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HOW TO BUILD A LOYAL AND PROFITABLE CUSTOMER BASE – SERVICE MARKETING AND CRM IN A PROFESSIONAL SERVICE FIRM

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KUINKA LUODA LOJAALI JA TUOTTAVA ASIAKASKUNTA – PALVELUIDEN MARKKINOINTI JA ASIAKKUUSSUHTEIDEN HALLINTA ASIANTUNTIJAYRITYKSESSÄ.

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Tämän opinnäytetyön tarkoituksena oli ratkaista miten nuori asianajopalveluita tarjoava asiantuntijayritys voisi rakentaa lojaalin ja tuottoisan asiakaskunnan parantamalla yrityksen markkinointiviestintää, palveluiden markkinointia sekä asiakkuussuhteiden hallintaa. Tässä työssä tutkitaan, että millaisia toimenpiteitä kohdeyrityksen tulisi hyödyntää parantaakseen yrityksen asiakaspalvelua ja asiakkuussuhteiden hallintaa, siten että sen olisi mahdollista tarjota huippuosaamistaan asiakkailleen. Juuri tällaisten toimien avulla yrityksen on mahdollista saavuttaa lojaali ja tyytyväinen asiakaskunta, jonka myötä yritys pystyy kasvattamaan myyntiään ja tekemään yrityksen toiminnasta tuottoisampaa.

Kohdeyritys sekä neljä sen nykyistä ja neljä potentiaalista yritysasiakasta haastateltiin tätä opinnäytetyötä varten, tarkoituksena selvittää miten kohdeyrityksen missio ja visio ovat kohdanneet asiakkaiden kokemukset, olettamukset sekä havainnot koskien yrityksen tarjoamien palvelujen laatua. Tehdyn tutkimuksen perusteella voidaan todeta, että nykyiset asiakkaat ovat olleet pääsääntöisesti tyytyväisiä kohdeyrityksen tarjoamiin palveluihin, ja aikovat käyttää kohdeyrityksen palveluja myös tulevaisuudessakin. Potentiaaliset asiakkaat, yhtä lukuun ottamatta, jolle kohdeyritys ei ollut entuudestaan tuttu, sanoivat, että he ovat kuulleet pelkkää hyvää kohdeyrityksestä ja he olisivat tarvittaessa valmiita käyttämään kohdeyrityksen palveluja.

Tämän opinnäytetyön lopputulos osoittaa sen, että ei ole olemassa liian hyvää asiakaspalvelua eikä yrityksen toimintaa voida liiaksi asti kehittää, sillä aina on varaa parantaa ja jokaisen yrityksen tulisi pyrkiä jatkuvasti kehittämään omaa toimintaansa kohti tyytyväistä asiakaskuntaa ja menestyvää liiketoimintaa.

HOW TO BUILD A LOYAL AND PROFITABLE CUSTOMER BASE – SERVICE MARKETING AND CRM IN A PROFESSIONAL SERVICE FIRM

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The purpose of this thesis was to solve how a young professional service firm that offers legal services, could build a loyal and profitable customer base by improving its marketing communications, service marketing and customer relationship management. This thesis studies what procedures the case company should implement to improve its customer service and customer relationship management, so that it could offer its customers service excellence, and through these actions get loyal and satisfied customers, and also to be able to increase its sales and make the business more profitable.

The case company and four of the existing and four of the potential business clients were interviewed for this thesis, intention to find out how the company owner's mission and vision meets the customers' experiences, assumptions and perceptions related to the quality of the services. As results of the research, the existing clients have been satisfied with the services offered by the case company, and they are intending to continue to use the case company's services also in the future. The potential clients, except for one that was not familiar with the case company, said that they have heard only good things about the case company and they would be ready to use case company's services if needed.

Conclusion of this thesis show that offering the customers service excellence, and developing the company's operations to the limit, cannot ever be done too well, and there is always room for improvement and every company should strive for a better customer service, and try to develop the company operations towards satisfied customer base and successful ways of doing business.

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1 INTRODUCTION

This thesis introduces how to increase customer satisfaction in the case company and how the customer relationship management could be implemented in any professional service firm. Nowadays the companies need to compete for the customers, because there are more and more service providers in the markets. Marketing communication and customer relationship management strategies help the companies to pay attention to the right components of the services.

The case company is a young professional law firm that offers legal and juridical services. The company is located in the southern part of Finland and it has approximately 75 clients at the moment, of which 8 are business clients. The case company's functions have expanded remarkably during the last two years, and at the moment the company is going through a significant brand building process. This thesis will study the experiences of the existing clients and the expectations of the potential clients relating to the service quality of the case company or professional service firms in general. At the moment I am working in the case company and I have had a chance to see how the company has developed during the last nine months, and what kind of growth opportunities the company has. In this thesis I can implement the knowledge I have gained during my studies in Satakunta University of Applied Sciences and this way offer valuable information for the case company.

This thesis will have an objective approach towards the case company and all the subjects covered in the theory part can be implemented in any professional firm that offers services for their clients, either in Finland or internationally. In the beginning of this thesis is explained the purpose of this study, research questions and the conceptual framework. Then in the theory part the bigger subjects studied in this work are marketing communications, marketing of services and customer relationship management. In the empirical part of this study is analyzed the interview results of the case company, potential clients and the existing clients. The structured interviews are based on Servqual model, which is a useful tool when measuring the service quality. Finally there is the summary and conclusions and my recommendations for the case company based on the theory and the research.

PURPOSE OF THE THESIS AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

1.1 Purpose of Thesis

Purpose of this thesis is to help professional service firm that offers law services, to build and develop its customer relationship management (CRM) and marketing communications and management. CRM is needed to improve practical service processes, and to help the company keep its clients delighted and serve them so that their individual needs are taken into consideration.

This study shows how beneficial the existing clients have found the services and what wishes the potential clients have related to the services that the case company has to offer.

The case company will benefit from this project in many ways, including loyal, long lasting and profitable customer relationships. This thesis will study what is required to achieve these relationships. Also, the business clients will be interviewed using the structured interview sheet. This way the case company will have valuable information and customer feedback that it can learn from.

1.2 Research Problem and Questions

The main research problem of this thesis is: How can the professional service firm build loyal and profitable customer base and how can it increase customer satisfaction through its actions?

Research questions for this thesis are:

- How the case company could improve its customer service and offer service excellence to its clients?

- What is customer relationship management (CRM) and what needs to be considered, when implementing CRM in a professional service firm?

- What advantages CRM gives to the professional service firm and how the company can add value for its clients, maintain customer relationships and have an advantage over competitors?

- What do the existing clients find useful and have they been pleased of the services provided by the case company?

- Recognizing the need for service: What opportunities do the potential clients see with the case company and what makes the customers make their buying decisions?

1.3 Conceptual Framework

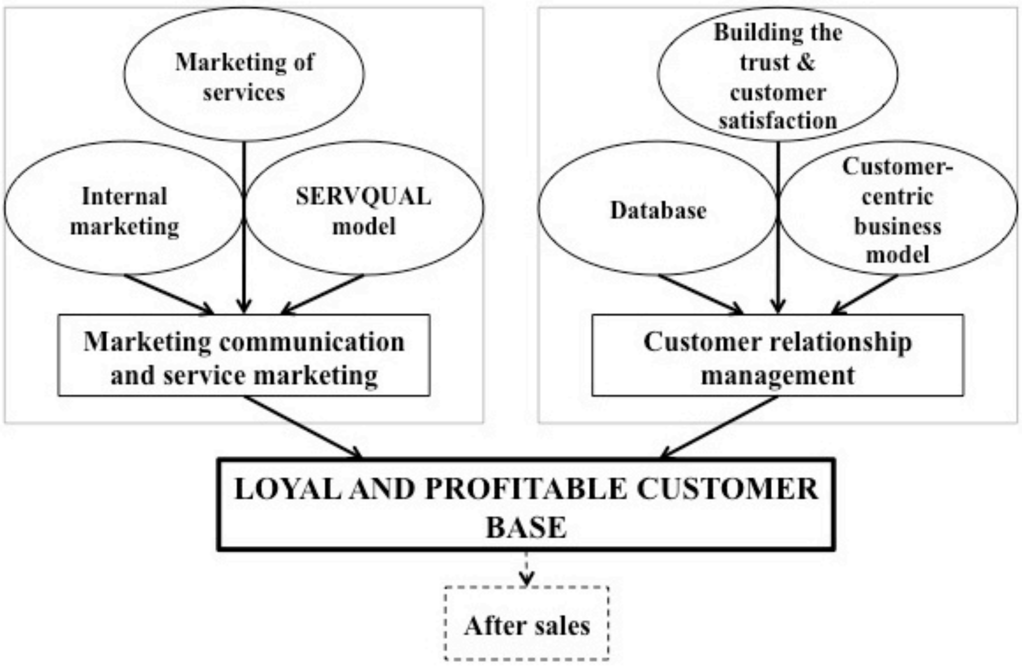

Figure 1: Conceptual framework: Steps towards the Loyal and Profitable Customer Base.

This conceptual framework explains why each part of this thesis is studied and how the theories link to each other. The theory part of this thesis explains the meaning of every part of the conceptual framework. Shortly presented the headlines in the conceptual framework are: Internal marketing – Doing business always starts inside of the company. The company should take care of the internal marketing first, to make sure that the employees of the company have clear vision and knowledge of the business idea. After this they can start to plan their marketing of services and evaluate how it has been implemented through the Servqual model and the 5 dimensions of service quality. These three parts together build the section of marketing communication and service marketing.

The bigger section in the theory part of this thesis is the customer relationship management chapter that tells more about the benefits of using the database, how to build a customer-centric business model and finally how to build trust and increase customer satisfaction. These two sections together answer the research problem – How can the professional service firm build loyal and profitable customer base, and how it can increase customer satisfaction via its actions? After the issues handled in the theory part are done and the clients have become more loyal and profitable for the business, the case company should solicit feedback for customer satisfaction and overall quality of service.

2 MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS AND SERVICE MARKETING

2.1 Marketing Communications

When doing business the main goal is to have pleased, loyal and profitable customer relationships. Customers are necessary to all of the businesses in the world and they build the foundation for any successful transactions made. Marketing communication between the company and the customer defines how well the company knows what it is doing, which leads the way to success. (Isohookana 2007, 35.)

Traditional marketing communications can be divided into different sectors; personal selling and customer service, advertising, promotion, direct marketing and informational marketing (Isohookana 2007, 132). Through marketing communications the company interacts with its various audiences. Marketing communications is intended to satisfy the public need for information. It supports the sales of products and services and customer relationship management, and makes the products and services desirable and visible. With marketing communication the company is connected to potential clients and existing customers as well as distribution and purchase related information. (Isohookana 2007, 16.)

