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Marketing Communications Plan for a Maritime Search and Rescue Association

Thesis 2015

Tiivistelmä

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Meripelastusseuran markkinointiviestintäsuunnitelma, 39 sivua, yksi liite
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Tämän opinnäytetyön tarkoituksena oli suunnitella ja tutkia yhdistyksen käytettävissä olevia markkinointiviestinnän keinoja. Meripelastusseura Etelä-Saimaa ry toimii Lappeenrannan ja eteläisen Saimaan alueella. Yhdistystoiminta pyörii useasti vapaaehtoisvoimin ja siten asettaa haasteita jo entisestään rajallisten resurssien käytölle.

Opinnäytetyössä tutkittiin markkinoinnin ja viestinnän kirjallisuutta ja muita lähteitä, kuten sähköisiä julkaisuja aiheesta. Teoriaosuus perustuu näihin lähteisiin. Teoriaosuus sovellettiin yhdistyksen tilanteeseen. Yksi tärkeimmistä lähteistä oli Meripelastusseura Etelä-Saimaa itse.

Kohderyhmän tunnistamisen jälkeen kävi suhteellisen selväksi, että perinteisemmät markkinointiviestinnän keinot ovat tehokkaampia Meripelastusseura Etelä-Saimaalle johtuen kohderyhmän ikärakenteesta. Kohderyhmä selvitettiin kvalitatiivisella tutkimuksella, johon vastasivat Meripelastusseuran aktiivijäsenet. Tämän tutkimuksen vastausten perusteella voitiin todeta, että kohderyhmä on iäkkäämpää väkeä, jotka eivät välttämättä käytä uudempia viestimiä kuten sosiaalista mediaa. Perinteisempiin viestintäkeinoihin lukeutuu muun muassa julisteiden käyttäminen sekä olemassa olevia jäseniä rekrytoinnista palkitseva bonusjärjestelmä. Tämä kannustava puskaradiomarkkinointi muodosti lopulta erittäin tärkeän osan opinnäytetyötä.

Asiasanat: Markkinointi, viestintä, yhdistys, markkinointiviestintäsuunnitelma, Suunnitelma, Puskaradio, WOM

Abstract

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Marketing Communications Plan for a Maritime Search and Rescue Association, 39 Pages, One Appendix
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The goal of this thesis was to plan and research mean of marketing communication available for an association. Meripelastusseura Etelä-Saimaa ry operates in Lappeenranta and the southern Lake Saimaa region. Associations often operate through voluntary work and thus is limited in resources. This creates an additional challenge.

Marketing and communication literature and other sources, such as digital publications were studied for this thesis. The theory part is based on these sources. The theory part was applied to the association's situation. One of the most important sources was the association itself.

After identifying the target group it was quite clear that the more traditional means of marketing communication would be more efficient in the case of Meripelastusseura Etelä-Saimaa due to the age structure of the target group. The target group was defined by conducting a qualitative survey to the active members of the association. Through the answers in this survey it could be deducted that the target group consists mostly of older people, who do not necessarily use newer means of communication such as social media. The more traditional means of communication include for example the use of posters and a bonus system that would reward existing members for recruiting new members. This incentivized Word of Mouth Marketing eventually formed a very important part of this thesis.

Keywords: Marketing, Communication, NGO, association, Marketing Communications Plan, Plan, Word, of, Mouth, WOM

Contents

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

This thesis is an operational one. It is a marketing communications plan for an association. The thesis is an assignment given by Suomen Meripelastusseura Etelä-Saimaa ry. This association operates in Lappeenranta. The thesis looks for solutions to the challenges of the association's marketing communication.

1.1.1 The Association

Suomen Meripelastusseura Etelä-Saimaa ry is a maritime search and rescue organization, which is based on voluntary work. The association is a member of the national central organization Suomen Meripelastusseura ry, which was founded already in 1897. The operations of Meripelastusseura Etelä-Saimaa are based on the individuals' will to help. They have no hired personnel, nor do any of the volunteers receive any compensation for their efforts.

Meripelastusseura Etelä-Saimaa is one of the largest member associations of the central organization. In 2013 they had 514 members of which 417 were TROSSI members (Meripelastusseura Etelä-Saimaa ry 2015). Suomen Meripelastusseura Etelä-Saimaa ry is governed according to the Finnish Associations Act (Patentti- ja rekisterihallitus 1989).

Suomen Meripelastusseura Etelä-Saimaa ry is a member of Suomen Meripelastusseura ry, a national central organization of approximately 60 maritime search and rescue associations. There are both large and small member associations. Meripelastusseura Etelä-Saimaa is one of the largest. Finland is a maritime nation with a relatively large coastline and approximately 100 000 lakes. Therefore some of the member associations operate in the Baltic Sea and some on the various lakes throughout Finland. The areas of operation vary greatly in size and nature. The Southern Lake Saimaa, where Meripelastusseura Etelä-Saimaa operates, is a somewhat large area. It is however also a very busy area. There are

a lot of boaters and people with summer cottages, but also some commercial traffic due to the Saimaa Canal and industry relying on shipping routes.

The equipment for member associations is mostly purchased and owned by the central organization. This includes also the biggest expense: the boats. Therefore Meripelastusseura Etelä-Saimaa does not own all of its equipment and is mostly relieved of that expense. However, the association has to pay for the premises they have in Lappeenranta and also for the fuel needed to operate the boats. Although the fuel is tax-free as long as it is used non-commercially, it is still a huge expense. Meripelastusseura Etelä-Saimaa's quick reaction boat Willimies drains more than a hundred liters of fuel per hour.
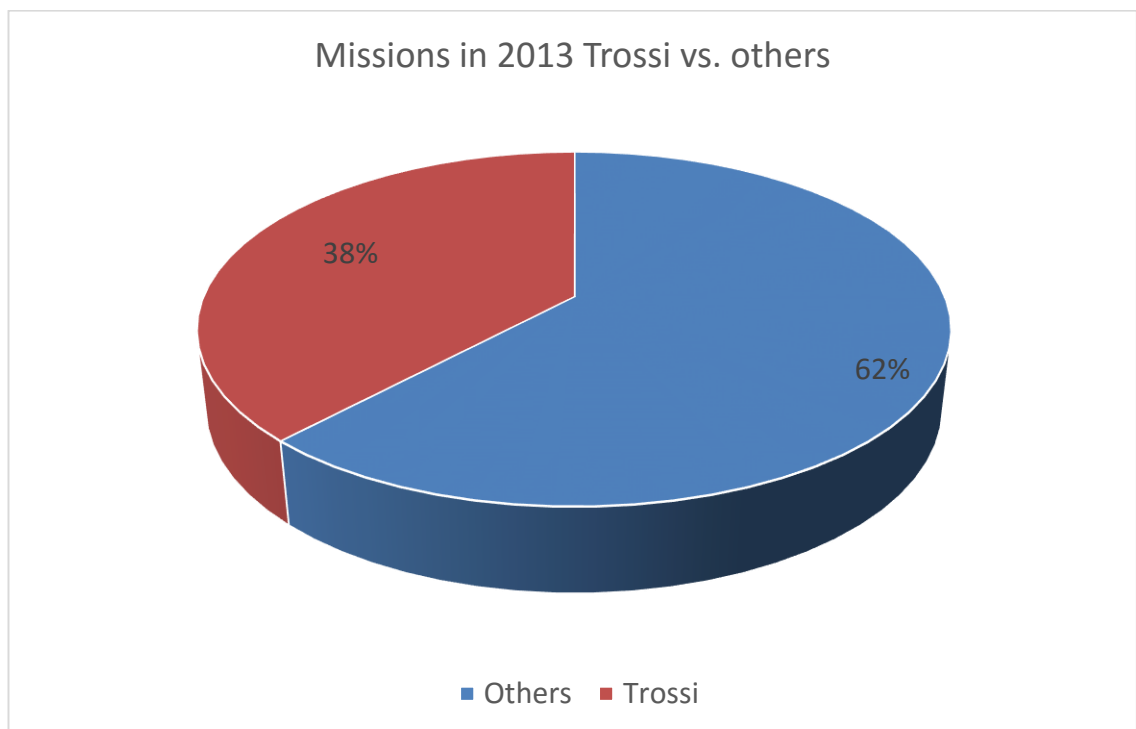
Suomen Meripelastusseura Etelä-Saimaa ry is a member of Suomen Meripelas-tusseura ry. The association's focus is on voluntary maritime search and rescue in the region of southern Lake Saimaa. For instance, the association offers the so called TROSSI membership, which acts as a certain type of insurance for boaters. The membership is paid as an annual fee. If a boater has an emergency while sailing southern Lake Saimaa, they are able to receive immediate aid from Suomen Meripelastusseura Etelä-Saimaa ry. This aid includes both towing and repair capabilities. When having the TROSSI membership, the boater pays no extra charge for this service. Without the membership the same service will be hourly taxed and significantly more expensive. The TROSSI service is always tied to the boat and not the person. The minimum length of a boat eligible for TROSSI is 2.5 meters. The maximum length of a boat is 24 meters.

