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MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS IN B2B COMPANIES

**The Roles of Marketing Communication Tools in the Digital
Age**

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in Marketing

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1 INTRODUCTION

For the last two decades marketing communications has gone through some significant changes, more than any other area of marketing (Keller 2001, 819; Chlebišova, Kyzeková & Zajarošová 2011). However, during this time the promotional mix and the meanings given to the various components of it have not changed dramatically, and personal selling, advertising and sales promotion activities are still regarded as the most important tools (Brennan, Canning & McDowell 2011, 179).

The most essential change a decade ago was the increased number of communication tools and their diversity, as well as the fragmentation of traditional advertising media and the emergence of new, non-traditional media (Keller 2001, 819–820). Today, it is the internet and online communications that are leading the change (Chlebišova et al. 2011) and the reasons seem to be very similar to those a decade ago.

1.1 The ever changing world of marketing communications

The development of the market with the customer evolving from a follower of messages during the time of mass consumption into a talented skilled consumer who knows what he wants and when he wants it, has created new challenges for the world of marketing and business. At first it used to be the manufacturer who ruled and decided what was sold and where, but as time progressed the roles changed and suddenly it was the customer who controlled the situation with purchasing decisions and lifestyle choices. People did not just automatically take what they were offered; they decided what they bought as well as where and when. They chose what they listened to or watched and they were not afraid to speak their mind. (Schultz, Tannenbaum & Lauterborn 1994.) Instead of companies pushing information to the audience, people pull information suited for their needs and from a source they prefer (Călin Gărau 2008, 174).

Knowing what the customer wants and needs is crucial and customers need to be listened to. Twenty years ago Schultz et al. (1994) wrote that marketing needs to take on new roles whilst the world evolves and be prepared to tear down old beliefs and habits. It became crucial for marketers to understand how important it is to truly comprehend the customer and their motives. (Schultz et al. 1994, 13.) Now, in the digital age, the world is even more hectic and if wanting to succeed companies must move fast and experiment new things (Valos et al. 2010). New opportunities are constantly emerging (Pickton & Broderick 2001) and companies need to seize these chances (Kimmel 2005).

The world as well as the field of marketing changes in an unbelievably fast pace and this change was summarised twenty years ago as:

The incredibly fast change from mass marketing to one-on-one marketing, from mass communication to individual communication, from what we knew and were comfortable with to things that seem to challenge the very nature of our businesses and our lives. (Schultz et al. 1994, 17)

These changes have taken the world from local media to global communication and from carefully scheduled events to instant communication no matter where one is physically located. The world has also moved away from place-bound communication to a situation where time or physical locations do not matter. (Armstrong & Kotler 2009.) Already twenty years ago it was said that with technology, media organisations are beginning to be able to identify, segment, select, and attract smaller, more attentive and focused audiences with their marketing communication activities (Schultz et al. 1994, 21). Compared to the situation 20 years ago, the significant difference can be seen exactly in the importance of digital media as a communication tool (Brennan et al. 2011, 179).

Over a decade ago it was written that online marketing is adopting an increasingly significant role in the business marketing strategy because of its benefits (Hutt & Speh, 2001, 422) and companies need to recognise the new opportunities constantly emerging in the ever changing world of business and marketing (Pickton & Broderick 2001). It has been said that this is no doubt “*the most dynamic period in the history of marketing*” and there has been a rapid evolution of online marketing (Valos, Ewing & Powell 2010, 361). Digital marketing has brought both challenges as well as immense and unprecedented opportunities (Valos, Ewing & Powell 2010), and the development continues and it is unlikely it will slow down, on the contrary, it will undoubtedly only speed up.

1.2 Purpose of the study and research questions

Marketing communications is an integral part of a company’s overall marketing mission and during the recent decades its role has increased dramatically and it has even been claimed that since marketing is part of communication and vice-versa, marketing and communications are practically inseparable (Shimp 2003, 3). The constant change has brought new methods for marketing communications in addition to the more traditional methods (Kimmel 2005) and in this hectic world of the digital age one has to move fast and experiment new things in order to be successful (Valos et al. 2010).

During this time of constant change the ones clinging to the past will be outrun by those who seize opportunities and understand the importance of development and adaptation to the new environment (Kimmel 2005). Business-to-business marketing communi-

cations in general as well as online marketing have been studied vastly. What is missing, is a point-of-view on how the more traditionally perceived marketing communication tools are linked to the online tools – how offline and online tools act together especially in business-to-business markets.

Marketing communication is a field that evolves extremely quickly (Fill 2011) and there is a need for an overview of the current situation of the marketing communication tools and their roles in the business-to-business context. Earlier research has studied for example online communications planning (Jensen 2006) and the combining of offline and online media (Chatterjee 2012) but not precisely regarding the business-to-business field. In addition, there are no studies on what exactly the current situation of business-to-business marketing communications is and how companies are addressing their online marketing communication efforts.

Moreover, there is no study on the position of online marketing in relation to the more traditionally perceived methods. Hence, it is justifiable to study the extent of online activities and its effects on the business-to-business sector and on other marketing communication tools. Having said that, the purpose of this study is to examine business-to-business marketing communications and the tools used by companies in their marketing communications efforts in the digital age and in a global environment. The research questions are as follows:

1. a) What are the marketing communication tools used in b2b companies today?
b) What are the roles of these tools?
2. a) What is the role of online marketing communications?
b) How has online shaped the field of b2b marketing communications?

For this study qualitative method was chosen as a research approach and the data was collected using semi-structured theme interviews. In order to answer the research questions representatives of large Finnish multinational companies in the business-to-business sector were interviewed. Altogether six people from whom five represent companies in the industrial sector and one an information technology company, were interviewed for this study. The interviewees are all managers, directors or vice presidents on marketing or branding, or both. Five of the interviews were conducted face-to-face but one was an e-mail interview due to the busy schedule of the interviewee.

The theory is presented in the second chapter since it is purposeful to treat it as a whole, because this gives an opportunity to compare the challenges and the possibilities related to each element in a meaningful way. This chapter covers the marketing communications efforts of business-to-business companies according to literature as well as the aspects of online environment and global marketplace. The role of integrated mar-

keting communications and importance of cohesive messages across all channels will also be discussed in the theory chapter.

After the theory chapter, the focus will be on the empirical research and analysing of the interviews and the material. Then, the results from the interviews will be dealt with according to themes that were also the framework for the interviews. The last part, conclusions, will present the findings and link the results to the theory, and then finally the summary will tie up the entire study and its findings as well as provide thoughts for future research.

1.3 Positioning the study

Marketing communications represent the company and can be seen as the ‘face’ of the organisation and it is something that the audience knows and respects (Pickton & Broderick 2001). Essentially, by marketing communications companies aim to inform, persuade, incite, and remind consumers, and this is done both directly as well as indirectly (Keller 2001, 819). Shimp (2003) begins opening the concept of marketing communications by explaining marketing and communication separately. According to him marketing is the activities with which businesses and other companies create transfers of value amongst themselves and also with their customers. Communications is the process where thoughts and meanings are conveyed and shared amongst individuals but also between companies and individuals (Shimp 2003, 3).

Thus,

Marketing communications represents the collection of all elements in a brand’s marketing mix that facilitate exchanges by targeting the brand to a group of customers, positioning the brand as somehow distinct from competitive brands, and sharing the brand’s meaning – its point of difference – with the brands’ target audience. (Shimp 2003, 3).

Business markets can be explained to entail all those companies buying goods and services to use in the production of other products and services (Kotler, Armstrong, Saunders and Wong 1999, 276). They can be seen as networks of evolving relationships between companies where there are continuing interactions instead of just a sequence of transactions. In business markets there are ‘social actors’, both individuals and organisations, who depend on others, and there are many factors influencing the business market, such as government regulations, the size of the market, international aspects, the nature of demand and the buying processes, the decision-making of other companies and the concentration of buying power. (Ellis 2011.)

The communication channel is no longer uni-directional but instead a network where everyone can send a message and the audience is connected to the organisations. With this network the gap between organisations and audience has been closed. Not just that, in a network, the audience is also connected to one another since online provides an interactive environment (Ellis 2011, 306). As much as it is no longer just one message to fit all, it is no longer just the companies pushing information to people for them to accept; it is about people pulling the information that fits their needs from a source that they like and at a time that suits them. (Călin Gărau 2008, 172, 174.)

Business-to-business communication is going through some significant changes and the internet and online communications are crucial during this change (Chlebišova et al. 2011). Electronic communication works two-way and in real time and it has offered businesses new ways to communicate and in such a way, that some traditionally perceived practices have been reconfigured. (Fill & Fill 2005, 323.) The world is hectic and if aiming for success in the digital age, companies need to follow the time and recognise new possibilities and seize the opportunities presented by the digital world (Valos et al. 2010).

Technology develops fast but it is not clear to what extent it is used in the marketing communication activities in the business-to-business sector. This study positions itself between research on business-to-business marketing communications and research on online tools and channels, by studying both aspects separately and in relation to each other. Even though it has been stated that the promotional mix has not changed dramatically (Brennan et al. 2011, 179), some changes regarding not only the online environment but also the more traditional tools and their roles might have taken place.

Electronic marketing has many names such as e-marketing, internet marketing, digital marketing and online marketing, and it can be described to be the marketing activities done through electronic communications through interactive computer-aided systems (Brennan, Baines & Garneau 2008, 160; Daj, 2011, 28). In this study, the term online marketing will be used to describe the marketing communication activities carried out in the digital environment and the means of electronic communications. With the term 'digital age' is meant in this study the situation where online environment and new technologies are shaping the world for both consumers as well as businesses in private and in working life, hence also having an increasing influence on marketing communications between business-to-business companies. Faster communication has brought individuals closer to each other and made the world smaller and it no longer matters where one is or even what time it is, when dealing with communication activities (Armstrong & Kotler 2009).

2 BUSINESS-TO-BUSINESS COMMUNICATION

The initial assumption is that the online environment and new technologies have developed greatly and hence influenced also the business-to-business sector. In this chapter first the more traditionally perceived means of marketing communication will be addressed and after that the concept of online marketing will be discussed in its own subchapter. Lastly, the global marketplace will be dealt with as well will be the idea of integrated marketing communications.

It seems that the development of new technologies has altered the field of marketing communications (Chlebišova et al. 2011) and its role will undoubtedly evolve further with new applications for marketing communications.

Nevertheless, it would seem that the more traditional marketing communication tools have still to lose their meaning. In this chapter first the more classic means of business-to-business marketing communications will be looked at starting with what seems to be the most important one according to literature, personal selling, and moving on to cover direct marketing and sales promotion as well as advertising and public relations.

However, first, the general field of business-to-business marketing will be discussed. After that the differences between business-to-business (b2b) and business-to-consumer (b2c) marketing will be dealt with to give an idea of the general field of marketing communications as a base for a more detailed examination.

2.1 Business-to-business marketing

In business markets there is a complex network of companies working together and the objective of b2b marketing is to manage these networks of buying and selling relationships (Ellis 2011). Marketing communications is an integral part of a company's overall marketing mission and these processes (Shimp 2003 3). B2b marketing deals with exchanges between organisations and it can be complex and risky (Brassington & Pettitt 2013).

The decision making unit is the place where buying decision are made and what marketing communication between companies essentially ought to do is to convince the members of this unit. This can be done with both personal and impersonal communication tools aimed at the purchase unit of the company and what communication planning needs to comprehend is who the communication should be focused at. The view nowadays is that the customer is not just an anonymous enterprise but a specific person, and the marketing communications efforts should be targeted at these people making the purchasing decisions (Ellis 2011; Chlebišová et al. 2011, 1231.) In this sense, b2b sector

can learn from the b2c sector where people make decisions based on misperceptions and emotions (Ellis 2011, 36).

Typically the buying organisation looks for information from various sources in different phases of the process (Chlebišová et al. 2011, 1234) and by integrating marketing communication efforts a company can collectively influence the audience (Payne & Holt 2001; Wickham & Hall 2006). Marketing communications efforts, from advertising and public relations to exhibitions, packaging and sales management, ought to be cohesive (Pickton & Broderick 2001, 3) and no matter the source of communication, the messages should be consistent (Ellis 2011, 72).

When marketing between b2b companies the focus should be on identifying customers and understanding their wants and needs (Fill & Fill 2005, 5; Kotler et al. 1999, 276; Fill 2011). With customer-centric marketing is meant the utilisation of detailed knowledge about customer behaviour in the target audience in marketing activities and seeking to fulfil the individual wishes of customers (Chaffey, Ellis-Chadwick, Mayer & Johnston 2006, 5).

In the b2b sector the participants are dependent on each other (Kotler et al. 1999) and the development of positive relationships is vital (Fill & Fill 2005, 7; Brennan et al. 2011, 11). When building strong long-term relationships, trust and commitment are crucial factors (Theron & Terblanche 2009, 384, 387; Ellis 2011, 70) and communication can be used to achieve this (Ellis 2011, 72). Collaboration and partnership are stated to be a core element in b2b field (Fill & Fill 2005, 7; Ellis 2011; Brassington & Pettitt 2013) and reciprocity is listed as a characteristic of the business market (Ellis 2011, 20). This means it is common for businesses to practice reciprocity in their buying processes, and buy from businesses that are buying from them (Kotler et al. 1999, 281). In addition, it is important to uphold also social, not only purely economic relationships (Ellis 2011, 20).

With relationship marketing the focus goes beyond just a single transaction between a buyer and a seller (Brennan et al. 2008, 138; Ellis 2011) and moves the focus on winning and retaining customers in the long-run and creating relational multiple exchanges (Ellis 2011, 65). Managers should pay attention to factors such as customer loyalty, and how to manage the relationships (Ellis 2011, 65). Relationship marketing, with its emphases on profitable lasting relationships, has been recognised as a way to not just win but to keep the customer for future cooperation and enhance customer value. (Kotler et al. 1999, 871; Brennan et al. 2008, 138–139.) With relationship marketing companies aim to improve their dealings with customers and since the considerable change in the marketing environment over the past few decades, companies are attempting to build better relationships with their customers in order to win customers in the highly competitive business market (Theron & Terblanche 2009, 383).

Relationship marketing recognises the need for quality and customer service, and the importance of having marketing closely integrated (Ellis 2011, 68–69). Trust, commitment, satisfaction and communication are factors contributing to the establishment and maintenance of relationships (Theron & Terblanche 2009, 384, 387; Ellis 2011, 70). Trust is a crucial factor when developing a successful relationship (Eisingerich & Bell 2007; Liang, Wang and Farquhar 2009), and commitment is seen as an expectation or even a norm in business relationships and with more notable commitment becomes more secure relationships (Liang & Wang 2006). Companies need to build loyalty and move the customer from being just a prospect into a mutual partnership (Ellis 2011, 171).

In business markets the participants are more dependent on each other compared to consumer markets and work together for a longer period of time through the entire process including after-sales operations (Kotler et al. 1999, 279). The goal is to gain mutual benefits for both parties by focusing on building a relationship continuously (Theron & Terblanche 2009, 384; Ellis 2011, 69). In addition, by creating solid customer relationships one can build a foundation for developing customer value, and so provide a base for lasting competitive advantage (Liang et al. 2009).

The relationships within the b2b sector are often very complex. This is because the relationships usually include multiple contacts at various levels across a large number of touch points. Also, the customers are quite vocal about their needs and demanding. (Hollyoake 2009.) The purchasing policy, decision-making process and the significance of the purchase all contribute to the complexity of the b2b field (Brassington & Pettitt 2013, 114–116). Compared to the b2c field in a b2b relationships the experience is a crucial part in the comprehensive customer management dynamic (Hollyoake 2009).

Currently, a special place in all customer loyalty programs is held by the organisation's communication activities which main purpose is to create steady and interactive dialogues with customers. New technology and new communication channels have created new and diversified ways to interact and they are moving the communication from face-to-face interaction into the digital world. (Daj, 2011, 28.) With this technology the communication is real time and there is 24/7 access to it (Ellis 2011, 306). Moreover, it does not matter where one is physically located (Daj, 2011, 28).

2.2 Differences between business-to-business and business-to-consumer marketing

Even though business markets and consumer markets have similarities, there are many ways in which they differ from each other. In b2b field the customers do not consume the products or services themselves (Fill & Fill 2005, 5) and the customer is an organi-

sation instead of an individual consumer (Brennan et al. 2011, 5). It has been stated that some of the main differences between b2b and b2c markets are in the market structure, nature of demand and the buying process (Kotler et al. 1999, 277; Fill et al. 2005, 5; Brennan et al. 2011). Other differences can be found in the character of the decisions and the decision-making processes (Kotler et al. 1999, 277; Brassington & Pettitt 2013) and also in the relationships developed between organisations (Fill & Fill 2005, 5; Brennan et al. 2011, 11).

The difference between b2b and b2c markets is not in the products themselves (Brennan et al. 2011, 6; Brassington & Pettitt 2013, 111) but more in the way those products are exchanged meaning how the marketing mix is used and on the interaction between parties (Brassington & Pettitt 2012, 111). Business marketers and consumer marketers often ask the same questions when aiming to sell their products by considering the buying process and the most effective ways to market – what differs are the answers (Kotler et al. 1999, 276).

In business markets the companies often deal with fewer but also larger buyers compared to the consumer market (Ellis 2011, 304). In addition, business demand is derived demand meaning the demand is ultimately derived from the demand of consumer goods (Kotler et al. 1999, 277–278; Fill & Fill 2005, 5–6; Brassington & Pettitt 2013, 111; Brennan et al. 2011, 11; Ellis 2011, 16), whereas consumer demand is direct (Brennan et al. 2011, 12). In business markets there is also inelastic demand which describes the situation where the total demand for a product is not too much affected by price changes, especially in the short run (Brassington & Pettitt 2013, 113). There is also joint demand, meaning the demand is linked to other b2b products (*ibid*). Lastly there is fluctuating demand where the demand of the goods usually changes more and also more quickly compared to the consumer market. (Kotler et al. 1999, 277–278; Fill & Fill 2005, 5–6.)

The nature of the buying process in business markets differs from the consumer markets in a sense that in the business market there are more people involved in the decision-making process and the whole process is more professionally dealt with. The decisions are also made by professionals and in a more rational fashion. (Kotler et al. 1999, 279; Chlebišová et al. 2001, 1231; Brennan et al. 2011, 11; Ellis 2011, 17.) When it comes to the decision-making process in business market the entire process is often very complex (Kotler et al. 1999, 279; Fill & Fill 2005, 6; Chlebišová et al. 2001, 1231; Brennan et al. 2011, 11; Brassington & Pettitt 2013, 116; Ellis 2011, 17) and the time needed to make the decisions is longer than in consumer markets, since in the business market the potential risk is often greater than in the consumer market (Kotler et al. 1999, 279; Fill & Fill 2005, 6; Brassington & Pettitt 2013).

In addition, the purchase is not made between just two people, but among people from various departments and from various levels in the organisation (Kotler et al.

1999, 279; Brassington & Pettitt 2013). In the business market the buying process is more of a group activity than an individual decision and the buying decision results from problems of the company instead of individuals (Fill & Fill 2005, 6; Chlebišová et al. 2001, 1231; Brassington & Pettitt 2013, 110). There needs to be good understanding of one-another as well as willingness to deliver and distribute information (Fill & Fill 2005, 6) since in the b2b markets also the product complexity is greater (Brennan et al. 2011, 11).

In business market the process is often more formal than the customer buying process and the participants are more dependent on each other (Brennan et al. 2011, 11; Brassington & Pettitt 2013, 115). Also, sometimes between businesses and the bigger purchases, the offerings need to be highly customised to the customer's needs and building close relationships with the customers is a vital part of this process. Businesses need to meet the customer's current orders but also predict the customer's possible future needs by thinking ahead. (Kotler et al. 1999, 279.) The significance of relationships in business market cannot be overlooked and it is seen as one of the key characteristics of b2b marketing (Fill & Fill 2005, 7; Ellis 2011, 304). In consumer markets the relationship between the manufacturer and the customer has not been seen as important, but in business markets the development of positive relationships is crucial to success (Fill & Fill 2005, 7; Brennan et al. 2011, 11; Brassington & Pettitt 2013).

Increasing number of b2b organisations are active in international markets and technological advances and other practices for communication, such as the internet, have made international communication easier (Ellis 2011, 15). It has been stated that compared to the customer market, business market is easier in the global context since with customer markets there are numerous cultural issues concerning things such as values and habits. In addition, one must decide whether the products and promotional activities should be adapted to the specific country. In the business market, on the other hand, there is less diversity when it comes to product functionality and performance due to factors such as worldwide standards for content and performance. (Fill & Fill 2005, 7.) This might be the case when it comes to the products and services themselves but with marketing also in b2b field the cultural issues and differences need to be taken into consideration in order to succeed in the new market. (Călin Gărau 2008).

In the b2b sector the importance of references from existing customers are important when aiming to win new customers and in the b2c sector the importance of word-of-mouth (WOM) or electronic-word-of-mouth (e-WOM) cannot be overlooked. In order to reach potential and existing customers, companies provide information about new contracts and products as well as testimonials from current customers. (Chaffey et al. 2006, 496; Fill & Fill 2005, 323.)

