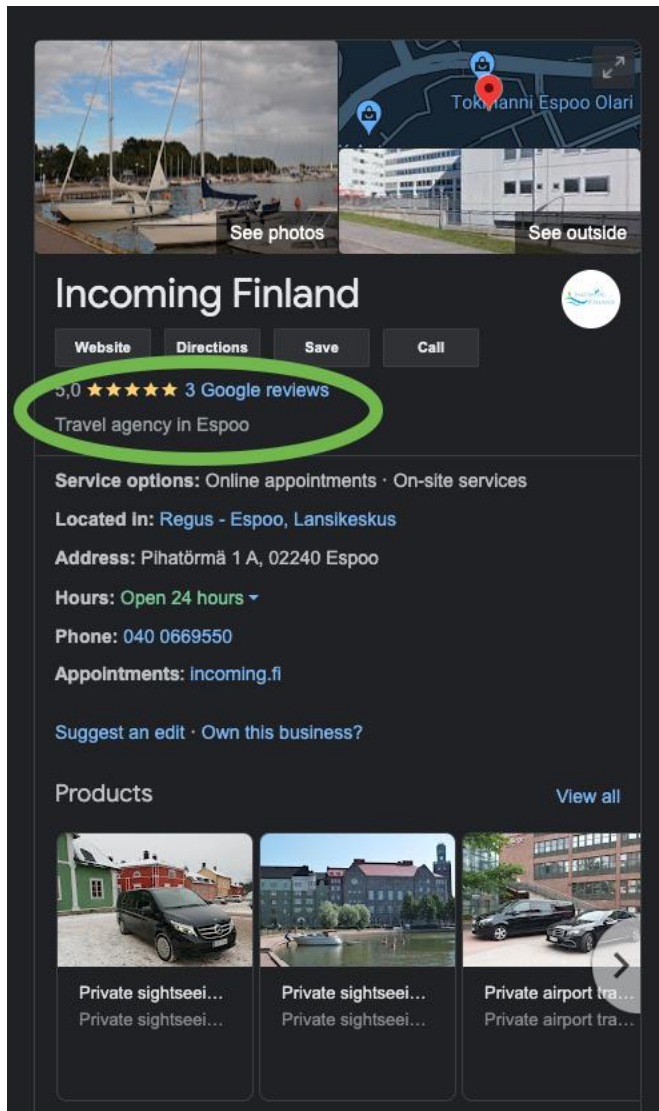


Figure 6 Google Search Engine list of Incoming Finland Oy. Google Search Result 2021

As shown in figure 5 and 6, having an actively growing review could encourage other customers to purchase the services of Incoming Finland Oy.

Using this interactivity approach, researchers and marketers have been able to conclude this feature of digital marketing is amongst the most compelling and essential features of digital marketing (Piñeiro-Otero and Martínez-Rolán, 2016).

4.10 Local directory registration and business listings

The company is listed on the local directory and business listings. Particularly, it is listed on TripAdvisor. However, it is not so much monitored but whenever needed it is kept up-

to-date. He noted that TripAdvisor has had new feature additions to the platform. The new feature functions like a management system, but he has not had time to understand how it works yet.

The expectation for the business listing is unclear. As previously noted, the business is only just getting back on track after the pandemic lockdowns and restrictions and only just starting to move slowly. According to him, it not fully moving and as such no expected result in sight.

On a scale of one to ten for adoption, utilization and result for local directory and business listings before the pandemic is ranked six out of ten. Two months before the pandemic, sales went up and tours within Helsinki and Tallinn tours and transfers due to the business listings. He would have ranked business listings marketing channel higher than six but TripAdvisor charges are quite high: taking 22 to 25 percent of commission on every sale.

4.10.1 Discussion

Apparently, the TripAdvisor's commission rate is a bit of concern, which may be the other reason besides the pandemic that the platform is not fully utilized and set up for the business at the moment. In this case the company can explore other platforms with less commission charges. Platforms such as Expedia or other business registry platforms that would be of benefit to the agency. In addition to that, having an inhouse marketer to oversee the responsibility of keeping the information up to date by consistently updating the account in accordance with any changes that the company made to their business practices could significantly impact on the agency's visibility.