In terms of money the TROSSI membership works so that the member pays their membership to a fund maintained by the central organization and the central organization then directs a part of this money to the member association. When an emergency occurs, the member organization then charges the central organization for the service provided to the member (Meripelastusseura Etelä-Saimaa ry 2015).

1.1.2 The Present Situation

At the moment Suomen Meripelastusseura Etelä-Saimaa ry is an association of 514 members, of which 417 are TROSSI members.

From Picture 1 it can be seen that currently 38% of total missions in 2013 were Trossi missions. Other missions counted for 62% of the total amount. It is fairly simple to deduct from this graph that there is significant customer potential in the target group (Meripelastusseura Etelä-Saimaa ry, 2015).

Picture 1 TROSSI missions and other missions (Meripelastusseura Etelä-Saimaa ry 2015)

There are also missions that do not require or are not eligible for Trossi. For example, official assistance missions are such. In Picture 2 they only count for a total of 8%. This consists of two categories. The first one is Medical Evacuation (MEDEVAC) with 2% and the second is Other Situations which counts for a total of 6%. This proves that a significant majority of missions are Trossi eligible missions (Meripelastusseura Etelä-Saimaa ry 2015).
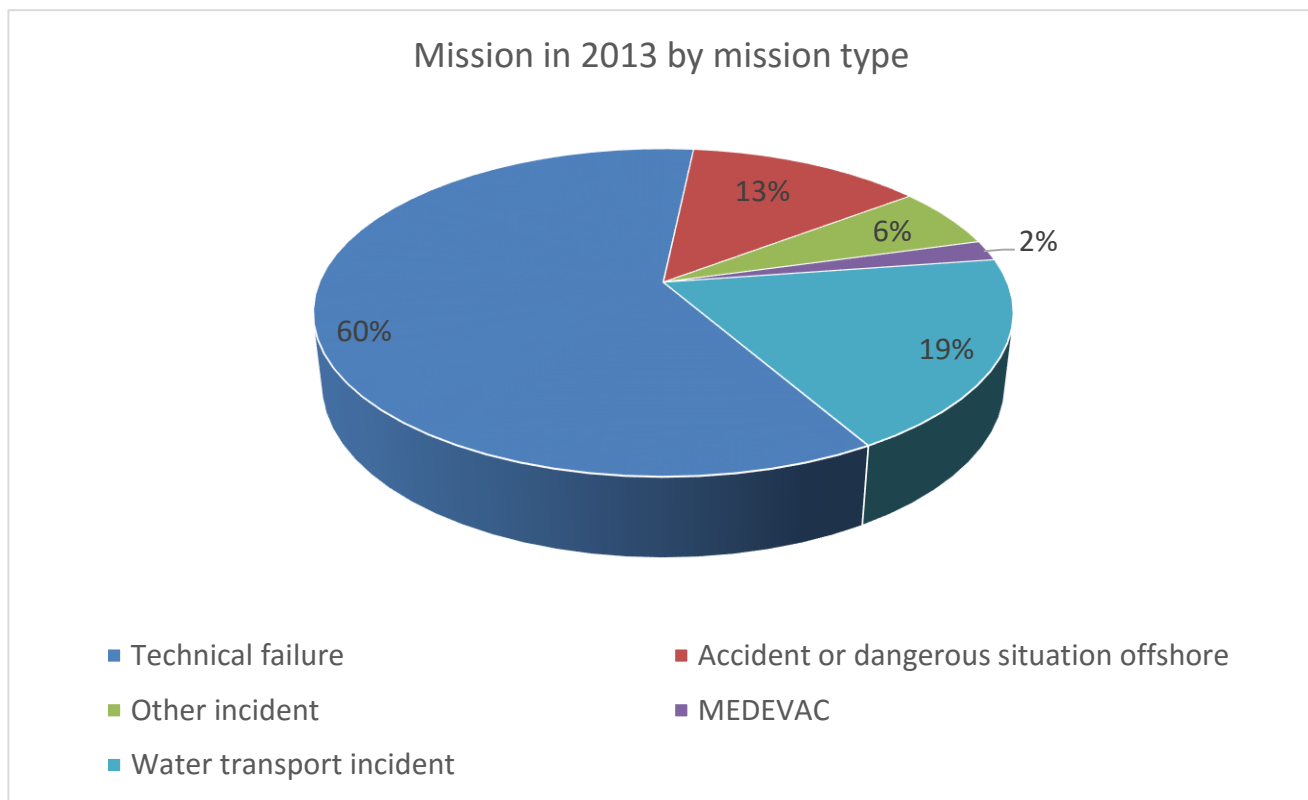
Picture 2 Missions by category (Meripelastusseura Etelä-Saimaa ry 2015)
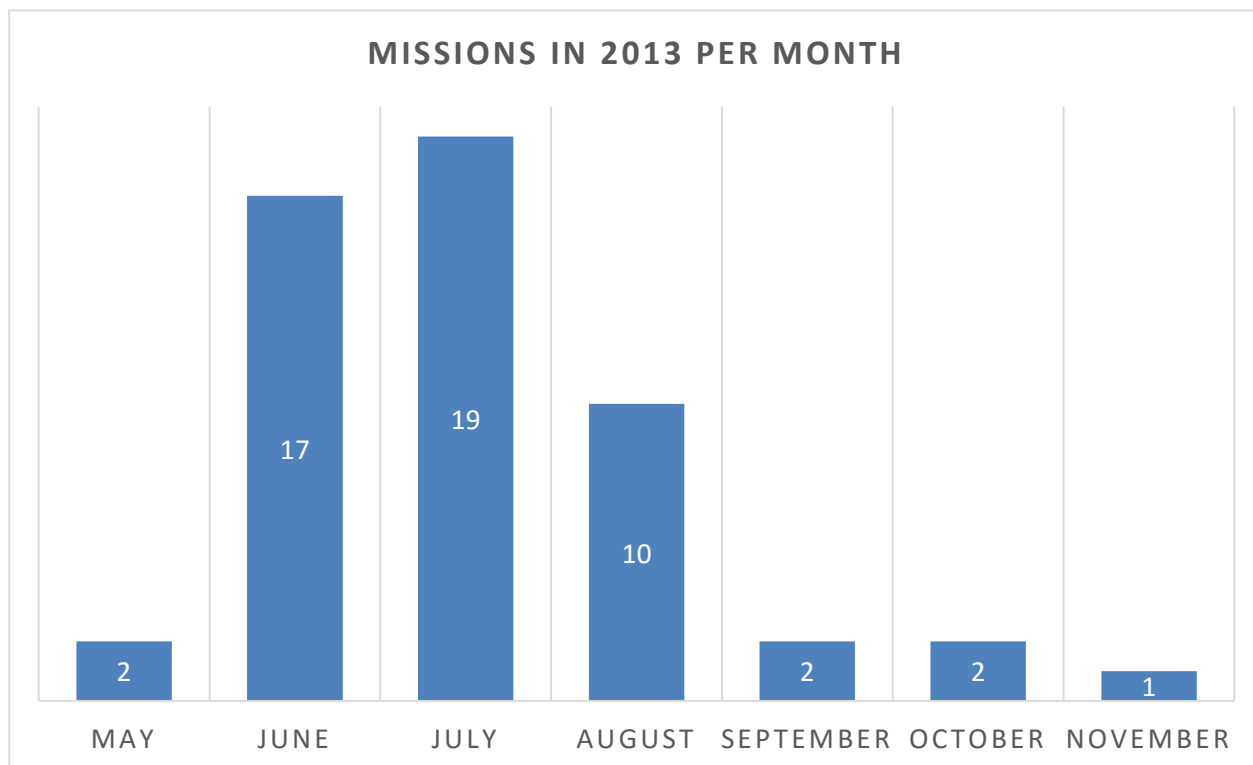
Picture 3 Missions per month (Meripelastusseura Etelä-Saimaa ry 2015)