2.1.1 Internal Marketing

Before doing any marketing, it is very important to take care of internal marketing, to make sure that every employee has a good grasp and idea what the company wants to promote and for who it is selling its services. The information flow inside the company needs to be effective and continuous. The interactions between employees and management are vital in terms of how well the company is capable of keeping their head above water. The mission of internal communications is to bind all the actions together as a functional unit. When internal marketing is done well, it commits and motivates the staff to work toward the company's objectives. Internal and external communications are both used to create and redeem promises. (Isohookana 2007, 16-17.)

Internal marketing should be an ongoing process inside of every company. This gives leaders the opportunity to align, motivate, and empower their employees at all functions and levels, and consistently encourage the employees to deliver a positive customer experience (Clow & Baack 2010, 261). The employer should guarantee development opportunities among the projects, and offer the employees comfortably challenging work assignments (Rossi 2012, 112).

Internal marketing suits well for both: Companies that sell products and for companies that offer services. Customer service always starts with effective listening, trying to solve their problem, or find an answer to their question by providing suggestions about how a company's products or services could benefit them. To make these interactions between customer and employee work, internal marketing is necessary.

“Successful interactions with customers result from well-established lines of communication.” (Clow & Baack 2010, 261-262.)

Some traditional channels used for internal marketing and communications are: in-person conversations, meetings, memos, letters, company manuals or handbooks, bulletin boards and newsletters. Nowadays more common communication channels are cell-phones, e-mails, intranet or even teleconference calls for example via Skype. (Clow & Baack 2010, 262.) However the most effective strategic forms of communication are face-to-face conversations, listening and active participation. By using these three ways of communication, the company can ensure that the information is shared and the message has reached the other party, and more likely the message is understood correctly. Face-to-face conversations reduces misunderstandings, offers opportunity to give immediate feedback and provides chance to ask questions and receive answers right away, with a fast tempo. Through the participation management can get proposals and new ideas from the employees, which also raises the level of commitment among the employees. (Rossi 2012, 121-126.)

Consumers compare products and services to one another. Easy way to gain an edge to the company’s competitors is to invest in the customer service. Employees working with satisfied, happy and loyal customers are more likely to be happier and have higher levels of job satisfaction. They also have increased productivity and they are less likely to quit or to be fired from their jobs. Clow and Baack show in their book that a company that has satisfied and loyal customers tends to attract better and committed employees. (Clow & Baack 2010, 269.)

Internal marketing’s mission is to engage employees and motivate them, and to create positive climate inside of the company. Employees should be encouraged to have open and sincere conversations, where for example the management really listens to them and pays attention for their comments and suggestions. At the same time the management can reinforce the company’s vision and mission, and help the employees adapt the corporate culture. Last but not least, if management provides rewards and recognition to its employees, it gives a good motivation boost to everybody. Through these actions it is easier for the company to move towards the customer-centric culture. (Clow & Baack 2010, 269.)

2.1.2 Buyer Behaviour

For understanding the consumer's behaviour the management needs to be aware of these three questions: what influences buyer behaviour in their market, who influences buying decisions and third, how do buyers make decisions. There are four different factors that influence what people will buy. These are as follows:

- *Cultural factors.* Things that motivate people to purchase are for example their culture, nationality, religion, race, location and social class. For example people living in the big cities desire different things, than the people living in the rural areas.
- *Social Factors.* The social groups where one interacts and the surrounding people make us follow trends and desire the feeling of belonging and fitting in. This can dramatically affect buying decisions. Peer pressure brings conformity and acceptance brings a sense of belonging. Also, role and status in society can control the buying behaviour.
- *Personal factors.* We all are individuals, which means we all have different taste, personality and lifestyle. Person's age, gender, income and occupation are personal factors too. The consumers who can afford expensive goods or services, prefer to buy them, unlike consumers with little money consume what they can afford based on what is necessary for them to survive.
- *Psychological factors.* Psychological factors, like hunger and thirst need to be satisfied before consumers can make any other decisions considering other needs. Other psychological needs are safety, social needs, esteem and self-actualization. (Doyle 2002, 245-246.)

The four social factors listed above, are the most significant influencers on the consumer's perceptions, preferences and buying behaviour. The second best influencer in customer behaviour is external communications such as advertising and commercials. (Doyle 2002, 247.)

In this thesis customer behaviour is mainly approached through psychological factors, because juridical services are used only if necessary and usually in the customer's case it is related to either his or hers income, economical safety, self-confidence and person's individual values that are proved to be either right or wrong by the law.

2.1.3 Marketing of Services

Services are not easy to define because they cannot be seen, touched, tasted or smelled. They are an experience or process. This makes it harder for the consumer to evaluate the quality of the service, because there are hardly any tangible characteristics for the client to evaluate the quality of the services. After the experienced service customers can assess the quality, efficiency and the courtesy of the received service. (Doyle 2002, 342.)

Before doing any external marketing, the company needs to identify its target market and audience. The company's management needs to show the directions where they want the company to go and with whom they desire to do business with. After they have decided the target audience, researched what their customers need and want, and have developed their products or services to the limit, they can start marketing their goods or services. Moreover, the company has to always be one step ahead of the competition. (Doyle 2002, 37.)

The more competition there is in a certain field of business, the more influence from the companies is needed for building the vision in the customers' minds. Marketing communication aims to add recognition of the service and pass that recognition through to sales. Today, long-term customer relationships are considered really important and as an asset. By using marketing communications the company can build, maintain and strengthen relationships with its customers; firms are always motivated and ready to sell and promote their services simultaneously while doing marketing. (Isohookana 2007, 62-63.)

In the service sector, marketing has to be consistent and create a kind of uniformity of the customer service interactions. This means that all the duties made in the company need to follow the same pattern every time, so that the customer knows he or she will always receive a certain level of quality and expect minimum performance standards. (Gilmore 2003, 163.) Image of the company is also built through websites, business cards, marketing materials and employee appearance.

2.1.4 After Sales

After sales is an important part of customer service. A well done after sales is what makes a supplier stand out from the competition and often more important than the service or price. One way to do after sales is to call the customer and ask them if everything is okay. If the customer confirms, they will be happy about the effort made with an after sales call. If the customer has a problem, the company can offer its help to solve the problem and make the customer delighted. (Website of The Marketing Donut 2013.)

Sometimes things go inevitably wrong. The way companies handle problems usually determines if clients are going to stay with the company, and keep doing business with the firm or end up as a lost opportunity. Companies should give value to the feedback that they receive, both negative and positive, because feedback gives valuable information to the company and an opportunity to improve its customer service. When customers complain, the company should apologize and thank them for the feedback. Right after this, the company should respond quickly to the client, so that client would not feel dissatisfied for long. Good service for the customers is to give them a follow up call or a letter of apology after a complaint and tell them what efforts the company has made to correct the unpleasant situation or mistakes. (Website of The Marketing Donut 2013.)

A good way for a company to collect feedback from its customers, is a customer satisfaction survey that is sent to the clients together for example with a sticker that says ‘we love feedback.’ Through this method, the clients can be encouraged to send valuable feedback to the company and this should be done every time a case is closed. Innovative approaches in communication is recommended because the use of imagination and creativity in either the internal or external communication, the more positive it becomes for employees to work or clients to receive services. (Rossi 2012, 119.)

2.2 Servqual Model

Servqual model is used for diagnosing the difficulties of the service quality and for finding the sources of potential improvements and opportunities of the services. In 1985, three marketing researchers Zeithaml, Parasuraman and Berry developed the Servqual model that is also known as the GAP-model. The model is based on these assumptions:

- "Quality and customer satisfaction is a comparison between the delivery that customers expect to receive and performance they perceive they receive. Satisfaction depends on the degree to which the two match.
- Customers find service quality more difficult to evaluate than product quality because they have few tangible clues so they must rely on other evidence of the quality they are likely to receive.
- Quality evaluation by buyers depends on outcomes and processes. Quality can be influenced by technical outcomes and functional or service outcomes. It can also be influenced by physical aspects of the service and by company image as much as by the interactions with service staff." (Young 2011, 181-184).

In addition to the GAP-model, Zeithaml, Parasuraman and Berry also developed the five dimensions of services that indicate what the consumers find important when they evaluate the service quality. If the company is able to comply with these dimensions, it will more likely earn the loyalty of the customer, because according to what is valuable to the customers, they have received the service excellence. (Arlen 2008.)

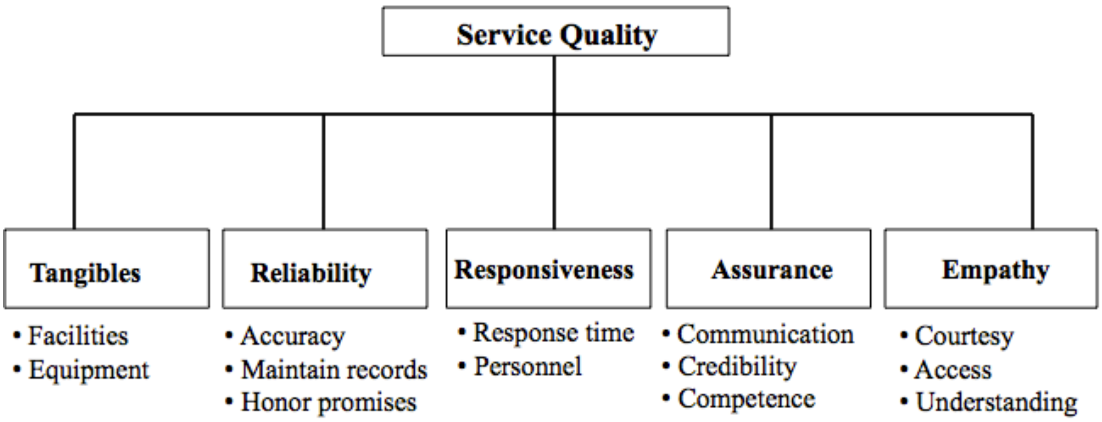

Figure 2: Servqual's five dimensions (Emerald Insight Staff 2003, 19).

As showed in the figure 2., the five dimensions are tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy.

- *Tangibles* mean the physical facilities, equipment, personnel and communication materials – the things you are able to see, for example how clean is the office or how the employees dress.
- *Reliability* means that the company does what it has promised dependably, on time, and does not give false hopes. Responsiveness makes the quality assessment.
- *Responsiveness* is that the firm desires to help its clients promptly and offer them services even in short notice.
- *Assurance* means the knowledge and politeness reflects through the company's employees' actions. It also means their ability to deliver trust and confidence to the clients. Here a company can show its expertise and competencies. Let the customers know how good you are in what you are doing.
- *Empathy* means the attention and the care that the customers receive from the company. Every customer should be treated specially and individually. The service provided is as valuable as the customer. (Arlen 2008.)