Although business-to-business and business-to-consumer markets have many differences, they also share some similarities such as the focus on identifying customers and understanding customer's needs. Both also realise the importance of gathering, processing and using of information regarding both customers and competitors. (Fill & Fill 2005, 5; Kotler et al. 1999, 276.)

2.3 The means of business-to-business marketing communications

When the traditional goal of marketing communications has been to convey information about products to the audience, today, the aim is to deliver value to the target audience, based on their needs. The understanding of both the needs and the environment of the audience is important, since marketing communication should be an audience-centric activity. Personal selling, direct marketing, sales promotion, advertising and public relations are traditionally seen as the five main tools of marketing communications. In addition to this, in order to deliver messages to target audiences one can use online media. (Fill 2011.) Where b2c marketing uses more indirect mass media channels in its marketing communication efforts, b2b marketing involves more direct methods (Ellis 2011, 304).

Personal selling and relationship marketing are seen as integral parts of business-to-business marketing and they represent the more traditional field of marketing activities in the b2b sector. While the internet as well as new technologies have had an impact on the way in which companies communicate with each other, the more traditional offline tools have not lost their meaning (Brennan et al. 2011, 179). However, one could say that the usage of new technologies have increased the amount of marketing communications, since it has brought new media for companies to use for communicating with each other. This has also made the media more fragmented and there is a great variety in available channels which need to be considered when planning marketing communication activities (Keller 2011). (Fill & Fill 2005, 300–301.)

The primary marketing communications tools include personal selling, sales promotion, advertising and public relations (Fill & Fill 2005, 301; Shimp 2003, 3), online advertising (Shimp 2003, 3; Fill 2011) and direct marketing (Fill & Fill 2005, 301). These tools can be used to achieve various goals and in various combinations, but the emphasis has usually been on personal selling and direct marketing (Fill & Fill 2005, 301) as well as sales promotion (Brennan et al. 2011, 179). The significance of relationships in business market cannot be overlooked and relationships built with main target groups are recognised as crucial factors when building competitive advantage (Fill & Fill 2005, 7; Chlebišová et al. 2001, 1235).

There is a unique role for every marketing communication tool and by combining the tools in an integrated way marketing communication can be made more effective. By partnering the communication tools one can receive better results in comparison to using them separately. Integrated marketing communications (IMC) believe that for marketing communication to be successful, a relationship must be built between the customer and the brand and the general opinion seems to see IMC as positive and effective (Percy 2008; Kitchen & Pelsmacker 2004; Cook 2004). It has even been said that building relationships is the key to modern marketing and that integrated marketing communication is the key to building relationships. (Shimp 2003, 12.)

2.3.1 Personal selling

Personal selling has been described to be ‘the interpersonal arm of marketing communications’ (Armstrong & Kotler 2009, 415) and it can act as an interpersonal tool for communication involving two-way interactive dialogue between the buyer and the seller (Fill & Fill 2005, 315; Brassington & Pettitt 2013, 457) and this is something other promotional tools cannot achieve (Brassington & Pettitt 2013, 457). With personal selling the sales people can interact with customers and potential customers and make sales as well as build relationships (Armstrong & Kotler 2009, 415; Brassington & Pettitt 2013, 457). Personal selling can be seen as more than just taking in orders and making sales; the sales force can actually be a source of value creation by building long-term relationships as well as maintaining the existing ones (Kotler et al. 2005, 753; Armstrong & Kotler 2009, 417). It can contribute greatly to the company before and after the sale (Brassington & Pettitt 2013, 457).

Salespeople work to build and maintain long-lasting and beneficial relationships with the customers, and this is done by listening and finding out customers’ needs and solving their problems (Kotler et al. 1999, 846). The meaning of personal selling varies depending on what the products are and on the type of the organisation. Compared to routinely purchased consumer products, high-priced industrial goods bought infrequently will probably involve personal selling in a bigger role in the promotional mix. (Brassington & Pettitt 2013, 456.)

Advantages of personal selling are the impact it can have on a potential customer and also the precision it has when it comes to both the content and targeting of the messages; with personal selling the messages can be targeted to the right contacts and with the right content. In addition, personal selling has an important role in building long-term beneficial relationships. (Brasington & Pettitt 2013, 458–459.) Trade promotions, trade advertising, direct marketing and public relations all play an important role in the mix and also support the personal selling effort. (Kotler et al. 1999, 846).

The tasks of personal selling are finding new customers, informing and persuading, helping with installation and demonstration with complicated products, maintaining relationships, gathering information and feedback, and lastly monitoring competitor action (Brassington & Pettitt 2013, 460–461). In addition, personal selling coordinates with its own company concerning the customers (*ibid*) and in a way works between the company and the customer representing them both (Kotler et al. 1999, 847–848). When representing the company, salespeople aim to communicate information about the company to existing customers as well as trying to find new ones. When representing the customer, salespeople act as representatives of customers' needs and problems inside the company, and by learning more about the customers and building strong relationships they can help create customer value. (*ibid.*)

The strength of personal selling is that it is dyadic, meaning it allows two-way interaction, which provides fast and direct feedback, a feature other promotional tools lack. In addition, the participation level in the decision process is higher compared to other tools. When combined with the possibility to tailor messages based on the feedback provided, there is a great potential for the sales process to solve problems for the customers. (Fill & Fill 2005, 338.)

With personal selling the control over individual salespeople is lower since in a face-to-face discussion with the client the salesperson is basically free to deliver the message he desires and adapt to the situation and meet the new circumstances. However, often the control over the messages is very good, even though it can never be as high as for example in advertising. If the messages are very inconsistent there can be confusion and the consequences can be vast in terms of the cost and time spent by both the company and the customer. (Fill & Fill 2005, 316, 338.) In addition, personal selling is the most expensive communication activity used by b2b companies (Fill & Fill 2005, 315; Brassington & Pettitt 2013, 459) and it is extremely labour intensive (Brassington & Pettitt 2013, 459).

Personal selling can bring the company and the product closer to the customer with a more interactive dialogue and in an ideal situation, the sales force and other marketing efforts work closely together in order to create value for both the customer as well as to the company. Still, the case with many companies seems to be that sales and marketing are treated as separate functions creating unnecessary problems between the two functions. (Armstrong & Kotler 2009, 418.) Frequently, marketing and sales are seen as distinct functions in managerial practice (Homburg, Jensen & Krohmer 2008), and the interface between sales and marketing can truly be problematic creating problems from time to time (Rouziès, Anderson, Kohli, Michaels, Weitz & Zoltners 2005).

It has been studied that when sales and marketing activities are coordinated it has a positive effect on market orientation and with the cooperation between sales and marketing in addition to market orientation there can be a positive effect on business per-

formance. There needs to be sharing of information and collaboration between sales and marketing in order to exploit the full potential of this intelligence and to understand the buyer's values. When there is reciprocal communication between sales and marketing the company can create added value for customers with the increased customer knowledge. With the insights not only into competitors' activities but also on the effects of the market the knowledge over competitors improves and that way also market awareness. (Le Meunier-FitzHugh & Piercy 2011.) However, especially between departments such as sales and marketing that have different philosophies, processes and goals, to initiate collaboration is no simple task (Dewsnap & Jobber 2000; Rouziès 2005).

Marketing can be seen as product focused whereas sales is more focused on the customer, and in addition, marketing has a more long-term and sales short-term perspective (Rouziès 2005). Furthermore, because of distrust and prejudices between sales and marketing these functions do not appreciate each other's roles in the strategic processes enough (Homburg, Jensen & Krohmer 2008; Matthyssens & Johnston 2006). It is typical for people from different departments to possess various skills and so have different orientation towards objectives and evaluation processes. Marketers and salespeople see things differently, and according to marketers salespeople are very short-term oriented and they act conveniently, sometimes even selfishly. On the other hand, salespeople accuse the marketers of being '*unrealistic dreamers*' whose plans might be great but unusable. Sometimes there is even a feeling of a lack of respect and appropriate support from marketing amongst the sales force. (Matthyssens & Johnston 2006.)

Another barrier is the lack of sufficient communication between the departments and effective communication is one of the most important factors in solving and preventing problems. There is also a difference in information management which creates its own issues with communication. Neither sales nor marketing always recognises how important the cooperation actually is and what kind of possibilities it can bring. Still, there are many reasons why the departments do not integrate as they should and some of the biggest barriers are stereotypes, one-sided reliance relations, varying 'hierarchy of priorities' and a number of organisational as well as communication factors. (Matthyssens & Johnston 2006, 343.) The sales force should be seen more as an asset when dealing with communication and relationships with the customers. Coordination between the sales and marketing departments could in fact improve the effectiveness of activities for both functions. (Rouziès et al. 2005.)

2.3.2 *Direct marketing*

With direct marketing customers and prospects are contacted directly aiming for immediate and measurable reaction or response by utilizing direct media such as catalogues

and brochures as well as mailings and telephone (Pelsmacker, Greuens & Van den Bergh 2007, 384). Direct marketing aims to remove channel intermediaries such as retailers, dealers and sales staff (Chaffey et al. 2002; Plesmacker et al. 2007, 384; Fill 2011, 278) and it is an activity used to create and sustain personal communication with customers, potential customers and other significant stakeholders (Fill 2011, 278). Customers have become more connected and they are increasingly expecting 24/7 contact and the areas of direct marketing and digital marketing have become interrelated. The development of technology, the changes in the customers' nature and the marketing environment have all generated to the rapid growth of direct marketing and it is used across both b2c and b2b markets. (Brassington & Pettitt 2013, 421–423.)

Direct marketing can be used for direct selling or to support product promotion, and it can deal with direct ordering, provide information, generate visits and trials, and create loyalty (Brassington & Pettitt 2013, 424–425). Direct marketing uses various advertising media in order to achieve a measurable response or transaction. With direct marketing there is the possibility to tailor and personalise messages and it is also a flexible communication tool. However, if executed poorly, the results can be an environment of distrust as well as conflicting messages with other communication activities, especially advertising. (Pelsmacker et al. 2007, 379–378.)

For most b2b companies direct marketing is often seen as an extremely important tool right after personal selling. It can be used to complement the personal selling effort by providing leads and making the ground work for a first sales call as well as decrease costs and make overall performance better (Hutt & Speh 2001, 420; Chaffey et al. 2002). The goal of direct marketing is to lower costs and improve the quality and speed of service for individual customers (Chaffey et al. 2002; Fill 2011, 278). With direct marketing many of the face-to-face aspects usually part of the personal selling effort can be removed and replaced, and this way, many activities part of the traditional sales person's tasks could be removed and so free the sales force to concentrate on their key skills (Chaffey et al. 2002). With direct marketing various channels can be utilised to contact different customers from different segments and this way release resources that can then be deployed somewhere else with more efficiency (Fill 2011, 280).

Where public relations convey information and build up brand values, sales promotion and direct marketing drive response (Pelsmacker et al. 2007, 278). Direct marketing can reflect a business strategy of a company and it can be used to complement other marketing communication activities supporting the brand or differentiate the company from competitor offerings (Fill 2011, 279). With direct marketing the goal is to target individual customers by delivering personalised messages and that way build a relationship that can be based on the responses of the customers. By communicating with customers directly and on personal basis, direct marketing aims to build one-to-one relationships and partnerships with the customers. Customer relationships can be developed

through direct marketing and usually the entire organisations and its culture supports this and is oriented to this development (Fill 2011, 280). With direct marketing it is possible to inform and persuade customers, and also create and build closer relationships. Direct marketing has potential to be the primary tool of building and sustaining long-term relationships between the buyer and the seller. (Brassington & Pettitt 2013, 422, 424).

Even though there is a growing number of direct marketing activities, there are essentially two main offline approaches; these are direct mail and telemarketing (Chaffey et al. 2002). However, it should be noted that the internet and web enabled services have taken over or superseded many of the tasks done by telemarketing as well as direct mail. (Hutt & Speh 2001, 419; Chaffey et al. 2002). Many aspects of the new elements of direct marketing can be integrated with the more classic direct marketing tools (Brassington & Pettitt 2013, 422). One can use e-mail marketing, mobile marketing, viral marketing, and social networking as means of digital direct marketing. Direct marketing is interactive meaning there is two-way communication between the company and its customer. In addition, it contradicts with the more impersonal approach that mass media advertising has traditionally offered and has an ongoing direct relationship implying continuity. Direct marketing can be used at different stages of the relationship building process starting from the initial contact with the customer. There is also a possibility to use direct marketing in combination with other tools such as trade exhibitions. (Brassington & Pettitt 2013, 422, 424, 426.)

2.3.3 Sales promotion

With sales promotion the aim is to offer additional value to the customers and usually to make an immediate sale (Shimp 2003, 4; Fill & Fill 2005, 304). In the past sales promotion has been seen as more a support tool with less value than advertising and personal selling but its role has developed to support and complement other marketing communication activities or even to act as the main tool (Burnett & Moriarty 1998, 312).

In the business markets these promotions are aimed at three main groups which are the sales force (Fill & Fill 2005, 304), channel partners and organisational customers (Brennan et al. 2011, 187). The role of sales promotion is to either change attitudes or accelerate sales, and the way to achieve this is to reward the current customers or encourage prospective customers. Methods of sales promotion include an allowance which is the main type of promotion and some other means are buying, count and recount, buy-back allowances, merchandising and promotional allowances. These various types of allowances are used to encourage wholesaler and retail response. (Shimp 2003, 4.)

There are three promotional activities that are stemmed from personal selling and these are exhibitions, field marketing and video conferencing (Fill & Fill 2005, 316). Trade shows are an integral and important element in the communications mix in the b2b sector (Fill 2011; Brennan et al. 2011, 188) and they are often used to display new products or developments in the industry (Hutt & Speh 2001, 425–427) and to generate sales leads (Brennan et al. 2011, 188; Brassington & Pettitt 2013, 456). Fairs and trade shows present an opportunity to publicise both new and old products as well as provide information about the company and find new customers (Hutt & Speh 2001, 425–427).

During trade shows and exhibitions customers can get familiar with new products and the purpose is not only to exchange information but also to build relationships (Brassington & Pettitt 2000, 817; Fill 2011; Ellis 2011, 304). Both with existing as well as potential customers, relationships can be deepened with invitations to the exhibition stand and events related to these exhibitions (Brassington & Pettitt 2000, 817). At trade shows manufacturers, suppliers and distributors can meet at a designated location (Fill 2011; Brennan et al. 2011, 188) and attract new customers (Fill 2011; Brassington & Pettitt 2000, 816–817), build loyalty, increase market size, reinforce other communications tools, and reward loyal customers (Pelsmacker et al. 2007). In addition, there is a possibility to take in orders or even make sales and generate leads (Fill 2011; Brassington & Pettitt 2000, 816–817). Companies can also reinforce advertising messages and images (Burnett & Moriarty 1998, 314), build corporate identity as well as aggregate market intelligence (Ellis 2011, 304).

Exhibitions provide an opportunity for the manufacturer to display their products and discuss them, and also meet prospective customers in a neutral environment. With exhibitions one can get their message across and make new contacts in a powerful and cost effective way. (Brassington & Pettitt 2000, 650.) With participants across the globe international exhibitions can be exceptionally valuable since there is a possibility to meet people that one might otherwise never come across possibly even leading to export deals (Brassington & Pettitt 2000, 650; Brassington & Pettitt 2013, 474). However, even though there are many benefits, disadvantages of exhibitions are the time needed for the planning and implementation of the exhibitions which is vast and sometimes disproportioned (Fill 2011) and the high cost of attending one (Brassington & Pettitt 2000, 816). Seminars as well as technical and professional conferences are also ways to generate interest and they involve social interaction as well (Ellis 2011, 304).

Exhibitions do not act independently of other marketing communications tools instead they can be used together with public relations activities and various events that support the launch of a new product. Exhibitions can act as part of marketing communication campaign with advertising and this way complement one another. While advertising is working with a long term focus creating awareness and positive feelings, sales promotion focuses on the short term effects by creating sales. (Fill 2011, 302.) Advertis-

ing and sales promotion strategies ought to be blended with the personal selling efforts and intertwined with the overall communications strategy. In addition, the advertising and sales promotion activities are not often used alone in the b2b sector and to reach the desired results the sales promotion and advertising activities should be integrated and coordinated. (Hutt & Speh 2001, 409).

2.3.4 Advertising

Advertising is a non-personal communication tool mainly for mass communication (Fill & Fill 2005, 302; Brassington & Pettitt 2013, 371), and it is used to stimulate the customers, both existing and potential, and communicate a message to them (Kotler et al. 1999, 793). It can be described to be all the presentation and promotion of ideas, products or services that is paid by the company and has an identified sponsor (Kotler et al. 1999, 793; Brassington & Pettitt 2013, 371). Still, even though there is a high degree of control when it comes to the design of the advertisement, it is difficult to say if it has any actual sway in the customers minds (Fill & Fill 2005, 302). In addition, advertising does not have high credibility compared to some of the other marketing tools such as personal selling (*ibid*).

In consumer markets advertising is widely used since it can reach mass audiences, both national and international (Fill & Fill 2005, 302; Brennan et al. 2011, 182). However, it has been argued in the past that due to the fact that in b2b market there is often more detailed and more technical information needed, advertising is not an effective marketing tool. Instead the messages ought to deliver means of differentiation, reinforcement and persuasion. For this reason, the focus has been more on personal selling as well as direct marketing that can be used to support the personal selling effort. (Fill & Fill 2005, 20.)

This does not mean that advertising does not have a role in the company's marketing communication process. Advertising has a more low profile role compared to the other tools of the communication mix. The role of advertising on b2b markets is more on informing and reminding, and it is used to build up interest and awareness (Chlebišová et al. 2011, 1234; Shimp 2003, 4, Hutt & Speh 2001), whereas public relations, direct marketing and personal selling deal with differentiation and persuasion. (Fill & Fill 2005, 303.) By creating awareness, altering impressions or attitudes and constructing brand values advertising can create engagement (Fill 2011, 223) and act as a supporting function to personal selling building awareness amongst potential customers (Hutt & Speh 2001). This way advertising can improve the entire marketing. In addition, with advertising it is possible to reach customers who sales people would not have access to otherwise. (*ibid*.)

When creating the advertising strategy two main elements must be covered; that is the message and the right media (Kotler et al. 1999, 797). In the past companies tended to develop the advertising messages and the media separately, in a way that the message development process was on the forefront and the media was not seen as important. This caused division amongst creatives and media planners. In time, media planning has grown in importance and the benefits of planning these activities together have been realised by companies. It has been said that in order to create effective overall ad campaigns messages and media should blend harmoniously (Kotler et al. 1999, 798.) The media used to present the message is equally important as the message itself and the media ought to be selected according to the target audience (Hutt & Speh 2001, 417; Brennan et al. 2011, 184).

Product brochures as well as catalogues have been an integral part of the communication process since they can provide detailed information and they are rather easy to leave behind after a sales visit or share otherwise. Brochures, case histories and technical data sheets can be used as a supporting tool since brochures can reflect on the company's overall capability, technical capability and support the message with third-party references. Compared to customer market, in the business market print has traditionally been rather popular.(Fill & Fill 2005, 320, 323.) However, the direction nowadays seems to be to move away from print and to start favouring online versions of for example company's magazine. Even though this would seem like a good idea one has to think it through and find out what is the best solution for each situation. Even though online versions might be less costly there are positive attributes to print such as possible higher opening rate and higher recall memory and engagement. Balance should be maintained and often the most successful campaigns utilise both print as well as online media to gain the best results. (Magee 2013, 85.)

Advertising differs from other forms of promotion because of its impersonal nature and in the way it communicates to vast audiences through paid media (Brassington & Pettitt 2013, 371). When advertising a new product the emphasis is on providing enough information about the product and its advantages to create interest among potential customers in order to encourage more investigation and a possible trial. (Brassington & Pettitt 2000, 593–594.) Advertising has a less direct role compared to other activities in the marketing communications mix but it is equally important. It often supports other activities such as personal selling efforts directly when it provides information on new products and development to a vast audience fast and generates leads. (ibid.) The efforts between individuals in charge of sales promotions and publicity should be coordinated if wanting to get the best results from advertising (Shimp 2003, 6).

Already some ten years ago online advertising had increased considerably and one of its main tasks was to drive website traffic and that way build name awareness. Online advertising focused on the company website which provided product and company in-

formation and had a more supporting function. The focus was more on the information than on conveying certain emotions or an entertainment aspect. In the online environment banner advertisements, pop-ups, microsites or superstitial or interstitials, were in a more supportive role compared to a lead communication role. (Fill & Fill 2005.) A significant difference today is the increased use of online advertising and the digital media (Brennan et al. 2011, 179). Now, it would seem that with the online content being dynamic and interactive it could result in the disappearance of trade publications as an advertising media. Trade publications have been an important source of information but with the possibility to gather this information online, printed trade publications might disappear. (Brennan et al. 2011, 186–187.)