In Picture 3 are outlined the numbers of missions per month. Evidently the months of summer are the most active months. This would suggest that the boaters could
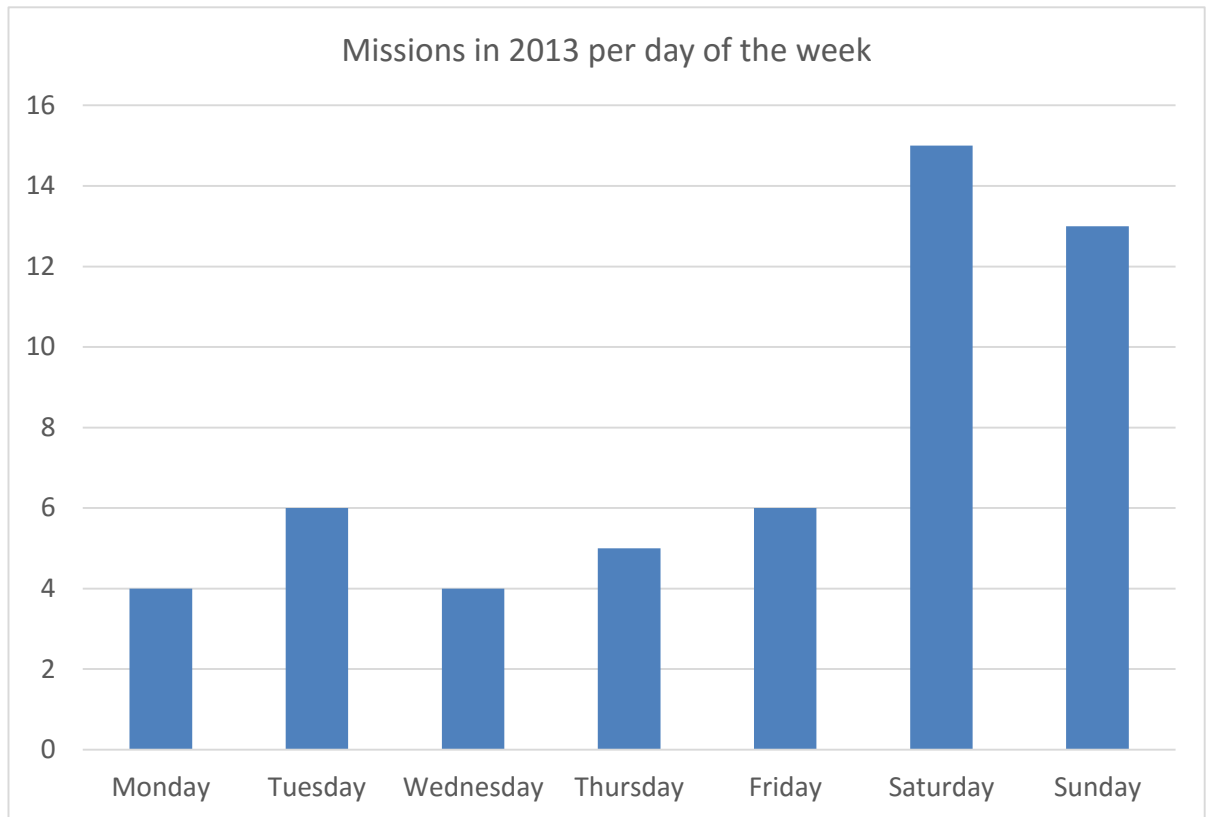
be interested in the membership in early summer or late spring, when they start their boating season. Naturally the autumn and winter seasons are not very busy, because of the weather and conditions.

Picture 4 Missions per days of the week (Meripelastusseura Etelä-Saimaa ry 2015)

Picture 4 shows the amount of missions per days of the week. Boating is more common during weekends as people have free time. Consequently the number of missions also increases then.

1.2 Goals and Research Problems

The main goal of this thesis was to produce a marketing communications plan. This marketing communications plan focuses on how to successfully market and sell the TROSSI membership. One of the communications methods planned in the beginning was a brochure. The brochure was supposed to be produced outside the marketing communications plan.

The marketing communications plan focuses on the means to recruit new members for the association. This is also the main goal and reason for the creation of this thesis. "The goal of any communications plan is to guide the implementation

of communication in long-term according to the strategy. The plan must not be a document that is taken out once a year, but a tool that guides everyday work (Juholin 2011)." Meripelastusseura does not have a very strict or precise communication strategy. Therefore here the main strategical policy is the goal of increasing the number of Trossi members through communication.

Another goal is to raise awareness of the association. When the awareness rises, marketing of services and products becomes easier. This will eventually affect the number of Trossi memberships and also the number of active members. Sponsorships and other types of support will be more easily available when the association has the visibility to be given in return. In the long run the whole association and its operations will benefit from this.

Suomen Meripelastusseura is an association that gains most of its operational revenue from the TROSSI memberships. Therefore the main challenge presented to the association is how to effectively recruit new members. This thesis will focus on finding answers to this question.

The marketing communications plan seeks to find out what there can be done to recruit new members. Limited resources will probably have some effect on the possibilities, but still the initial estimate is that there are several possibilities to be evaluated. The digital age has brought on some powerful communications methods, of which only a few are in use at the moment, and not perhaps to their full potential. Also, the communication should have clear focus points and goals. Otherwise the message will be communicated ineffectively and may not reach the customer at all.

Another important problem is defining the message. What kind of a message reaches the customer? How the customer understands the communicated message? Will the message raise interest? These are crucial questions that need to be answered before any message is sent towards the customer.

1.3   Research Methods

Informative and comparative research methods were used in this thesis. During the process different communication channels were compared and assessed

through various sources. Several of these were then chosen for the marketing plan.

The target group's profile was identified through qualitative research. Qualitative research was used, as it was deemed the most efficient mean to gather relevant data. "The characteristics of qualitative research provide flexibility and suitability for use in the interpretation of a marketing management situation. This is particularly so when carrying out research in an organizational or business context." (Carson & Gilmore 2006, p. 65). From qualitative research methods a survey was used. The survey was conducted with a questionnaire distributed via email. The questionnaire with open questions was sent out to active members of Meripelastusseura Etelä-Saimaa. The people that answered the questionnaire are either active members of Meripelastusseura Etelä-Saimaa or some of their sister associations in Finland, or regular boaters. Their answers provided crucial information on different types of boaters. This helped in identifying the target group. A total of eight answers were received. There were a total of four questions, all of them qualitative in nature.

Qualitative research is useful, when one aims to understand a phenomenon as a whole or an entity. It is meant for gathering unwritten factual information or information on the factors that lie underneath people's actions. This research method uses personal or group interviews to gather data. With an operational thesis, information that is mainly indicative is often enough. When planning the interview questions it is important to ensure that they provide answers to the main problems. The qualitative data does not necessarily need to be analyzed, but it can be used as a source in an operational thesis (Vilkka & Airaksinen 2003 pp. 63-64).

1.4 Target Group

Target group identification is one of the first elements that need to be completed when planning marketing or marketing communication. The audience can be individuals, groups, special publics or the general public. "The target audience will heavily affect the communicator's decisions on *what* will be said, *how* it will be

said, *when* it will be said, *where* it will be said, and *who* will say it." (Kotler & Armstrong 2010, p. 433)

The obvious target group for TROSSI-membership are the boaters and people with summer cottages around southern Lake Saimaa. These people tend to have boats and are active sailors around the Lake Saimaa waters. Therefore they also face the risk of an accident while offshore.