All of the dimensions above mentioned are important to a company that offers services, but not all of them are equally important. The Company needs to decide what dimensions it wants to emphasize. Anyhow, they need to pay attention to all of these 5 dimensions to make their clients satisfied. (Arlen 2008.)

2.3 Conceptual Model of Service Quality – The Gaps

While the competition between companies is increasing, companies need to stand out from the crowd by offering something better, more unique and make the customers feel like they have a need for the services that the company has to offer. When the company succeeds in this field it will obtain a competitive advantage over its competitors. As mentioned earlier in the Internal marketing part, if you want to keep your customers happy, start with your employees. A company's internal relationships will have a direct or indirect impact upon customer relationships (Payne, Christopher, Clark & Peck 1999, 184). "The success of a relationship marketing strategy will ultimately hinge upon the way in which the external and internal marketing programmes are aligned" (Payne et al. 1999, 9).

The GAP model is used for measuring service performance. This is done by evaluating the customers' perceptions to the customers' expectations. The gaps occur when these two do not meet. (Payne et al. 1999, 184.)

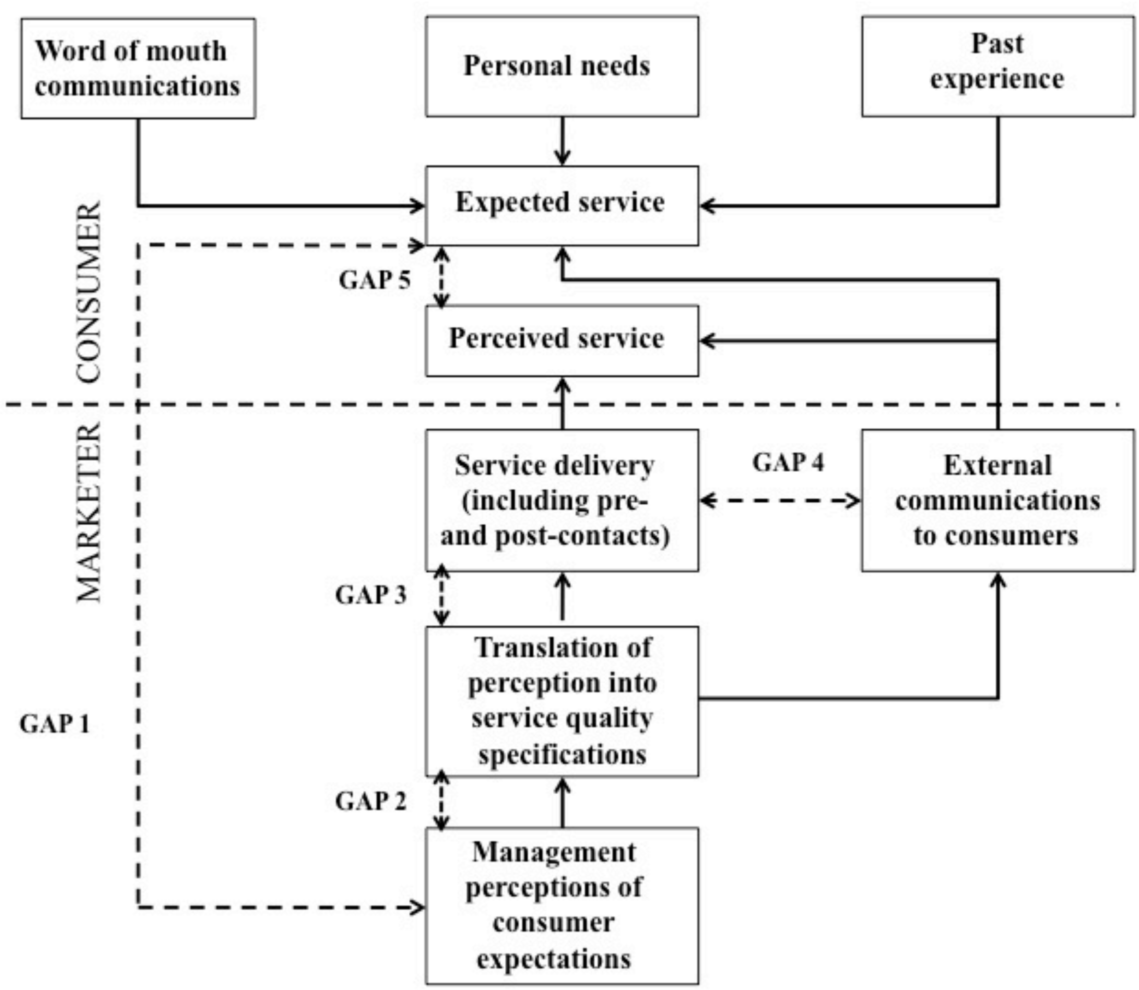

Figure 3: Service quality model (Payne et al. 1999, 201).

Gap 1 – The management perception gap. This gap compares the difference between company's management's views and the views of the clients or the markets in general.

Gap 2 – The quality specification gap. This gap exists when management's objectives do not reflect with the company's quality standards, strategy or plans.

Gap 3 – The service delivery gap. This happens when there is a difference between quality strategy, plans and the firm's delivered services.

Gap 4 – The market communications gap. This means all the differences between marketing communications (delay in the customer perception) and service delivery.

Gap 5 – The perceived service gap. This is the most significant gap. This occurs when there is a difference between the service deliveries perceived and to be experienced by customers and their expectations. Attention is paid on the perception of experience. This means that for example, marketing campaigns could forge the customer's perception of the real experience. (Young 2011, 181.)

3 CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT

3.1 What is CRM

CRM stands for customer relationship management. It is a strategy, that benefits companies to learn more about their customers' needs and behaviours, and it also helps to build and maintain the relationship between the company and the customer. With CRM, companies can offer better customer service, satisfy customers' needs and grow their revenue. When implementing CRM strategy in the firm, the company needs to use a database and start collecting customer-data and also motivate its employees to work towards the common goal. CRM is useful to most of the companies that operate with customers, and it can be applied differently depending on the size of the company. As a rule, the further an industry is away from the end customer, the less important CRM is and vice versa. (Wailgum N.d.)

3.2 Building the Customer-Centric Business Model

The main thing that the company needs to consider when it wants to move towards a customer-centric organization is to deeply understand their customers and personalize the services they deliver. For this a company should collect as much information on their clients as possible. The data can be collected straight from the customer, via customer surveys, internet sources like Facebook, Linkedin and so on, or information can be purchased from organizations that sell customer information (e.g. Credit- and financial information or other statistics). More importantly the company needs to know what information drives customer behaviour and spread that knowledge inside of the company. It is not about the amount of information, but the quality of the information. To succeed in warehousing, all the customer data collected needs to be stored in a good database programme. (Freeland 2002, 72-73.) When the company is building a management information system, the management should ensure that the employees know what information is important for the company and teach the employees to carefully gather the right information from customers (Clow and Baack 2010, 267).

When starting collecting the data, the company needs to find out three things: What it already knows about the client, what it does not know about the client and what it wants to do with the gathered data. When the firm has identified answers to these three questions it can start filling the gaps. (Freeland 2002, 74.) The reason information and customer data is collected is for building a deeper relationship with the customer, and this way to achieve the ultimate goal: increased sales. When the company knows how clients behave, it can forecast what the customer might need next and this way start to promote service in advance to prevent the future needs. (Freeland 2002, 76-77.)

An effective and working database helps any professional service firm to keep track of their customers. The database warehouse holds three different names: current customers, prospective customers and former customers. The database warehouse can also hold a list of interesting people and companies for future marketing plans. The prospective customers should be approached in different ways: the most valuable leads can be visited or called personally and the other leads can be approached with marketing material via email, letters or phone calls by the salesperson. (Clow & Baack 2010, 226-227.)

3.2.1 1-5-25 Rule

The 1-5-25 Rule is one of the famous principles of customer relationship management. The rule explains why the existing customer relationships are so important to the company.

1 = “the cost of sales (the price)” for existing clients. For the existing client, selling one product or service costs 1 unit (euro, phone call, hour of work).

5 = “the cost of sales” for a new client. For the new client selling one product or service, costs 5 units to the company (euro, phone calls, hours of work). A new customer acquisition needs more effort than keeping the existing client. Raising the client’s awareness of the company and its products and building the trust will take time and resources. The client also might be another company’s customer, so convincing to change could be difficult.

25 = “the cost of sales” for former or lost client. Getting back former customers, who might even be unhappy, is really expensive. One product or service costs 25 units (euro, phone calls, hours of work). (Hellman, Peuhkurinen & Raulas 2005, 29-30.)

To increase profit, customer loyalty should be maintained and improved. Companies should create, develop and manage their customer relationships through upward customer specific gross margins and additional sales. When marketing and sales costs are reduced the company’s profitability will start to increase per each made transaction. Committed customers will also purchase more often and recommend the services to others. The more key customers the company has, the more it will profit. (Hellman et al. 2005, 29.) ”A small percentage of customers represent a large percentage of total revenues and profits” (Freeland 2002, 79). Instead of advertising services only to the new customers, the professional service firm should retain and build relationships with existing ones by offering them additional services and educate the staff for better service quality. This way the professional service firm does not have to spend large amounts of money for advertisement. (Payne et al. 1999, 65.)

3.2.2 The Life Cycle of Customer Relationships

The life cycle of customer relationships can be divided into different stages. This requires different actions from the company in each stage. Ending the customer relationship is the hardest step, because it can be ended in a good or bad way. The company needs to take extra care to prevent a customer leaving in a negative mood, because unsatisfied customers will tell the others how unhappy he or she was of the company's actions and services. If the closing of a relationship is done in style, the customer can potentially return later. Successful ending and cooperation between the company and the customer can affect the 1-5-25 rule positively, meaning that the company does not necessarily need 25 units to get the customer to come back. (Hellman et al. 2005, 41-42.)

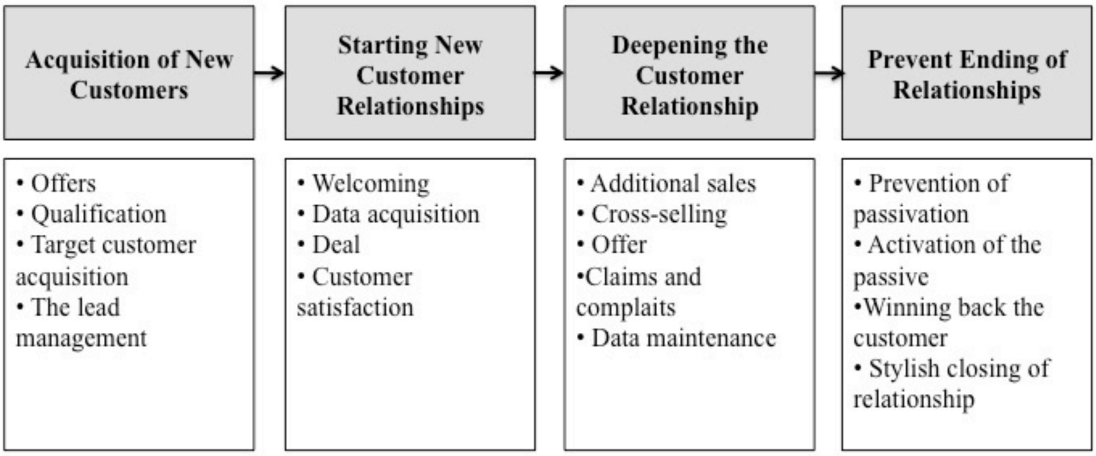

Figure 4: The life cycle of customer relationships (Hellman et al. 2005, 42).