4.11 YouTube Marketing

The company is only just starting to use YouTube marketing. It is seldom used and no YouTube viewer has used the company service yet. On a scale of one to ten for adoption, utilization and result for YouTube marketing, he ranked it one out of ten.

4.11.1 Discussion

The company can set up a budget and create a campaign on YouTube and see how well that works for them. A designated employee can run the campaign and check the results and conversion rate both on YouTube and Google video partners.

Piñero-Otero and Martínez-Rolán (2016) demonstrated that when the that visual communication appeals to human's visual thinking and thought processing patterns. YouTube marketing represents an effective and engaging way of reaching larger audiences and consequently result in greater engagement and possibly purchase of product or service (Piñero-Otero and Martínez-Rolán, 2016).

4.12 Application marketing

The company has not ventured into application marketing channel. Therefore, has no ratings for the strategy. However, the CEO is convinced it would be a nice addition but was skeptical there is no time for that at the moment.

4.12.1 Discussion

The company can hire a developer to help them create and launch an app for their business. The services and products on the app should be then consistently updated by a designated employee so that the information and services presented on the app would correspond to the information provided on the company's webpage. The app would help the customers to access, search, book and buy services easily and fast regardless of their location at that time.

4.13 Pay-Per-Click (PPC) Marketing

For PPC, the company currently runs a Facebook and Instagram campaign for Pay Per View a variation of the PPC.

On a scale of one to ten for adoption, utilization and result for PPC marketing, he ranked it six out of ten.

4.13.1 Discussion

It is apparent that the company using PPC marketing strategy on several platforms such as Google, Facebook and Instagram. In favor of utilizing the whole potential of the strategy it is wise to set up a budget for all of the platforms and hire a marketer, who would manage the budget and run the campaigns. As well as consistently check the results, adjust the demographics, location and interests, and the bets, depending on the campaign in question. Also, the company can try to run their ads on YouTube and TikTok as well, which can help to improve the company's online presence and increase ROI. However, in order to understand what works for the company better in terms of conversion and ROI, all of the platforms above should be taken into account, tested and reviewed.

4.14 Online Reputation Engagement Management

The company takes online reputation engagement quite seriously. As with ratings and reviews, the response to negative feedback or comments means the company reacts ASAP. The expectation is for the company to be presented to the audience as a reliable travel agency and appealing in the eyes of the customer. And the agency's current reputation that has been built over time is good from the CEO's point of view.

On a scale of one to ten for adoption, utilization and result for online reputation engagement management, he ranked it seven.

4.14.1 Discussion

In chapter 1 of the literature review, Piñeiro-Otero and Martínez-Rolán (2016) identifies branding as a digital marketing tool that offer immense opportunities to create and sustain brand image over the Internet. Incoming Finland Oy does its best to maintain a good reputation online. As it has been mentioned previously in "Reviews and Ratings" section the CEO tries his best to react to the reviews and comments as fast as possible and solve

the any problems in question. It's also beneficial for the company, that it operates in several languages, such as Finnish, English and Russian.

However, it might be wise for the company to reduce the amount of their websites to 2-3 and combine their services on some of the websites as well as social media pages. This will reduce the amount of resources used to monitor all of the websites and platforms and will allow the company to have an easier access to communication and "listening" to every and each customer. The company can designate these responsibilities to a marketer, who would monitor and sustain the company's reputation online.

4.15 Digital Marketing Plan

However, despite all of the discussions and interview response raised on 14 digital marketing strategies in the previous sections, for travel agencies to reap from the benefits and advantages of these strategies, there is a need to determine that their online presence and digital marketing strategy follow a carefully thought-out plan, with practical and achievable goals that are in agreement and align with the agency's brand or image.