Boaters as a target group are somewhat heterogenic. The conducted survey gives some insight to the target group's composition. Boaters seem to be roughly divided into a few subgroups. There are day cruisers who seem to favor short trips and not spending the night anywhere. These could be divided to people with fast or slow boats. Then there are boaters who just go to their summer cottages. Apparently these people also belong to the day cruisers group according to a few answers in the survey.

Sailboat sailors are an obvious group. To these people the trip and the travel without wind is very important. The destination is not that important. Sport fisher-men are described as a group by several people in the survey. It seems logical as fishing is very popular in Finland.

As two opposites, association boaters and individualists were mentioned. The former find the social aspect of boating very important while the latter seem to avoid any social contact or associations. The individualists also tend to favor natural harbors where there are no people.

A typical boater is roughly 30-70 years old according to the survey. Younger people come along with their parents or grandparents. The age distribution could be explained by the fact that most people of that age group are usually employed and can afford the costs of boating. People over 60 probably also have time in their hands as they may be retired.

1.5 Competitors

There are no obvious competitors to the service offered by Meripelastusseura Etelä-Saimaa. Trossi-membership is the only service of its kind at least in the area of southern Lake Saimaa. However, when in an emergency, the boater still

has several choices of who to contact first. S/he may contact the police, the fire department or Meripelastusseura Etelä-Saimaa. Or s/he may just call 112, the emergency line. If the accident has indeed happened offshore, the police and the fire department will probably contact the association and the mission will eventually be handed over to them anyway. The Emergency Rescue Centre can also make the same decision, so in each case it is likely that the association is given the mission (Meripelastusseura Etelä-Saimaa ry 2015). As there are no actual competitors to the service, there are also no justified reasons for actions that would increase competitive advantage.

2 Marketing Communication

2.1 The Goals of Communication

Meripelastusseura Etelä-Saimaa seeks to convey a message to the customer. The message implies that the customer should acquire a TROSSI-membership before the sailing season begins. The membership will then provide safety, security and assurance to the customer throughout the season.

There are nine elements in the communication process. Two of these are the major parties in communication – the sender and the receiver. There are also two that are communication tools – the message and the media. Four more are communications functions – encoding, decoding, response and feedback. The remaining element is noise (Kotler & Armstrong 2010, pp. 432-433). These are seen in Figure 1.
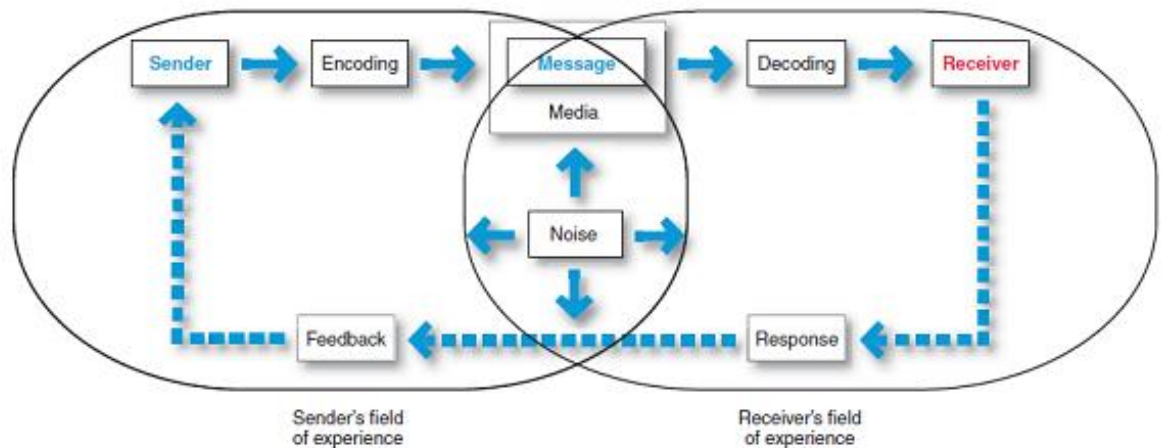
Figure 1 Elements in the Communication Process (Kotler & Armstrong 2010, p. 432)

The model of Figure 1 is the framework of communication applied to the association's situation. The message is encoded into a form that catches the customer's attention through the noise. This means that the message has to be interesting, but also clear. Encoding the message is critical, as it has to mesh with the decoding process at the customer's end. Therefore there must be common knowledge and experience between the two. "The more the sender's field of experience overlaps with that of the receiver, the more effective the message is likely to be." (Kotler & Armstrong 2010, p. 433.) This does not mean that there can always be complete common knowledge and/or experience between the two parties. Understanding the target audience is the key of this approach. Therefore the target group and what kind of response is wanted from them must be defined as precisely as possible. In the case of Meripelastusseura Etelä-Saimaa the target group and their desired response is somewhat specifically understood.

In the used model the focus is on the message rather than the audience, i.e. shaping the right type of message is the most important part. The message has to be accurate both factually and subjectively. Factually means correct spelling and language, while subjectively means full undistorted information, figures and quotes (Carroll, et al. 2014). The marketing communications plan should have clear goals. Otherwise there is little to no point in creating it at all. While setting these goals one has to bear in mind that they should be realistic. Meripelastus-seura Etelä-Saimaa sees the recruitment of 100-200 new Trossi members as a

realistic goal. Considering that there are at the moment approximately 400 Trossi members now, the target is probably high, but reachable.

Another goal of this marketing communications plan is to raise awareness of the existence of the association and the services it offers. At the moment Meripelastusseura Etelä-Saimaa sees low awareness as one its key weaknesses. However, as the association operates on the basis of voluntariness, there are rarely enough resources to perform other than its core tasks. The rising awareness would probably ease the other activities as new recruits would be available. It is also possible that the older active members would be more motivated by the rising awareness. After all, the excitement of others can be a great encouragement.

Higher awareness could also raise the interest of sponsors and other supporters. Sponsors usually want something in return for their support. Visibility is the most common possibility for this. "The sponsor expects a return in terms of publicity which does not reflect adversely on the sponsor." (Gratton & Taylor 2000, p. 164) If the organization does not have high awareness and/or visibility the interest for supporting it is obviously very low. Then again supporting an association which is dedicated to helping people voluntarily would not reflect adversely on the sponsor. Unfortunately supporting a sports club or team is usually much more beneficial to a sponsor. For example, the overwhelming visibility of the Finnish national ice hockey league team SaiPa in Lappeenranta makes it much attractive for sponsorships.

Growing visibility could also probably make Trossi recruitment easier. Trossi missions are an important source of income. Visibility could also bring other types of missions. An example could be someone's need for towing cottage building materials to an island.

When compared to sponsors the Trossi members are the more stable source of income. A sponsor can offer quickly excessive amounts of resources, but can also be a risk. When this sponsor decides to withdraw from the sponsorship it would be an immediate crisis. However, the withdrawal of one Trossi member from his/her membership would not be a very serious blow.

There is also the possibility of public support. However the public sector is usually very tight-fisted with sponsorships. The city of Lappeenranta could be a possible supporter. The politicians just tend to support an already visible organization as it is a safer choice.

Key Messages

Key messages are messages the organization wishes to convey about itself or its agenda, wants the public to know, accept or take action on. It is also what the organization wants the intermediaries to relay to their audiences. "Key messages may include objects, names of persons or organizations, issues, or topics; attributes, substantive or evaluative; or associations, co-occurrences between any two objects, attributes, or objects and attributes" (Carroll, et al. 2014). Key message could be that Meripelastusseura Etelä-Saimaa is offering Trossi membership. While also other messages can be sent, the key message is what essentially is wanted to be communicated.

2.2   Marketing Communications Mix

Marketing communication and its efficiency is of paramount importance to business success. The most excellent and exciting products will fail if their benefits are not communicated to the customers. Communication is also important after the purchase. People tend to look to advertisements afterwards in order to justify their recent purchase to themselves. A communications mix is a necessity in this activity. In the center of this communications mix is the customer. Communications need to be carefully tailored to a specifically identified target group (Ruskin-Brown 2006, p. 136). Communications Mix is the backbone of this plan.