3.3 Implementing the Customer Relationship Management and Building Trust

Customers are the lifeblood of every organization. Unfortunately companies are unable to give excellent service for every customer, but it does not mean that a company should give poor service to any customer. To avoid this, organizations must do some selection in their choice of customers and start to create more strategic relationships with the selected customers. Good criterion for this selection for example is how a company evaluates some clients. Loyal customers will buy more, consume less time, are comfortable with prices and they recommend the company to their friends and family and essentially bring in more customers. Getting to this point will require a large investment from the firm and confidence building in the customer relationship. "There is no point in creating a high cost relationship with a low value customer." (Brown 2000, 51.)

Before companies can influence their customers, the customer has to be able to trust the firm and the firm needs to build that trust. The main elements of reliability are openness, sharing information, approval, support and the work towards a common goal. Openness means honesty. For example, the company should tell the customer instead of hiding any information of faults and ills of the product or service. The consumer has the right to know about any existing risks. Sharing means a company needs to find and offer information that is beneficial to the client. Approval stands for understanding and respecting the client. Support means that the client's personal strengths and abilities are appreciated. Finally, working toward the common goal stands for ending the "who knows the best" setup, and here both are listening to each other. Doing business needs "a solid ground" between the two parties, to succeed. (Havunen 2000, 190.)

Companies have to be patient when doing business and especially when starting new customer relationships. Building a relationship is a time consuming process and it does not happen by clicking your fingers. Advertising has a great impact on the image that the customer has of the company. The image largely determines if the customer starts to trust the company. According to the study made by Johnston and Withers, a potential consumer needs to make 6 perceptions of the product or the service and after that they will have 60% better knowledge of what the company stands for, and what they try to sell. Buying decision requires 6 positive observations. Another thing that has a lot of importance in the eyes of the customer is the expertise and know-how that reflects straight to the reliability. (Havunen 2000, 191.)

3.4 Generating Customer Satisfaction and Commitment

Customer loyalty is the outcome when the organization has managed creating a benefit for its customers, so that they will continue using the products or services from the company. True consumer loyalty has been built when consumers are so happy with the company that they become indirect spokesmen creating positive word-of-mouth advertising for the organization without seeking any rewards for themselves. (Brown 2000, 55.)

When the company can successfully solve a client's problems by resolving their complaints, these clients can become more loyal than the ones who never experienced a problem in the first place. This is why professional service firms should have effective and working complaint handling systems or a prepared strategy of what to do when customer complains or is unhappy. (Mills 2004, 87-88.)

Once the company has defined the loyal and profitable customers, it needs to start to work on how to hold on to them. The client configuration demands resources and capacity from the company, so the easiest and fastest way to select clients with high lifetime value is to ask these four questions:

- Which clients have the biggest strategic importance?
- Who are the most significant revenue contributors?
- Which customers are profitable?
- Who are the loyal ones? (Mills 2004, 78.)

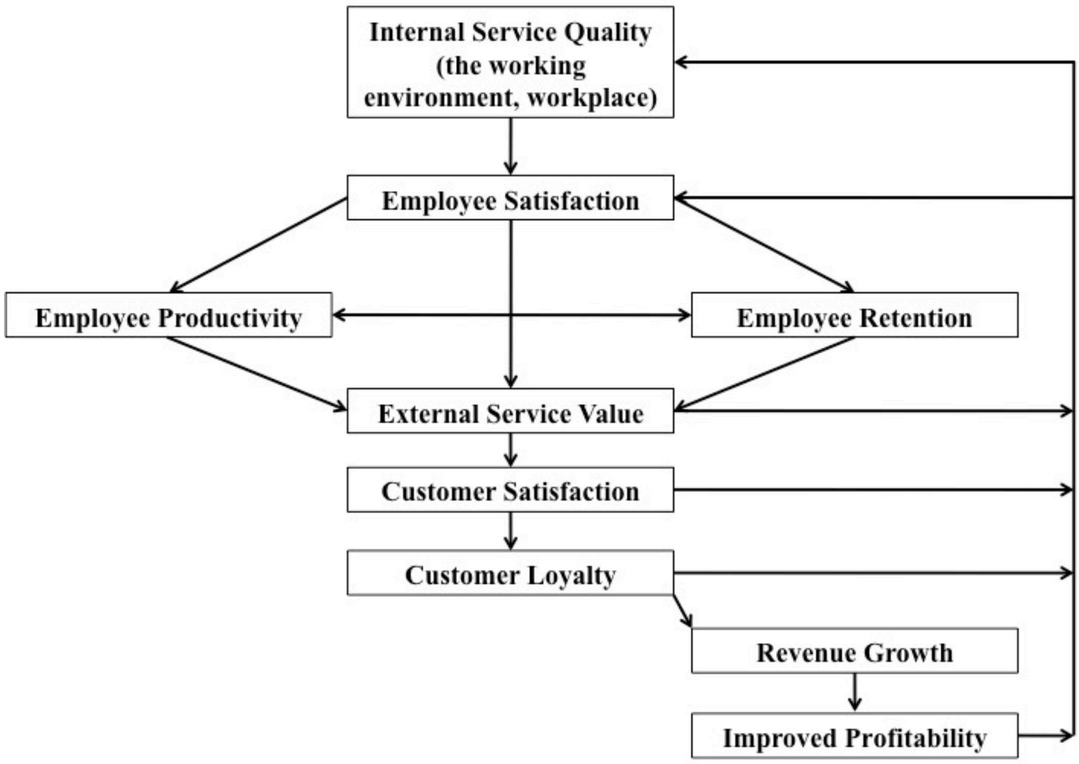

Figure 5: The service profit chain (Palmer 2008, 324).

The figure shown above sums up the steps that need to be considered when offering great quality services to the clients and it also shows where the actions lead. There is an obvious link between the improvements made in service quality and the improvements in financial performance. There is also a link between the customer satisfaction and loyalty towards the company. Satisfaction creates loyalty and dissatisfaction is the main reason to cause discontinuation of purchases. (Palmer 2008, 324-325.)

4 METHODOLOGY

4.1 Research Design

This research is a descriptive study where the owner of the law firm was interested about the service quality and customer satisfaction that his company produces to its customers and also wanted to know what the potential clients expect and require, when it comes to the service quality and customer satisfaction. Such information could help him build the services so they would satisfy most of the clients, either existing or potential.

The object of the descriptive study is to gather information that gives precise profiles of people, events or situations. It is vital that the researcher has a clear picture of the phenomena that he or she wants to study and collect information. (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2003, 97). The goal of descriptive research is to study matters that are important and relevant for the phenomenon studied. Through the interviews the case company can have valuable information related to its practises, for example, the answers can show that it could be necessary to change the company's practices for having pleased customers. Descriptive studies help the case company to: 1) Understand the characteristics of a chosen group in the studied situation, 2) aids thinking systematically about the aspects in the current situation, 3) gives ideas for the further exploring and 4) gives suggestions for the case company, how to continue doing business. (Sekaran 1992, 97.)

4.2 Research Methods

This research is implemented by using mostly qualitative research methods. Qualitative research is the best option when studying customer satisfaction and wishes of the potential clients for the future customer relationships. The data is collected using a structured interview sheets. The sample of clients was carefully selected from the case company's register. All of the interviews were held in person. Questions were left open, so that the customer could give their opinion and complete the answers.

Qualitative research is based on real life, where the items are studied comprehensively. In qualitative study the object is to find and reveal answers instead of verifying the existing answers. In qualitative research the target group is appropriately selected instead of a random sampling method. (Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara, 2000, 155.)

The main purpose of *qualitative research* methods is to study human behaviour in the social, cultural and political contexts that they occur. Useful tools to study qualitative issues is to use for example, interviews and case studies, which usually result in qualitative primary data that is non-numerical. Qualitative research gives freedom to the interviewer to study wider issues and it gives the interviewee opportunity to answer corresponding to reality. (Salkind 2006, 12.)

In comparison to the qualitative research, the *quantitative research* studies mainly numerical data, mostly the variables and the correlations between them. Questionnaire is a great tool to find answers for the research problem. Phenomenon is studied by using bigger populations than in the qualitative study. The questionnaire should be tested before starting the interviews because the sample group is usually so big that correcting the questions afterwards would be almost impossible. The gathered information should be expressed in statistical form, followed by a report in which the research problem is resolved. (Kananen 2011, 72-73.)

Case study is a method used for studying individuals or institutions in a unique setting or situation in as intense and as detailed a manner as possible. They are often highly detailed and personal descriptions. The most common things studied in case studies are human behaviour for a variety of reasons. The case study gives a rich account of information related to the case studied. (Salkind 2006, 205-206.) Case Study is a strategy used in research that involves an empirical exploring of a special presence phenomenon within its existing true context using various sources of evidence (Saunders et all. 2003, 93).

T*he case study* method provides detailed and intensive information from the individual case or a small number of cases in relation to each other. Common features for the case study are as follows: The interviewer selects a single case, situation or number of cases, which relates to the individual, group or community. Case study is interested in processes and individuals’ connection to its surroundings (natural situations). The data will be collected by using different kinds of methods, such as perceptions and observations, interviews and examination of documents. Case study objective is usually a description of the phenomenon. (Hirsjärvi et al. 2000, 123.)

4.3 Population and Sample

The researcher needs to decide if he or she wants to study an entire population or a sample that has been decided in advantage. When the data is collected and analyzed from the whole population (groups, clients or cases), the term used is census. However, for many research questions or objectives it might be too difficult because the resources are limited, meaning that the researcher does not have enough time, money or access to study the whole population. Census method can be used if it is possible to survey the whole population as it is of a manageable size. The other method for collecting data is called *sampling*. The sampling method usually provides enough information for the researcher. If the question, ‘Do you find the look of the office attractive?’ was asked from sample of clients and 60 per cent of the respondents said ‘yes’, it can be expected that 60 percent of the whole population finds the look of the office attractive. (Saunders et all. 2003, 150-152.) “By studying the sample the researcher would be able to draw conclusions that would be generalizable to the population of interest” (Sekaran 1992, 226).