In reviewing the literature, Rogers (2012) in his analysis opined that every company ought to create a model or framework for its digital marketing campaign to achieve success at a time where every other company is implementing digital marketing campaigns.

Using the model by Rogers (2012) as the basis for designing a digital marketing, the 14 digital marketing strategies would serve as a form of guideline for travel agencies to guide them through the various processes of their digital marketing.

In his book: *The Network Is Your Customer*, Rogers (2011) presented five core strategies for customer networks that can be used by businesses and organizations of all sectors and sizes to build more effective relationships with customers: access, engage, customize, connect, and collaborate. According to him, these strategies can help to drive key business objectives as product differentiation, sales efficiency, build brand, reduced costs, improve customer loyalty, and innovation capacity (Rogers, 2011).

The *Five Core Strategies* model proposed by Rogers (2011) include:

1. Access
2. Engage
3. Customize
4. Connect
5. Collaborate

Using Rogers (2011) core strategies, the 14 digital marketing strategies can be subdivided along this core strategies as follow:

ACCESS — the travel agency must be faster in delivering service, be easily accessible, be everywhere, and always reachable to the customers. The 14 digital marketing strategies that helps to achieve this feat are the following:

- Website design
- Search Engine Optimization (SEO)
- Search Engine Marketing (SEM)
- Social Media Management and Marketing
- Content Marketing
- Mobile Marketing
- Leverage Reviews and Ratings
- Local directory registration and business listings
- YouTube Marketing
- Application marketing
- Online Reputation Engagement Management

ENGAGE — the travel agency must be a source of valued content. The 14 digital marketing strategies that helps to achieve this are the following:

- Website design
- E-mail marketing
- Social Media Management and Marketing
- Content Marketing

- Mobile Marketing
- Advertising
- Leverage Reviews and Ratings
- Local directory registration and business listings
- YouTube Marketing
- Application marketing
- Online Reputation Engagement Management

CUSTOMIZE — make the product offering adaptable to the customer's needs. The 14 digital marketing strategies that helps to achieve this feat are the following:

- Website design
- E-mail marketing
- Search Engine Marketing (SEM)
- Social Media Management and Marketing
- Content Marketing
- Mobile Marketing
- Advertising
- YouTube Marketing
- Application marketing
- Online Reputation Engagement Management

CONNECT—become a part of your customers' conversations. The 14 digital marketing strategies that helps to achieve this feat are the following:

- Website design
- E-mail marketing
- Search Engine Optimization (SEO)
- Search Engine Marketing (SEM)
- Social Media Management and Marketing
- Content Marketing
- Mobile Marketing

- Advertising
- Leverage Reviews and Ratings
- Local directory registration and business listings
- YouTube Marketing
- Application marketing
- Pay-Per-Click (PPC) marketing
- Online Reputation Engagement Management

COLLABORATE—involve your customers at every stage of your enterprise. The 14 digital marketing strategies that helps to achieve this feat are the following:

- Website design
- Social Media Management and Marketing
- Leverage Reviews and Ratings
- Local directory registration and business listings
- YouTube Marketing
- Application marketing
- Pay-Per-Click (PPC) marketing
- Online Reputation Engagement Management

It is important to bear in mind that Rogers (2011) builds his model around the behaviors and needs of customer networks. This is in contrast to models that use specific advertising communication tools or technologies. Other factors to keep in mind when implementing the digital marketing plan are the following: due to the evolving digital landscape, the marketing plan must always evolve to meet the marketing realities, resource such as human resource and financial resource are limited and finally the timing of the marketing campaign must align with trends.

CONCLUSION

This thesis set out to explore, in what capacity, is the travel agency Incoming Finland Oy using the 14 digital marketing strategies to improve the agency's online visibility and improve competitiveness. In addition, the purpose of the current study was also to design digital marketing plan as a blueprint digital marketing plan for travel agencies looking to increase their customer base and improve sales. The most obvious finding to emerge from this study is that in the context of the Incoming Finland Oy, allocating resource for marketing can substantially increase sales and brand visibility.