A definition of communications mix is:

"A number of promotional methods used in combination to promote a particular product through communicating with individuals, groups and organizations in the 'target group'." (Ruskin-Brown 2006, p. 136)

Promotional methods are very important in a communications mix. There are various ways for communicating a message. Important is also how these methods of communication are combined and used in conjunction. This could be heavy

advertising or using the sales force to communicate the excellence of the product. As communication is of such importance, the organization has to have a certain message that can be conveyed. This also presents the challenge of doing it right: the receiver has to understand and interpret the message as the sender intended. Communication is supposed to be a two-way exchange of information, but this is usually not achieved. For example, advertising is almost completely a passive medium (Ruskin-Brown 2006, p. 137), (Kotler & Armstrong 2010, pp. 432-433).

The D.A.G.M.A.R. model stands for the following: Define, Advertising, Goals for, Measured, AdveRtising success. (Ruskin-Brown 2006, p. 137)

The Figure 2 shows a model of the communication process that needs to be followed with new and existing customers. At first there is unawareness, which then runs through different positive stages to a favorable action.
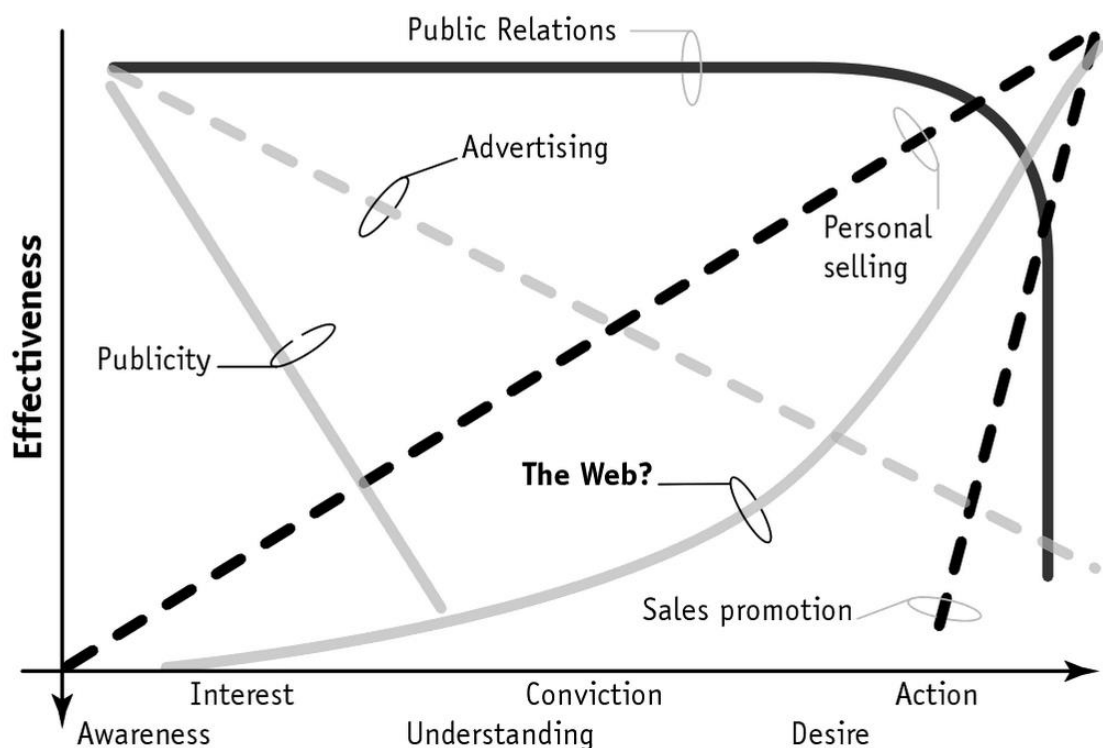

Figure 2 D.A.G.M.A.R. Model of Communication Process (Ruskin-Brown 2006, p. 137)

D.A.G.M.A.R. Model shows how promotional activities should achieve a number of tasks:

- Generating sufficient effect to create high levels of awareness and interest in a target group.

- Communicating more tailored messages, which meet specific information requirements, and allow a full understanding of the offering for the target group.

- Providing appropriate mechanisms (such as references, visits to other customer sites, trials or demonstrations), which strengthen customer's belief and of the company's credibility.

- Final convincing processes, normally via sales contact, to secure a favorable decision and to keep a satisfied customer. (Ruskin-Brown 2006, p. 138.)

Advertisements are used mainly to convey information. This information can be in the form of words or symbols. Advertising can be used to support or create an image, educate, persuade or inform. However, an important role of advertising is to encourage a customer to make a buying decision and provide assurance after that decision (Kotler & Armstrong 2010, pp. 432-433), (Ruskin-Brown 2006, p. 140).

Advertising should not be understood to be equal to marketing. It is more likely that advertising reinforces or strengthens an image rather that completely creates it, as a strong image is the total of a customer's experiences with a company and/or its products. Trying to advertise a positive image with bad products will probably result in cynical customers that will spread negative word of mouth. Over promising is also dangerous. A customer will not buy again a product that did not deliver what it promised. Advertising can reinforce image and loyalty, but not easily build it. The parts of the communication or promotion mix have to be clearly thought through. How much should be spent of advertising is also a difficult question. This due to the problem that the return on investment is difficult to measure (Ruskin-Brown 2006, pp. 141-142).

Personal selling can be defined as follows: "Personal selling is defined as an interpersonal communication process by which a seller uncovers and satisfies the needs of a buyer to the mutual, long term benefit of both the parties." (Rajput & Vasishth 2008, p. 126) This particular definition points out how personal selling

is ultimately about building a relationship, rather than just an exchange of goods and currency. It is about a partnership which is mutually beneficial. Personal selling is oral communication that is meant to make the customer see that his/her need or needs can be satisfied with the seller's product or service. The salesperson should be able to understand the customer's goal and provide him/her with a solution that is also economically viable to the customer. Personal selling cannot replace or substitute promotion or vice versa. They should in fact be seen as mutually supportive. Personal selling is generally more important in business-to-business markets, while advertising and promotion are dominant in business-to-consumer markets (Rajput & Vasishth 2008, p. 126) (Ruskin-Brown 2006, pp. 142-143).

The key goal of communication is to convince the customer to make the buying decision over and over again. It is also important in showing the customers the value of the product and informing them that they lack information. When the customers are aware of the product they can be persuaded to see that they have a need for the product. After the purchasing decision the main task of promotion is to maintain customer loyalty. Personal selling can be used to support this (Ruskin-Brown 2006, p. 143).

2.3   Word of Mouth Marketing (WOMM)

Word of Mouth Marketing (WOMM) is based on the idea that the potential customer hears about the product or service from his/her friend or acquaintance – in other words from a trustworthy source of the customer. In this lies the power of word of mouth. No other marketing method is able to convince the customer more greatly (Kimmel 2010, pp. 94-97).

Word of mouth is personal communication that concerns a product, service, brand or idea. The personal communication occurs between people or organizations that do not have any connections to a commercial entity or marketing source. Word of mouth can be divided into positive and negative WOM. The PWOM is communicating positive thoughts about the product, such as someone recommending a friend to buy the same smart phone as s/he has bought (Kimmel 2010, pp. 97-98). Spreading positive word of mouth adds credibility to the product

(Young 2008). The NWOM on the other hand is usually complaining about how bad a product or service is. A person could be telling his/her relatives about the horrible service s/he received in a clothing store. In either of these cases the power of WOM is staggering. While the positive WOM can drive sales to sharp rise, the negative WOM can at worst destroy a company or marketing entity (Kimmel 2010, pp. 97-98). Negative word of mouth can also be generated by other parties, such as competitors, clients, subcontractors and colleagues in other communities. The effects of this can often be destructive (Juholin 2011, p. 169).

Word of mouth should not be confused with rumor. Rumors spread without a good knowledge of the original source and therefore are not trustworthy like word of mouth, since WOM always comes from a known source. A person spreading word of mouth has often had personal experience with the product or service in question, whereas a person spreading a rumor usually has no experience about the product or service (Kimmel 2010, pp. 99-100).