This case study was implemented as a qualitative study, which is why the sample picked for this thesis was 50 percent of the entire population. The case company has eight business clients and four of them were chosen to interview in this study. The selection criterion for the four was the number of assignments done from the company and the extent of the projects. This made it possible to have comprehensive answers from the interviewees because they had several experiences of the case company. As a reference, 4 potential clients were interviewed to gather information about their expectations towards juridical services and the case company.

Also the owner of the professional service firm was interviewed to make it possible to reflect the experiences of the existing clients and expectations of the potential clients to the firm's goals, mission and vision. The two groups interviewed for this thesis were divided into two sampling frames: Existing clients and their opinion about the perceived service quality, and potential clients and their expectations about the service quality.

4.4 Making the Questionnaire and Data Collection

The questionnaires made for this thesis were done based on the Servqual model presented in the theory part. Usually the Servqual model is studied via quantitative methods, but in this thesis the approach was qualitative. The reason for using the qualitative method was the size of the sample and by the structured questions it was possible to have more comprehensive answers from the interviewees. The questionnaires were built so that it is possible to compare answers of the existing clients and potential clients to the case company owner's vision.

The questions chosen to use in this study were used because of a new and interesting qualitative approach for the Servqual model wanted to be implemented. The questions were generated based on the Servqual 5 dimensions and Service quality model (showed in the figures 2 and 3). The Servqual models offer comprehensive information for the company that can be used to improve the company's customer relationship management, and to allocate the company's actions to the right sections to make customers more satisfied. The questionnaire was directly linked to the theory part, which makes the context of this thesis equal.

Information for this case study was collected using one-to-one interviews with four current and four potential clients. In this qualitative study, the principal method of collecting information was a structured interview sheet and the information collected was primary data. The data was collected particularly for the ongoing project. Its advantages were that it is a flexible way to collect information and it takes into consideration the interviewees as individuals. In the structured interview, the questions were thought out in advance so every client answered the same questions. This way the given responses could be compared to each other. The short open questions showed what were essential and important factors to the respondents. (Hirsjärvi et al. 2000, 195.)

The structured interview sheets that were used to collect information for this thesis can be found from the appendices section of this thesis. Some of the questions that were asked from the case company or the existing and potential clients are not studied in this thesis even though they were asked. Only the information that was found relevant was used as a material for this thesis.

All meetings were held during January 2014. The clients were informed in advance and the meetings were organized with the company owners and CEOs according to their schedules. The interviews were carried out on site in client facilities. All of the interviews were recorded and the interviews were carried out in silent and peaceful places to minimize the external distractions. All the interviewees were told that the information collected for this research would only be used in purpose for this study and for developing the case company's CRM and marketing.

4.5 Validity and Reliability

In scientific research, validity and reliability of the work needs to be evaluated. These two show the quality and credibility of the work. Reliability marks consistency, but it is not a promise of validity. Reliability occurs when the study can be repeated.

This might be expensive or difficult to execute, and it is usually used in quantitative studies. (Kananen 2011, 126.)

Reliability can be estimated through these three questions: 1) Would it be possible to achieve and replicate the measured results obtained in other occasions? 2) Could other researchers come up with similar results in a similar situation? 3) Is there transparency in how the collected data has been transformed into rational research? (Saunders et all. 2003, 101.)

Validity stands for the findings. Validity asks if the findings are what they appear to be and for increasing the possibility of getting the right answers, there should be close attention paid for the validity and reliability. (Saunders et all. 2003, 100-101.) Construct validity shows how well the interview results obtained fit together with theory and the design of the study. The construct validity asks: "Does the instrument tap the concept as theorized" (Sekaran 1992, 172-173).

All the eight company owners interviewed for this study were Finnish. That is why the questions were asked in Finnish to make sure that the interviewed people understood the questions to improve the quality of the answers and gather more information from the interviewees. This increases the validity of this study.

5 THE CASE COMPANY – PROFESSIONAL SERVICE LAW FIRM

The case company studied in this research is a young professional service law firm that offers legal and juridical services related to healthcare, technology and environmental questions. The company specializes in offering help to its customers by solving problems related to injury and insurance matters, contract and business matters and administrative and licensing procedures. Typical customers are quality conscious consumers of small and medium sized enterprises. The company's mission is to help customers in the best possible way and its vision is to become nationally known as a highly appreciated law firm, employing 5-6 persons in the future. At the moment the company has three employees that include two lawyers and a secretary.

According to the owner of the case company, things that differentiate the company from other law firms are integrity, planning and creativity. The company wants to give added value to customers by offering services that benefit the customer more, not just the necessity a client needs. Individual tailoring of assignments makes the case company stand out from the crowd. The company wants to give its customers warm, immediate, joyful and sensitive customer service.

At the moment the case company has a commercial in the local newspaper. This is for increasing the awareness among local clients, promoting the company and building the image. The company wants to approach the potential business clients by using direct marketing by making a phone call and visiting the company. Advertising for the private customers in this area is not as important as advertising for the business clients because the private clients usually contact the office themselves through a doctor or friend recommendation.

5.1 The 5 Servqual Dimensions of Service Quality in the Case Company

The owner of the company was interviewed for this thesis, and he was asked questions about the 5 dimensions of the service quality which is discussed in the theoretical part of this thesis (section 3.2.2.).

Tangibles – The case company has paid a lot of attention to its tangibles, such as the look of the office, website, marketing materials and appearance of the personnel. The external look of the office and the presentation of the company are important because that is the first thing the customers see. According to the case company, the first impression is very important and it gives a promise of quality to the clients. The company is building a new website at the moment and the office has gone through a serious brand building process. Services differ from products because there are fewer things that the consumers can relate to, which makes it harder for the consumer to make a decision which service provider they should use.

Reliability – According to the owner of the case company, reliability means keeping the promises and maintaining the operational consistency. The office has developed routines that every employee should follow for keeping the quality level high. The company uses a database in order to keep track of the ongoing assignments. All the clients are listed and every action made must be recorded in the system, so that it is possible to go back and see what has been made for each client. At the moment the company has approximately 75 clients and it would be impossible to keep the assignments in order without a well working database.

Responsiveness – Responsiveness is one of the most important things when running a business. It is absolutely essential that the clients reach someone, even though they may not get an answer right away, they know the company will get back to them with the answer as soon as possible. At the moment the case company's business has increased significantly and the owner cannot answer every phone call coming to the office. This is why the company has adopted a PBX service, which is controlled by the secretary. The call requests are collected and the company tries to answer these during the same day.

Assurance – For delivering the assurance for the customers, the case company's owner seeks to develop his own professional skills continuously and he also encourages his employees to do the same. Challenging of self is an important part of employee development. The core areas of the case company's expertise are compensation and insurance matters. They have made big efforts to provide high level service quality to its clients, in particular, the areas mentioned above.

Empathy – Empathy means understanding the customers' needs and giving the clients good customer service. Accessibility plays a big role here too and it gives customers the feeling that the company is ready to listen to their needs and concerns. In the case company there is always someone to talk to and the case company tries not only to solve the juridical problem that their clients have, but also to help to relieve the clients' anxiety related to these issues. Every client is treated as an individual.

The 5 dimensions mentioned here are important to success and cooperate with the clients and delivering customer satisfaction. The better the company can perform in each of the 5 dimensions the more likely the clients will get good customer service and positive results in their case.

5.2 Pricing of the Services

Sometimes giving a price for the service can be hard for the company. It can also be hard for the client to estimate if the price of the service is moderate or expensive because the services do not have a proper basis for comparison and the assignments can vary per customer. Usually a good index for the price is the monetary benefit produced for the client.

The case company has three different pricing methods: an hourly pricing, meaning that the company agrees with the customer a price that will be charged by the hours worked. This is an inexpensive choice for the customer if the case does not need much work. If the case requires many hours of work, the bill will be bigger than the clients assumed, which could make them unhappy and cause a conflict between the case company and the customer. Second pricing method is a predetermined price for the work for example, 3.000,00 euros for the work. The last method is the price in relation to the benefit produced to the customer. If the case is done successfully and the customer sees increased revenue, the case company will get a commission of the profits.

The pricing per worked hours is an old fashioned approach and the case company seeks to move toward negotiated pricing or the price in relation to the benefit produced to the customer, where the boundary conditions are agreed in advance. When using either one of these two methods there are no surprises to the customer; when the price is known in advance, customers will be more satisfied.

The interview of the case company owner was held in 24th of January in 2014.

6 INTERVIEWING THE EXISTING CLIENTS

6.1 The Sample of Existing Clients

Four existing business clients were interviewed for this research during January 2014. The sample of business clients was chosen in advance from a selected group of key customers and they were interviewed with structured questions regarding the co-operation with the case company. They were informed beforehand about the interviews and the purpose of the interviews.

All of the companies interviewed for this thesis do business in the southern part of Finland and the 2 out of the 4 companies have some international business involvement in their operations. The existing clients work in different sectors of business that includes industrial subcontracting, environmental services, recycling and waste management, investments, leasing of industrial properties and car maintenance services. They all have previous experience in legal services, either from the case company or from some other professional law firms. Three out of the 4 companies have a continuing need for juridical services that include for example, contract laws, product liability issues, environmental regulatory issues, permit procedures, issues related to supply and delivery of goods and equipment, and employment legislation.

In the interview, the existing clients were asked how they became the case company's clients. Reasons for becoming clients were very different: Through friendship or mutual networking, through somebody's recommendations or by coincidence. Two out of the 4 companies were considering the use of other agencies when they had a need for juridical services. The main reasons they ended up on using the case company's services were the local position, sense of reliability and easiness of doing business. The price level was also one of the things that influenced their decision. The clients found the case company's price level cheaper compared to the price level of the capital regions' law offices. The clients also appreciated the technical equipment and the archiving systems that the case company has because the information, once delivered, will stay in the database and cooperation can continue from where they left recently.

6.2 The Perceptions of the Existing Business Clients

The existing business clients were asked questions about the service quality that they had received from the case company. The questions were mirrored to the Servqual model. All of the four existing clients considered that assurance and responsiveness are the two most important dimensions of the Servqual model. Here is the overview of the things that the existing clients deemed important when talking about the service quality:

Tangibles – The existing clients did not see the tangibles, such as the look of the office, very important when doing business with a law firm, because most cases the clients do not even visit the office and correspondence is mainly handled by emails or phone calls. Instead of the presence of the office, the presentations of the documents were found important, for example, the look of the layout, logos and the general comprehensiveness. The external credibility of the staff was also recognized as an important factor, which increases the feeling of credibility of the company.

Reliability – According to the interviewed clients, reliability is parallel to the company's assurance and understanding of the customers needs. All of the 4 companies said that they have been satisfied with the case company's reliability and the way their juridical issues have been taken care of. As mentioned before, the clients said that the archiving of the documents has been managed well in the case company.