2.3.5 Public relations

In its commonest usage, advertising is about communicating to customers or potential customers, whereas public relations (PR) determines a wider range of target audiences. That includes those that might not have a direct trading relationship with the company or a clear objective of a sale. Such as any other communication activity, also public relations ought to be deliberate, planned (Brassington & Pettitt 2000, 783; Pelsmacker et al. 2007, 291) and sustained, meaning PR is a strategically thought out activity with long term commitment, and it does not simply seize whatever free publicity chance that comes along. (Brassington & Pettitt 2000, 783; Brassington & Pettitt 2013, 476.) Public can be seen to be any group with a common characteristics and with whom a company desires to communicate. However, not all publics are equally important to the organisation. There are publics such as financial public, media, internal, government and trade associations, commercial and general public. (Brassington & Pettitt 2013, 476, 478.)

Public relations consist of a selection of communication activities the main types including press releases, press conferences, interviews, events, lobbying, corporate advertising, sponsorship, crisis management and investor relations. Public relations can be effective in the b2b context and by using the variety of available public relations tools one can develop. (Fill & Fill 2005, 310.) With public relations the focus is on presenting the company's values and creating a strong and positive image rather than on a hard sell. The relationship between the company and its public is important and public relations work with the quality and nature of it. Public relations have many techniques and various tools to choose from and basically every aspect of mass media can be utilised for publicity purposes. (Brassington & Pettitt 2000, 789.) Corporate PR can be used both as a part of the process of building long-term relationships with various publics or as a tactical short-term reaction to an unexpected crisis (Brassington & Pettitt 2013, 479).

Public relations should be part of the long term strategic building of the company's image by developing credibility and improving the company's profile, in order to improve other marketing activities. This way PR can work as a part of the communications mix in synergy with the others. Especially the integration of marketing communications and corporate communications is important and PR is an important component in this (Pelsmacker et al. 2007, 291). For example, when launching a new product or service, planned public relations efforts for target audiences can generate both interest and awareness. Where public relations can be used in long term strategy building, there is also short term tactical use when reacting to an unexpected crisis, but even then, there is a long term contingency plan behind the communication activities. (Brassington & Pettitt 2000, 787.)

With public relations, the corporate identity can be created and maintained and the company's image as a good corporate citizen can be improved by upholding good relations with the media, sponsorships and attending trade fairs (Pelsmacker et al. 2007, 292; Brassington & Pettitt 2000, 783). In order to create the desired image in the eyes of the public, the company must understand how it is perceived by outsiders and PR and two-way communications are crucial in achieving this (Brassington & Pettitt 2013, 476).

It must be made sure that, like any other marketing activity, PR is integrated with the rest of the company's promotional efforts and is clearly related to the company's objectives. Marketing PR aims to build long-term strategic image, develop credibility and raise the organisation's profile, in order to enhance other marketing efforts. (Brassington & Pettitt 2013, 479.) With the online tools and digital environment, there is a possibility of converging marketing and public relations in a way that is not really possible offline (Scott 2010, 25, 19).

2.4 Online marketing communications

Internet provides a direct route to customers and it can be described as a vibrant medium for communication (Fill & Fill 2005, 316). Digital media has the ability to reach target audiences more efficiently than print (Brennan et al. 2011, 187) and in the digital age the buyer has more power and can decide when, where and how they buy (O'Connor, John, Galvin, Eamon & Evans, Martin 2005). Consumers are empowered and they demand more (Valos et al. 2010). With the marketing environment changing constantly the more traditional methods are not working as efficiently as before (Kimmel 2005) and nowadays people turn to the web to solve problems (Scott 2010, 25, 19). In order to reach the right audiences with the right message, marketers have had to experiment with new means of communication (Kimmel 2005). In the hectic world of

the digital age, one has to move fast and first movers are often able to leave their competitors behind (Valos et al. 2010).

The internet has been described to be:

A medium that allows for interactivity, and is possibly the purest form of marketing communications dialogue outside of personal selling. (Fill & Fill 2005, 323)

Online is a powerful medium and with it one can communicate with present and potential customers effectively (Hutt & Speh 2001, 422). These new information technologies and new electronic communications have had a profound impact on the economic field (Daj, 2011, 27). However, the nature of a company's products and services as well as target audience's buying behaviour, have an impact on the relative importance of online marketing (Chaffey et al. 2006, 4).

Online communication is two-way and fast and so allows businesses and individuals to seek information and communicate with each other in such a way that some more classic communication activities have been reconfigured (Fill & Fill 2005, 323). In the online environment strengths of various media are combined and online can be used as a hybrid of these bundling together text, audio and visual. The internet can work as a combination of promotional tools by comprising of advertising, sales promotions, public relations, direct marketing and personal selling activities. Some specific promotional activities can be especially useful in b2b marketing, especially the overall use of the company's websites and email communications. (Fill & Fill 2005, 324). The choice of methods as well as channels for marketing, to both consumers and businesses, is vast and more creative and non-traditional methods for communication are being used increasingly (Kimmel 2005, 1–2).

Electronic marketing, which has many names such as e-marketing, internet marketing, digital marketing and online marketing, can be described to be the marketing activities done through the use of electronic communications technology with interactive computer-aided systems (Brennan et al. 2008, 160; Daj, 2011, 28; Chaffey et al. 9). Internet can provide flexibility, speed, global reach and interactivity (Daj, 2011, 27; Brennan et al. 2008, 162–163) as well as personalisation of messages (Daj, 2011, 27). In addition, once implemented, the system is cost effective (Brennan et al. 2008, 162–163). Hutt and Speh (2001) also discuss the benefits of the internet and mention the possibility to integrate the internet into media plans, capture the economies of the internet, make real-time changes, create 'unlimited shelf space' for products, reach customers on a global scale and lastly build one-to-one relationships with customers. (Hutt & Speh 2001, 422–423).

2.4.1 Corporate website

The corporate website should be or become the organizing mechanism for communications and it should be a central integrating point for marketing communication (Gruen, 2005, 176). It can act as a platform combining different communication tools (Călin Gărau, 2008, 176; Fill & Fill 2005, 324) such as advertising, sales promotions, public relations, direct marketing and personal selling activities (Fill & Fill 2005, 324). Segmenting and addressing the diverse audiences has been regarded as a problem in the past (Călin Gărau, 2008, 176), but with the interactive tools accessible to companies today, segmenting and creating personalised messages for mass audiences is possible (Daj, 2011, 279; Valos et al. 2010).

The web has become central integrating point and information can be presented to the world straight via the web and companies no longer have to rely on advertising in order to get attention from buyers (Scott 2010, 25). Even though the significance of the internet varies between organisations, they all share the changing behaviour of their stakeholder audiences (Chaffey et al. 2006, 6). Marketers aim to create value to customers and online is one tool for this with its interactive nature and capability to personalise messages (Valos et al. 2010). On the internet it is the content that drives action (Scott 2010, 25, 19).

2.4.2 Web 2.0 and social media

Through digitising the global economy the techno-economic revolution has shaped not only b2c field but also b2b communication. Today there are various mobile devices that allow people to directly connect with social networks such Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, Google Plus and YouTube. These new social technologies not only enable new ways to communicate online but enhance b2b collaboration activities as well as business conversations. (Sood & Pattinson 2012, 117.) The internet and the technologies related to it make the social media we know today possible and prevalent and with more people joining the online communities every day the impact of social media increases (Tuten & Solomon, 2014, 2). With the term social media is meant

The online means of communication, conveyance, collaboration, and cultivation among interconnected and interdependent networks of people, communities, and organizations enhanced by technological capabilities and mobility. (Tuten & Solomon, 2014, 2)

Web 2.0, a new generation of web tools, is providing novel ways to use online by creating opportunities for interaction and cooperation (Altamimi 2014, 40) and it encompasses the likes of blogs, wikis, podcast, mobile marketing, search-engine marketing and consumer generated content (Valos et al. 2010). The social networks with social media are altering the way companies communicate with existing and potential customers. This new media provides a chance for instant real-time communication and a quick contact with customers, providing they also use these networks. Since the facilities of the internet have evolved and the social media has gained popularity and the likes of Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn have all become more professionally oriented and more of a business network, b2b marketers have begun to reconsider the social network environment. (Chlebišová 2011, 1234.) Various organisations are increasingly using tools provided by Web 2.0 in order to support and improve the innovation processes as well as their communication activities (Altamimi 2014, 40).

Increasing dependency on social media and its networks among consumers also affects the way businesses communicate with each other. With these applications one can establish and deepen business relationships and these activities are accessible and actionable almost everywhere and on mobile devices. (Sood & Pattinson 2012, 118, 122.) However, the problem with social networks is that people often use them to enjoy themselves and to have fun on their free-time, not related to business. Hence, it is important for businesses to use highly precise targeting and to use the right networks. (Chlebišová 2011, 1234.) There are also challenges such as anonymity and statelessness and sensory limitations. (Brennan et al. 2008, 162–163.) Companies are using various forms of online marketing but not always with great success (Valos et al. 2010).

2.4.3 *Combining offline and online marketing activities*

The impact of online is significant and it has become crucial for marketers to be able to find the most effective combination of offline and online marketing tools and channels, but due to the variety of current and emerging digital applications there are also challenges in integrating online marketing to the overall strategy, such as shortages in required skills (Valos et al. 2010.) Still, many organisations see online marketing as a strategic tool and are using it marketing together with the more traditional marketing methods or have chosen to use online marketing almost exclusively (Brennan et al. 2008). The web can be integrated to other media in order to do successful marketing; the secret is in finding the right mix of media in order to reach the target audience (Hutt & Speh 2001, 422). Multi-channel marketing is about the combination of online and traditional channels supporting customer communications and product distribution at different points in the buying cycle (Chaffey et al. 2006, 10).

There can be problems when integrating these online marketing tools into the more traditional ones in the marketing communication mix and it has been said that the digital tools do not go in line with the more traditional activities and online communications ought not to be integrated into them but rather be treated as a separate discipline (Daj, 2011, 28; Jensen & Jepsen 2006, 19). Many marketers also have problems convincing the board with new ideas regarding online marketing since they often feel more comfortable with traditional media they are more familiar with. However, companies ought to follow the time and recognise new opportunities and adjust to the changes that online marketing presents and become experts also in this area of marketing communications. (Valos et al. 2010.)

2.5 Features of offline and online marketing communication elements

In this subchapter both offline and online marketing communications covered in the previous subchapters will be summarised. This table presents the different features related to the marketing communication activities with added online activities to the original figure presented on the greyscale.

Table 1 A summary of the features of the key marketing communication activities
(adapted from Fill & Fill 2005, 302)

	Personal selling	Direct marketing	Sales promotion	Advertising	Public Relations	Website	Online advertising	Social media
Ability to deliver a personal message	High	High	Low	Low	Low	Medium	Medium	High
Ability to reach a large audience	Low	Medium	Medium	High	Medium	High	High	High
Level of interaction	High	High	Low	Low	Low	Medium	Medium	High
Ability to adjust the tools as circumstances change	Medium	High	High	Medium	Low	High	High	High

The different activities all have their own roles in the marketing communications mix since they have varying features as well as their benefits and disadvantages. From the more traditionally perceived elements, personal selling and direct marketing the themes such as delivering a personal message, level of interaction, targeting particular audiences, ability to adjust the messages accordingly and credibility of the message are high or medium. Sales promotion is not far from this with same themes being also high or medium except for the level of interaction and ability to deliver a personal message being low. Advertising has the ability to reach large audiences but it has a low ability to deliver a personal message and there is not much interaction. With public relations the ability to deliver a personal message and level of interaction is also low. (Fill & Fill 2005.)

Online tools, on the other hand, have the ability to deliver personalised messages, reach large audiences, target particular audiences, provide 24/7 support and up-to-date information. It can also adjust to changing situations and be interactive. Online is a medium allowing for interactivity (Fill & Fill 2005, 323; Daj 2011, 27; Brennan et al. 2011, 162–163; Ellis 2011) and personalisation of messages (Daj, 2011, 27). It also provides an ability to reach target audiences more efficiently than print (Brennan et al. 2011, 187). With the interactive tools one can segment and create personalised messages also for mass audiences (Daj, 2011, 279; Valos et al. 2010).

Web 2.0 is also an interaction online tool (Altamimi 2014, 40) and it provides a chance for instant real-time communication and a quick contact with customers (Chlebišová 2011, 1234). 24/7 access and support is a benefit of the website (Ellis 2011, 306) and customers are also expecting 24/7 support nowadays (Brassington & Pettitt 2013,

421–423). There is also the possibility to have up-to-date information (Ellis 2011, 306) and make real-time changes online (Hutt & Speh 2001, 422–423).

2.6 Marketing communication in a global marketplace

Globalisation adds yet another dimension to the marketing communications efforts and the developments in technology and communications have contributed to the merging of national markets into one global marketplace (Hill 2009, 4, 11). Almost every company's marketing deals with some sort of international issues no matter the size of the company (Armstrong & Kotler 2009). With globalisation there has been an increased mobility of goods, services, labour, technology and capital across the globe, and international business consist of transactions executed and implemented across national borders (Czinkota, Ronkainen, Moffett, Marinova & Marinov 2009, 7–8). A global firm can be defined to be a company gaining R&D, production, marketing, and financial advantages in its costs and reputation by having operations in more than one country (Armstrong and Kotler 2009, 483). One needs to make a choice between tailoring company's business approach to suit the individual cultures or to see the world as just one market where one approach fits all (Czinkota et al. 2009, 83).

Within the b2b market, companies with international operations often have common needs and requirements worldwide (Hutt & Speh 2001, 255). However, also in b2b field the cultural issues and differences need to be taken into consideration in order to succeed in the new markets (Călin Gărau 2008). Culture can be seen as a challenge but also as an opportunity, but this requires understanding of the culture itself, its differences as well as similarities. By embracing local culture, building relationships, employing locals in the interest of gaining cultural knowledge, adapting products as well as processes to local markets and coordinating by region, a company can turn culture and its appreciation into success. Cultural adaptability is vital in new markets; one must have patience, flexibility and appreciation of other's beliefs. (Czinkota et al. 2009, 53, 82–83.)

International trade might be blooming, but while international trade keeps growing, there comes intensified competition and ever more aggressive expansion into the new markets. This growth has brought greater risks for companies when entering new foreign markets. (Armstrong & Kotler 2009, 483.) Brennan et al. (2008, 217) have mentioned factors that could affect company's investment and marketing efforts in a foreign market. These are political risk, economic, commercial and infrastructure risks, demand-level risks and distributor or partner risks (Brennan et al. 2008, 217). When entering the global market the political risks such as corruption, bribery and political instability with unstable governments (Brennan et al. 2008, 217–218; Armstrong & Kotler

2009, 483) need to be assessed especially when considering entering emerging and developing countries (Brennan et al. 2008, 217–218).

High levels of inequality, poverty, inflation and interest rates are economic risks often linked to unstable corrupt political systems. In addition, poor economic conditions mean weak demand. Commercial risks include problems with the exchange rate, payment, fraud and damaged products during shipment. (Brennan et al. 2008, 221.) Changing economic conditions can create fluctuating demand and cultural differences and varying buying behaviour have an impact as well. Hence, both the product and the marketing efforts might need adapting to suite the new market and its expectations. (Brennan et al. 2008, 222; Armstrong & Kotler 2009, 483).

Globalisation is said to be the merging of once distinct and separate national markets into one global marketplace. One underlying factor for greater globalisation is technological change and the developments in communications and information processing brought by it. (Hill 2009, 4, 11.) It has been said that tastes and preferences have become more similar between customers around the globe with the help of common media, including films, television, music and especially the internet (Hennessey 2005). All this is helping to create one global marketplace (Hill 2009, 6) and creates cultural convergence that can diminish cultural barriers to some extent (Hennessey 2005).

New technologies have done their part and with technologies for real time interactive communication also new opportunities have emerged. In addition, with future technologies there are possibilities for new communication methods for global marketing with, for example, internet access almost where ever with mobile phones and tablets. (Hennessey 2005). It is crucial for marketers especially in the global marketplace to keep an eye on new potential communication possibilities and its opportunities (Hennessey 2005) and through digitising the global economy the techno-economic revolution has shaped the b2b communication and interaction (Sood & Pattinson 2012, 117). With various mobile devices allowing people to directly connect with social networks, there are new ways to communicate online and the collaboration activities as well as business conversations can be enhanced (ibid).

However, one should not be too quick to see the global marketplace as a place where people share the same values and tenets. Global communications, possibility to travel around the globe and worldwide markets may have given an idea of ‘a global village’, but there are still deep cultural differences between nationalities. If wanting to be successful in various countries one requires ‘cross-cultural literacy’. Hill (2009) defines cross-cultural literacy to mean the understanding of the affects cultural differences can have across and within nations on business practises. Gaining understanding of the cultures of those countries where one is aiming to do business is crucial, and often a foreign enterprise is required to adapt and succeed. (Hill 2009, 88.) Companies need to focus on cultural differences in their communications efforts, and target the message for

that particular audience but still in a cohesive manner (Călin Gărau 2008). When wanting the message to reach foreign audiences, the cultural specificity of the target audience needs to be noted and the message adapted accordingly (Călin Gărau 2008, 177).

The demands must be taken into consideration and the activities need to be tailored accordingly. Nevertheless, the marketing communication tools, channels, and content need to be integrated appropriately (Hennessey 2005). All this requires a thorough understanding of cultural differences, attitudes and behaviour (ibid) since the affect of the culture to consumer reactions cannot be overlooked (Armstrong & Kotler 2009, 489). Not paying attention to cultural nuances and differences can result in expensive and embarrassing mistakes, and on the other hand, when a company understands cultural norms, traditions and preferences it can gain advantage in the market and utilise cross-cultural opportunities. (Armstrong & Kotler 2009, 489–490.)

2.7 Integrated approach in business-to-business marketing communications

Integrated marketing communications (IMC) believe that for marketing communication to be successful, a relationship must be built between the customer and the brand. Shimp (2003, 12) even argues that building relationships is the key to modern marketing and that integrated marketing communication is the key to building relationships. The notion of integrated marketing communication, IMC, emerged some twenty years ago but even though the advantages of it have been recognised it is still rather rarely implemented in an effective way (Percy 2008; Kitchen & Pelsmacker 2004, 19; Cook 2004; Shimp 2003). The general opinion seems to be that IMC truly is effective if not even necessary, but even so there is little proof of it actually being widely practiced although a growing number of companies have started to implement an integrated approach in their marketing communication activities (Percy 2008; Kitchen & Pelsmacker 2004, 19; Cook 2004).

The marketplace has been described as fragmented, cluttered, global, dynamic, de-regulated and unprecedented, and so a carefully planned marketing communication approach has been seen as vital rather than just beneficial (Schultz & Kitchen 2000). The insufficiency of communications could be solved with integrated marketing communication and cooperation of communication efforts. This way optimal coverage could be reached and attending the target customers could be done with smaller investments. (Wickham & Hall 2006.) With unified communication a company can benefit from the synergic effect that integrated communication tools bring in order to reach customers on highly competitive markets (Wickham & Hall 2006). The goal of integrated marketing communication is to make sure that all the components of the company's marketing

communications speak with one voice, thus amplifying and reinforcing the core message of the company (Payne & Holt 2001).

Essentially, the process of integrated marketing communication aims to develop marketing communication and its components in a consistent manner and to assure that the message is uniformly carried through and present in every element of the communications mix. The message ought to be conveyed with a coherent strategy in order to reach the appropriate target audiences. (Chlebišová et al. 2001, 1235; Percy 2008). The cohesiveness of all marketing communications elements must be ensured (Pickton & Broderick 2001, 3).

No matter the source of communication, the key is consistency (Ellis 2011, 72), and according to Percy (2008, 15) without integrated communication a company's marketing can actually be less effective. Marketing needs to be coordinated and the message has to be consistent in order for the brand to enjoy the synergy benefits and the 'lift' from the whole program. If marketing communications is not carefully planned and delivered so that it has a coherent look and feel it does not matter if the positioning is the same. The consistency brings greater impact for the campaign since when everything, from adverts to packaging is align, the earlier exposure to the product and its marketing will work in favour for the others. (Percy 2008, 15.)

Nevertheless, there are still issues that need resolving, such as the need to know the nature of and to what extent IMC actually effects the marketing communications practice (Lee & Park 2007). There has also been scepticism of IMC being something of a "*management fashion that is short lived*". However, there is evidence to the contrary, and IMC seems not to be fleeting but has rather become a stable feature in the marketing communications landscape across the world and is used in various types of organisations. (Shimp 2003, 8.)

Following the emergence and extensive use of the internet in both consumer and business sectors also the organisation of marketing communications has changed fundamentally (Chlebišová et al. 2011). Gruen (2005, 176) has stated that the organisation's website should be or become the organising mechanism for communications and that the website should act as a central integrating point for marketing communication. It might be close to impossible to control all the media and the numerous messages sent by the company, but with the company's website the messages can at least be centralised and integrated for various stakeholder groups. The entire company has to be devoted to the idea of IMC if it wants to receive the full benefits of it, and all functions ought to be actively involved. (ibid.)