Although, for a successful digital marketing strategy, it is important to set clear objectives that would be monitored across the employed platforms to determine their performance. Additionally, it is crucial to understand the specific features of the marketing channels used. Tourism agencies essentially have to start considering using channels like YouTube, TikTok and other viral platforms within their marketing mix. However, like any other social media marketing, travel agency advertisers must understand that today's tourists do not want to feel they are being sold something. Tourists are increasingly skeptical about real and staged authenticity, and marketing campaigns that does not seem real would have an adverse effect on the audience.

The findings of this thesis have many valuable implications for digital marketing practice. First, it provides advertising managers and marketers a list of strategies to choose from. Second, it outlines the importance of individual strategies through the literature review. In this way, the marketer can explore the different channels and use this thesis as a basis for further research. Ensuring appropriate allocation of resources, continuous monitoring and evaluation of the 14 digital marketing plan should be a priority for any travel agency seeking to improve sales and grow the business.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1. INTERVIEW REQUEST

To: roman@incoming.fi

From: daksja@hotmail.com

SUBJECT: Interview Request Letter

Dear Roman Drugalev,

I am writing to request for an interview with you to obtain some relevant information regarding the latest digital marketing strategy adopted by Incoming Finland Oy.

I am a Final year International Business student at the prestigious Arcada University of Applied Science majoring in Marketing. I am required to submit a paper on Digital Marketing Plan for my graduation.

I interned at your firm in Summer 2019 in the Marketing department, and I was very impressed with the work your company is doing to assist international travelers with their transfers and tours. It would be my honor if you can share some marketing insight with me to assist me in my paper. The information which you provide me shall be used in the strictest confidence.

I look forward to hearing positively from you soon.

Thanking you in advance.

Yours sincerely,

Darja Suskova,
BA
Phone: +358 452338655
Student No. 20254

Supervisor: Mikael Forsström,
Contact Details: +358 xxxxxx

APPENDIX 2. QUESTIONNAIRE GUIDE

For each of the 14 marketing strategies, the below questions were asked.

- a) Do you use it? (Scale from 1 to 10)
- b) How often it is used? (Scale from 1 to 10)
- c) The expected results? (Scale from 1 to 10)
- d) Actual results? (Scale from 1 to 10)
- e) Practicality (an example of a use case). Scale from 1 to 10.

2) Website design

- a) How often? How often is it updated, and the information is added?
 - i) High-quality (HD) images, infographics, and videos
 - ii) Short insights and highlights of the attractions
 - iii) Maps and guides
 - iv) Accommodation's listings (hotel, resorts, etc.)
 - v) Information about Travel and transport (Airport, Public transport, cabs)
 - vi) Blogs and Articles (travel tips, Packages, and local dialect)
- b) Expected results? Contact through the website forms-

3) E-mail marketing

- a) How often? What type of content is sent out? Newsletters? Emails (what type of emails)? What platforms are used?

4) Search Engine Optimization (SEO) Organic Search

- a) Do you use it? Which platforms do you use? Google Ads? Bing?

5) Search Engine Marketing (SEM) Paid

- a) How often? Which platforms do you use? Google Ads? Bing? Google Search Network (websites owned by Google) or Google Display Network (YouTube, Gmail?)

6) Social Media Management

- a) How often? Which platforms? Pages, photos, articles, hashtags?

7) Content Marketing

- a) How often? All social media platforms. Customer reviews and stories?

8) Mobile Marketing

9) Digital Advertising

- a) How often? Facebook ads? LinkedIn? Twitter?

10) Leverage Reviews and Ratings

- a) How often? Check that the review is good, and ratings are high?

Local directory registration and business listings

- b) How often? TripAdvisor?

11) YouTube Marketing

12) Application Marketing

13) PPC Marketing

14) Online Reputation Engagement Management

If you used the strategies, that you do not use at the moment, do you think they would:

Improve your digital visibility/online presence?

Increase the customer base?

Give return on investment?