Generally younger people generate more WOM than older people. The young people get more easily excited about new products and tend to also then recommend these products to their acquaintances (Kimmel 2010, pp. 102-103). Word of mouth is largely based on opinion leaders that communicate more actively about their opinions and are also listened to by others around them. These opinion leaders can also be called market mavens. These influential individuals are twice as likely to recommend products or services to other people. One or more of the following must be true if opinion leadership is to take place:

1. The consumer is not informed well enough to be able to make an adequately informed choice.
2. The product or service is complex and difficult to evaluate using objective criteria.
3. A consumer has no ability to evaluate the product or service, no matter how the information is disseminated and presented.
4. Other sources of product- or service-related information (e.g., salespeople or advertisers) are perceived to have low credibility.
5. It is easier to consult an opinion leader than other sources.

6. There are strong social ties between the consumer and the opinion leader (e.g., the opinion leader is liked and respected).
7. The consumer needs social approval (i.e., cares about what others think). (Kimmel 2010, p. 107)

There are three factors that trigger word of mouth. The first one is *Extreme satisfaction or dissatisfaction*. It derives from the people's natural tendency to share good or bad experiences. If a product has been particularly good, a person is likely to recommend it to his/her friends. Then again, if a product has caused a person to scream in horror, his/her friends are also very likely to hear about it. Negative WOM has also been found to increase at greater rate than positive WOM (Kimmel 2010, p. 105).

The second factor is *Novelty of the product*. New or unusual products generate enthusiasm and attract attention. The uniqueness of a product can make people talk about it (Kimmel 2010, pp. 105-106).

The third factor is *Consumers' commitment to the firm*. In this case the consumer is very loyal to a company or a brand. A loyal customer tends to filter out the negative word of mouth and spread the positive WOM. They are also usually not happy about negative news about their favorite brand and may even try to defend it (Kimmel 2010, p. 107).

Marketing is nowadays a highly competitive field and this has overwhelmed the customers. This means that people encounter huge number of advertisements every day and have probably become increasingly cynical. Spending huge amounts of money to marketing may not necessarily bring the expected results, as customers will still spread their own ideas (Young 2008).

Good service or product quality creates buzz. Customers will remember the constant and continuing positive experiences. This means that word of mouth will spread also on its own (Young 2008). Customers that have little to no experience

about the product will often seek information and opinions from their acquaint-ances.

Category factors: visibility, complexity, reliability, design, frequency of use, novelty, price	Marketing intervention: advertising, promotions	Consumer factors: tenure, loyalty, mavenism, purchase rate, gender, age, social contact

Motivation   Opportunity

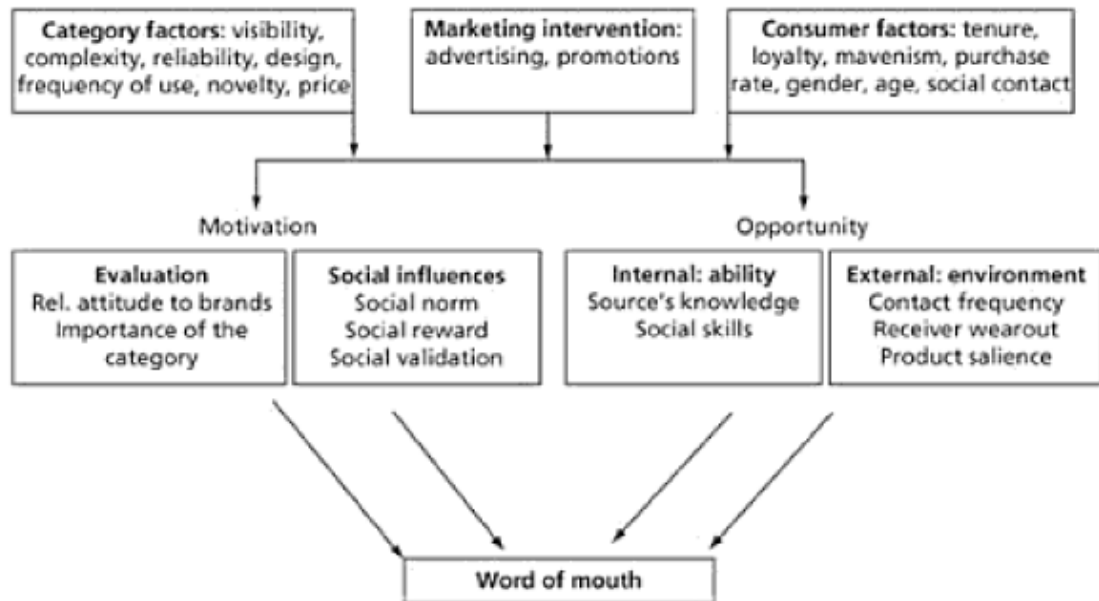| Evaluation Rel. attitude to brands Importance of the category	Social influences Social norm Social reward Social validation	Internal: ability Source's knowledge Social skills	External: environment Contact frequency Receiver wearout Product salience

Word of mouth

Figure 3 Model explaining the production of Word of Mouth by East, Vanhuele and Wright (Kimmel 2010, p. 108).

Figure 3 represents a conceptual framework about the production of word of mouth and how the factors of this process operate. The researchers acquired evidence that rate of recommendation can often be related to such factors as relative attitude to the brand (i.e., the rating of a brand compared with other available brands in terms of satisfaction), the referral status of the communicator (i.e., whether the person was recruited by recommendation of not); whether the communicator recommended other product categories, and customer tenure (i.e., duration as a customer of the brand). (Kimmel 2010, p. 108) However, these factors will not always produce word of mouth. For example, customer tenure was found to be negatively related to recommendation for some categories, such as credit cards, bank accounts and supermarkets, and then positively related to others, such as car servicing (Kimmel 2010, pp. 108-109).

The Figure 3 model "is based on the assumption that behavior stems from three sources of influence – motivation, opportunity, and ability (MOA)" (Kimmel 2010,

p. 109). Basically this approach shows how word of mouth is transmitted more likely when people desire to and have the relevant skills and opportunity to do so.

At the top level of the model there are category, marketing and consumer factors, which would be the root of WOM production. This would hint that interesting products, marketing interventions, and consumer characteristics can lead to the beginning of the process.

At the second level the model has motivation and opportunity influences. Motivation includes personal and social aspects, while opportunity is divided into internal influences that are the communicator's abilities and external influences that come from the environment. Some products, such as mobile phones generate word of mouth more easily. On the other hand, WOM efficiency may diminish if customers experience receiver wear-out which makes them tired of hearing about a product over and over again (Kimmel 2010, p. 109).

In summary, there is neither single nor simple answer to the question of what factors produce and stimulate word of mouth. The factors in Figure 2 are catalysts that may trigger WOM. This theory also shows that offering incentives to customers form recommending products to others, while often beneficial, may not necessarily be needed. Word of mouth can spread also on its own (Kimmel 2010, p. 109).

WOM's weakness is its immeasurability. In other words, it is difficult to put in figures the return on investment it produces. Although it has been agreed generally that word of mouth is able to generate wide awareness, its ability to generate actual sales is a highly disputed matter. There have been both successes and failures in trying to drive sales through word of mouth campaigns. Apparently it also requires some amount of luck, since customers will engage in word of mouth also without any marketer doing anything (Ferguson 2008).

A major strength of word of mouth Marketing is that the receiver considers the sender's message reliable. This is because from the receiver views that the sender has nothing to gain from his/her opinion. Therefore the sender also has no reason to untruthfully praise or scold the product (Boyer, et al. 2015). When the sender is affiliated or receives an incentive for recommending a product, Word

of Mouth becomes Covert Marketing. The sender's affiliation is not supposed to be revealed – hence the term covert marketing – to the receiver but if this were to happen the message would probably not be perceived as trustworthy as a message from a non-affiliated sender. The customers do not want to be deceived and may see covert marketing as some kind of deceit (Boyer, et al. 2015). However, if the receiver has strong ties to the sender, s/he will be more susceptible to the message and may not suspect covert marketing or deceit, or may just ignore the doubt. This is not because of the message itself, but because of the strong relationship between the sender and the receiver (Boyer, et al. 2015). Covert marketing can also be called incentivized WOM. As earlier was mentioned, WOM's success may be difficult to measure. Incentivized word of mouth makes it possible to measure the return on investment of the marketing efforts. Every bonus handed out practically means a product sold due to word of mouth (Kimmel 2010, pp. 224-229).