IMC has been claimed to be a competitive advantage used by many organisations. It has also been predicted that IMC would continue to grow since the importance of having an integrated approach to marketing is recognised as vital. Before the emergence of IMC, promotional tools were seen as separate and distinct and they were managed sepa-

rately and not seen as a coherent entity. (Kitchen & Pelsmacker 2004, 18–19.) The development of the internet and customer-focused viewpoint have been mentioned as some of the factors driving the development of a more integrated approach in marketing and communications. Indeed, the internet and online marketing can in a way bring the company closer to the customer (Cook 2001, 1) and the internet seems to be the place where information is looked for first. (Kitchen & Pelsmacker 2004, 22.)

IMC has developed from an idea of a coordinated marketing communications approach to a harmonious notion and coherent planning (Cook 2004, 1). The rapid growth of the internet and new technologies have changed the field of marketing (Chlebišova et al. 2011) and integrated marketing has gained momentum from this (Cook 2004; Kitchen & Pelsmacker 2004). In addition, coupling database systems can help to reduce the gap between a marketer and customer by better understanding and better targeting. (Cook 2004, 1.) It has been stated that

Marketers that seek to link media and marketing databases are likely to gain a fuller recognition of the customer and to bring IMC full circle – to incorporate both creative strategy and media planning. (Cook 2004, 1–2.)

Marketing communications start with planning and is followed by decisions and then action. If the aim is to integrate the communication activities and messages the planning cannot be formulated in isolation of each other. (Pickton & Broderick 2001, 17.) The idea of integrated marketing communications is to form a clear, consistent and compelling message (Kotler et al. 1991, 781) and the goal is to achieve common set of communication objectives to be able to promote a single positioning (Percy 2008, 5). However, the integration of marketing communication is not just about the uniformity of the message across various channels (Kitchen et al. 2004), but also about coordinating and managing the information to be transmitted through complementary channels so that the image presented to the target audiences is coherent (Călin Gărau 2008, 171).

3 EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

In this chapter the methodology of the study is discussed. Firstly, the reason why qualitative method was chosen for this study is explained and after that, the focus will be on the research method. For this study the chosen research method was a case study and the data was collected with semi-structured theme interviews.

Also, the analysis of the data will be covered and the profiles of the interviewees will be presented. Lastly, the study and its trustworthiness will be evaluated through various criteria.

3.1 Research approach

Every research has a purpose and this purpose guides the research strategy choices (Hirsjärvi et al. 2007, 133). Qualitative approach was chosen for this study because its characteristics and features suited the purpose and research questions better than quantitative approach. With qualitative research there is more emphasis on dynamic processes instead of static categories (Gerson & Horowitz 2003, 199), and rather than authenticating already existing claims the goal is to discover or reveal facts (Hirsjärvi et al. 2007, 157). Quantitative research makes conclusions based on the statistical analysing of the material for example with percentage charts and with statistical testing of the results (Hirsjärvi et al. 2007, 136) which was not the right method for this study. Instead, the way qualitative method interprets and aims to understand the point of view of the actors (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2001) suited the research better.

For this study a flexible method that adapts to changing circumstances was needed since the data was collected through face-to-face interviews. Qualitative approach can be described to be open and flexible and it has the ability to adapt to changing circumstances which also requires flexibility in the research design. There are three types of qualitative data and these are interviews, observations and documents. (Patton 2002, 169–170.) In this research the focus is on the marketing communications tools used by companies in the b2b field and the hope is to get a comprehensive picture of the situation at the moment. For this reason qualitative approach is suited since it aims to depict ‘*real life*’ in a comprehensive way (Hirsjärvi et al. 20007, 157). When wanting to understand and explore a group or a certain phenomenon, qualitative research is extremely suitable because qualitative approach focuses on human meanings and experiences in real life as they are understood by the participants of the research (Patton 2002, 163). With qualitative approach better information on the topic from this point of view could be collected since this way the interviewees can tell more closely about the challenges

and possibilities of the different marketing communication activities. Also, during the interviews new topics and view-points could be found.

When compared to quantitative approach, qualitative research topics are often more general and tentative, mostly since in a qualitative study it is expected that the study evolves its focus once the researcher is in the research setting and begins to interact with the participants (Patton 2002, 171). When choosing a research method, researcher ought to think which method would bring most clarity to the problem at hand and choose the one that best suits the situation and the exact research purpose (Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 2007, 131–133). Silverman (2010, 13) suggest that when deciding on the research method the researcher should ask himself “*Will I learn more about this topic using quantitative or qualitative methods?*” and “*What will be the knowledge payoff for each method?*” (Silverman 2010, 13).

Quantitative research did not suite this particular study since it highlights universal causations and the material ought to be suited for numerical measuring and there should be a possibility to present the findings in a statistical form. However, the aim with qualitative research is to depict real life as diversified as possible. Quantitative and qualitative researches are often described as opposites (Hirsjärvi et al. 2007, 131–133) and quantitative orientation is based on the use of numbers as its name suggests. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2001, 24–25.) For this reason, quantitative approach would not suite this study and its purpose.

The data for this study is collected with interviews and according to qualitative orientation the target and the researcher are in interaction with each other whereas quantitative orientation assumes that the target of the research is independent of the researcher (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2001, 23). Where quantitative approach asks “*How many?*” qualitative asks “*How?*” (Silverman 2010, 11, 118). What type of information is considered more important depends on where the interest of the researcher lies and what type of information is needed (Hirsjärvi et al. 2007, 156). No method is better than the other but there are right methods for particular research topics and for particular purpose. (Silverman 2010, 118.)

Since qualitative research takes into account the observations and perceptions of the examinee, one can get closer to the meanings given to the phenomena and the examinee’s point of view and voice can be heard (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2001, 28). There is a possibility to find out more about the motives behind the answers and discuss them further if needed which is why qualitative approach would give the best answers to the research questions of this study since it takes notice of the point-of-views of the participants (Patton 2002, 169–170). However, the researcher must take into account the fact that reality cannot be broken arbitrarily into pieces and remember that the researcher’s own values can affect the way the phenomenon is understood. (Hirsjärvi et al. 2007, 135–136, 156–157.)

3.2 Research method

For this study the chosen research method was a case study which focuses on the characteristics of a particular entity or phenomenon (Patton 2002, 166) and this seemed to bring the most clarity to the research questions of this study. For this study the data was collected with interviews with representatives of Finnish multinational companies. Hence, a case study which typically aims to describe the phenomenon and it deals with detailed and intensive information about a separate case or a small group of somehow related cases (Hirsjärvi et al. 2007, 128–130) would provide the desired results.

Characteristic for a case study include the focus on an individual or a group of individuals, and it is interested in how the individuals are in terms of their surroundings (Hirsjärvi et al. 2007, 131). This study focused on large Finnish multinational companies because these companies have both the resources and possibilities to practice broad marketing communication mix. Most of the companies represent the industrial sector which gives an interesting point-of-view since often companies from this sector are thought of as more traditional also in their marketing communications activities.

These companies were chosen for this study because of the similar features and these six companies in particular for of the possibility of interviews from representatives of these companies. From these six companies five represent the industrial sector and one the IT-sector, which was thought, would be an interesting addition to the interviews. These companies are rather similar when it comes to their size and level of internationalisation making it possible to compare the data. In a case study material is often collected using multiple methods such as observation and interviews (Hirsjärvi et al. 2007, 131) which was done in this study as well. The material was collected with interviews providing also the opportunity to observe and follow the behaviour of the interviewee and the mood of the interview in general.

There are three traditional research strategies which are experimental research, survey research and case study. With the experimental strategy the aim is to measure the effect a variable has on another variable. Survey research on the other hand collects information in a standardised form from a group of people often with a questionnaire or a structured interview. (Hirsjärvi et al. 2007, 128–130.) There are also multiple methods for a qualitative research. Case study, which was chosen for this study, focuses on characteristics of a phenomenon or a single person, and it seeks to understand an entity. Other methods can for example focus on cultural patterns of a group, examine multiple cultures and compare them to each other, seek solutions or improvements for practical problems or study documents and relics aiming to understand the past. (Patton 2002, 164–165.)

If choosing to collect the data with interviews, a rather difficult question is how many interviews or cases are needed. There is no clear answer and it ultimately depends

on the research problem at hand. (Silverman 2010, 192–192.) The term saturation is used in qualitative research to describe the situation where the interviews do not provide new information to the research problem anymore; there is a sufficient amount of material when the same things start to repeat themselves in the interviews. There are some problems related to this way of thinking, such as the way the interviewer's knowledge on the subject can affect the collection of information and also the fact that the mindset of qualitative research is that all cases are actually unique (Patton 2002). Still, by studying one case closely enough one can find out what is meaningful and recurrent in the researched phenomenon. (Hirsjärvi et al. 2007, 177.)

3.3 Data collection

In order to answer the research questions of this study, interviews, and more precisely semi-structured theme interviews, were chosen as a method for data collection. This because theme interviews are targeted at designated themes and instead of detailed questions the interview proceeds along chosen main themes (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2001, 47, 48). This and the way theme interviews free the interview from the point-of-view of the researcher and makes the voice of the interviewees heard (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2001, 47, 48; Patton 2002), were reasons why theme interviews were chosen as a method for data collection for this study.

Qualitative orientation assumes that the target and the researcher are in interaction with each other and so every interview, no matter how standardised, is actually a product of a cooperation between the interviewer and the interviewee (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2001, 23). The idea of studying something through an interview requires the assumption that by talking to people and listening and interpreting what they say and how they say it one can collect information on this topic (Mason 2003, 225).

3.3.1 Theme interviews

The aim was to go through certain main themes and questions with every interviewee, such as the means for marketing communication in the company and their online presence, but still leave room for free conversation in order to find new and exciting information. Also, for some interviewees some themes might have been more relevant so there was a possibility to talk about those topics more and in a more detailed manner. There were also topics that were not in the original question framework that came up during the interviews that were meaningful for this study.

In a case study the material is usually collected with observations and interviewing (Hirsjärvi et al. 2007, 131), as was done here in this study. With theme interviews the focus can be on specific main themes instead of individual questions leaving more room for interpreting and interactive discussion. Theme interviews recognise the meaning of people's perceptions on things and the fact that some meanings are created through interaction (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2001, 47, 48).

For this study data collection through a survey was not suitable since in a survey the questions are formed precisely and they cannot be altered according to changing situations. Interviews, on the other hand provide a possibility to adapt to the changing situations with freedom to study some topics further and in more detail and also address new topics not in the original question framework. Interviews are a powerful way to acquire information to better understand a phenomenon (Seidman 2013, 13) and they can provide meaningful information and data not possible to collect with a survey. (Hirsjärvi et al. 2007, 199–200.)

Interview is a unique method since there is a direct linguistic interaction between the researcher and the interviewee. This has both pros and cons, the biggest benefit being the flexibility while collecting data. In addition, the researcher can monitor the collection of the data during the interview in a required way and adapt to the situation. (Hirsjärvi et al. 2007, 199–200.) However, a problem with interviews is that it is very time-consuming. The researcher must contact the interviewees, interview them, transcribe the material and then analyse it. (Seidman 2013, 11.)

Interviews are one of the most common ways to collect information and since it is a rather flexible method, it suits various research purposes. With interviews, the researcher aims to convey a picture of the interviewee's thoughts, perceptions, experiences and feelings. In an interview situation there is direct interaction between the interviewee and the interviewer providing a situation where it is possible to control the information gathering and also find out the motives behind the answers. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2001, 34, 41.) When interviewing, the researcher needs to concentrate on the stories of the interviewees and keep own assumptions in the back and not let them affect the results (Seidman 2013, 9).

Theme interviews are closer to non-structured than structured interviews and the reason it is called a semi-structured method is because one of the aspects of the interviews, its topics or themes, are same for each interviewee. With theme interviews there is more freedom in the order and form of the questions than with structured interviews but it is not completely free as a non-structured deep interview. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2001, 47, 48.) For this study the semi-structured theme interview method was chosen since it provides a possibility for freer conversation within the limits of the chosen themes which seemed like the best way to collect data for this study.

The way an interview differs from a basic conversation is its goal to gather information and that it has been planned beforehand and has a sense of direction. Even though the discussion might go a little off the topic, the interview should be executed with the interviewer's terms and be lead by him. There should be room for free discussion in order to discover more and possibly something unexpected or unknown, but some sort of structure is still needed to guide the discussion. (Gerson & Horowitz 2003, 204.) Compared to questionnaires interviews are more expensive and especially with non-structured and semi-structure interviews there is sometimes plenty of un-relevant information. In addition, interviews are not as anonymous as questionnaires and interviews are often more demanding for the researcher. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2001, 36, 42.)

There are many types of interview methods and the differences are based mostly on how strictly the questions are formed beforehand and to what extent the interviewer himself construes the situation. The problem with structured interviews regarding this study was the questions being preset and standardised. Deep interviews on the other hand, are completely non-structured which did not suite this study either. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2001, 43, 45, 46; Seidman 2013, 14.) The benefit of a focused interview is the possibility to go through the topics in the order best suited for that specific interview and move along according to the mood of the interview while still having a structure to help guide the interviews (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2001, 34). When conducting the interviews for this study, there were sometimes jumps from topic to topic, but it was made sure that all the main questions were answered and enabling the comparing of the answers with each other.

3.3.2 *Presenting the interviewees*

The purpose of the study is to look at the b2b marketing communications and the tools used by companies with the presence of online environment and in a global context. The companies and interviewees were chosen in order to reach this goal. Finnish large global companies mainly from industrial field with one company from the information technology sector were chosen for the interviews. This because industrial companies are often thought of as more traditional when it comes to marketing, but they are still big players in the field hence it would be interesting to find out how their representatives described the current situation and especially the presence of online. Also, these kinds of companies often have the resources to conduct various marketing communications efforts and they practice international marketing communications as well.

The interviews were conducted face-to-face apart from one which was an email-interview. The face-to-face interviews all lasted from approximately from 45 minutes to an hour and were held at the premises of the companies, so four in Helsinki and one in

Hyvinkää. The interviews were conducted during 2.4.–10.4.2014 and the e-mail interview was answered on 13.4.2014. There were six interviewees from five different companies, so two were from the same company but from different departments. The transcribed text resulted in approximately 52 pages and the email interview approximately 3 pages, so all together the material from the interviews consists of 55 pages.

The interviewee's names or specific companies are not mentioned, but all agreed for the use of their titles as well as short description of the company and its field of business. The size of business of all companies was large and they had business activities outside of Finland. In the results chapter the interviewees will be referenced to according to certain letters given to them from A–F in no particular order.

Table 2 Interviewee profiles

Title	Line of business	Level of Internationalisation	Date and duration of the interview
A Marketing Director	Metal industry	Global presence	2.4.2014, 55 min
B Marketing Manager	Construction, building products	Europe	2.4.2014, 43 min
C Head of Marketing Operations	Information technology	Global processes	10.4.2014, 44 min
D Manager Corporate Branding and Marketing	Engineering and service, cranes	Global presence	10.4.2014, 38 min
E Vice president, Marketing	Paper and packaging	Global presence	4.4.2014, 1 h 3 min
F Vice President, Brand and Marketing	Pulp, paper and energy	Global presence	e-mail interview answered 13.4.2014

The interviews were carried out in Finnish since both the researcher and the interviewees were Finnish speaking. This was thought would give the best results and most valuable content from the interviews. From these transcripts the interviews were translated into English for the results part and for the direct quotes.

3.4 Data analysis

When analysing the material, the data ought to be reviewed in relation to the research questions (Silverman 2010, 221, 234). Analysing the data can be roughly divided into two approaches; firstly, 'explanatory approach' where statistical analysis is used to make conclusions and second, 'understanding approach' where qualitative analysis is

used. Analysing, interpretation and conclusions are core aspects of the study and with the analysis the researcher finds out what kind of answers there are to the research questions. (Hirsjärvi et al. 2007, 216–219.)

With qualitative methods, the arranging of the material for analysing is a rather large undertaking. Ordinarily the analysing is thought to start after the material has been collected and arranged, but with qualitative research where the data is collected through interviews the analysis is done during the whole process (Hirsjärvi et al. 2007, 216–219; Miles, Huberman and Saldaña 2013). When the data has been collected, it is good to start going through the results right away when the material still inspires the researcher and the interviews are freshly in mind. (Hirsjärvi et al. 2007, 216–219.) Analysis during the data collection enables the researcher to think between the existing data and possibilities for later data collection and do corrective moves (Miles, Huberman and Saldaña 2013; Hirsjärvi et al. 2007, 216–219).

Issues with data collection with qualitative research can be an overload of data (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2001, 36, 42). One solution is to code the material for easier analysis (Miles et al. 2013). In this study the transcribed text was divided according to themes derived from the question framework and some additional themes that rose from the material.

With every interview conducted for this study, the discussion went on nicely and the interviewees had a lot to say which resulted in plenty of material from all six interviews. Sometimes the conversation went a little off the topic the main themes were still covered. This was also somewhat encouraged since this brought some very interesting points that were not directly asked. The results from the interviews were organised according to themes on which the interview framework was also based on, and with some comments overlapping with two or more themes they are represented in more than one section as felt appropriate in the results chapter.

3.5 Evaluation of the study

Even though the researcher aims to avoid mistakes, every study must be evaluated through certain criteria to test its trustworthiness. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985) trustworthiness involves establishing credibility, transferability, confirmability and dependability. Credibility of a study implies to the confidence in the results and their truthiness and with transferability the researcher shows that the findings have applicability also in other contexts. Confirmability refers to the degree of neutrality in the study or to what extent the findings are moulded by the respondents instead of the researcher motivation, interest or bias. Dependability means the results are consistent and can be repeated. (Lincoln & Guba 1985.) The reliability of the research also implies to

the repeatability of the results, so the reliability of the research means its ability to give non-accidental results and this can be established in many ways. For example if two people find the same results whilst studying a phenomenon or if one person is studied twice with different methods and the results are same, the results can be stated as reliable. Validity is also a concept associated with the evaluation of the research and it means the capability of the research method to measure what it is supposed to measure. (Hirsjärvi et al. 2007, 227.)

Verification means inspecting the common or subtle biases that could affect the entire process or the drawing of conclusions. Some issues deal with the overload of data, missing information, selectivity and overconfidence in some parts of the material especially if attempting to affirm a key finding. Some sources might also provide unreliable information. (Huberman & Miles 1994, 438.) Researchers need to keep an open mind and not make premature assumptions about the findings. In a qualitative research there needs to be detailed description regarding the study and a clear reporting of the material and the procedures. (Patton 2002, 169–170). The reader should be able to trust in the authenticity of the reported data. Careful preservation of the material can a solution for this since this way the data is easily retrievable. (Huberman & Miles 1994, 349.)

In this study, the aim has been to be clear on all the details regarding the interviews and the data collected from them. The transcribed text is preserved as are the recordings, and except for the personal information of the interviewees there is information presented on the interviewees as well. The aim is to present the collected data as unbiased as possible by reporting the facts based on the interviews as they are without making any premature assumptions to ensure neutrality in the study. Nevertheless, it is near impossible to leave all own ideas and assumptions completely aside. However, the goal was to ask the designed questions and leave the talking to the interviewee instead of guiding the answers to a certain direction.

One can never be completely sure of the truthiness of the findings, but in this study according to the researcher's judgement it is high. All interviewees answered also the negative questions properly and there was no feeling of hiding any issues or highlighting the positive aspects. In addition, in the e-mail interview all questions were answered properly without leaving the negative aspects aside.

Since in a qualitative research there is always interaction with other people, in addition to the validity and reliability of the research, also ethical issues need to be taken into consideration. Qualitative research is based on the responsibility of the researcher to assure the participants attend with consent and are treated ethically (Patton 2002, 169–170). Even though, this study does not deal with very personal matters of the interviewees, the ethical aspect is still present. There are some general principles when it comes to research ethics such as the voluntary participation as well as the right to withdraw, protection of the research participants, assessing possible benefits as well as risks

to the participants, obtaining informed consent and lastly doing no harm. (Silverman 2010, 153–154.) In this study the privacy of the interviewees' is respected and no names are mentioned. Also, everyone participated voluntarily and had the right to withdraw at any point. The information presented on the interviewees has also been approved by the interviewees.

The trustworthiness of a qualitative study can be improved by a detailed narrative of the performance of the study covering all aspects of it accurately and truthfully (Hirsjärvi et al. 2007, 227.) When dealing with interviewees, the quality of the process should be monitored during every step of the research. One way to reach for quality is to make a good interview frame and to think ahead which themes could be deepened and think for possible additional questions in advance. During the interview the quality can be improved by making sure the equipment is in order and check that everything is working also during the interview. At the end of the interview it is good to go through the questions and make sure no important themes or questions were left unanswered. In addition, notes about the interviewees and the surroundings can be made to make the interpretation easier later on. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2001, 184.)