Responsiveness – The clients listed benefits that they have found of the transactions made with the case company. They found the size of the case company convenient, because it is not too busy and clients will get responses to their question relatively quickly. They have always reached someone in the office when needed and the customer service has been professional. The responsive actions have been quick on behalf of the case company.

Assurance – Two out of the 4 business customers said that they have been really satisfied of the case company's competence and they have found the lawyers skilled and professional. One of the existing clients mentioned a situation where the case company did not have enough specialized expertise their case required, but they were satisfied with the fact that the case company recommended to use some other colleague's service to solve their juridical issue. The client said that they found that very good customer service. One of the other clients said that in the local level the knowledge is really good and they have noticed development and potential in the case company's actions and they will continue using their services.

Empathy – All of the four clients said that the case company has understood their needs well and the received service has been polite. Usually the cases are clear and therefore the only thing that matters is the sufficiency and the way in which the client's issues are taken care of. One client said that the reason why they are case company's clients is the fact how their needs are taken into consideration. The other existing client said that the case company is a young office and understanding will grow along with the customer relationship.

The clients were asked if they would recommend the case company to their fellow entrepreneurs. All of the clients could recommend the case company to their colleagues because the company is reliable, professional and easy to keep in touch with. One of the clients could recommend the case company for the small and medium-sized enterprises and especially taking care of the contract issues, civil affairs and other things related to their business. Another said that the staff of the company is nice, polite and genuine.

According to the existing clients, the best ways to communicate with them are emails and phone calls. Also, lunch meetings are good and effective ways to keep in touch. All of the companies interviewed for this study said that the first meeting is very important and it should happen face to face. This helps both parties to build trust.

6.3 Client Experiences of the Pricing Methods

Two of the existing clients said that they have been satisfied with the case company's prices. Both of them had had great benefit from the juridical services, which is why they were willing to pay more for the company and they found the prices suitable. One of the clients said that in their case the need of additional help was necessary and the problem was solved, so they were happy to pay the price. Another client said the case company is still a young office and learning, which is why the efficiency will get better through experience and this will be better from the client's point of view; this will lead to less work hours required per case which results in lower bills in the future. The client also said that the case company's desire to develop is obvious and supports the customer relationship. Therefore, they want to support the growing office and keep doing business with them.

A hypothetical question was asked from each client. They were asked to imagine a situation that their company has 100.000,00 euros dispute going to the court and they would need to choose between two law firms: One was a 4-star office that would take care of the case with 15.000,00 euros and the other one was a 5-star office, which offers perfect service to its clients and is really professional. The clients were asked would they be ready to pay more for getting 5-star level juridical service and if they were, how much more would they be willing to pay to receive excellent work and service?

Client number 1 said pricing questions are a sensitive issue for small and medium sized companies because they do not have the required solvency. In these cases the companies would choose the 4-star service. In their case, they want to pay for the certainty and this is why they could use the 5-star service and possible pay 4.500,00 euros more to receive the excellent service quality.

Client number 2 said that they would be willing to pay more if it would be 99 percent sure that they had a chance to win the case. They would be ready to pay 10.000,00 euros more for the quality. Client number 3 said that in principal, when they make a choice of using some certain service they commit to the billing policy and they actually do use the 5-star services occasionally. The client said that he does not know if they would need the 5-star office in this case and determining the price is also difficult for the client. Client number 4 said that if the 4-star office could benefit his needs, they would not want to pay more for the extra quality.

The interviews of the existing clients were held in 21st and 25th of January in 2014.

7 INTERVIEWING THE POTENTIAL CLIENTS

7.1 The Sample of the Potential Clients

In addition to the existing clients four potential business clients were interviewed for this research during January 2014. The sample of potential business clients were chosen in advance from the selected group of interested customers and they all were interviewed with structured questions regarding the service quality they expect to receive and what they have received, if they have previous experience of juridical services. They were informed beforehand about the interviews and the purpose of the interviews.

All of the four interviewed potential clients also do business in the southern part of Finland and 3 out of the 4 have international business involved in their operations. The potential clients work in different sectors of business that includes industrial subcontracting, constructions, elements for the construction industry, marine products, soil cultivation and road construction. All of them have used juridical services at least once before. One of the potential clients has a continuing need for juridical services, the three others not as much because the contracts come from the customer and the cooperation between the companies and their clients have been done for so many years, that the outside help is not necessarily needed, except in conflict situations. Possible issues where they could use juridical services are customer specific contract issues, trade reforms, the CE-labelling issues, proceedings and contractual matters, contract disputes, possible work related accident issues, international certificate matters and general binding agreements.

In the interview, the potential clients were asked if they have used juridical services before and if they have, how did they find the law firm that they were using. All of the 4 companies had used juridical services earlier and the 2 out of the 4 companies had found a lawyer through the employers' associations. One of the companies had used a local law office before, because that was the only potential option in the region that time. The fourth company had been using two different law firms; the other one was chosen via mutual network and local presence was one of the factors that influenced their decision. The other one was chosen due to its special knowledge and expertise.

7.2 The Service Quality Expectations of the Potential Business Clients

The potential business clients were asked questions about the expectations that they have towards the quality of juridical services. The questions were mirrored to the Servqual model. The potential clients considered assurance and empathy are the two most important dimensions of the Servqual model. Also the responsiveness was seen very important because often the need for information occurs quickly, which is why the cooperation needs to be effective. Here is the overview of the things that the potential clients keep important when talking about the service quality:

Tangibles – The potential clients did not either find the look of the office or the facilities important, instead they would pay attention to the company’s website because that is the first promise of quality, i.e. how well the websites have been designed and what can be expected. The website is also important for finding the company’s contact information. One of the potential clients said that he does not believe in what he sees and he finds marketing materials unnecessary. Things that matter more are the experiences and other peoples’ references.

Reliability – The potential clients said that the reliability is very important when doing business together and they also need to be able to trust the other party. Once the assignment has been given to the professional service firm, the weight should be off the client’s shoulders. Also the comprehensiveness of the communications, the look of the emails and detailed correspondence are things that reflect reliability.

Responsiveness – Attendance is one of the most important things in the business environment. Emails and phone calls need to be answered, the things cannot remain floating in the air; a confirmation of receiving requests must be answered quickly so that the customers can be sure their messages have been delivered. One of the clients interviewed said a previous law firm they used had only one email address for the office and they found it quite inconvenient because they did not know if their message had reached the right people in the company.

Assurance – The potential clients emphasized the importance of the writing skills. Juridical documents usually include a lot of information that can be difficult to the client to read and understand. That is why they appreciated law services and lawyers who can write the things down so that anybody can understand them. Competence and professional skills are considered necessary and the credibility is built through them.

Empathy – Taking care of the customers needs and quick responses are very important to the clients. The customer is usually the first expert regarding their case so it is very important that customer is carefully listened to. The issues need to be seen from the client's point of view and the service provider must be able to see the whole picture. It is also meaningful to remember what has been done before and avoid situations where the customer needs to repeat what has happened.

In the interview, the potential clients were asked what kind of image they have about the case company. The clients said that they think the case company is accurate, skilled and credible, and 3 of the 4 clients had only heard good things about the case company. One of the potential clients said that he did not know that the case company existed and that is why he did not have any opinion. The interview for this thesis was his first touch with the case company. Other good things mentioned about the case company were its location and good parking facilities, professional and positive personnel and a modern website. The clients also mentioned that the other lawyers in the region were not as up to date as the case company.

According to the four potential business clients, the best ways to communicate with the case company are emails. This way it is easy to go back and see what have discussed and the messages are documented. All of the clients said that they are very busy and they do not want any extra work. That is why emails or phone calls should be made only when there are important things that need to be discussed. Personal meetings were also considered important especially when starting the cooperation.

The clients were asked if they wished the case company to contact them. They said that they would not mind getting email specifically detailing what services the case company offers. Otherwise the contact is based on customer needs and they call when they have a need for juridical services. The companies try to avoid conflicts and lawyers, and usually the disagreements can be agreed together with their customers. One of the clients said that if the case company has something in mind for preventative purposes, contact would be welcomed.

7.3 The Potential Clients' Willingness to Pay More for Quality

The potential clients were asked the same hypothetical questions as the existing business clients: Would they be ready to pay more for the 5-star professional firm's services if they would imagine a situation that their company had a 100.000,00 euros dispute going to court and they would need to choose between two law firms. All of the four potential clients said that they would be ready to pay more to receive a 5-star service. Three out of the 4 clients said that they could pay 3.000,00-5.000,00 extra for the great service. Reasons for this were the fact that the companies do have insurance for the legal expenses and the disputes are handled only once. The costs could be much more for the companies if they do not use the help of the lawyers. One of the interviewees said that if they would have great chances to win the case, they would pay 15.000,00 euros extra for the 5-star service quality.

Three out of the 4 potential clients said that the price levels in their previous cases have been suitable because they have either won the case or the service has been done effectively and fast by using the hourly pricing method. This way the cost for the work has not been expensive. Effectiveness was given great importance among the clients. One out of the 4 clients said that they lost the case they had. They said that if the lawyer they used earlier could have been more effective and energetic, they potentially could have won the case.

The interviews of the potential clients were held in 20th, 22nd and 23rd of January in 2014.

8 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

To guarantee good customer service, the companies should pay a lot of attention to their internal marketing. A motivated personnel is the best way to lead the company towards growth and prosperity, and to gain competitive advance over the competitors. The company needs to identify its target markets and study buyer behaviour, and after that it is possible to start doing external marketing. The purpose of service marketing is to increase the visibility of the company and to get people's attention.

After having the customers attention, the company needs to start doing customer relationship management. One of the most useful tools of CRM is a well working database where the customer information can be stored. This allows the company to provide high quality service for each client and this way increase the customer satisfaction. The more satisfied customers the company has, the more it can increase sales and make bigger profits.

The service performance and customer satisfaction can be measured by using the Servqual model that was developed in 1985 by three marketing researchers Zeithaml, Parasuraman and Berry. The model compares the company owner's expectations to the customers' experiences and perceptions, and if these do not meet, the gaps occur.

The key findings and conclusions of this study are listed below through the research questions:

How can the case company improve its customer service and offer service excellence to its clients?

Good customer service always starts inside of the company. Before the employees can deliver a good customer service they need to be satisfied to work for the company and they need to be trained to deal with customers. They also need to have a good knowledge of the company and its services, so that they know the company's limits and this way do not give customers empty promises.

The clients interviewed for this thesis, either the existing ones or the potentials, said that responsiveness is really important. Sometimes the day in the office can be a little chaotic and the situations do change all the time, nevertheless, it is crucial to contact the clients during the same day if they have tried to reach the company. This is what separates the amateurs from the professionals.

What is customer relationship management (CRM) and what needs to be considered, when implementing CRM in a professional service firm?