Word of mouth marketing has to be designed and planned so that it is relevant to the target group. If the desired customers do not watch a lot of television or do not use social media, it is probably not a good idea to plan a word of mouth campaign based on those media. Another factor to consider is whether using the word of mouth is likely to cause more harm than positive results. In some cases the image of an established organization can be tarnished if it uses methods unbeknownst to the industry. On the other hand this same action can be seen as pioneering and give a significant advantage (Kimmel 2010, p. 217).

There also has to be a story that is told to the customers. The customers cannot convey messages to each other if they do not have anything to go with. Therefore an organization has to have an inspiring marketing story to tell (Kimmel 2010, p. 218).

3   Marketing Communications Plan for the Association

This chapter contains and discusses the various means of marketing communication available for the association. These means of marketing are the ones

deemed feasible, with the ones deemed unfeasible already ruled out. Marketing communication can be conducted with any and all of these. Finding the right mix should result in the best result of conveying the message.

The main marketing method chosen is word of mouth. It has been laid out in the theory part and probably offers the most efficient way for Meripelastusseura Etelä-Saimaa to recruit new members.

3.1 Customer Motivation

A Trossi member should be seen as a customer. A customer needs to have some reason to purchase a product or a service. "At the center of every great market strategy is the ability to clearly communicate and then consistently deliver what the customer is paying for regardless of the product or service, regardless of market complexity or size. This is what motivates the customer." (Papke 2013, p. 25) Customer motivation could be defined as such. The customer's need for the product has to be communicated clearly while also having such a good product that s/he will want it again and again. Therefore an important thing for the sellers is to know what they are selling.

The Trossi membership offers several reasons for the customer to want it. In total they appeal on both rational and emotional sides. The most obvious and also the most general one is safety offshore. The customer has an assuring knowledge that in case of an emergency, no matter how small, help would be available. This is both an emotional and also a rational appeal. There is always the fear that something could happen even though it would not seem likely. It is also rational to acknowledge the possibility of an incident because of rapidly changing weather, a collision or an engine failure, just to name a few.

The towing service is also available in a minor incident. As an example this could mean a broken propeller while going to the summer cottage on a sunny day. Although there would be no immediate danger, a free towing service is very useful in such a situation. After all, Trossi costs only 75€ per year while towing without it costs 140€/hour (Meripelastusseura Etelä-Saimaa ry 2015).

An important motivator is the good feeling a customer receives for supporting such activity. Although this is probably usually not alone a reason enough to make the buying decision, its importance should not be underestimated.

3.2 The Communications Mix

The Communications Mix chapter goes through the different media suggested for Meripelastusseura Etelä-Saimaa. The media chosen for the communications mix are printed material, Internet, word of mouth, social media and personal selling. The chapter also features a short look at a brochure. This was added due to wishes from the association and is shortly mentioned as they may have interest in producing one in the unforeseeable future. This would however be a large project and would probably produce a thesis of its own.

Printed Material

As boaters are usually keeping their boats in harbors and waterfronts, a possibility could be to spread posters to these locations. Printed material also supports word of mouth marketing efforts. The message is remembered more easily when there is a reminder somewhere. The following locations are in the area of operations of the association:

- Lappeenranta harbor
- Lappeenranta Piers:
    - Skinnarila
    - Kivisalmi
    - Tyysterniemi
    - Korkkiranta
    - Linnoitus
    - Lauritsala
    - Pappilanniemi
    - Perinnelaivatelakka (Vintage Boat Dock)
- Joutseno piers:
    - Honkalahti
    - Likosienlahti
- Taipalsaari piers:
    - Kirkonkylä (Municipal Centre)
    - Saimaanharju
    - Saimaanranta
- In addition, the boat gas station Saimaan Loiste in Lappeenranta Harbor is a potential location. Also the cottages of Lappeenranta Sailing Club and Lappeenranta Boating Club could be possible locations for promotional material.

Internet

Meripelastusseura Etelä-Saimaa already has a website. This website contains a lot of useful and accurate information about the association. The Trossi membership is defined there very precisely. However, it is currently updated quite infrequently. Then again the website probably should contain mainly the long-term information that changes rarely. The messages, which are basically anything on the website, should be encoded so that the visitor clearly understands, or decodes, the information. In a normal webpage the message can probably be quite long, containing full text and paragraphs, unlike on social media where the messages tend to be shorter.

The website should convey only a few key messages, such as the agenda of Meripelastusseura, which probably is the idea of helping people offshore. Other key messages could be the availability of Trossi membership and that the association is constantly recruiting members. Currently the front page shows clearly that recruiting is open, but for example the Trossi banner is somewhat small and not probably the first to catch the visitor's eye. (Meripelastusseura Etelä-Saimaa ry 2015) The fact that the association is for maritime search and rescue, should become quite clear already from the association's name and also the coloring of the website. However, none of this information is available in English. It should be considered whether at least the key messages should be available in English in the future. This of course requires that there would be a demand for service in that language. It is possible that the number of foreign boaters in southern Lake Saimaa area may increase in the future.

One possible way to communicate the professionality of Meripelastusseura could be to show the association's history as a success story. The website could have a section about the history of the association and how it has been helping people through the decades. A good story is interesting. (Juholin 2011, p. 79)

The brochure could be made available also through the website. This would also increase the value of the website. A link to the brochure on the website could also be available directly on the Facebook page.

Word of Mouth and Social Media

The potential members are difficult to reach in large scale, as they are not a single unified and organized group. However, the existing Trossi members are. Meripelastusseura Etelä-Saimaa does have their contact information and therefore they can be reached. These people also probably have friends who own boats and go boating. A possible way to recruit new members could be to take advantage of this existing base of members. What if the existing Trossi members would receive a bonus or a gift for recommending membership to someone? This would allow for a huge recruiter base.

The advantage of word of mouth marketing is that the potential customer gets to hear about the product or service from someone s/he knows already. People also tend to trust their acquaintances more than advertisements from some impersonal company or organization. The customer who already has a Trossi membership knows that the service is good and reliable. Therefore s/he is in an excellent position to also recommend the membership. For the potential customer/member it might be difficult to argue against the membership when a friend or a relative is recommending it.

The word of mouth marketing could and should be actively applied in order to spread the word. Naturally the WOM should be positive WOM. The story of a professionally operating voluntary association that helps people in a case of emergency is an interesting story. Spreading this story through the existing members could attract new members. When these new members would have good experiences about the service they could also attract again new members. The existing members could be motivated with some incentives or bonuses. They would then benefit for recommending the membership.

This would be a situation where everyone benefits. The new Trossi member receives the benefits of the membership, the recruiter would get a gift and the association would have a new member, thus securing them more resources.

An important factor is the opinion leaders. If these could be identified, the WOMM efforts would probably be much more efficient. The opinion leaders have the

greatest influence and largest social networks, so therefore they would be the most useful tool when it comes to WOM marketing efforts.

E-mail could be a powerful tool, when used right. Contacting the existing members through this method should be quite reliant and effective. If the existing Trossi members receive a well-structured e-mail that informs them about the possibility to receive a bonus or a gift for recruiting a new member, they could be a large and effective marketing force. An e-mail should contain a simple and interesting heading and an ingress that convey the key message or messages. These should make the whole point clear to the receiver. The structure of the entire message should be clear and preferably short. The e-mail should not include too much information. If more information is needed, it should be made available in the website. The e-mail should then contain hyperlinks to this additional information (Juholin 2011, pp. 177-180.)

Suomen Meripelastusseura Etelä-Saimaa ry has already some existing social media presence. They have a Facebook Page, and also an Instagram account.

Today, Facebook is often considered a "must" for a company or an organization (Dixon 2012, p. 20). It is the most popular social media and therefore the most likely to reach the largest audience.

Instagram on the other hand is a quickly growing service that revolves around sharing pictures and video material. It includes several filters that can be easily used to edit the material before publishing it. Instagram also uses hashtags in the same manner as Twitter.