If the interviews are transcribed as soon as possible right after the interviews that can also make the quality of the results better, especially if the researcher conducts both the interviews and transcribes himself. In this study the interviews were conducted by the researcher and they were transcribed right after the interviews. Trustworthiness of the interviews depends on the quality, for example if just some of the interviewees have been interviewed or the audibility of the recordings is not good, or if the transcription follows different rules in the beginning and in the end the material is not trustworthy. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2001, 185).

When dealing with interviews, reliability focuses on the actions of the researcher and the way the results are analysed instead of the actual answers; it considers if all the available material is taken into consideration and whether they are correctly transcribed. It is also important that the results should mirror the minds of the interviewees and not the premature assumptions of the researcher (Patton 2002). In addition, it ought to be remembered that the result of the interviews are always a product of the cooperation of the interviewer and the interviewee. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2001, 189.)

The same framework of questions was followed with every interview and a stripped down version of the framework with the main themes was sent to every interviewee few days in advance. One interview was conducted via e-mail because of the busy schedule of the interviewee. The e-mail interview was conducted with the same questions framework used for the interviews and the answers were satisfactory and detailed. The interviews were transcribed shortly after the interviews during the same day or the next day. The recording was done with a laptop with a recording program called "Audacity" and there were no problems with the audibility of the recordings.

Some points rose up after the first interviews that were not in the original framework and since this was a valuable theme some questions were asked via e-mail from the first interviewee regarding this subject. The answers were added to the transcription as a separate part. The interviews followed a very similar pattern but there was also freedom to focus on some subjects that felt more relevant for this specific interviewee. Still, the main themes were always covered properly and to the researcher's satisfaction so that the answers could be compared and they covered the same main themes.

4 RESULTS OF THE STUDY

In this chapter, the results of the interviews will be presented and discussed. They are organised according to the themes that also formed the framework for the interviews. Since some topics of discussion overlap with two or more themes they are represented in more than one section as felt appropriate.

Firstly, the current situation and the more traditional means of marketing communications will be looked at and after that the focus will be on online and the global marketplace. The online marketing was a main focus of this study so it will be discussed in its own subchapter addressing the current situation of online marketing and its use in the interviewed companies. The aspect of a global marketplace as well as thoughts on the future will be discussed in their own subchapters as well.

4.1 Business-to-business marketing communications

When discussing the tools used in marketing communication activities the answers were very unanimous and all the companies used tools from personal selling, direct marketing, sales promotion, advertising and public relations. The extent of use varied to some extent but all in all the activities were rather similar. (Interviewees A, B, C, D, E, F)

From sales promotion activities, various customer events and seminars were mentioned by all, from new product launches to more free events for long-time customers (A; B; C; D; E; F). These events were especially used to keep in contact with existing customers and to build loyalty even further (A). They were an activity associated more with the later part of customer relationship building whereas trade fairs and exhibitions were also a tool to create awareness and generate new leads (A). All interviewees mentioned trade fairs, exhibitions or seminars as a marketing communication tool especially in the more emerging markets or when promoting a new product or service (A; B; C; D; E; F). Seminars were also regarded as a great support tool for personal selling with sales people receiving good leads in face-to-face situations provided by these events with these contacts often leading to more contact with customers (F). Customer seminars, customer magazine and website can also be used to communicate how the company's solutions help solve the customers' challenges and reach results (F).

Telemarketing, a direct marketing tool, was also mentioned by two (C; D), but it was seen more as a declining tool. There have also been trials of text message marketing (A). Also digital direct marketing was used in combination with other tools with e-mail campaigns for targeted product or services promotion and launches or as newsletters and also as a marketing tool for invitations to customer seminars. (F)

Advertising, both online and print, was used by every company but online advertising was clearly in a bigger role compared to print (A; B; C; D; E; F). Advertising was seen as a tool for finding new potential customers and creating awareness in new markets; it was seen as a marketing communications activity in the beginning stages of a customer relationship where the brand image is still being built in the customers' minds (A). Public relations were an activity used by all, with articles in magazines or press conferences held in regard to new products or services. (A; B; C; D; E; F)

The role of print and print advertising is clearly declining in all the companies and it is still used but very little, and if used then on trade magazines or other relevant medias. It can be a good marketing communication tool in new emerging markets when building the brand and creating awareness but the disadvantage is that advertising is very expensive (A). The tools used in advertising were mainly advertisements in trade magazines and their online versions and online marketing in general seems to be a more active environment for advertising purposes.

However, customer magazines and newsletters were still used, both print and online versions. These magazines were also seen as something that could be coming back and they have had a great response from the customers (A; B). Also, some print advertisements in trade magazines or other appropriate releases were used (E). In addition, references are seen as important tools in marketing communication in the b2b field (A; B; C; D; E; F), as are certificates on environmental issues for example (E). In the b2b sector references are very important and that is why real-life customer cases and calculations are often used for marketing purposes (F). Sponsoring was also mentioned as a marketing communication tool (D).

Customer surveys and collecting feedback after events for example, was also seen as an important aspect of marketing communications. After analysing the data one can make decisions based on the customer feedback and develop activities (A; B; C; D; E; F). Training provided for customers was also mentioned as a part of marketing communications (A).

One tool that still seemed to rise above everything else was personal selling and the work of the sales force as a marketing communication activity. Marketing was seen to have an important role in supporting the personal selling effort and creating tools for the sales force to use. (A; B; C; D; E) Face-to-face situations with customers are regarded as valuable and therefore customer seminars and events are important for companies. Marketing supports the sales force and provides the material for them and by creating awareness and face-to-face time during trade fairs marketing helps the sales force to reach their goal and the whole company's goal of making sales. (A; B; E)

Advertising is not the main communication tool but it still is an integral part of the communication mix. Both print as well as online advertising is used, and many of the printed advertising or promotional materials work as supporting tool for personal selling

as people still feel it is nice to be able to leave something behind on a sales visit such as a leaflet or a brochure. (A; B; E) However, meaningful and valuable content is vital, and there should not be anything pointless or useless (B).

According to the interviews when compared to b2c also the b2b sector tries new things since one needs to test what works and how to make an impact. However, in the end also in the b2b sector people buy from people and in that sense the rules of consumer marketing need to be adapted to the business environment – the logic is basically the same. (C)

The interviewees claimed that also in the b2b field the aim is to see customers as people who cannot always make decisions purely on rational claims. Interviewee C stated that even though someone would say they make decisions based purely on reason, rational factors are something that have to be in order so that one is considered a relevant business partner. According to the interviews marketing aims to affect also the emotional side with the messages, although compared to b2c the decisions are based less on emotional aspects, but still in the end, it is people selling to people. Sales force is said to often think these things purely as facts but marketing tries to consider also the emotional aspect and how to affect this side. Sometimes marketing tries to create profiles for different types of people and try to figure out if this person would actually spend time on LinkedIn or Facebook, for example. (A; C; B) According to interviewee C by considering the emotional factors one could actually stand out:

Emotional aspects could be used to stand out more. Yes, it can never be completely ruled out. (C)

As stated by interviewee F, in product or service launch campaigns different marketing channels are combined depending on the target group. E-mail marketing with links to the company website for more information, customer magazine articles with some also featured on the website and customer seminars and advertising were mentioned as ways to combine different tools. The advertisements can also have a QR code to link to relevant information on the company website. According to interviewee F by combining the various tools in different parts of the process the target groups are better reached with better impact. (F)

For customer seminars, there is a combination of tools used so that there is an e-mail marketing tool for invitations or an online event management tool to handle invitations if a larger event, registration and communication to participants, including a thank you note afterwards as after sales operations. The seminar materials are also distributed to participants via web before the actual seminar as interviewee F stated. (F) According to interviewee C, often different projects are handled as campaigns so when dealing with a

product launch for example, all the different marketing communication tools are used together (C).

In the opinion of interviewee D, when launching a new product there needs to be co-operation between various departments and with good collaboration also the best results can be reached. Marketing should be taken into the process already early on for example with a product launch, not in the very beginning, but it has been recognised that it is good to have marketing in the process already in the early stages. This way the value proposition can be thought of and the benefits for the customer can be recognised. According to interviewee D, one can already think of the key marketing communications messages and maybe even the key marketing points and what is it that separates the company from the competition. By the end of the process when the material starts to be ready, it can be given back to the technical people to see if it is usable and the content is correct so that promises that cannot be kept are not made. (D)

Challenge here is to know at what stage marketing should be taken in the product development process so that it won't be too late as stated by interviewee C. Marketing should be linked in the development process already at the early stages and recognise the possible selling potential of the product and how it should be presented to the audience. Also, generally in building the whole business case marketing ought to be consulted so that a product with no business value will not be developed just because it is nice. (D) Marketing can support the overall service development when new products or services are brought to the market, and the role of marketing is establishing here as well so that marketing is a part of the entire commercialisation process (C).

When it comes to the marketing communication messages, they have to be in line with the brand and guidelines of the company as claimed by interviewee D. However, it was also stated that working in the b2b sector does not mean it all has to be dull and grey and there should be a sort of freshness to marketing communications so that there would also be surprising features. Then again, when representing a more traditional line of business, an industrial company, according to interviewee D, obviously there needs to be a certain tone-of-voice and frameworks when it comes to the way the company wants to be presented; one cannot go completely crazy but new and fresh approach is needed also in this field of business. In addition, it was mentioned that one needs to consider whether this marketing material achieves sales and has actual value or does it just remain somewhere unused. (D) As believed by interviewee C, the information should not just be static but more interactive; it could be fun and different (C).

4.1.1 Content marketing and integrated approach

Content marketing seems to be a trendy term, but on the other hand it is the basic work that marketing and communications have always done as stated by interviewee C. According to interviewee C the difference now could be the identification of various buyer profiles and aiming to tailor information that is relevant to them or to talk in a language relevant to them. (C) The content of marketing communications, whether it be on the website or a presentation to customers, seemed to be a crucial factor for all interviewees. In the opinion of interviewee B, the right and appropriate substance was a key factor and one has to know what are the tools and their advantages, and also how to use them in order to get the best results. There are different kinds of buyers and the content has to be thought of according to that and the value of the products needs to be shown by different arguments for different groups as claimed by interviewee C. Marketers need to know how to tailor the messages and offer information that suits its users and according to interviewee C, this is an area where businesses are only getting started (C).

It is not only about the technical benefits of the product but the overall advantage to the customer. (B)

It is always about the relevant content. (C)

Interviewee C stated that one needs to find the factor that differentiates the product or the company from others and then highlight it, and the same themes should be found on all the materials worldwide according to interviewee B. Interviewee C mentioned that there should be a global one brand and to reach that, good visual guidelines are needed as well as instructions on how to use the logo and also about the tone-of-voice.

According to interviewee F, unified main messages are very important in a global b2b market and companies cannot have differing messages and corporate image in different areas. With a global company, area marketing and sales play a vital role in the marketing and especially with various campaigns according to interviewee F. For example, e-mail marketing campaigns are mostly initiated and run by area marketing, but the tools, main messages and visuality are aligned by corporate line marketing so that a unified company image can be maintained in interviewee F's opinion.

4.1.2 Personal selling and marketing's relationships with the sales force

Even though new technologies have changed the field of b2b marketing communications it seems that personal selling has not lost its meaning and is still regarded as the

most important or at least one of the main marketing communication tool. The need for face-to-face communication is still there and marketing has to understand the customers' wants and needs and provide salespeople with appropriate tools and work together with the sales force in order to achieve the best results. (A; B; C; D; E; F).

According to the interviews, when the goal is to build loyalty and lasting relationships there has to be some sort of regular contact and this cannot be done solely online or by phone calls. There has to be face-to-face time with the customers and prospects. Personal selling was seen as an important tool by all and online has risen right next to it and is often used to support the personal selling efforts. (A; B; C; D; E; F).

Personal selling is from marketing activities clearly number one. (D)

Business is not done by sending newsletters, it happens when a sales person goes to meet the potential customer as stated by interviewee A. The main goal is to bring the client and the sales person together and make sales (A). However, in order to reach this goal, the sales force needs proper tools and support from marketing, they need something to give to the customers to leave behind after a sales visit, such as brochures or leaflets according to interviewee A. Interviewee F also mentioned the importance of sales support (F).

According to interviewee A, the relationships with customers are developed through regular visits and communication, and also by providing training and knowledge on new products. When aiming to build loyalty, there can be events which are more casual and not just focusing on the business side. By meeting the customers in a freer environment good cooperation and deeper relationships can be built. (A)

It is important for marketing and sales to work together, as interviewee A stated:

There is no sales without marketing and no marketing without sales. (A)

However, there can be problems because of possible different views on things between sales force and marketing according to interviewee A. One example is that sales people might be more traditional whereas marketing is more of a pioneer and wants to try new things and has a little more courage. In the opinion of interviewee A, one needs to build an image and create something that stands out; it needs to be something different than what the competition does so that the company stays in the customers minds. According to interviewee B, because everyone has their own focus areas and interests there can sometimes be problems, and sometimes marketing needs to try to sell their ideas to the sales people. There needs to be a clear way to operate in productization and servization because sometimes the flow of information between sales, marketing and product management can be challenging since everyone has a lot to do according to

interviewee F. However, in the opinion of interviewee F, there are also positive outcomes from good cooperation:

More targeted and efficient marketing integrated with sales actions –and of course better results. (F)

According to interviewees B and E, sales and marketing ought to work hand-in-hand and it could be more integrated and like anything else, it is never perfect, but the closer you get the better. Cooperation can work really well but it is something that needs to be worked at every day according to interviewee C. There might be a lot of discussion on what ought to be done, but in the end, cooperation is vital and that way also the best results can be reached. Active communication between these two parties is crucial as stated by interviewees A and B.

There can be challenges, but all the interviewees said that the cooperation works well, it just needs constant care. One way to overcome these challenges is to regularly meet with the sales people from the segments one is responsible of and that way keep up the active dialogue between sales and marketing, and also learn more about the customer (E). Interviewee C stated that marketing needs to know the customer even better and also keep up with the requirements of the market.

Interviewee D claimed that with a good customer relationship management (CRM) system, one can follow the customer's buying path and interest as well as how it evolves from a lead to an offer, and during this time various marketing efforts are made. However, not having a working CRM system for marketing can create challenges in the opinion of interviewee E.

According to interviewee D, when working with large sales and big purchases, it is not only sales and marketing that should work together, cooperation with technical support is also important when wanting to gain deeper knowledge on the products and make sure one does not make promises that cannot be kept. There needs to be support for the sales force and the sales people need to know about the technical details too, so there needs to be a lot of cooperation concerning the technical details with the experts as well according to interviewee E. Customers have problems they need solutions for, and that is what the company offers. Interviewee A stated that marketing creates awareness and tools for the sales force, and the sales people discuss business with the customers and technical people go through the technical details. According to interviewee A, every aspect is needed and it is about balance.

All the information on websites and brochures is written together with technical people, since they understand the products in detail. They bring the facts and marketing figures out how to present that information in a more customer friendly way and not just as technical data (A). Customers often need to see arguments supporting the purchase

and concrete benefits and advantages on their own processes according to interviewee C.

Even though it was basically unanimous that online will continue to grow, personal selling was still seen as a vital part of the marketing communications mix, and an option where sales visits would completely disappear was not seen by anyone. When it comes to personal selling, it will always have a vital role in the b2b world according to the interviews. Marketing's role is more on building the image of the brand and creating the picture of a believable and trustworthy partner. Interviewee C claimed that marketing can bring insights on what is happening on the market, what affects the client's everyday life and how to help them in this situation. However, the trend is to move towards having everything found online and companies are increasingly investing in online activities in the opinion of interviewee A.

4.1.3 *The traditional marketing communication efforts and their goals*

In this figure the different marketing communications tools and their roles related to the goals of marketing communications efforts will be presented according to the interviews. The figure moves from creating awareness and building an image to reaching customer loyalty.

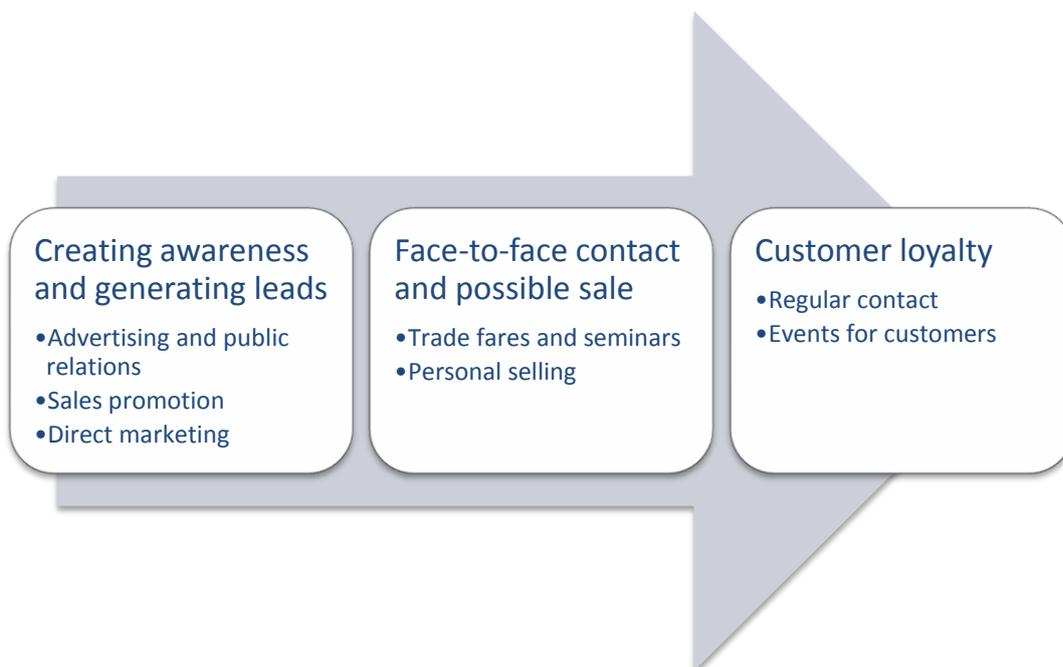


Figure 1 Goals of marketing communications and the more traditional tools related to them according to the interviews

Every tool on the marketing communications mix has a role and a goal it pursues. Advertising and public relations focus on creating awareness as well as building a brand image and making the company known. With sales promotion and direct marketing the goal is to generate leads and keep in contact with the customers.

During trade fairs and various seminars one can launch new products and create face-to-face time with potential customers and with contact from personal selling there is always a possibility for sales. Lastly, there is loyalty, which is a result from long term relationship building between the company and the customer which also needs to be maintained with regular contact and events with key customers.

4.2 Online marketing efforts

According to the interviews the role of online marketing has grown rapidly and there is no doubt the growth will continue. This can also be seen in the way online is used nowadays in the communication mix; the role is bigger and more meaningful and instead of being just an assisting function it can work as an assembling tool with the web page gathering everything from technical data to videos in one place as stated by interviewees A and E. According to interviewee E, the web is a place where both customers and sales people can find support 24/7 with up-to-date information.

Online has many benefits, the most mentioned one being that it always has real-time information and that it is easy to update compared to print, according to interviewees A, B, C, D and E. Online definitely has replaced print to some extent as stated by interviewee A, and with online one can target the message better and updating is easier and its use can also be followed, as seen by interviewee B.

One challenge for companies as mentioned by interviewee C, is the diversification of the customer base since when one wants technical data, the other wants information on costs. In interviewee C's sight:

The right substance is the key and one must provide content that is of interest to these different types of buyers and relevant content is the base for everything when wanting to make the new online environment work well. (C)

According to interviewee C, online content can be easily updated and one can react fast and utilise opportunities on a whole new level. However, in interviewee C's opinion, there has to be constant monitoring in order to know what is happening and what people are talking about, and there needs to be flexibility if wanting to react to these opportunities.

Marketing tries to stay on top of new things and also try new things, and while sometimes it might fail there are also positive surprises, for example with the electronic newsletters that have proven to be successful as mentioned by interviewee A. According to interviewee B, electronic newsletters are common and they are working well, and their success and development can be followed to some extent. With the electronic newsletter there is a possibility to get data on the opening percent and what links have been opened and how many ‘bounces’ there are and also how many have re-sent it (B). According to interviewee B, this way more insight can be gained compared to print advertisement. It also enables a more personalised style so that the message reaches the right audience (B)

According to interviewees B and D, the trend seems to be to move away from print, or if print is done it could be an element in a campaign and something that stands out and is done really well. At the same time, another trend sees print somewhat coming back according to interviewee E. The digital hype has partly calmed down and it is understood that target groups need to be reached with various tools. Interviewee E believes there is room for both print and digital and they can coexist since they both have their roles.

4.2.1 Website and advertising online

According to interviewee B, the website is a very important tool for marketing, and the aim is to get leads also from there. Company’s website is a place for 24/7 support for both customers as well as sales people, and all information is gathered there including technical data (B). Interviewee E states that marketing aims to create added value also to the sales people to make selling products and services easier at the same time making it easier for the customers to buy. According to interviewee E, online provides up-to-date information for various stakeholders.