The customer relationship management is a strategic tool that helps the company to learn more about its clients' needs and behaviours. When implementing the CRM in the company, a good database is a vital tool in the CRM processes. There, information associated with the customers can be stored and it helps the company to stay on track in each project. Also the internal marketing has a great impact on the success of the good CRM. The satisfied employees will reflect the company's mission and vision to the clients. The employees are the best and most visible advertisements for the company; this is why the company should take good care of its personnel.

Customers' trust towards the company occurs through the actions and service given to the customer. Once the company has defined who are the loyal and profitable customers, it needs to start to work on how to retain them and try to offer as good of customer service as possible. Customer relationships do not just happen overnight, which means that it is time consuming and takes lots of effort. The reward of a well-managed CRM strategy is loyal customers and increased sales.

What advantages CRM gives to the professional service firm and how the company can add value for its clients, maintain customer relationships and have advantage over the competitors?

When the company uses the customer relationship management, each and every customer will be taken into account and the company consciously seeks to provide service excellence. The database systems enables that every client can be treated as an individual. Via the customer relationship strategies, the company can improve different areas of customer service and gather valuable information either straight from the customer or via customer satisfaction surveys. A finely managed CRM system alone is not enough; the company needs to deliver what it has promised to its customers and take responsibility for its promises – that is what makes the quality assessment.

When the company finds suitable programs and strategies for its operations and through these is able to build routines in every day working life, it will grow its efficiency, maintain clients happiness and in turn will gain advantages compared to the other companies. Marketing materials are external factors, but for some customers they reflect the brand and quality – an assumption of the service quality. This is why marketing and marketing materials should be paid attention to. What comes of the after sales the case company should always sum up the case with the customer after the project has been finished. This way both parties can learn from the process and the experience, and the customer is given a chance to give valuable feedback to the company.

What do the existing clients find useful and have they been pleased of the services provided by the case company?

The existing clients found the location of the case company excellent because there are not many law firms in their region that are specialized in the business' juridical issues and contracts. The case company gives the access for its clients to do business in their hometown. This gives the company added value, due to its accessibility level and meetings are easy to arrange even with tight schedules and short notice. They also were satisfied with the professional skills and service level of the case company.

The existing clients have mainly been satisfied with the case companies prices. They said that they would like to use pricing methods, where they have assumptions of the final amount, for example, the pre determined price or the price in relation to the benefit produced to client are suitable pricing methods.

Recognizing the need for service: What kind of opportunities do the potential clients see, when doing cooperation with the case company and what makes the customers make their buying decisions?

The potential clients interviewed for this thesis were delighted to hear more about the case company because they all might have a need for juridical services in the future. The buying decision for using the case company's services arises when some issues or problems occur. The clients said that it was good to know the case company's potential for taking care and providing its help especially for the business clients. The clients said that they try to avoid situations were they might need a lawyer's help but that is not always possible. They also said that after what they have heard about the case company, they are more likely going to contract with the firm if needed.

The potential clients were asked what they consider as a good customer service. The overview of the answers was that they appreciated functionality, effectiveness and easiness of doing business. Time is money and the effectiveness reflects straight to the price. They also required listening skills and authentic customer service with commitment to solve the client's case and a genuine interest in the client as a person.

9 RECOMMENDATIONS

This research was done for the case company and the main purpose was to help the case company to develop its CRM and service marketing. Satisfied customers increase the brand value, which is why the customer satisfaction needs to be taken seriously. The case company should start to collect feedback from its customers regularly and then analyze the received feedback. This allows continuous development of the services and provides plenty of ad hoc information for the case company.

The case company should also offer opportunities to its employees to educate themselves and this way help them to develop their personal knowledge and strengths. The more transparency the company's actions are, the more satisfied the employees would be. That is why the best ways to do internal marketing are face-to-face conversations, listening and participation. Through the knowledge and satisfaction level of the employees, the case company can be confident that employees spread a positive attitude and good customer service to the company's clients.

The best marketing channels for the case company according to the interviewed customers would be direct marketing via emails or phone calls. Most of the clients also appreciated personal business meetings, because it is easier to do business when you know the other party. Also tradeshows and entrepreneur association appointments could be effective channels for introducing the case company for potential clients. As well the advertising in the professional publications was seen as a good marketing channel.

When the case company has established its place among the business clients, and the business has grown enough, it could start to operate in the international field by orientating international contract laws for example. This way the case company could benefit more the business customers who make international trade. The company could also make cooperation with foreign law firms, so that it would help the other office in issues related to Finland’s legislation and vice versa.

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APPENDIX 1

KOHDEYRITYS: OMISTAJAN HAASTATTELU Tammikuu 2014
CASE COMPANY: INTERVIEW OF THE OWNER January 2014

1. Mitä yritys tarjoaa asiakkailleen?
   - What does the company provide to its customers?

2. Mikä on yrityksen missio ja visio?
   - What are the company's mission and vision?

3. Liittyykö yrityksen toimintaan kansainvälisyyttä? Jos ei, olisiko se jossain muodossa mahdollista toteuttaa?
   - Is there any international business involved in the company's actions? If not, could it be possible to implement somehow?

4. Miten mainostaisitte yritystänne yritysasiakkaille?
   - How would you promote your company to the business clients?

5. Miten nykyiset yritysasiakkaat ovat päätyneet toimistonne asiakkaiksi?
   - How have the current business clients become your clients?

6. Miten/millä keinoin pyritte lähestymään potentiaalisia asiakkaita?
   - How / by what means are you trying to approach the potential customers?

7. Mitä toimisto pyrkii tarjoamaan asiakkailleen kun puhutaan 5 dimensions of Servqual mallista:
   - What the office strives to provide to its customers when it comes to 5 dimensions of Servqual model?
   a. Tangibles (toimiston ilme, henkilökunta ja mainosmateriaali esim. nettisivut) ___
   Tangibles (look of the office, personnel and marketing material e.g. websites)
   b. Empathy (asiakkaan tilanteen ja tarpeen ymmärtäminen ja huomioiminen) ___
   Empathy (Understanding the customer's situation and needs)
   c. Responsiveness (asiakkaan tarpeisiin vastaaminen, tavoitettavuus) ___
   Responsiveness (Meeting the customer's needs and accessibility)
   d. Assurance (ammattitaito, osaaminen, uskottavuus ja asiantuntijuus) ___
   Assurance (professional skills, know-how, credibility and expertise)
   e. Reliability (luotettavuus, järjestelmällisyys) ___
   Reliability (authenticity, systematic skills)

   f. Laita yllä mainitut asiat tärkeysjärjestykseen
   Put the above-mentioned things in order of importance

8. Millä perusteilla yrityksenne palveluiden hinta muodostuu?
   - On what basis does the prices of the company's services form?

9. Minkälaista asiakaspalvelua yritys pyrkii asiakkailleen tarjoamaan?
   - What type of customer service the company aims to provide to its customers?

10. Miten kohdeyritys erottuu muista asianajotoimistoista?
    - How does the case company stand out from the other law firms?

APPENDIX 2

STRUKTUROITU HAASTATTELU, NYKYISET ASIAKKAAT Tammikuu 2014
STRUCTURED INTERVIEW, EXISTING CLIENTS January 2014

1. Kertoisitteko lyhyesti mitä yrityksenne tekee?
   - Could you shortly describe what does your company do?

2. Millaisia juridisia kysymyksiä liittyy yrityksenne:
   - What kind of juridical questions are related to your company's:
   a. Valmistamien tuotteiden tai tarjoamien palveluiden myyntiin?
      - Manufactured products or the provided services?
   b. Tuotantovälineiden ostoon?
      - The purchase of production equipment?
   c. Yrityksen toimintaan muuten (hallinnolliset kysymykset, työntekijät, yms.)?
      - Other operations (e.g. administrative issues, employees, etc.)?

3. Millä tavoin päädyitte kohdeyrityksen asiakkaaksi?
   - How did you become the case company's customer in the first place?
   a. Minkä ongelman vuoksi käännyitte kohdeyrityksen puoleen?
      - What kind of case or issue did your company have?
   b. Miten/mistä kuulitte kohdeyrityksestä ensimmäisen kerran?
      - Where did you hear about the case company for the first time?
   c. Oliko teillä mielessä muita palveluntarjoajia sillä hetkellä kun teitte valintaa asianajotoimistosta?
      - When you made your choice of a law firm, did you had in mind any other service providers (other lawyers)?
   d. Mikä ratkaisi valinnan kohdeyrityksen puoleen kääntymiseen (mitä odotuksia teillä oli)?
      - What determined the selection to turn to the case company for help (what expectations did you have)?

4. Minkälaisiin asioihin olette kiinnittäneet huomiota, kun puhutaan kohdeyritykseltä saamanne juridisen palvelun laadusta?
   - What are the things you have paid attention to, when talking about the quality of the juridical service that you have received from the case company?

   a. Tangibles (toimiston ilme, henkilökunta ja mainosmateriaali esim. nettisivut) ___
      Tangibles (look of the office, personnel and marketing material e.g. websites)
   b. Empathy (asiakkaan tilanteen ja tarpeen ymmärtäminen ja huomioiminen) ___
      Empathy (Understanding the customer's situation and needs)
   c. Responsiveness (asiakkaan tarpeisiin vastaaminen, tavoitettavuus)___
      Responsiveness (Meeting the customer's needs and accessibility)
   d. Assurance (ammattitaito, osaaminen, uskottavuus ja asiantuntijuus) ___
      Assurance (professional skills, know-how, credibility and expertise)
   e. Reliability (luotettavuus, järjestelmällisyys) ___
      Reliability (authenticity, systematic skills)

   f. Seuraavaksi pyytäisin teitä laittamaan tärkeysjärjestykseen yllämainitut kohdat a-e rivien perässä oleville viivoille. 1 Tärkein – 5 vähiten tärkein.

Next I would ask you to put the a-e points mentioned above in order of importance, so that 1 is the most important – 5 the least important.

g. Onko kohdeyritys täyttänyt odotuksenne kohdissa a-e? Jos ei, niin miltä osin ei ja miksi ei?
- Has the case company fulfilled your expectations in a-e points? If not, what extent it did fell short of expectations and why?
h. Oliko kohdeyrityksen tarjoamassa palvelussa jotain sellaista, johon olitte erityisen tyytyväinen?
- Was there something in the service that you received from the case company, which you were particularly pleased?