The problem with social media in this case is that the target group consists mainly of middle-aged to elderly people. According to the survey they may not use services such as Facebook or Instagram regularly. Therefore social media should probably be seen as secondary means of communication when trying to convey the message. Still, at least Facebook would probably be useful. As Instagram focuses on sharing of "moments" through images, it would probably not serve very practically when trying to recruit Trossi members. Instagram could still be used to raise and maintain awareness about the association and their operations.

The results of the interview do not support the extensive use of social media as a marketing channel. As some younger people apparently also go boating, maintaining the association's current Facebook presence can be suggested. Facebook could be used to share sections of the association's website, but other than that very little should be contributed to the development of social media presence in general.

The use of Instagram should not either be developed further, at least in a large scale. The target groups are apparently not very active in this social media either, as Instagram is mainly used by younger people.

Social media also has huge amounts of noise. Especially Facebook is filled with content that is trying to reach the users of the service. The small number of relevant users are very likely to be overwhelmed with content. Therefore reaching the target group is even more difficult.

The messages used on social media should be short and concise. They could be complemented with pictures and links to relevant websites. Also, if there is new information on the association's website, it should be linked to Facebook with a clearly encoded message.

Personal selling

As 62% of missions are related to non-Trossi boaters (Picture 1), one possibility could be to communicate with the customer immediately after the incident. The potential customer is there, and s/he would at this point see very clearly the benefits of being a member. After all, the person has just experienced that the threat of an accident is very real. However, probably a "soft" approach should be applied here. A person who has just experienced an accident may not be the most receptive one. S/he may be in shock, or just frustrated or annoyed about the incident. Then again, the accident victim may be very susceptible to believe what his/her savior tells him/her. With personal selling the message is conveyed in real-time and in person with spoken language. Therefore usually a polite, but clear approach should work here without a too complicated encoding of the message. Personal selling can also have long-lasting effects as it is as much about building a relationship as solving the customer's problem.

Brochure

Meripelastusseura Etelä-Saimaa could produce a brochure or a small book that would include anything and everything a sailor could need while offshore. A sailor would have this book at his/her boat and if there were any information s/he would require to know quickly, the information could be found from the book. For a book of this kind to be useful, there needs to be a lot of information from different organizations and players. The information should also be specific and clear. This project would however probably require more resources than the association can muster. Gathering the data would also require wide cooperation from several associations and officials. The following organizations should be considered as possible partners:

- Southeast Finland Police (Kaakkois-Suomen poliisilaitos)
- South Karelia Fire and Rescue Service (Etelä-Karjalan Pelastuslaitos)
- The Finnish Border Guard (Rajavartiolaitos)
- Emergency Rescue Centre Administration (Hätäkeskuslaitos)
- Customs (Tulli)
- Voluntary Rescue Service (VaPePa)
- Voluntary Fire Department (Vapaapalokunta)
- The other maritime search and rescue associations of the Saimaa watershed
    - Iisalmen Järvipelastusyhdistys
    - Imatran Järvipelastajat
    - Joensuun Järvipelastajat
    - Kuopion Järvipelastajat
    - Lieksan Järvipelastajat
    - Länsi-Saimaan Järvipelastajat
    - Puulan Järvipelastajat
    - Savonlinnan Järvipelastajat
    - Sisä-Savon Järvipelastajat
    - Varkauden Järvipelastajat

This brochure creates significant added value to the membership: the association is able to produce useful guides when it has more resources. Once in the hands

of a boater, it also improves the image of the association. If Meripelastusseura Etelä-Saimaa was able to produce a useful handbook, it is probably able to do right other things as well. The image will stay in the boater's mind. Creating this image is also highly beneficial for other marketing efforts in the long run. Marketing of other services such as Trossi will be easier and also cheaper. The positive image will affect the buying decision positively. Also the customers can make the buying decision on their own just based on the image (Rope 2000, p. 180).

The brochure could be made available also online, perhaps through the association's website. In this way it could be accessed easily from various devices, such as computers and smartphones.

The soft approach could mean just handing the customer an information letter or a brochure. Also hinting at the possibility of having the membership is plausible, but it has to be done carefully. The customer could be angered if s/he is suggested that s/he could have saved hundreds of euros by having the membership. If the customer indeed is angered, s/he may never want to hear anything about the whole membership, no matter how rationally it would be justified to him/her.

3.3   The Means of Marketing Communication in Short

The means that could be used are portrayed here (Table 1) in a matrix in order to give a clear picture of their features, strengths and weaknesses. It is mainly meant to show at a quick glance what the different methods offer. The methods' effects are presented in relation to the target group. This table is not meant to give all the essential information in one place, but more to help understand the marketing methods in relation to each other and as a Marketing Mix entity.

	Visibility	Costs	Strengths	Weaknesses	Long-term effect
Printed material	High (for target group)	Low	Reaches target group	Only useful in specific locations	Short
Internet	Low	Relatively low	Website accommodates lots of information	The customer has to find the website first	Long
Word of Mouth	Very large	Very low	Can cause genuine excitement in the target group	Difficult to measure	Possibly long
Social media	Low	None to low	The modern communication channel	Does not reach the target group effectively	Long
Personal selling	Low	Free	The best opportunity to convince a customer	The customer has to be found	Short

Table 1 Marketing Communications Methods in a Matrix

The Tracking of Results

The goal of the marketing communication planned here is 100-200 new Trossi members. The campaign spans the boating season, from spring to autumn. After the season the goals should be revisited and the achievements assessed. At this stage should also be assessed which communication and marketing methods were successful and which were not. This information is crucial in order to improve future communication and marketing efforts.

4   Discussion and Conlusions

4.1   Discussion

There could have been a different kind of basic outline for this thesis. However, the main point all along the process was the relevancy of this work to the client. The problem with an association that has its resources already stretched thin is the limitation of options. Therefore the chosen Marketing Mix consists of methods that have low costs. It limits options, but this approach seems to still suggest that it is possible to do marketing successfully with limited resources. This is however still just theoretical at this point, as none of these marketing methods have not yet been applied in the association. Nonetheless this plan gives advice and tells what could and probably should be done in order to reach and recruit potential members.

There are definitely weaknesses in this plan and some factors could have probably been researched more thoroughly, but there are concrete methods that Meripelastusseura Etelä-Saimaa could use. This was the main goal of producing this marketing communications plan.

4.2   Conclusions and Suggestions

In this thesis the possibilities of marketing communication for a South Karelian non-governmental organization were researched and evaluated. This organization does not have very large resources and its operations are based entirely on voluntary work. However, it has a long history and professional attitude towards the search and rescue service it provides.

During the thesis process various marketing communication channels were evaluated and some were ruled out of this thesis as impractical to the association. The ones left were chosen due to their relevance to the target group and their low costs.

Suomen Meripelastusseura Etelä-Saimaa ry has several possibilities on how to improve their marketing communication. The most relevant communication methods for them are probably to use their existing members as recruiters through a

bonus system, spreading posters around the piers and ports in Lappeenranta, and also recruiting immediately after an incident. The publications of boating associations also seem to be a relevant communication channel to boaters. Therefore they could also be a possibility. Placing advertisements to these publications could also be an effective way to reach potential members.

One finding of the thesis was that the awareness about Meripelastusseura Etelä-Saimaa is currently low and would benefit from a recruiting campaign.

The service, Trossi membership, should be compelling enough for the customers. Although the assessment of price is not included in this thesis, it is probably a fair assumption that a member benefits clearly from the additional safety measures and their cheap price compared to the costs of having an accident without a membership.

The results and effectiveness of the measures suggested in this thesis could be studied in the future, in order to make corrections and developments. The brochure mentioned in the Media chapter could provide someone a topic for a thesis, as Meripelastusseura Etelä-Saimaa has significant interest in producing something like a "boater's guide book".

The survey also revealed a possible need for further research on boater's attitudes and knowledge. Several answers expressed concern over these. This may or may not however be relevant for anyone from the field of business administration.

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Appendix

The survey questions:

1. Describe a typical boater
2. Describe subtypes of boaters (if any exist) Do you have any estimate of their distribution?
3. Describe the age distribution of boaters
4. What communication channels the typical boaters (and their subgroups) follow?