Web is an important tool which enables 24/7 up-to-date support. (E)

In the opinion of interviewee B, meaningful content is important and when entering the website customers should see immediately what their role is and how they can find relevant information. According to interviewee B, there is so much information available so the route to relevant information has to be easy or if it takes time the journey has to be enjoyable so that one can learn something.

According to the interviews, the tools used for advertising online encompass basically everything from the website to social media forums. For advertising purposes companies use Google marketing and search engine optimisation, social media forums

such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and LinkedIn, banner advertisements, nano-sites, white papers, re-marketing and e-mail marketing and QR-codes to drive traffic to the website. (A; B; C; D; E; F). Digital marketing clearly has its place in the marketing communications mix as stated by interviewees C and F, and there are various methods of using it, such as ad space from various online channels and own nano-sites (C) and company's website and targeted e-mail marketing with follow-up by sales (F).

According to interviewee A, also in b2b field, people try to find information about other companies on the internet when searching new business partners. For this reason for example Google marketing and search engine optimisation are very useful (A). Search engine optimisation means that the web site is naturally brought higher on the results list because of its content, and with Google marketing if someone makes a search with a certain word the company's ad pops up as stated by interviewee A.

There are also banners on relevant medias such as industry websites or own websites as stated by interviewees A, B, C and F, and re-marketing where a client or a prospect leaves a memory trace if they have visited the site and then maybe on another site a banner advertisement of the company pops up. In the opinion of interviewee A, this is not always that effective and there is possibility of negative feelings toward the constant banner advertisement familiar from the b2c sector as well. According to interviewee F, banners can be used to advertise either the company or act as part of a promotion campaign creating awareness. There is also bought online space other than banners such as content-centric nano-sites in trade media which can have a link to the web site as mentioned by interviewee C. However, there can be seen a move from banners to more content based marketing also in online advertising (C).

According to interviewee C, with so much information available online it is important to understand the client's world and also what the customer's customer might think. Marketing needs to think how to support the customers and help them in the best possible way, and relevant information should be easily found in the opinion of interviewee C. This is where search engine optimisation, Google marketing and other online tools are very useful (C).

There are also mobile devices such as smart phones and tablets that need to be considered as well since everyone seems to have them with them at all times, and it seems that many rather have these devices with them instead of lap tops according to interviewee A. This huge change has happened during the last year and it grows exponentially, and companies need to evaluate how to deal with this situation and whether to make a mobile app or responsive websites as stated by interviewee A.

According to interviewee B, web shop could also work for b2b companies with information on some processes and where and when the material arrives, but probably not with bigger purchases. However, interviewee F mentioned that there are already some

services online such as an online eServices tool, a web shop for spare parts and consumables (F).

4.2.2 *Social media*

When it comes to trying new things for example on the social media scene, b2c usually gets involved first and b2b follows after. All interviewed companies are present in the main social media networks such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and LinkedIn both for marketing as well as recruitment purposes. Facebook might be used more for recruitment and employer-branding and Twitter is mostly used for newsfeed, whereas LinkedIn can be used for recruitment purposes as well as connecting with potential customers (C). There are conversation forums online for various causes such as sustainable development where a company might want to be present and use it to connect with prospects as mentioned by interviewees C and E.

LinkedIn is a more professionally oriented network and of social media forums is probably the most useful for b2b companies according to interviewee B. Within LinkedIn there can be targeted campaigns which are a good tool for reaching out to business executives, but the substance needs to be right as stated by interviewee C. There are also discussion groups for various segments, such as the mining industry, and clients take part in these groups and they have conversations and change thoughts with each other, and companies can place advertisements there and try to guide traffic to the company's website according to interviewees A, B and C. According to interviewees A and B, LinkedIn is a very important recruitment channel but there have been new contacts for sales people as well. The benefit is that activity there can be followed and one can see how many followers there are, how many likes there have been and what the engagement percent is and this can then be shown to sales as an argument according to interviewee B.

However, overall social media has not been as useful in the b2b sector according to the interviews, and companies are having some trouble figuring out how to best utilise it in a meaningful way. Competitors and many b2b companies are struggling with the same issues. The problem could be that for example Facebook is more of a private forum for people and people might want to keep work separated from that in the opinion of interviewees A, B and C. Nevertheless, it is still part of the marketing communication mix and one of its benefits is that it is cost effective as claimed by interviewee C.

According to interviewee C, one has to listen to the social media and try to identify the relevant discussions where one should be active and identify those talking there and that way try to get in to the conversations and utilise this channel to its full potential. At the moment there is regular updating and activity increases all the time and the next step

is to be able to create such interesting substance that people react and post or re-tweet it as stated by interviewee D. On the other hand this can also be a generation thing, since the youth is growing into this world of social networks and online communication according to interviewee D.

It could be that if you don't have presence you don't have a future. (D)

In the opinion of interviewee E, when it comes to social media sometimes it might be more of an experiment but it is good to try new things. However, often everyone thinks that one has to be present everywhere but companies ought to think if it actually brings added value for its users (E). For this reason there might be a healthy development with people studying what is actually useful for them according to interviewee E.

But it's good to try new things. I believe in both, also in the digital tools when they are actually useful to the customer. There was such a hype some time ago that there is nothing but online, but definitely, both are needed. (E)

Also, for example in the information technology sector the client base might be more receptive to information from these channels since they might be more active there themselves as stated by interviewee C. According to the interviews, knowing the customers and their wants and needs is crucial in the social media as well.

4.2.3 Offline and online tools

According to interviewees E and F, online and offline tools should be in line with each other with the same messages, and online marketing can be integrated into the other more traditional marketing channels based on how the target groups can be reached most efficiently.

I don't believe that the marketing should be categorized strongly into 'traditional' and 'digital'. The online tools have brought new marketing channels and the marketing mix can be created utilising both traditional and these new channels. (F)

In the opinion of interviewee B, there can be an added challenge if the online activities are dealt with by a separate team instead of having the digital activities part of the

‘business as usual’. According to interviewee B, online should not be just a separate part of the organisation but so that everyone gets involved.

The importance of online has increased strongly, not as a separate thing but integrated into b2b marketing. (F)

According to interviewees B and F, online-offline combinations can be used successfully, such as the use of QR-codes on print ads or in trade press advertisements and using e-mail marketing for event invitations and after sales operations. Internet is used everywhere and it could even be the number one tool, but also the tools for sales force are extremely important according to the interviews. All personal contacts with customers or potential customers, all the seminars and trade fairs are also very important and every tool has its own role as stated by interviewee A. Personal relationships with customers and with sales and technical support are important, but through the digitising also marketing and communications are able to get closer to the customer and follow their behaviour according to interviewee B.

4.2.4 Change during the last 5 years

According to interviewee A, nowadays it is all about the website and online marketing, whereas five years ago first everything else was thought out, such as trade fairs and advertising, and after that the website. Today, it is clear that online has a part in the communications mix and it is often the starting point and no one gives it a second thought (A). According to interviewee A, everything else is sort of extra and online tools allow for reaching and serving customers better as stated by interviewee F.

In 2008 or 2009 companies tried to get their websites in order and 5 years ago there were still storages full of brochures according to interviewee B. Now people are moving all the time and the next step is to have all the information available no matter where or when, or what device one might have with them (B). The message ought to be same everywhere and from all channels, and it should produce some sort of added value so that it is more like a service instead of just static information in the opinion of interviewee B.

According to interviewee B, the role of online has changed dramatically when compared to the role it had 5 years ago when there was just the website and nothing more. All the product information was gathered on the web page but the content was not thought of in terms of what type of buyers it was targeted at (B). There might have been some banners but social media was not even heard of in the b2b sector according to interviewee B.

4.2.5 *The use of analytics and marketing automation*

The online environment provides new possibilities in the form of analytics and in the ways to utilise this enormous amount of information according to the interviews. Measuring and analysing the data from the website can give vast amounts of information on how people act on the website. According to interviewee D, one can follow activities such as how many people have visited the site, how many have opened the newsletter, which videos have been watched, how long people stayed on the site, what did they do there and how many leads were generated. Social media can also be followed with the amount of re-tweets and likes as claimed by interviewee D.

However, there is a possibility for the data to be analysed more and further and there is definitely potential according to the interviews. Now, one might know how many people have visited the site and where they have been, but the data on what exactly they did on the web site should be studied more. According to the interviews, there is a vast amount of information on how people use the site and whether they like one site better than the other and this knowledge should be utilised. With all this information the company can act accordingly and corrections can be made based on the results from the analysis. That is something all interviewees felt could be done even better, since there is such an enormous amount of information and in order to get better results one needs to learn how to utilise it even further and find the right information with the most meaning to a company's marketing. (A; B; C; D; E; F)

According to interviewee B, there is a need for more know-how when it comes to analytics and it will definitely grow even more in the future.

One must know the right substance and know the tools and their benefits, and also how to use them in order to get the best use out of them. (B)

According to interviewee D, the skill is to create such content so that it is not just about buying the products but about meaningful substance to the customers so that they can see the benefits. One should recognise the needs of the customer and have targeted messages to certain segments but in a meaningful way using the tools of content marketing so that the feel of the message is not too pushy and negative in the opinion of interviewee D. When thinking about sales, one can get to know the customer better with all the information from CRM and this in turn affects marketing communication according to interviewee D.

There is a lot of potential and it is about actions based on knowledge. (D)

According to interviewee C, the role of analytics will grow dramatically in the future and the better analytics marketing can for example show to sales and identify certain things, the more valuable marketing's role will be. More analysing could be done, and it is an ongoing process and there needs to be constant development (C). One ought to know what works and what does not, and with analytics results can be proved to sales and that way marketing can claim its role on a whole other level according to interviewee C.

The aim is to create a more harmonised measuring system since there is so much data and so many points of views to look at it from as mentioned by interviewee D. This is confusing when wanting to find out what exactly it is one wants to measure since it is more important to know where to aim at and what is the goal and then set the measurements according to that, rather than to measure obvious things with no real meaning (D). However, this process of harmonising and building a measurement system for the data so that it guides to the right procedures, is in its starting point according to interviewee D.

Marketing automation is 'the talk of the day' as stated by interviewee A, and now according to interviewee C, during the last year or even the last 6 months, the talk about marketing automation has become a subject of discussion. Marketing automation enables even faster and also more precise answering of customer needs and it enables personalisation even if the customer base is large according to interviewee A. Also, personalisation of websites can be an application and visitors are shown topics they were interested when visiting the site previously (A). According to interviewee A, it will become more common, at least it is implemented in many companies, and with it the customer gets the right information at the right time and in the right way.

In the opinion of interviewee D, marketing automation is a concept related to the entity of analytics and the possibilities it provides in the future. Marketing automation is a technology with which it is possible to actually see what people are doing in the digital media and evaluate different activities and that way generate new leads according to interviewee C. In the opinion of interviewee C, this way a company can see if the relevant influential information for target groups works and look at the content in light of this new information and see what works and what does not.

Online has surely grown and I believe in the future of targeted marketing communications and tailored messages. (D)

According to the interviews, that is something companies are examining now and figuring out what they want to do with CRM and marketing automation tools. According to interviewee D, the aim is to expand the CRM tool to cover also marketing elements and so it would be possible to get a 360 degree picture of the clients and their

buying behaviour and also find out what sort of marketing activities have been targeted at them. When talking about marketing automation things such as the way a client acts on the websites, what they clicked, what they opened from the newsletter, what videos they watched or which route they used to get to the site, all have a big role as stated by interviewee D. That is how the digital footprint of a client is formed, and with that knowledge one can target the right messages to the right audience according to interviewee D.

That is the future where we are going at, but right now we are just planning and defining, but it is not a question whether it will come or not. (D)

According to interviewee C, the role of analytics as a guide for marketing communications is crucial and its importance will only continue to grow. However, companies are only at the early stages on this path (C). Nevertheless, the pace will only accelerate and in two years time the situation will already be completely different as stated by interviewee C.

4.2.6 Future of online

According to the interviewees, in the future the role of online will grow and the role of print will decrease. However, according to interviewee A, it has turned around a little and some companies have started to print their customer magazines again. Getting rid of all print has led to a situation where it is fun to get a printed invitation and it can be something with which a company can actually stand out in the opinion of interviewee A. Nevertheless, it is unlikely that the situation will turn around completely, online will undoubtedly continue to grow according to the interviews. The challenge is how to be found amongst all the information online and how to stand out, and to find the right customers and for them to find the company and their messages (A). Still, even though the online environment grows, it seems clear that companies will continue to have sales people also in the future according to interviewee A. Since some brochures are still made and they are also in pdf-form on the website there is an interphase when it comes to print according to interviewee B. However, all in all print is decreasing and one solution would be to also remove the pdf-files from the website and create meaningful substance instead and have smaller amounts of printed brochures and leaflets to be passed on when needed in the opinion of interviewee B.

Also according to interviewee C, the role of online marketing will grow in the future, but it is led by relevant substance. Interesting tailored content to specific target groups through which they can educate themselves and that way trust in the products and ser-

VICES provided by the company are vital, according to interviewee C. This way, the company can be build on that image by showing that ”*we know this stuff.*” according to interviewee C. The potential to utilise online will definitely grow and it is really just up to the imagination and focus where one chooses to use their resources as claimed by interviewee C.

The focus used to be on telling what we have and what we can do, now it is more from the outside to inside, what should we tell. (C)

According to interviewee D, with online one can mass tailor information and make it feel tailored for an individual even though there is a big segment with similar thoughts. The more traditional elements will not disappear though in the opinion of interviewee D. The traditional tools are very important when generating leads at the beginning of the ‘sales funnel’ and after that if there is a case the sales force comes in (D). According to interviewee D, what marketing can do is to create a good sales kit for the sales people to use and with bigger purchases there might be a team around the case.

According to interviewee E, personal selling will not disappear, but it is clear the role of online will grow also as a selling channel in the future. Online is a support tool for both sales and customers, but the starting point is what the customer needs in the opinion of interviewee E. However, even though online has grown, the face-to-face meetings at trade fairs and seminars should not be underestimated and they are still extremely important according to interviewee A. The next steps might be online sales tools, increase of extranet tools for customers and the integration of online to CRM systems according to interviewee F.

But to acquire new customer purely through the web seems hard to believe, then again, if one thinks ten years back no one could have imagined where we are now, so maybe I’ll be laughing at myself in five years. (A)

The online environment has grown dramatically in the last 5 years and digital tools for marketing communications have claimed their place in the communications mix according to the interviews. Nevertheless, there would seem to be place for both digital and traditional tools in the marketing communications activities. In the figure below the change happened during the last five years regarding online as well as thoughts on the future of it are presented according to the interviews.



Figure 2 Evolution of online marketing communications according to the interviews

The web page has evolved from a marketing tool that did not have that much meaning and was not really invested in into a vital element in the marketing communications mix combining the benefits of many other tools and providing both support as well as new interactive possibilities for marketing communications. Today, the web page is a common platform comprising all the information from technical data to product videos. The content has become a focal point and relevant information for the right audiences seems to be at the centre of online marketing communication activities. In addition, the information and possibilities that analytics and marketing automation brings is vast and there is still a lot of potential.

Online tools have developed considerably and added their input to the marketing communication activities. Digital tools can be used to achieve the same goals as the more traditional elements of marketing communications. The following figure demonstrates this.

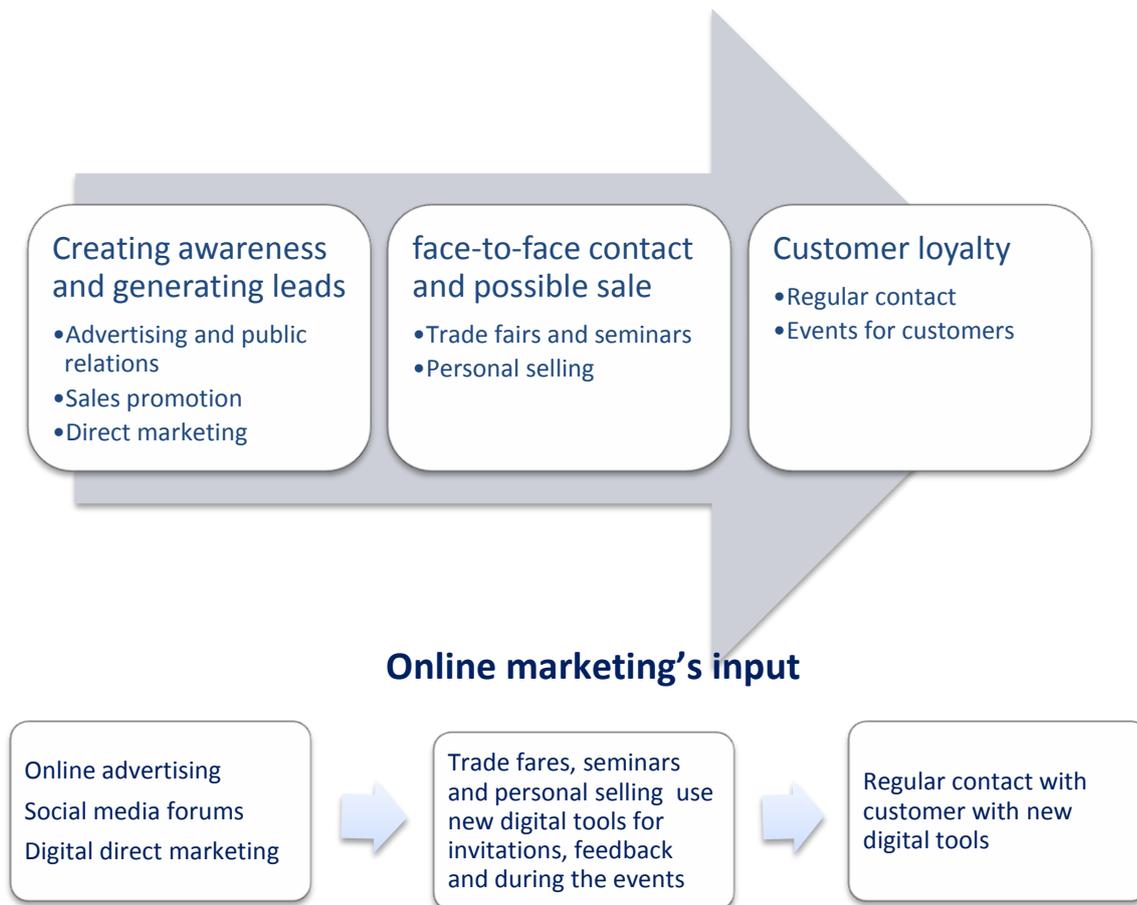


Figure 3 Goals of marketing communications and the more traditional tools related to them according to the interviews with online marketing's input

The goals of the more traditional marketing communication activities have remained rather similar and online activities can be found to match these goals or to provide something extra for the activities. When the objective is to create awareness and generate leads, one can use online advertising, social media forums and digital direct marketing instead of or in addition to the more traditional tools.

If the goal is to gain face-to-face time and so make sales, with trade fairs and seminar new online tools can be used for invitations, feedback and real-time participation during the actual events. Also personal selling can utilise online tools. Customer loyalty can be reached with regular contact with the customers as has been done before but with digital tools the communication can be made easier and more effective.

4.3 Global marketplace and its features

Increasing number of b2b organisations are active in international markets and technological advances and other practices for communication have made international communication easier (Ellis 2011, 15). According to interviewee A, the geographical location and how well-known the company is in this region, determine the activities performed by marketing. In the home markets companies concentrate more on building loyalty whereas on new markets the focus is on creating awareness through activities such as trade fairs and advertising as stated by interviewee A. When building loyalty, there can be events for the customers and regular visits (A). What activities are more important, depend on the marketing's goals in that area and the situation of the market and whether it is old or new according to interviewee A.

In the opinion of interviewee A, the challenge in new markets is to figure out how to find the customers and reach them with the right messages, and also in b2b field the search often starts from the internet. There are also service providers who have registers of clients for a certain field of business that companies can buy but there is no guarantee if these are usable or good (A). Then there are local partners who can help companies to get started in a new marketplace according to interviewee A.

According to interviewee A, people dealing with marketing in other countries need to understand the marketplace and for example go to learn about other cultures and business in offices abroad and see how business is done there. This way better knowledge of the customers' needs can be gained as well as an understanding that needs vary in different countries (A). Tight cooperation with the local sales force and marketing is important in order to make sure that all aspects of promotional material is usable and work in other cultures and some freedom is given to area marketing to reach this according to interviewee A. Nevertheless, all this ought to be done within the limits of the company's guidelines so that the same elements are present worldwide and the message stays consistent in the opinion of interviewee A.

According to interviewees A and D localisation with for example banners for a specific group is not done enough and one reason for this is the lack of resources.