5. Miten arvioisitte teille tarjotun palvelun hintaa ja sitä, että onko palvelu hintansa arvoista?
- How would you evaluate the price of the service and whether the service gave value to your money?
   a. Tuntihinta
   Hourly pricing
   b. Palvelun kokonaishinta
   The total price for the service
   c. Palvelun hinta suhteessa tuotettuun hyötyyn
   The price in relation to the benefit produced to the customer

6. Mitä olette valmiita laadusta maksamaan?
- How much more are you willing to pay for the quality?
   a. Kuvitellaan, että yrityksellänne on 100.000 euron riita menossa oikeuteen, ja se on ”pakko” hoitaa.
   - Imagine a hypothetical situation that your company has 100.000 euros dispute going to the court and it needs to be taken care of.
   b. Asia tullaan hoitamaan käräjäoikeudessa ja 4 tähden asianajotoimisto on ilmoittanut veloittavansa asianne hoitamisesta 15.000 euroa. Heiltä kuitenkin puuttuu tähti teidän tärkeimpänä kohdassa 4a-e pitämästänne asiasta.
   - The case will be dealt with in the District Court and a 4-star law office has announced that they will charge 15.000 euros for managing the case. However they are lacking a star of your most important 5 dimensions listed in the section 4a-e.
   c. Olisitteko valmiita maksamaan enemmän, jotta saisitte itsellenne 5 tähden toimiston hoitamaan asianne?
   - Would you be ready to pay more to receive services from the 5-star law office?
   d. Kuinka paljon enemmän olisitte valmiita maksamaan 5 tähden toimistolle huippupalvelusta?
   - How much more would you be ready to pay for the 5-star office for the great service?

7. Millaista on mielestänne huono asiakaspalvelu? Entä erityisen hyvä asiakaspalvelu?
- What do you consider as a bad customer service? What about good customer service?

8. Jos tuttu yrittäjä kyselisi suosituksia asianajotoimistosta, miten luonnehtisitte kohdeyritystä hänelle?
- If a friend entrepreneur would ask you about the case company, how would you describe the case company to him or her?

a. Palvelujen laatu
   - Quality of the services
   i. Tangibles (toimiston ilme, henkilökunta ja mainosmateriaali esim. nettisivut)
   Tangibles (look of the office, personnel and marketing material e.g. websites)
   ii. Empathy (asiakkaan tilanteen ja tarpeen ymmärtäminen ja huomioiminen)
   Empathy (Understanding the customer's situation and needs)
   iii. Responsiveness (asiakkaan tarpeisiin vastaaminen, tavoitettavuus)
   Responsiveness (Meeting the customer's needs and accessibility)
   iv. Assurance (ammattitaito, osaaminen ja uskottavuus, asiantuntijuus)
   Assurance (professional skills, know-how, credibility and expertise)
   v. Reliability (luotettavuus, järjestelmällisyys)
   Reliability (authenticity, systematic skills)

b. Hinta
   Price

9. Millaisia juridisia palveluita uskotte tarvitsevanne / haluaisitte käyttää tulevaisuudessa?
   - What kind of legal services you believe your company would need / you would like to use in the future?

10. Pitäisikö kohdeyrityksen tarjota teille tällaisia palveluja aktiivisesti?
    - Should the case company actively offer you these kinds of services?

11. Miten toivoisitte kohdeyrityksen pitävän teihin päin yhteyttä? (sähköpostit, puhelut, henkilökohtaiset tapaamiset…?)
    - What is the most convenient way to communicate with your company?
    (Emails, phone calls, personal business meetings…?)

12. Markkinointi on tärkeä osa brändin rakennusta ja näkyvyyden saamista. Mitä markkinointikanavia suosittelisitte kohdeyrityksen käyttävän jotta tavoittaisimme juuri teidän yrityksenne?
    - Marketing is an important part of brand building process and visibly assets. What marketing channels would you recommend the case company to use, in order to reach your company?

13. Millaisena näette yrityksenne ja toimistomme välisen kumppanuussuhteen vuoden päästä?
    - How do you see the partnership between the case company and your company in a year?

14. Miten paljon annatte arvoa jälkimarkkinoinnille ja mitkä mielestänne ovat hyviä keinoja tehdä jälkimarkkinointia kun edellinen toimeksianto on päättynyt?
    - How much value do you give to the after sales, and what do you find the best ways to implement after sales, after the case is closed?

15. Mikäli olette aikaisemmin käyttäneet muiden asianajotoimistojen palveluja, miten vertaisitte heiltä saamaanne palvelun laatua kohdeyrityksen tuottamaan laatuun?
    - In case you have previously used the services of other law firms, how would you compare their quality of service to the quality received from the case company?

APPENDIX 3

STRUKTUROITU HAASTATTELU, POTENTIAALISET ASIAKKAAT Tammikuu 2014
STRUCTURED INTERVIEW, POTENTIAL BUSINESS CLIENTS January 2014

”Potentiaalisten asiakkaiden odotukset palvelun laadun suhteen”
”Potential customers' expectations in terms of quality of service”

1. Kertoisitteko lyhyesti mitä yrityksenne tekee?
   - Could you shortly describe what does your company do?

2. Tekeekö yrityksenne kansainvälistä kauppaa? Jos tekee, niin mihin maihin ja minkälaista?
   - Does your company do international trade? If doing so, which countries and what kind of trade?

3. Millaisia juridisia kysymyksiä liittyy yrityksenne:
   - What kind of juridical questions are related to your company's:
   a. Valmistamien tuotteiden tai tarjoamien palveluiden myyntiin?
      - Manufactured products or the provided services?
   b. Tuotantovälineiden ostoon?
      - The purchase of production equipment?
   c. Yrityksen toimintaan muuten (hallinnolliset kysymykset, työntekijät, yms.)?
      - Other operations (e.g. administrative issues, employees, etc.)?

4. Onko yrityksenne aiemmin käyttänyt juridisia palveluja?
   - Has your company used juridical services before?
   a. Minkä ongelman vuoksi käännyitte asianajotoimiston puoleen?
      - What kind of case or issue did your company have?
   b. Miten kuulitte asianajotoimistosta?
      - How did you hear about this law firm?
   c. Oliko teillä mielessä muita palveluntarjoajia sillä hetkellä kun teitte valintaa asianajotoimistosta?
      - When you made your choice of a law firm, did you have in mind any other service providers (other lawyers)?
   d. Mikä ratkaisi valinnan juuri tämän asianajotoimiston puoleen kääntymiseen (mitkä olivat odotuksenne)?
      - What determined the selection to turn to this specific law firm (what expectations did you have)?

5. Minkälaisiin asioihin kiinnitätte/kiinnittäisitte huomiota, kun puhutaan saamanne juridisen palvelun laadusta?
   - What are the things you pay attention to / would pay attention to, when talking about the quality of the service?
   a. Tangibles (toimiston ilme, henkilökunta ja mainosmateriaali esim. nettisivut) ___
      Tangibles (look of the office, personnel and marketing material e.g. websites)
   b. Empathy (asiakkaan tilanteen ja tarpeen ymmärtäminen ja huomioiminen) ___
      Empathy (Understanding the customer's situation and needs)
   c. Responsiveness (asiakkaan tarpeisiin vastaaminen, tavoitettavuus)___
      Responsiveness (Meeting the customer's needs and accessibility)
   d. Assurance (ammattitaito, osaaminen, uskottavuus ja asiantuntijuus) ___
      Assurance (professional skills, know-how, credibility and expertise)

e. Reliability (luotettavuus, järjestelmällisyys) ___
Reliability (authenticity, systematic skills)

f. Laittakaa tärkeysjärjestykseen
Put in order of importance

6. Miten arvioisitte teille tarjotun palvelun hintaa ja sitä, että onko palvelu hintansa arvoista?
- How would you evaluate the price of the service and whether the service gave value to your money?
   a. Tuntihinta
   Hourly pricing
   b. Palvelun kokonaishinta
   The total price for the service
   c. Palvelun hinta suhteessa tuotettuun hyötyyn
   The price in relation to the benefit produced to the customer

7. Mitä olette valmiita laadusta maksamaan?
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   a. Kuvitellaan, että yrityksellänne on 100.000 euron riita menossa oikeuteen, ja se on ”pakko” hoitaa.
   - Imagine a hypothetical situation that your company has 100.000 euros dispute going to the court and it needs to be taken care of.
   b. Asia tullaan hoitamaan käräjäoikeudessa ja 4 tähden asianajotoimisto on ilmoittanut veloittavansa asianne hoitamisesta 15.000 euroa. Heiltä kuitenkin puuttuu tähti teidän tärkeimpänä kohdassa 4a-e pitämästänne asiasta.
   - The case will be dealt with in the District Court and a 4-star law office has announced that they will charge 15.000 euros for managing the case. However they are lacking a star of your most important 5 dimensions listed in the section 4a-e.
   c. Olisitteko valmiita maksamaan enemmän, jotta saisitte itsellenne 5 tähden toimiston hoitamaan asianne?
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   d. Kuinka paljon enemmän olisitte valmiita maksamaan 5 tähden toimistolle huippupalvelusta?
   - How much more would you be ready to pay for the 5-star office for the great service?

8. Millaista on mielestänne huono asiakaspalvelu? Entä erityisen hyvä asiakaspalvelu?
- What do you consider as a bad customer service? What about good customer service?

9. Millainen mielikuva teillä on kohdeyrityksestä?
- What kind of image do you have of the case company?
   a. Palvelujen laatu
   - Quality of the services
      i. Tangibles (toimiston ilme, henkilökunta ja mainosmateriaali esim. nettisivut)
      Tangibles (look of the office, personnel and marketing material e.g. websites)
      ii. Empathy (asiakkaan tilanteen ja tarpeen ymmärtäminen ja huomioiminen)
      Empathy (Understanding the customer's situation and needs)
      iii. Responsiveness (asiakkaan tarpeisiin vastaaminen, tavoitettavuus)
      Responsiveness (Meeting the customer's needs and accessibility)
      iv. Assurance (ammattitaito, osaaminen ja uskottavuus, asiantuntijuus)

Assurance (professional skills, know-how, credibility and expertise)

v. Reliability (luotettavuus, järjestelmällisyys)
Reliability (authenticity, systematic skills)

b. Hinta
Price

10. Millaisia juridisia palveluita uskotte tarvitsevanne / haluaisitte käyttää tulevaisuudessa?
- What kind of legal services you believe your company would need / you would like to use in the future?

11. Pitäisikö kohdeyrityksen tarjota teille tällaisia palveluja aktiivisesti?
- Should the case company actively offer you these kinds of services?

12. Jos olisitte kohdeyrityksen asiakkaita, miten toivoisitte kohdeyrityksen pitävän teihin päin yhteyttä? (sähköpostit, puhelut, henkilökohtaiset tapaamiset…?)
- If your company was a case company's customer, what is the most convenient way to communicate with your company? (Emails, phone calls, personal business meetings…?)

13. Markkinointi on tärkeä osa brändin rakennusta ja näkyvyyden saamista. Mitä markkinointikanavia suosittelisitte kohdeyrityksen käyttävän jotta tavoittaisimme juuri teidän yrityksenne?
- Marketing is an important part of brand building process and visibly assets. What marketing channels would you recommend the case company to use, in order to reach your company?