Could be localised even more, encouraged, within the limits of the brand.
(D)

According to interviewee A, a cohesive message worldwide is important but the content still needs to be evaluated according to a certain area. The master-materials are translated and used in various countries and in the end the message needs to be cohesive as stated by interviewee A. Messages such as energy efficiency or other important corporate messages should be seen everywhere since they are linked to the corporate image

as well, according to the interviews. However, the main messages can be opened up by ‘local flavour’ with local customer references, the faces of local customers and the company’s personnel in images, emphasising the technologies and services that help solve the challenges and best support the customers’ business in that particular area according to interviewee F.

In global marketing, the main messages have to be aligned, but because of cultural differences it is essential to involve area and local marketing and sales into how the marketing actions or campaigns are realised. Sometimes this is related to images, colours, sometimes on how the messages are. (F)

According to interviewee F, it is important to consider the reference or customer cases as well, and try to use local cases whenever possible. This way the local capabilities close to customers, such as experts and service centres, are on focus (F).

According to interviewee b, there can also be some local events such as trade fairs and events in new markets where some products can be promoted and the material used there should be localised as well. One solution would be to do more marketing through electronic communication and have websites in various languages, and customise the content depending on the product offering of the marketplace according to interviewee B. This way localisation could be brought even further and there are still more possibilities in this area (B). However, the messages should not be localised too much in order to maintain the main message in the opinion of interviewee B.

According to interviewee C, marketing activities should be done according to the needs of the specific countries, for example in some countries recruitment can be the main focus. Pictures and colours need to be thought of, as well as what points should be highlighted; Scandinavian image or a global image, or maybe even both (C). Also the style needs to be considered, whether it should be relaxed and non-bureaucratic or more formal in the opinion of interviewee C. The local people and sales people are valuable in this process and the network has to work as stated by interviewee C.

According to interviewee D, one challenge is the way countries are in different stages when it comes to the online environment and for example in Asia or China the whole online-presence and social media is completely different compared to Western countries. In Asia and China one has to go through their own channels, waipo and weechat, but at the same time the acceptance for social media marketing is a lot higher and it works better compared to for example Germany where the acceptance for social media marketing is very low (D).

According to interviewee D, there can be social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn for both corporation and local sites, and YouTube channels can be

used to present brand and product related videos. Search engine optimisation is used everywhere around the world and this also needs to be taken into consideration when creating online content in the opinion of interviewee A.

With the general material there is not much localisation but certain products and product brands can be very localised depending on the distribution according to interviewee E. The material needs to be checked with the people on the field when it comes to language versions and cultural issues (E). In the opinion of interviewee E, the content of the material ought to be neutral.

It has to be considered that we are selling everywhere in the world. (E)

In a global environment, the different markets are in different stages and some are focused more on service business and some have more emphasis on new investments, for example as stated by interviewee F. The online marketing channels vary depending on the area and there needs to be knowledge on which are the most efficient ones in that country or area (F). According to interviewee F, after that, the marketing messages and actions need to be adjusted according to this.

If wanting to address a certain campaign or message to a certain geographical area, one needs to remember that many of the online tools or channels are such, that the message will be visible globally according to interviewee F. One way to tackle the challenges according to interviewee F is:

By combining the best possible mix of channels and by giving area marketing and sales a key role in realising marketing actions. (F)

According to interviewee A, there can also be some challenges regarding the legislation of the country if it is stricter with for example its direct marketing policy. Time difference might be inconvenient but it is not a real problem (A). However, talking with people from different cultures is always challenging since people act differently, and some cultures do not like to say directly if something is wrong and there can be misunderstandings sometimes because of cultural differences according to interviewee A.

Cultural issues need to be considered, and in some countries for example personal contact has more meaning if wanting to do business and in some the interaction is freer and less formal as claimed by interviewee A. For example in Asia and India personal relationships are very important (A). According to interviewee A, the local salespeople are a great asset when dealing with these issues since they possess firsthand knowledge of that country and its culture.

4.4 Possibilities and thoughts on the future

At the moment the provided substance is in a sort of ‘bulk content’ but it could be that these ‘tools of the future’ with which one can recognise what the customer has been interested in, offer a very strong possibility to personalise content better in the future according to interviewee D. With the data from CRM-systems and with the digital footprint even more detailed segmenting is possible and also targeting will be more precise (D). This way one can offer information to the customer they have already been interested in before according to interviewee D.

In the opinion of interviewee D, certain discretion has to be kept in mind so that the customer does not get annoyed by the fact that their actions are being monitored. In addition, one must remember that the actual motives behind the actions made online can never be known, just the actions themselves (D). On the other hand, people do realise that it is the online world and monitoring and collecting data is a part of it, but it might be undesirable that personal life and work life get mixed up according to interviewee D. However, in the opinion of interviewee D, this is the way to go and it can make the customers’ path easier.

Interviewee D also stated that the content is a crucial factor since soon everybody is doing the same thing and they have the same data to use. The part that counts is the content and whether one can create meaningful substance and in an insightful way by telling stories (D). According to interviewee D, there can be excitement in the b2b field as well.

It does no one any harm if someone laughs or is surprised, in that sense a sort of freshness is positive. (D)

Interviewee B had similar thoughts:

We should produce experiences and stand out from the masses. (B)

According to interviewee F, marketing could be integrated more into the life cycle of the customers’ production lines or equipment and improve customer experience even more. There is also trackability and measurability of marketing actions and the possibility to utilise global know-how network and in certain cases also reference cases across areas can help gain more knowledge (F). Interviewee F states that the better the right customer needs can be targeted and the customer experience can be improved, the better results there will be.

In the opinion of interviewee B, there should not be just static information, but added value and a service for the customer. According to interviewee B good substance is the key.

What we need to develop is content marketing and to me that means that we have relevant messages for relevant target groups at relevant time. (B)

According to interviewee B, customers should not get a newsletter and have to wonder if there is any relevant information for them. Companies should know more about the preferences of the customers and create substance meant for them, and then try to make the sale this way (B). Selling is important but in a way the digital marketing and the possibilities it has for doing business can change the situation as stated by interviewee B.

According to interviewee B, online will grow as will the business in general, but trade fairs and events will still be important at least for now since meeting people face-to-face is still valuable. However, online can eat away its role and in this hectic environment, people might not have the time to go to the events in person, but obviously it also depends on the products sold as seen by interviewee B. According to interviewee B, there are still some things that people need to see and feel such as paper or construction materials for example, but with 3D animations and pictures a lot can be done nowadays. In the end, one must remember to work on the customer's terms (B).

According to interviewee B, marketing should create experiences such as events or campaigns where things are done differently. There should be something that stays in the customers' minds and if one does not know the customer well enough this can be really hard to execute successfully (B). Interviewee B stated that when understanding the customer and personalising the content also the customer notices that the company has made an effort.

According to the interviewee C, personal selling will always have an important role in the b2b world. However, more and more IT-services are moved to the 'cloud world' where the role of marketing can be 80 percent and sales' only 20 percent, which is completely opposite compared to the outsourcing world (C). In addition, if the identified customer segments are very small, there might not be need for a whole team other than just marketing and online contacts to keep the company in the customer's mind according to interviewee C.

This change will also affect the competencies needed for marketers and moves it closer to communication activities, so marketing communications. (C)

Interviewee C also stated that there needs to be more customer insights and analytics which are rather new for b2b and the role of analytics and also analytical thinking will grow and will be needed more in the future. According to interviewee E, companies need to understand their customer base and their needs better and develop marketing communications from the needs of the customers. Marketers need to figure out what the customers need and how the company can support this according to interviewee E.

According to interviewee F, in the future things will not stay the same.

The use of more efficient and integrated sales or marketing tools will create possibilities for more targeted marketing according to the life cycle of the customers' production lines. (F)

However, interviewee F also stated that the importance of online will increase but not as a separate function but integrated into personal sales work. The personal role of sales and technical experts will always be very important according to interviewee F.

5 CONCLUSIONS

With interpretation is meant the analysing of the results and making own conclusions based on this. The researcher should collect together the main points and give clear answers to the proposed research questions and then base the conclusions on these points. The conclusions should contemplate the meaning of the found results to the research area but also to their possible wider meaning. (Hirsjärvi et al. 2007, 224–225.) In this chapter the conclusions made based on the results from the interviews will be discussed in relation to the theory as well as to the research questions. The first research questions dealt with the different marketing communication tools and their roles and the other ones with the role of online marketing communications and its impact on b2b marketing communications.

Integrated approach to marketing communications will be addressed as well, as will the marketing communications in a global marketplace. Then, the theoretical and managerial implications will be addressed and lastly, the limitations of the study will be discussed as well as the ideas for further research.

5.1 Marketing communications today

The interviews supported many points presented in the theory when it came to the marketing communication tools and their roles. The importance of personal selling was emphasised both in the theory as well as in the interviews and the communication between sales force and marketing was seen as vital. Direct marketing, sales promotion, advertising and public relations were also all used in the companies and had a place in the marketing communications mix. Their roles were similar to those described in the theory with some new elements brought by online tools.

The answers on online marketing were slightly different compared to the theory which is understandable as the technological development moves fast and new themes not widely covered in the theory, such as the use of analytics and marketing automation, were discussed in the interviews. However, both interviews as well as theory stated that online has grown dramatically and it is an important element in the marketing communications mix. In addition, it would seem that many of the more traditional marketing communication tools have had a make-over due to the development of online and the digital environment, according to the interviews.

According to the previous theory, the promotional mix and meanings of its components have not changed dramatically, and personal selling, sales promotion and direct marketing activities are still regarded as the most meaningful tools (Fill & Fill 2005; Brennan, Canning & McDowell 2011). However, according to the interviews, online

has risen right next to them with personal selling and online marketing being the two number one elements.

5.1.1 The roles of marketing communication tools

The usage of online has grown dramatically in the last five years and technology has developed further bringing new ways to utilise the online environment, according to the interviews. It would seem this is only the beginning and there are more and more tools for marketing communications emerging and some more traditional tools have been reconfigured as a result as stated by both theory (Fill & Fill 2005) as well as the interviews. The previous theory stated that electronic communication works two-way and in real time offering businesses new ways to communicate and provide up-to-date information (see e.g. Fill & Fill 2005; Ellis 2011; Brassington & Pettitt 2013). Other benefits of the website included 24/7 access according to both theory and the results. Online environment's capability to be easily updated and provide real time information was mentioned as a key benefit of online marketing also in the interviews. According to the results, it would seem that all the traditional tools still have their roles but because of the development of online and the digital environment some are represented in a different form. The theory stated that compared to the situation 20 years ago, the significant difference can be seen exactly in the importance of digital media as a communication tool (Brennan et al. 2011).

It was claimed in the theory (Brennan et al. 2011) that the marketing communications mix and its elements have not changed dramatically. Also, according to the interviews, for example advertising and direct marketing still exist and have a place in the marketing communications mix. However, because of the development of technology and digitalisation the way companies advertise and contact customers has changed and the role and utilisation of online has grown dramatically also regarding these tools. Direct marketing is moving towards digital direct marketing with e-mail marketing, mobile marketing, viral marketing, and social networking instead of traditional mail according to both theory and the interviews (Brassington & Pettitt 2013). According to the interviews, instead of print advertisements the focus is on online tools such as banner advertisements, Google marketing and search engine optimisation, nano-sites and white papers. In addition, instead of storages full of brochures all information regarding product information and technical details should be found online on the company's website as stated in the results. However, according to the interviews, some printed materials are still used when it provides actual added value to the customer.

According to the previous theory, advertising has been seen as a marketing communication tool that concentrates on informing and reminding, and it is used to build up

interest and awareness (see e.g. Chlebišová et al. 2011; Shimp 2003), and its role has been more of a low profile. This was supported by the interviews where advertising was mentioned by all but as a tool used more on new and emerging markets where the company is not that well known and there is a need to create awareness and build brand image. According to the results, trade shows were also used in the new emerging markets aiming to create interest whereas customer events were something related to home markets where the focus is on building loyalty instead of awareness.

Nevertheless, according to the results, trade shows, exhibitions and face-to-face contact are still valued high and their impact and importance should not be overlooked even in the digital age. Instead, the more traditional trade shows or seminars utilise digital tools with e-mail invitations, real time participation during the seminars with mobile applications and social media forums, and afterwards there is a possibility to give feedback through online tools. There should be a balance of online and offline since both are needed and bring their input to the entity according to the results. In addition, it is important to uphold also social, not only purely economic relationships as Ellis (2011) has stated.

Both theory and the interviews state that the best results from marketing communication activities are reached when the tools are used together and they support each other since each tool has its own role in the communication mix (see e.g. Shimp 2003). When it comes to online and the more traditionally perceived elements working together, also according to the results, the best results are reached when they are used together combining offline and online tools instead of using them separately in isolation. According to Magee (2013), there should be a balance between these tools and often the most successful results are reached by utilising both traditional as well as online tools. According to both theory (see e.g. Shimp 2003) and the results, by combining marketing communication tools in an integrated way they can be more effective and by partnering the communication tools one can receive better results in comparison to using them separately. Traditional and digital marketing tools should not be separated completely since the marketing mix can utilise both channels and that way be more effective, according to the interviews.

According to the results, content marketing and customer-centric marketing seem to be at the core of marketing communications with both traditional as well as digital tools. Also in the online environment the trend is to move towards more content based marketing with a cohesive message across all channels, according to the interviews. Marketing efforts start from the needs of the customer and marketing communications should produce added value so that instead of just static information there would be a service for the customers.

According to the previous theory, integrated marketing communication is not just about the uniformity of the message across various channels (Kitchen et al. 2004) it also

deals with the coordinating and managing of information that is transmitted through various channels in a cohesive way (Călin Gărau 2008). According to the results, both with the more traditional as well as with online tools the key is consistency and the messages should be cohesive no matter where or what the channel is. According to the interviews, also in the foreign markets the main messages should remain the same with some local flavour with pictures and case stories. However, according to the results, even though the cultural issues need to be considered and marketing must act accordingly, the main messages should always be there and the image of the company should be consistent no matter where.

According to the previous theory, usually organisations look for information from various sources in different phases of the process (Chlebišová et al. 2011) and by integrating marketing communication efforts a company can collectively influence the audience (see e.g. Payne & Holt 2001; Wickham & Hall 2006). The previous theory stated that marketing communications efforts ought to be cohesive and the message should be consistent from all channels (see e.g. Pickton & Broderick 2001; Ellis 2011).

Online advertising's task has been to drive website traffic and it focused on the company website which provided product and company information and had more of a supporting role according to the results as well as previous theory (Fill & Fill 2005). The focus was more on the information than on conveying certain emotions. However, the emotional side is also present in the b2b markets when making decisions as stated in the interviews. According to the results, since online is also focusing on meaningful content in this sense, b2b sector can learn from the b2c sector where people make decisions based on emotions.

5.1.2 *Personal selling*

Even though online and its usage has grown dramatically, according to the results, personal selling still seems to have a vital part in the marketing communications mix, and an option where sales visits would completely disappear was not seen. Face-to-face contact and interaction between companies and their customers is still seen as crucial since the sales do not happen with advertisements and newsletters but when the sales person goes to visit the customer. In the interviews, marketing's role was said to be more on building the image of the brand and creating the picture of a trustworthy partner and with marketing one can bring insights on what is happening on the market, and how to best help the customer. According to the interviews, the sales activities need to be supported and marketing should provide the sales people with the best possible tools. Trade promotions, trade advertising, direct marketing and public relations all play an impor-

tant role in the mix and also support the personal selling effort, according to the previous theory (see e.g. Kotler et al. 1999).

The cooperation between marketing and sales was seen as important in the interviews and the relationships ought to be worked at constantly. According to theory marketers and salespeople see things differently and marketers can according to salespeople sometimes be '*unrealistic dreamers*' whose plans might be good but unusable (Matthyssens & Johnston 2006). This was also somewhat recognised in the interviews with marketers trying more new things and being pioneers whereas sometimes the ideas had to be sold to the sales people who were not so eager to experiment new things. Another barrier according to theory is the lack of sufficient communication between the departments (Matthyssens & Johnston 2006). Effective communication is one of the most important factors in solving and preventing problems according to the previous theory (Matthyssens & Johnston 2006, 343) as well as the results, and active communication between marketing and sales was mentioned as vital in the interviews.

According to the previous theory (see e.g. Armstrong & Kotler 2009) the case with many companies seems to be that sales and marketing are treated as separate functions creating unnecessary problems between the two functions and in an ideal situation the sales force and marketing would work closely together creating value for both the customer as well as to the company. However, this seemed not to be the case in the interviewed companies where the importance of good cooperation between sales and marketing was understood. According to the results, the relationships between marketing and sales were also constantly worked at in order to maintain good cooperation.

According to the interviews, this was also important when dealing with foreign markets where the local sales people are a great source of information when dealing with cultural issues or other matters. Also according to the previous theory (Rouziès et al. 2005), the sales force should be seen more as an asset when dealing with communication and relationships with the customers, and coordination between the sales and marketing departments could in fact improve the effectiveness of activities for both functions.

5.1.3 *Content marketing and customer-centric approach*

According to the previous theory, online communications are crucial in the changes that b2b marketing communications is going through (see e.g. Chlebišova et al. 2011) with the internet providing flexibility, speed, global reach and interactivity (see e.g. Daj 2011; Brennan et al. 2008). There is also a possibility to personalise messages and build one-to-one relationships with customers (see e.g. Daj 2011; Hutt & Speh 2001). The theory also states that marketers' goal is to create value to customers and due to its in-

teractive nature and capability to personalise messages, online is a good tool for this (Valos et al. 2010).

According to the results, marketing communication tools such as advertising have moved increasingly to the online environment and companies are ever more active in various forums where their activity and success can be followed and analysed for further improvements. Analytics seem to be a vital part of the online environment according to the results, and its popularity has grown since with analytics companies can measure their performance. In addition, based on the digital footprint of the customer, changes can be made accordingly. According to the interviews, the use of analytics also provide a possibility to learn more about the customer and recognise target audiences and segments and create tailored messages also to mass audiences. Marketing automation is something that can help take this development even further with more precise information about the customers and hence even more personalised messages.

According to previous theory (Fill 2011), the traditional goal of marketing communications used to be to convey information about products to the audience and now the aim is to deliver value to specific target audiences. Content should be based on the customers' needs and marketing communication should be an audience-centric activity as stated in the previous theory (Fill 2011). According to both previous theory (Fill & Fill 2005) as well as the results, the focus of online advertising used to be on the company website that provided only static product and company information rather than meaningful content. According to the interviews, information was gathered on the web page without thinking about the content in terms of what type of buyers it was targeted at. According to the previous theory (Fill & Fill 2005), online marketing's role used to be more of a supporting function and according to the results, 5 years ago the online activities comprised of just the website with static information and nothing more. Now, according to the interviews, also online marketing is led by relevant content and tailored messages aimed at specific target groups.

According to the results, the focus of marketing communications has somewhat changed from the idea of just providing information to a situation where with new technology enabling better analysis of customers, targeted personalised messages and meaningful content seem to be at the core of the activities. According to the previous theory (Fill 2011), marketing communication should be an audience-centric activity and the audience's needs and environment should be understood. This argument was well supported by the interviews.

According to the previous theory (Fill 2011), traditionally the goal of marketing communications has been on conveying information about products to the audience, but the focus has changed and now the aim is to provide value to a target audience that is based on their needs. Providing value and relevant content was seen as important also according to the results and this was something that was also at the centre with online

marketing. According to the results, with analytics there is a possibility to learn more about the customers and know them better and use this information when creating marketing communication messages and content. According to the results, compared to the past, now the focus is on identifying various buyer profiles and tailoring information so that it is relevant to them and presented in a language relevant to them. According to the previous theory (Călin Gărau 2008), the situation has changed from companies pushing information to a situation where people are pulling the information that fits their needs and they look for information when it suits them and from a source that they like.

According to the theory (Daj 2011), organisation's communication activities have a vital role when building customer loyalty and its main purpose is to create steady and interactive dialogues with the customers. According to the previous theory (see e.g. Brassington & Pettitt 2013), personal selling has many advantages including the impact it can have on a potential customer and the precision when it comes to personalising content and targeting the messages to the right audience. Also with direct marketing there is a possibility to tailor and personalise messages according to the previous theory (Pelsmacker et al. 2007). In addition, according to theory (Fill & Fill 2005), both with personal selling as well as direct marketing the level of interaction between the company and the customer has been seen as high whereas with sales promotion, advertising and public relations the ability to deliver personalised messages has been seen as low in the past.

According to the previous theory (see e.g. Fill & Fill 2005; Armstrong & Kotler 2009), personal selling allows two-way interaction, which provides fast and direct feedback and with interactive dialogue personal selling can bring the company and the product closer to the customer. With direct marketing one is able to tailor and personalise messages as well (Pelsmacker et al. 2007). However, according to the results, with the new tools for marketing communications such as analytics and marketing automation, also other marketing communication tools outside of personal selling and direct marketing can create more tailored messages to the right audience when learning more about the customers. According to the previous theory (Cook 2004), the rapid growth of the internet and new technologies have changed the field of marketing communications with database systems reducing the gap between a marketer and customer. It was stated in the theory (Daj 2011), that the personalisation and face-to-face contact have been seen as a benefit of personal selling that other tools lack. However, according to the results, with new online technologies marketing can come closer to one-on-one contact with the customer, by moving the communication from face-to-face interaction more into the digital world.

According to previous theory (Călin Gărau, 2008), segmenting and addressing the right audiences has been regarded as a problem in the past, but according to the results with the online tools accessible today, segmenting and creating personalised messages

for mass audiences is possible. According to the interviews, due to the digitalisation, marketing is able to get closer to the customer and in a way the digital marketing and its possibilities can change the situation completely. According to the previous theory (Daj 2011; Valos et al. 2010), with online tools there is a possibility to personalise messages and build one-to-one relationships with the customers which is something that has traditionally been seen as an exclusive benefit of personal selling. According to the interviews, these tools are also increasingly used in practice in the b2b field. Nevertheless, according to the interviews, it seems that the important face-to-face contact between a buyer and the seller cannot be completely replaced with online tools, at least for now.

According to the interviews, instead of static information marketing aims to provide meaningful content and value to customers. The right content at the right time to the right people is at the core of marketing communications in the digital age where there is an overflow of information and companies need to stand out. Everything starts from the customers and their wants and needs, and customer-centric marketing aims to provide the customers with the information they need in a way that makes an impact.

The following figure depicts the way analytics can be used to gather information on customers and then use that information to create the digital footprints according to the results. This information can then be utilised in re-marketing efforts, in targeting, tailoring and personalisation of messages. All this results in meaningful content that is relevant to that exact customer and can be found on relevant medias at a relevant time. With marketing automation the targeting and personalisation of messages is made possible also for mass audiences.

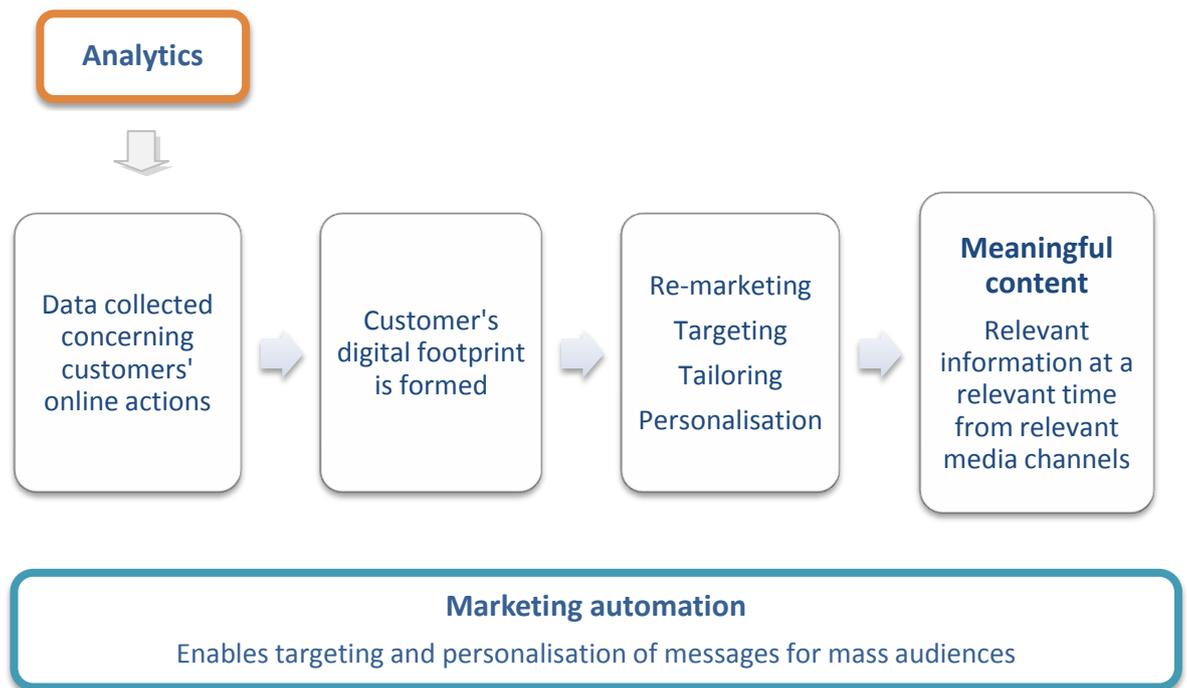


Figure 4 Analytics as a tool for creating meaningful and relevant content based on customers' needs and interests

In this figure the use of analytics in content marketing and customer-centric approach is presented. With analytics and marketing automation the digital footprint of the customer can be formed and based on that more targeted, tailored and personalised messages can be created. This way information can be developed based on the customers' or prospects' previous interests making the content more relevant to them.

With the use of analytics there is a possibility for marketing communications to produce targeted messages and follow customers' actions and behaviour on the website and in the online environment altogether. These elements have been added to the table presented previously in this study and the updated version is presented below.

Table 3 A summary of the features of the key marketing communication activities
(adapted from Fill & Fill 2005, 302 with input from the interviews)

	Personal selling	Direct marketing	Sales promotion	Advertising	Public Relations	Website	Online advertising	Social media
Ability to deliver a personal message	High	High	Low	Low	Low	Medium	Medium	High
Ability to reach a large audience	Low	Medium	Medium	High	Medium	High	High	High
Level of interaction	High	High	Low	Low	Low	Medium	Medium	High
Ability to adjust the tools as circumstances change	Medium	High	High	Medium	Low	High	High	High
24/7 up-to-date information	Medium	Low	Low	Low	Low	High	Medium	High
Ability to follow customer behaviour and actions	High	Medium	Medium	Low	Low	High	Medium	High
Ability to target messages	High	High	Medium	Medium	Medium	High	Medium	High

Schultz et al. (1994) stated twenty years ago that with technology, media organisations are beginning to be able to identify, segment, select, and attract smaller, more attentive and focused audiences with their marketing communication activities. According to the results, with the technology available today this is possible and with the technology developing continuously the precision improves all the time. In addition, according to the interviews, these tools are used in practice in everyday marketing communication activities. Now, according to the interviews, with the help of analytics and other online tools, companies are able to target and personalise marketing messages and provide information from relevant channels.

In the figure the greyscale represents those online based activities added to the original figure and the added abilities brought to light by the interviews. The added abilities are derived from the results of this study and together with the added online activities they represent the activities possible through digital tools such as analytics.

According to the results, even though some more traditional ways to utilise marketing communication tools still exist, it seems clear that online tools have valuable benefits. Many of the advantages previously seen as only part of personal selling can also be

found in the digital tools, according to the interviews. Online provides interactivity, possibility to target and personalise messages, and the ability to adjust to changing circumstances quickly. In addition, it provides something not really possible with the more traditional methods such 24/7 support and real-time up-to-date information. Moreover, the possibilities analytics and marketing automation brings are enormous and they have features not seen in the more traditional methods such as the ability to follow customers' behaviour in real-time and make improvements according this information.

5.2 Implications

In this subchapter the theoretical and managerial implications of this study will be discussed based on the results of this study. The results might not be representative of the b2b field altogether but still both theoretical as well as managerial implications can be derived from them.

The use of offline and online tools together for example, had both theoretical as well as managerial implications. However, especially the new applications brought by the online environment such as analytics had interesting implications.

5.2.1 *Theoretical implications*

What this study can provide to the existing theory is the impact of the growing use of analytics in the business-to-business sector. This study provides more insights to the theory on tools for more detailed analysing of customers' behaviour online as well as more precise targeting with the help of these tools. Marketing automation in the b2b environment is a rather new concept and the companies are just beginning to find its full potential.

There is plenty of material regarding the use of online marketing in the b2c field but the b2b sector has gotten less attention. However, this is a growing field and especially the possibilities provided by digital tools and marketing automation are providing interesting data. Especially the b2b sector where personal relationships are extremely important the growing use of analytics presented in this study provide more insights to the earlier theory.

The synergy effects from using multiple marketing communication tools together have been studied before and campaigns where multiple tools and channels are used together seem to be a common activity in b2b marketing according to the results. Also the benefits from using offline and online tools together have been studied to some extent although mostly on the b2c sector. According to the results from this study the

same benefits can also be found on the b2b sector and offline and online tools are not or should not be regarded as separate tools but rather as one entity. Online should be brought to the 'business as usual' and instead of separating offline and online channels and tools they are becoming increasingly integrated.

5.2.2 *Managerial implications*

According to the interviews, the roles of marketing professionals might change towards a more analytical approach which would affect the competencies required from marketers. There will most likely be need for more customer insights as well as analytics meaning also the growing need for analytical thinking from marketers in the future. Marketers need to possess more knowledge than before such as skills in communications because of the increased meaning of content. Nowadays marketers need to possess more talent also outside of marketing with the need to analyse and know the customer better.

What should be noticed are the new roles needed for marketers and the need to gain knowledge about the new tools. Both theory and the interviews suggest that marketing needs to follow its time and one should not cling to the past. There is a need to try new things even with the option of failure. Especially with these new digital tools for marketing companies can follow the examples on the b2c market. Marketers should not forget that the emotional side is also present in the b2b field, and try to influence this side of potential buyers as well.

Nevertheless, one should not be blinded by the grandness of the new tools technology provides, but consider what the best solution really is and whether they actually provide value. One should not try to force anything. Even if the general opinion seems to support the use of online tools, this does not mean they are always the best solution. There is room for both offline and online tools in the marketing communications mix. The more traditional means for marketing communications have not disappeared and the interviews supported the statement of using offline and online tools together. Marketers ought to plan the communication activities as entities comprising of various tools and media this way reaching the full potential of all activities.

Since personal selling and one-to-one contact with the customer was regarded as the most important marketing communication tool by both the theory as well as the interviews, marketers need to remember the importance of good communication between marketing and sales force. The sales force is a valuable source of information especially in the global markets where the local sales people can provide insights and knowledge. The possibilities a good collaboration can provide ought to be utilised and the relation-

ship valued. As stated in the interviews, regular contact between the two departments and care for the relationship is needed, and it will also be rewarded.

In the interviews the benefits from using multiple tools together as in a campaign were mentioned and even though this creates some challenges there are also synergy effects. Using offline and online tools and channels together was encouraged and these two dimensions should not be seen as separate anymore. Marketers could utilise the full potential of all the marketing communication tools with multimedia campaigns and with the help of the analytics tools as well as marketing automation, this could create excellent results.

There amount of data is huge and there is still potential. Marketers need to learn how to best utilise this material and find the right data suited for their marketing communication strategies. However, the negative effects of the growing use of analytics should also be considered. It might be that people realise that the online environment is a place where certain action are being followed and analysed. Nevertheless, there can also be negative feelings towards a too eager approach from the company's side and marketers need to assess the extent to which they want to take the tailoring and personalisation of messages.

5.3 Limitations of the study

Every research has its limitations due to various factors such as time and resource constraints. One can always find mistakes or parts that could have been better, but no work is perfect and it should not be. In this subchapter the limitations of this study will be discussed and evaluated.

The lack of wider practical experience in b2b marketing communications was a limitation when it came to forming the framework for the questions. The framework was build based on theory and some previous ideas on the subject, but already the first interview proved that there is so much more under the surface when it comes to the marketing communication activities in practise. Luckily the tone of the interviews was rather free and this sort of free discussion was encouraged. Each interview gave more point-of-views and topics for the later interviews but obviously the ideal situation would have been to have all that information in the beginning. However, the idea of a research is to make new findings and if all the information would have been available in the beginning there would have been no idea to do the research in the first place.

In addition, due to time constraints only six people were interviewed which in the context of the b2b sector is very little. Also, all interviewees represented Finnish companies limiting any cultural comparison in the study. The companies also represented mainly industrial companies meaning the results can only give a general idea of the

situation of marketing communications activities between b2b companies. Hence, the results cannot be construed to be representative of the b2b market as a whole.

One additional limitation is that one can never really be sure of is the trustworthiness of the source. The interviewees might have embellished their comments without intention and highlight the positive and underestimate the negative.

5.4 Ideas for future research

When contemplating on ideas for future research there are many points that could be studied in more detail and from different point-of-views. One can only guess what the future holds especially when looking how fast technology has developed during the last five years and how it has changed the marketing communications activities. What is interesting is the way face-to-face contact and personal selling are still regarded as vital components in the marketing communication mix and no one saw their importance declining anytime soon. The roles of the marketing communication tools could be studied more and regularly in order to find out if and how they have evolved in time.

Since the results are not representative of the b2b market as a whole, perhaps a comparative study between countries and business sectors would provide interesting data as well. One could study the differences between domestic companies and global companies as well as cultural differences between companies from different countries.

Based on the finding it could be suggested that the study of analytics and marketing automation could be carried out further. Interesting here is the rapid development of the technology and how it affects marketing communications through these new tools. It would seem that the use of analytics in marketing communication activities will increase but how and to what extent could be studied further. According to the results there is unused potential in the data provided by analytics, so this would undoubtedly provide interesting topics for future research as well. The effects of the increasing use of analytics in marketing communications could also be studied from the customer's point-of-view. In order to gain more in-depth knowledge on the effects of increasing use of analytics, future research could concentrate in the viewpoints of the customers and if and how it affects their behaviour and buying habits.

Similar overview on the marketing communications activities will surely provide new results in the future. However, how far the development will go only time will tell, and it can also go the other way seeing the more traditional tools coming back and becoming means for differentiation. Personal selling efforts and the need for one-on-one interaction in b2b sector might never disappear but their position might alter, and hence the role and position of personal selling in the marketing mix would be an interesting topic for future studies in a couple of years or more. In addition, how the use of market-

ing automation changes the field of marketing and whether the role of online will grow even further and whether it adopts some of the roles that previously belonged to personal selling could also provide topics for future research.

6 SUMMARY

The summarising chapter should reconnect the analysis to the basic questions that were inspiring in the first place, and it ought to stimulate the readers by demonstrating how the research has stimulated its writer (Silverman 2010, 353). In this chapter, the study and its findings will be summarised and hopefully the enthusiasm of the researcher regarding this study as well as the subject of the research is transmitted in the final words of this chapter.

Marketing communications has gone through some significant changes during the last decades (Keller 2001; Chlebišova et al. 2011) and one of the most essential changes has been the increased number of communication tools and their diversity and the emergence of new, non-traditional media (Keller 2001, 819–820). Still, in spite of all this change, personal selling, direct marketing, sales promotion, advertising and public relations are regarded as meaningful and important tools and they are still used in the companies' marketing communication efforts, according to the results. However, the online tools have added their input to the more traditional marketing communication activities and brought new applications to the marketing communications mix.

Earlier research had studied online communications as well as the use of offline and online tools together, but not precisely regarding the business-to-business field. In addition, there were no studies regarding the current situation of business-to-business marketing communications or the position of online marketing in relation to the more traditionally perceived methods. That being the situation, the purpose of this study was to examine business-to-business marketing communications tools used by companies in their marketing communications efforts in the digital age and in a global environment. This was studied through the following research questions:

1. a) What are the marketing communication tools used in b2b companies today?
b) What are the roles of these tools?
2. a) What is the role of online marketing communications?
b) How has online shaped the field of b2b marketing communications?

The research approach chosen for this study was qualitative and the research method was a case study which focuses on the characteristics of a particular entity or phenomenon (Patton 2002, 166). The data was collected with semi-structured theme interviews and six people representing Finnish global companies were interviewed during 2.4.–10.4.2014 in Helsinki and Hyvinkää. One interview was conducted via e-mail due to time constraints and it was answered on 13.4.2014. The interviews resulted in approximately 52 pages of transcribed text and the email interview approximately 3 pages, so

altogether the material from the interviews consists of 55 pages of transcribed text. The study was also evaluated with various criteria to assure the trustworthiness of the study.

When it comes to the means and roles of different marketing communications tools in the b2b sector the theory was well supported by the interviews. Personal selling, direct marketing, sales promotion, advertising and public relations as well as online marketing were all represented in the marketing communications mix of the interviewed companies. The goals related to the marketing communications tools according to the interviews were similar to those presented in the theory, as were the roles of the tools as well. Advertising was seen as a tool to create awareness and interest, and trade fairs were means for creating awareness as well but also to generate leads. Direct marketing and personal selling were both used to interact with customers, and public relations provided information for various audiences. However, according to the results, the activities related to the tools had somewhat changed due to the input of online tools meaning the activities of these tools were brought to the online environment. Instead of print advertisement there is online advertising with banners and nano-sites and instead of direct marketing there is digital direct marketing through social media forums.

The integrated approach to marketing communications was seen as important by both theory and the results, and according to the results, cohesive meaningful content seemed to be the key especially in online marketing. According to the results, when planning marketing communication activities in a global context the main messages ought to be cohesive but some of the marketing messages could also be localised since the cultural differences need to be considered. However, the main messages should always remain cohesive also globally. According to the results, content marketing and customer-centric marketing had an important role in the companies' marketing communication activities.

The role of analytics in creating tailored content was remarkable according to the interviews and personalisation and targeting of the messages to the right audiences was seen as an integral part of the communication efforts. Nevertheless, personal selling has remained as the primary tool in b2b marketing communications although the role of online has grown dramatically. Even though personal selling still holds the first place, it would seem that according to the results online activities have risen next to it and these two have somewhat become the two leading activities for companies marketing communication efforts.

The main goal according to the interviews seemed to be the ability to provide customers with relevant content that has actual value to them. According to the interviews the information should be delivered using the right channels in the right way. The amount of data that can be collected is vast and there is still potential on how to use all this material and companies need to find out what is of actual value to them and how to turn it into their advantage. Marketing communication should take into consideration

also the emotional side of the customers and instead of static information, provide interactive content that makes an impact.

It has been said that “*no great story ever started with someone eating a salad*” and it would seem that also in the b2b field it is okay to sometimes have the ice cream with extra sprinkles and surprise the audience with something unexpected. Even though the b2b sector might seem to be limited by guidelines when it comes to marketing, there is a possibility to colour outside the lines, within the limits of good taste. There can be surprises and experiences, and one should seize new opportunities and adapt to the new environment.

When it comes to b2b marketing communications there is a traditional aspect with personal selling still being the number one tool, but this more classic side has been shaped by modern technology and online tools. Traditional marketing communication activities have not disappeared, they have only taken a different form and they are executed within the framework of the digital age. The focus has changed from having static information, to providing meaningful content and value to customers, and in reaching this goal all the elements in the marketing communications mix are still needed. Their roles and tasks have remained the same as have their goals, but what has changed is the means of executing and achieving these goals. The digital development has created new ways to utilise the traditional marketing communication tools and even though some have been modified by this change, the roles have remained the same. Now, it is about finding new opportunities and the best way to utilise these new tools and create the best combination and balance between old and new, traditional and digital.

Technology has evolved dramatically during the past five years and this has affected the b2b marketing communications as well. Five years ago online activities comprised of the website with the information regarding the company just gathered there, without a focus on the content. The aim used to be on companies telling what they have and what they can do. Now, the focus has changed to what companies should tell – what the customers want and how they want to hear it.

At first, the idea of five years might not sound like a very long time but when looking back at own life one realises how much can happen in that time. The same applies here with marketing communications and especially when it comes to the development of technology and the online tools it has brought with it, both in personal as well as in professional life. In the future, some things will probably stay the same, such as the need for face-to-face contact and personal relationships, but many things will also change, and it seems impossible to predict how the world will look in five years time. Now, since to any common knowledge there is no *DeLorean* available to use, or other ways to travel in time for that matter, the only thing to do is wait and see what the future holds.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Framework for interview questions

Theme	Questions
Current situation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What marketing communications tools do you use? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What are the most meaningful/ most used? ○ Can you put them in order? ○ What are the roles of different tools? • How do you combine these tools? (e.g. in campaigns) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What sort of combinations? ○ What possibilities does this bring? ○ What challenges are there? • How important is the cohesiveness of the messages? • Challenges and possibilities in coordination with sales force and marketing (plus technical support) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ How does it work? ○ What challenges are there? ○ What possibilities can a good collaboration bring?
Challenges & Possibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the challenges in marketing communications in general? • How do you overcome the challenges? • Is there anything that could be done better? • How could the different roles or tools be developed or is there something missing?
Online marketing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What sort of online marketing tools do you use? • What is the role of online tools? • How do they act in relation to the more traditional tools?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How, in your opinion, has the online marketing environment developed in the last 5 years?• How do you see the future of online marketing?• How will its role develop and do you believe its use will continue to grow? (in relation to the more traditional tools, such as personal selling)
Global	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How does the global market affect marketing communications?<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ What needs to be taken into consideration?<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Geographical (government, time difference etc.)▪ Cultural (language, values, traditions, etc.)○ How does it affect the communication? Does it?• How much do you localise the messages?
Future and possibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How do you see the future? (The use and roles of the marketing communication tools?)<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Do you believe the roles of the tools will stay the same or change?○ For example, does online continue to grow and how will the role of personal selling develop in relation to this?• Is there anything else that you feel is missing from marketing communications or what could be done more?